[Published in the *Journal of Philosophical Research* 31 (2006) 81-102]

Moral Realism without Values

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Abstract: In this paper I draw on some of the work of John McDowell in order to develop a realist account of normative reasons for action. On the view defended here, there can be correct moral judgments that capture the reasons there are for acting in certain ways; and the reasons themselves are just some of the morally relevant facts of the situation about which the judgment is made. Establishing this account relies crucially, I argue, on an appeal to substantive ethical theory, to a theory that allows for the attribution of truth to the judgments in question. The account defended here can in fact be equally well supported by ethical theories as otherwise diverse as those of Aristotle and Kant. The resulting account is a version of moral realism, but one that is not committed to defending a realist account of the nature of moral value.

I

Wittgenstein once claimed that "if a man could write a book on ethics which really was a book on ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world."[1] He made this somewhat startling, slightly comical, and certainly enigmatic declaration in one of the only public lectures that he gave in his lifetime. As the rest of the lecture seems to indicate, Wittgenstein's point was that the subject matter of ethics is really something incapable of expression, something apparently incapable of being captured in "cognitive" terms. It was this thought, or at least some interpretation of it, that made Wittgenstein's early philosophy especially attractive to the emerging ethical

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 3–12. The temporal qualification marks the fact that Wittgenstein's position in the lecture is tied to his early views about the boundaries of intelligible thought and talk: see, for instance, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961), 6.42, 7.

"noncognitivism" of the Vienna Circle and its followers.[2]

More than fifty years after Wittgenstein's lecture on ethics, David Wiggins delivered his 1976 lecture, "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life," arguably one of the most insightful (if peerlessly cryptic) pieces of moral philosophy in the twentieth century. In that lecture, Wiggins set his face against the subjectivist tendency, and specifically against the noncognitivism, that came to dominate almost every aspect of moral philosophy in the greater part of the twentieth century. At a crucial point in his lecture, Wiggins appeals to Wittgenstein's later thinking about objectivity (especially as the notion applies to mathematics) in order to develop his own anti-subjectivist, anti-noncognitivist position in ethics. But Wiggins almost immediately qualifies his appeal to Wittgenstein, claiming that "Perhaps this is a million miles from ethics."[3]

The two episodes illustrate how it can already be a controversial question what precisely ethical theorists are supposed to be theorizing about, unclear which sorts of issues fall squarely into the subject matter of ethical theory. Moreover, there is, I think, a certain indeterminacy about the answer to this question which pervades the recent history of ethics.[4] Moral theory in the greater part of the twentieth century often failed, for

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[2] This is not to suggest (what seems to be false) that Wittgenstein himself endorsed the logical positivism that grew out of the Vienna Circle. See, for instance, Rudolf Carnap, "Autobiography," in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, ed. P. Schlipp (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1963).

[3] David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 87–137, 129. Here I am using "subjectivism" to characterize the non-cognitivist approaches that Wiggins opposes both in his 1976 lecture and in "A Sensible Subjectivism?" *Needs, Values, Truth*, 185–211.

[4] Of course the indeterminacy is not limited to recent history, nor is it limited to the particular manifestation that is most important for me in what follows.

instance, to distinguish between two apparently quite different issues, only one of which, as it seems to me, is clearly relevant to ethics. It often failed to distinguish between those issues that focus on the nature of moral value, and those issues that focus on the nature of reasons for action. Issues concerning the nature of moral value are, as it seems, issues that fall within the realm of metaphysics proper, and not necessarily within the realm of ethical theory; for unless a connection is forged between the existence of a certain moral value and what someone has a reason to do, issues concerning the status of moral value are, from the point of view of ethics, merely metaphysical. And yet moral philosophy in the greater part of the twentieth century was consumed by a debate over the metaphysical status of moral value. In what follows I therefore want to insist that the essentially metaphysical issues concerning the notion of moral value be kept clearly separated from the essentially practical issues concerning the notion of a reason for action. I do so in order to develop what I will call a "realist" account of reasons for action, an account that can disclaim the need for a realist account of moral value, at least as that position has traditionally been understood. But I think it is important to keep these two issues clearly separated in any case, quite independently of trying to develop a position like the one I develop here.

II

In order to situate the argument to follow, the discussion needs to start just a bit further back. As a paradigmatically realist account of moral value, I single out, in the usual fashion, G. E. Moore's notorious contention that "goodness" is an indefinable and "non-

natural" property.[5] This provocative view, first aired in 1903, has initiated one-hundred years of debate over the nature of moral goodness, and about the nature of moral value more generally construed. The almost instantaneous noncognitivist backlash to Moore's position, for instance, fueled by the rise of logical positivism, precluded any such realistic construal of the nature of moral value, insisting instead that all moral discourse was, in one way or another, an expression of the speaker's moral attitudes. Moral discourse was not therefore seen as the type of objective discourse that is answerable to a reality independent of itself, and such discourse was certainly not seen as something answerable to a realm of "non-natural" moral values. With the decline of logical positivism, however, toward the end of the twentieth century, new forms of moral realism appeared on the horizon.[6] These new versions of moral realism aimed to supplant Moore's apparently crude account of moral goodness, but they were united in their aim to avoid a comparably crude subjectivism about moral value. And so, as late as 1998, Simon Blackburn still felt it necessary to devote an entire chapter of his Humean account of practical reasoning, *Ruling Passions*, to castigating the most prominent contemporary

[5] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

[6] Here I have in mind, not only the work of John McDowell discussed below, but also the different realism about value put forward by David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations," *Morality, Reason, and Truth*, ed. D. Copp and D. Zimmerman (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985); Richard Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. G. Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 181–228; and Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163–207. Two of the most recent defenders of moral realism are Paul Bloomfield, *Moral Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

versions of realism about value.[7] The debate over moral realism initiated by Moore (a debate couched in terms of the nature of moral value) has therefore continued into a new century.

But why must a realist in ethics feel committed to fighting on that particular front, arguing interminably over the nature of moral value? It is true, of course, that the aim of any realist position in ethics is to avoid a subjectivist construal of the subject matter of ethics: avoiding the thought that judgments about moral value are expressions of the speaker's moral attitudes, or avoiding the thought that the most objective verdict there can be about what one should do is a verdict ultimately derived from the present elements in one's "subjective motivational set".[8] As it seems to me, however, avoiding subjectivism can be achieved simply by developing an account of what ethical agents sometimes have reason to do, an account which allows as much objectivity as possible to the reasons themselves, distancing reasons for action as far as possible from any subjectivist source. Such an account will reject the idea that reasons for action must be constituted by some of the psychological states (e.g. by beliefs and desires) of the agent whose reasons they are; it will also reject the idea that reasons for action must derive their normative force from such psychological states. Moreover, such an account, as I aim to show, need not commit itself to any particular thesis about the nature of moral value. As

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[7] Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 4.

[8] Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101–113. Of course it is not that there is anything unreal about reasons that are derived in this way. Instrumental reasons, for instance, are no less real for being instrumental. Nevertheless, a position that allows for more objective reasons than that—reasons not indexed to the particularities of the agent's psychology—is a recognizably realist position.

far as its relevance for ethics is concerned – as opposed to its relevance for metaphysics proper – the debate over the nature of moral value should come to seem considerably less urgent.

In the next section I initiate the argument proper for the position I will be defending here. Among other things, the discussion aims to disentangle two separate strands in the ethical thought of John McDowell, whose work in this area has provided one of the more influential realist positions in the contemporary debate. This discussion will allow the distinction between a realist account of value and a realist account of reasons for action to come into sharper focus.

III

John McDowell's well-known defense of an analogy between values and secondary qualities, coupled with McDowell's distinctive understanding of the nature of secondary qualities, has often been understood as a way to bolster an account of moral realism.[9] The analogy that McDowell proposes has been understood, that is, as a way to bolster an account of the nature of moral value according to which moral value need not be seen as "a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[10] After briefly sketching the analogy that McDowell proposes, I go on to consider an objection that seems to me to offer an instructive example of how one can misunderstand the nature of the position that McDowell defends. Clearing up the misunderstanding will help

[9] John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 131–150 (originally published in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. T. Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 110–129). All page references to McDowell in the text are to *Mind, Value and Reality*.

[10] McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 136.

disentangle two separate strands in McDowell's ethical thought – strands which, as I have already suggested, need to be kept clearly separated in all ethical thought.

In what follows it will be crucial to bear in mind that McDowell's aim in defending the analogy between values and secondary qualities is to disown the implausible picture provided by a different analogy that one can draw, an analogy between values and primary qualities. It is the implausible picture provided by this different analogy that seems, for instance, to be the target of J. L. Mackie's celebrated "argument from queerness."[11] For, according to Mackie, a realist about value is committed to maintaining that an "objective value" would have to be part of the "fabric of the world," as well as being such that "something's being good both tells the person to pursue it and makes him pursue it."[12] One way of responding to Mackie's objection is thus to reject the claim that knowledge of an objective value would have to be such that it could *make* someone – make *anyone* – pursue it. This would be to reject (at least one version of) what has come to be known as the "internalist" requirement on moral motivation: the requirement that posits a necessary or "internal" connection between an agent's judgments of moral value and his being motivated to act in accordance with (or to "pursue") that value.[13] I will not discuss that response to Mackie here. This is perfectly appropriate, at least here, since McDowell himself opts for a different way of responding to Mackie's criticism. McDowell's own response is to concede the force of Mackie's objection, but to insist that a realist about value need not be committed to the position

[11] Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), chap. 1.

[12] Ibid., 40.

[13] For an excellent recent discussion of this requirement, and extensive bibliographical references, see Sigrún Svavarsdóttir, "Moral Cognitivism and Motivation," *Philosophical Review* 108 (1999): 161–219.

that is its target. Thus McDowell writes that:

> it seems implausible – at least upon reflection – to take seriously the idea of something that is like a primary quality in being simply *there*, independently of human sensibility, but is nevertheless intrinsically (not conditionally on contingencies about human sensibility) such as to elicit some "attitude" or state of will from someone who becomes aware of it. (132)

The analogy between values and secondary qualities is therefore meant to enable a realist about value to reject the implausible picture that Mackie wishes to hang on realists about value.

According to the secondary-quality analogy that McDowell proposes as an alternative, a secondary quality is a property that cannot be adequately understood independently of some reference to the effects that such a property would have on human (or similar) sensibility. This is because a secondary quality is not adequately understood except in terms of its disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance. An object's being red, for instance, "is understood as something that obtains in virtue of the object's being such as (in certain circumstances) to look, precisely, red" (133). The suggestion is that what it is for something to be red is not adequately understood except in terms of what it is for something to look red; and what it is for something to look red is not adequately understood except by reference to the sensibility of creatures who are sensitive to the way red things look. Now the analogy between values and secondary qualities, according to McDowell, is that both of them can be "understood only in terms

of the appropriate modification of human (or similar) sensibility" (143). An experience of value, on this view, is not adequately understood except by reference to the sensibility of creatures that are sensitive to what is valuable.

How is the analogy supposed to bolster an account of moral realism? For on this account, both values and secondary qualities are quite clearly subjective, at least insofar as any adequate understanding of them contains an ineliminable reference to the sensibility of creatures like ourselves. But the crucial idea behind this attempt to defend the objectivity of value is to distinguish two very different notions of objectivity. According to the first notion, a property is objective only if it is there to be experienced independently of any particular experience of it. And a property is subjective only if it is not there to be experienced independently of any particular experience of it, and so is a "mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it." This first notion of objectivity is relatively undemanding, since it seeks only to be able to acknowledge a difference between seeming to be right in one's judgments about value or color (say), and actually being right about them.[14] It does not demand that objectivity be completely alien to subjectivity.

The second notion of objectivity is, however, more demanding. According to this second notion, a property is objective only if it can indeed be understood without any reference to the responses in sentient observers to which the property is disposed to give rise. This second notion of objectivity can appropriately be labeled the "absolute conception" of objectivity, then, since it is the notion of objectivity provided by what Bernard Williams has characterized as the "absolute conception" of reality – a conception

[14] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §258, and McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 167–197.

of reality that is "to the maximum degree independent of our perspective and its peculiarities."[15] According to this second notion, a property is subjective if it can be adequately understood only by reference to the subjective states that it is disposed to give rise to in particular observers.

Now secondary qualities, on McDowell's account of them, are objective according to the less demanding notion of objectivity, even though they are not objective according to the more demanding notion. Secondary qualities are there to be experienced, and so objective in that sense, even though no adequate understanding of them can dispense with some reference to the effects that they have on sensibilities such as our own. To follow up on the analogy, then, neither values nor colors (say) are like primary qualities in being simply there, independent of human (or similar) sensibility. But according to McDowell, "this does not prevent us from supposing they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them" (146), and so objective in the sense characterized by that independence.

IV

Whether that account of value adequately answers Mackie's objection remains, of course, an open question. And, indeed, an instructive criticism of McDowell's view of moral knowledge has recently been proposed by Charles Larmore.[16] Considering Larmore's criticism will allow us to appreciate an important misunderstanding about the nature of

[15] Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 137–140. See also his *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1978), 239–252.

[16] Charles Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 5. All page references to Larmore in the text are to this work.

the moral realism that McDowell defends. And, indeed, considering this criticism will allow us to appreciate an important misunderstanding about the nature of moral realism in general.

Larmore criticizes McDowell's perceptual model of moral knowledge because it does not, he thinks, take "the form a proper account of the nature of moral knowledge should take" (108). For his own part, Larmore recommends an account of moral knowledge – and a corresponding version of moral realism – according to which moral knowledge amounts to an agent's recognizing the reasons he has for acting in certain ways: the content of such knowledge must accordingly contain, at least implicitly, some reference to such reasons. But according to Larmore, the perceptual model of moral knowledge that McDowell advocates should appear misconceived, since it cannot, he says, "account for the normative content of moral knowledge" (109-10). Of course Larmore is prepared to admit that in certain circumstances we can quite plainly see that some action is bad or wrong or cruel; but that does not yet capture the normative element of moral knowledge that he finds indispensable. Larmore's idea is that moral knowledge is just a particular variety of normative knowledge in general – knowledge, that is, of what we ought to believe and do. And the objection to McDowell's perceptual model of moral knowledge is that "it makes no sense to say we "see" the action's being something that *ought not to be*; that is, there is no sense in saying we *perceive the reason* why the action should not be done" (110). This apparent failure to capture the normative element of any genuine moral knowledge is what Larmore takes to be the "fundamental flaw" in any perceptual account of moral knowledge.

At this point we need not stop to evaluate Larmore's criticism of the perceptual

model of moral knowledge (though I return to his criticism below, in section 11). What I want to draw attention to here is the fact that Larmore credits McDowell with having come to acknowledge that the perceptual model is flawed in just the way he indicates. In McDowell's more recent writings, Larmore says, McDowell "leaves behind the perceptual analogy" (111). Now the evidence for this claim is meant to be found in McDowell's paper "Projection and Truth in Ethics."[17] In that paper McDowell maintains that earning the right to speak of *truth* in ethics would have to be:

> a matter of supplying something that really does what is merely pretended by the bogus epistemology of intuitionism. Instead of a vague attempt to borrow the epistemological credentials of perception, the position I am describing aims, quite differently, at an epistemology that centres on the notion of susceptibility to reasons. The threat to truth is from the thought that there is not enough substance to our conception of reasons for ethical stances. (162)

Does what McDowell says in this passage indicate, as Larmore thinks, that McDowell abandons the perceptual model of moral knowledge? In what follows I

[17] McDowell, "Projection and Truth in Ethics," in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 151-166 (originally presented as the Lindley Lecture at the University of Kansas, 1987). Larmore also offers the following claim as evidence for what he takes to be McDowell's alternative to the perceptual model: "the idea that normative thought in general is engaged in attending to a 'space of reasons,' which 'are there whether we know it or not,' forms the heart of McDowell's 1991 John Locke Lectures, *Mind and World*" (*The Morals of Modernity*, 111). As I hope the text below makes clear, it seems to me that Larmore's remark, while true, nevertheless fails to show that McDowell abandons a perceptual model of moral knowledge.

attempt to show that it does not. This requires me to furnish an explanation of why McDowell seems to say that he has abandoned the perceptual model if in fact, as I want to urge, he has not. I also need to explain what McDowell means when he says that his position aims at an epistemology that "centres on the notion of susceptibility to reasons." For at first glance at least, McDowell's claim seems to be a straightforward adoption of the account of moral knowledge endorsed by Larmore: an account according to which moral knowledge amounts to a recognition of the reasons one has for acting in certain ways.

Why does McDowell say that his account of moral knowledge does not rely on a "vague attempt to borrow the epistemological credentials of perception"? That remark, as it seems to me, is meant to distance his account of moral knowledge from the account given by an "intuitionistic realism," a position McDowell characterizes as "rather clearly disreputable" (154) since it maintains that values can be properties had "intrinsically or absolutely, independent of their relation to us" (151). The conception of moral value that McDowell aims to disown here is therefore precisely the conception he aims to disown when he proposes the analogy between values and secondary qualities. Thus the two different positions that Larmore claims to be at work here are just two instances of the very same attempt to reject a disreputable strawman. And McDowell's rejection of the strawman does nothing to show that he abandons the perceptual model provided by the analogy between values and secondary qualities; that analogy was always meant to distance a realist epistemology of value from the implausible alternative that pictures objectivity as something wholly independent of subjectivity.

Nevertheless, when McDowell says that his position aims at an epistemology that

"centres on the notion of susceptibility to reasons," it can seem that he is suddenly committing himself to the account of moral knowledge endorsed by Larmore. Understanding McDowell's claim in that way would, nevertheless, be a mistake. For at the very outset of the paper on which Larmore's reading of McDowell relies,[18] McDowell announces that the argument of his paper will respect a distinction that David Wiggins has pressed between "*evaluations*," and "*directives* or *deliberative* (or *practical*) judgements." Wiggins spells out the distinction in the following passage:

> I propose that we distinguish between *evaluations* (typically recorded by such forms as "*x* is good", "bad", "beautiful", "ugly", "ignoble", "brave", "just", "mischievous", "malicious", "worthy", "honest", "corrupt", "disgusting", "amusing", "diverting", "boring", *etc*. – no restrictions at all on the category of *x*) and *directives* or *deliberative* (or *practical*) judgements (e.g. "I must ψ", "I ought to ψ", "it would be best, all things considered, for me to ψ", etc.).[19]

The point of respecting such a distinction, for McDowell, is to be able to address questions concerning the attribution of truth to evaluations, while putting to one side questions concerning the attribution of truth to deliberative judgments. He says explicitly that the argument of his paper will only be concerned to make room for the attribution of truth to evaluations.

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[18] "The paper on which Larmore's reading relies" is not of course the sole basis for Larmore's reading of McDowell (see, e.g., the previous note), but no distortion occurs by using the phrase for ease of exposition.

[19] Wiggins, "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life," in *Needs, Values, Truth*, 95–96.

The point is crucial for evaluating the claim that McDowell abandons the perceptual model of moral knowledge. For given the plausible assumption that "I ought to ψ" entails "I have a reason to ψ,"[20] moral knowledge as Larmore conceives it must be a kind of knowledgeably held deliberative judgment. But McDowell says explicitly in the paper on which Larmore's reading relies that his project is to make room for the attribution of truth to "ethical stances," which he says we are to understand as evaluations, *not* as deliberative judgments. Now presumably a correct ethical stance is a form of moral knowledge. But when McDowell places emphasis on having reasons for an ethical stance, those reasons are not to be understood as Larmore suggests. The point is that one should have reasons for an ethical stance taken toward whether something is valuable or not. Endorsing an epistemology according to which one should have reasons for one's evaluations is thus a *requirement* on the perceptual model of moral knowledge, not a move away from it.[21]

V

The confusion in interpreting McDowell's position stems from failing to keep clearly separated the two different forms of moral realism that are in play here. The analogy that McDowell proposes between values and secondary qualities is meant to furnish support for realism about *values* – which get featured in the content of evaluations. It is not

[20] See Williams, "*Ought* and Moral Obligation," in *Moral Luck*, 114–123; McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 77–94 (originally published in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. 52 (1978): 13–29); and Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity*, 96.

[21] It is worth noticing that this requirement is already present in "Values and Secondary Qualities."

meant to bolster the sort of realism that Larmore is concerned to defend, namely, realism about *reasons for action* – which get featured, at least indirectly, in the content of deliberative judgments. McDowell's defense of realism about reasons for action is not therefore to be found in the analogy between values and secondary qualities. His defense of this different sort of moral realism is rather to be found, as it happens, in papers that predate his defense of the secondary-quality analogy. Thus the account of moral knowledge that Larmore credits McDowell with having come to acknowledge as an alternative to the perceptual model – and which supposedly prompts McDowell to abandon the perceptual model – is actually an account that McDowell has always in fact endorsed. In this section I want to consider some of what McDowell says about reasons for action, in order to help develop, in the remainder of the paper, a realist account of reasons for action.

According to Wiggins's characterization, as we have seen, a deliberative judgment is a judgment of the form "I ought to ψ" where ψ is some verb of action. Now it seems plausible to suppose that whenever such a judgment is true – whenever it is true that I ought to ψ – it is also true that I have a reason to ψ. It seems plausible, moreover, to suppose that my reason to ψ in such a case is not given by the "ought" statement itself, but rather by some specification of the details of my situation. Statements of the form "I ought to ψ" thus entail statements of the form "I have a reason to ψ," and giving an explicit specification of the reason will involve giving an explicit specification of some at least of the morally salient details of the situation in which the judgment is made. This entailment relation yields a set of deliberative judgments in a sense that goes beyond Wiggins's characterization – judgments whose contents bear some direct relation to the

relevant sorts of reasons. Now a realist construal of deliberative judgments, in this expanded sense, will allow for the attribution of truth to such judgments, even in those cases in which an agent's reason for acting in a certain way is neither constituted by, nor derived from, any of the agent's psychological states, and in particular, cases in which such a reason is not derived from any of the agent's desires.[22] Of course I cannot hope to establish this position here.[23] But after briefly characterizing McDowell's own account of this position, I do want to draw out some of the apparently unappreciated consequences that seem to follow from it.

McDowell has proposed an account of deliberative judgments, in the expanded sense just characterized, according to which an agent's reason for acting as he does is sometimes just the particular conception he has of his situation, a conception that does not derive from any of the agent's desires. According to McDowell, a full specification of an agent's reason for acting will "credit him with psychological states given which we can see how doing what he did, or attempted, would have appeared to him in some favourable light" (79). And given McDowell's view that – at least in certain cases – it is the agent's "conception of the situation" that "suffices to show us the favourable light in which the action appeared to him," an agent's conception of the facts of his situation can "constitute the whole of a reason" for acting as he did (80). Now an agent's conception of the facts of his situation is a cognitive state: a state that purports to characterize the way things are. The view under consideration is therefore that a cognitive state alone,

[22] The contemporary impetus for this view is presumably Thomas Nagel's *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).

[23] For an excellent discussion of the arguments on both sides of this debate, and extensive bibliographical references, see R. Jay Wallace, "How to Argue about Practical Reason," *Mind* 99 (1990): 355–385.

without any supplementation by a pre-existing desire, can constitute an agent's reason for acting as he does. The paradigmatic case in which this happens is the case of prudential action: an agent's reason for acting prudently can be constituted, McDowell says, by an "awareness of some fact that makes it likely (in his view) that acting in that way will be conducive to his interest." In such a case the agent's "view of the facts may suffice, on its own, to show us the favourable light in which his action appeared to him" (79). The view is that in such cases no reference to a pre-existing and "independently intelligible" desire is needed in order to show us the favorable light in which an agent sees his action. Of course we need not deny that the agent has a desire to act as he does; it is just that the ascription of the desire follows from the fact that we take his conception of the situation to have constituted his reason to act as he did (80). In a similar way, McDowell maintains that virtuous actions can be instances in which an agent's reason for acting as he does is exhausted by his conception of the facts of his situation. An agent's reason for lending a helping hand can be constituted, for instance, by the fact that, as he sees it, the beneficiary is a close friend in need.

Those two sorts of cases are special by comparison to the more common cases of reasons for action. In these apparently less contentious cases,[24] a full specification of an agent's reason will indeed include some reference to a pre-existing and independently intelligible desire. So, for instance, a full specification of an agent's reason for taking his umbrella will cite both his belief that it will rain – his conception of the situation – as

[24] There are questions about whether one needs to appeal to "independently intelligible" desires even in these sorts of cases. See McDowell's "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?"; and T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 1.

well as his desire not to get wet. And while we sometimes say that someone took his umbrella simply because he thought it would rain, a full specification of his reason for doing so will also cite a desire as an independent extra component. What McDowell wants to insist upon is that in cases in which an agent acts virtuously, the agent's conception of the facts of his situation suffices, all by itself, to constitute the agent's reason for acting as he does. It is not that we fail to mention an independently intelligible desire because of an understandable omission of the obvious. Such a desire is no part of what constitutes the agent's reason for acting in those cases in which an agent acts virtuously.

VI

That account of reasons for action has, however, seemed to many to be wildly problematic. The most prominent objection against it is that a cognitive state alone can never constitute an agent's reason for acting as he does, since a cognitive state alone is never sufficient to motivate someone to act. Proponents of the objection insist that all reasons for action are at least partially constituted by the very pre-existing and "independently intelligible" desires which McDowell claims to be (at least sometimes) unnecessary. Now I do not myself find it problematic that an agent can be motivated to act solely on the basis of his being in a particular cognitive state.[25] What I do find problematic, however, is identifying an agent's *reason* for acting as he does with the

[25] Michael Smith argues vigorously in *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) for the thesis that a desire must be a constituent of an agent's reason for acting in a certain way. In response to Smith's arguments, G. F. Schueler offers a promising attack on the thesis. See Schueler, *Desire: Its Role in Practical Reason and the Explanation of Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

cognitive state that is his conception of his situation. When McDowell says that an agent's view of the facts of his situation may suffice, on its own, to constitute a reason for acting, that claim, as it seems to me, is correct.[26] But an agent's view of the facts of his situation can be thought of *either* as a cognitive state *or* as the content of such a state. The difference is between his view of the situation, understood as a cognitive state, and the situation *as viewed by him*. The latter option registers the way the situation appears to a deliberating agent, the way he sees it. In those cases in which we say that the agent's conception of his situation explains his acting as he does, the facts of his situation seem to him to count in favor of a certain course of action; and it is the facts of the situation as they appear to him – the *content* of the cognitive state that he is in – that constitutes his reason for acting as he does.[27] This way of thinking about an agent's view of his situation is supported by the fact that in citing his reasons for acting in a certain way, an agent often mentions only what he takes to be a morally relevant fact of his situation. His reason for lending a helping hand, for example, might just have been (constituted by) the fact that the beneficiary was a close friend in need.

VII

The essentially subjective character imported by the agent's own view of the facts of his situation indicates that this way of thinking about an agent's reasons for acting as he does

[26] The claim is correct, at least, if the notion of "constitution" is not meant to bear any serious metaphysical weight, see section 8 below.

[27] Of course the content of the cognitive state cannot be his reason for acting as he does unless he is actually in that state; nevertheless, his reason for acting as he does can plausibly be thought of as *what* he believes when he is in such a state. Arthur W. Collins makes a similar suggestion, see "The Psychological Reality of Reasons," *Ratio* 10 (1997): 108–123.

is an account of the agent's "motivating" reasons. An agent's motivating reason is the reason we cite (and the reason he himself can at least in principle cite) in an explanation of why he acted in that way. Now the notion of a motivating reason for action is an essentially subjective notion. This can be seen most clearly by comparing it to a parallel notion in cases (or at least apparent cases) of empirical knowledge. In considering an apparent case of empirical knowledge, we can say that an agent's reason for believing that things are a certain way is that it appears to him as though things are that way. Of course the way things appear to a subject is, in an obvious sense, a subjective matter; and the fact that things appear that way is logically independent of the question whether things are the way they appear to him to be. Nevertheless, in the cases that amount to knowledge, the appearance that things are a certain way is not *merely* an appearance that they are that way: in such cases, the way things appear to be *is* the way things are.[28] Now the parallel between reasons for action and reasons for belief invites us to consider whether the reasons for which an agent acts *really are* reasons – or really are *good* reasons – for acting in that way. There is a question of whether an agent's motivating reasons for acting as he does can aspire to a level of objectivity that motivating reasons themselves, with their essential subjectivity, do not seem to possess. The question is whether we can speak of veridicality in this area of ethical thought – in the area of how the facts of a situation can sometimes also appear to be reasons for action. And, of course, any ethical theory that allows for the attribution of truth to deliberative judgments

[28] On the idea that the content of a veridical perception need not stop anywhere short of the very fact whose upshot the perception is, see McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996). There is, arguably, already something similar in Aristotle: see my "Aristotle on Illusory Perception," *Ancient Philosophy* 21 (2001): 57–71.

as I have construed them here will provide an account according to which genuine reasons for actions come into view. That is one of the things a substantive ethical theory can do.

The question brings us to one of the key Aristotelian elements in McDowell's own account of deliberative judgments (though it should be obvious, as I have just said, that the ethical theory employed at this point need not be Aristotelian).[29] The idea is that a normal human upbringing furnishes ethical agents with a certain more or less determinate conception of how one should live, a conception that will of necessity color the way they conceive of the situations in which they find themselves. Any sufficiently determinate ethical outlook will thus bring into view certain apparent reasons for action. It is yet a further point that only an *appropriate* or *decent* ethical upbringing – which culminates in the appropriate molding of an agent's ethical character – can equip an agent to apprehend the specifically ethical dimension that consists of the requirements that situations impose on behavior (51). The conceptual capacities acquired in an appropriate ethical upbringing thus allow one to conceive of situations in such a way that *genuine* reasons for action come into view. Such an upbringing equips one with a kind of sensitivity to ethical requirements, a sensitivity that McDowell is indeed comfortable describing as a kind of perceptual capacity:

The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case,

[29] As a concrete alternative to the Aristotelian account that McDowell endorses, consider the recognizably Kantian suggestion that a decent moral upbringing results in an agent's setting morally appropriate ends for herself, and, in particular, the end of respecting the dignity of rational nature as such, both in one's own person and in the person of others. I develop this idea further in my paper "Kantian Reasons for Reasons," *Ratio* 20 (2007): forthcoming.

> whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. When a decent ethical upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons. Thereafter our appreciation of its layout is indefinitely subject to refinement, in reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking.[30]

The appeal to a substantive ethical theory that allows for the attribution of truth to deliberative judgments makes available a more robust account of moral reasons. For a discrepancy can now open up between an agent's motivating reasons for acting as he does and the reasons there actually are for acting in certain ways. This possibility allows that an agent can fail to notice the reasons he has for acting in certain ways, reasons that are "there anyway," whether or not he is aware of them. Reasons in general need not therefore be seen as *merely* the way the facts of a situation appear to a deliberating agent – the content of the cognitive state that is an agent's conception of the facts of his situation. There is now a question of whether an agent's conception of the facts of his situation is an accurate conception, a question of whether an agent's deliberative judgments are correct. Any ethical theory that allows for the attribution of truth to deliberative judgments as I have construed them here will allow for this consequence.

One other consequence of this account, which McDowell himself does not particularly emphasize, is that Wiggins's distinction between evaluations and deliberative

[30] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 82. The capacity in question is explicitly modeled on Aristotle's conception of *phronêsis*, "practical wisdom," something Aristotle characterizes as a kind of perception (see especially Books II and VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*).

judgments will not be very sharp for those agents with a sufficiently determinate conception of how one should live. From the point of view of someone whose upbringing has equipped him with a sufficiently robust repertoire of ethical concepts, that is, no distinction between evaluations and deliberative judgments will be visible in many of the cases in which he makes an evaluation.[31] An agent's conception of his situation may for instance include such judgments as that -ing would, in the circumstances, be generous. According to Wiggins's characterization, this is an evaluation rather than a deliberative judgment. But such a conception of the situation can surely show us the favorable light in which an agent sees the proposed action. The proposed action seems to be the generous thing to do, and, since the agent has been brought up in a certain way, that judgment by itself registers, from his point of view, a reason to ψ. The judgment that ψ-ing would be generous thus serves both as an evaluation and as a deliberative judgment. From a certain point of view the two types of judgment will not diverge, as with someone who says, "Well maybe it *would* be the generous thing to do – but why should that matter to me?" His response will rather be along the lines of someone who says, "I don't really have a choice; it would be cruel not to." Of course judgments of this sort do not record the only kinds of reasons there are, since a deliberative judgment need not involve any specifically evaluative concepts. It is nevertheless worth registering that, from the point of view of a certain kind of deliberating agent, the distinction between evaluations and deliberative judgments is not as sharp as Wiggins suggests.[32]

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[31] Cases in which this is obviously not so are evaluations employing aesthetic concepts.

[32] This claim does not commit one to any particular thesis about the nature of moral value (as the argument in section IX below aims to demonstrate); so it is possible to develop a realist position in ethics that disclaims the need for a realist account of value.

VIII

Now McDowell is supremely unconcerned to address questions concerning the nature of the reasons that agents have for acting in certain ways. When faced with a question of what it is that in general constitutes the space of reasons, McDowell says that one is entitled simply to shrug one's shoulders.[33]

If we find that response to the question unsatisfying, we may want to try to furnish an answer to it ourselves. We can make some headway toward an answer to this question by considering again the parallel that exists between reasons for action and reasons for belief. In a particular case of apparent empirical knowledge, a subject is faced with a certain appearance as to how things are in his immediate environment; the content of his cognitive state is therefore that things are just that way. And if the subject believes that things are the way they appear to be, presumably his reason for believing what he does will be provided by the content of the cognitive state in which he finds himself: that is, namely, by the appearance that things are that way.[34] But if the case is one that amounts to knowledge, the appearance that things are a certain way is not a *mere* appearance: it *is* the way things are. We should therefore say that the subject has a genuine reason – not merely a motivating reason – to believe that things are that way. And it seems plausible to suppose that the reason will still be furnished by the content of the cognitive state in which he finds himself, namely, by the very fact that things are that way.

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[33] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 178.

[34] Of course other beliefs of his, to the effect that he is not being misled in this particular case, will be relevant.

According to McDowell's account of deliberative judgments, as we have seen, an agent's motivating reason is "constituted" by his conception of the facts of his situation.[35] In order to draw out an account of genuine moral reasons that parallels the account just given in the case of reasons for belief, we will have to drop McDowell's insistence that an agent's conception of a situation "constitutes" his motivating reason. What we should say instead, in my view, is that the *content* of such a conception *is* the agent's motivating reason. If we allow ourselves to do that, then an agent's motivating reason for acting in a certain way can simply *be* the fact that, as it seems to him, to act in this way will be (say) to help a friend in need. The agent's motivating reason will thus be provided by the content of the cognitive state that is his conception of the facts of his situation. But if, as McDowell contends, there are appropriate ethical upbringings which furnish agents with correct conceptions of their situations, then in certain cases the content of an agent's conception of his situation will be a genuine reason for acting in a certain way: since a correct conception of his situation is a case of knowledge, the content of the cognitive state is, simply, a fact. This allows us to identify, in a case in which an agent correctly conceives of his situation, his motivating reason with the reason that he genuinely has anyway, whether he is aware of it or not.

On this understanding of reasons for action, an agent's motivating reason (in a case in which he correctly conceives of his situation) stands in the same relation to a genuine reason for action as the content of a belief (in a case in which the belief amounts to knowledge) stands to facts. The relation is not one of "constitution," but rather one of

[35] The constitution relation, as some metaphysicians have been eager to point out, seems to fall short of the identity relation, since a ship, e.g., can be constituted by its planks while remaining the same ship when some of the planks are replaced.

identity. Thus, for instance, one's reason for acting temperately in a certain situation might just be (to borrow some vivid examples from Rosalind Hursthouse) *that one is waiting to see whether one is HIV positive*, or *that she said "no."*[36] In such cases we should not say that the facts of the situation "constitute" a reason to act temperately; those facts *are* the very reasons themselves. *That she said "no"* can simply *be* the reason to desist.[37]

The upshot is that the account of reasons for action that I have been developing is stronger, from a realist point of view, than the alternative account according to which reasons are merely constituted by the facts of one's situation. For on that alternative account, an agent's reasons for acting in certain ways stand as something that mediates the relation between an agent's motivating reasons and the facts of his situation. This can

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[36] See Rosalind Hursthouse, "The Virtuous Agent's Reasons: A Reply to Bernard Williams," in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, ed. R. Heinaman (Boulder, Col.: Westview, 1995), 24–33. Hursthouse herself is admittedly not interested in establishing any metaphysical conclusion about the nature of reasons for action. For contemporary adherents of the view that facts can also be reasons for action see Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), as well as Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and see Joseph Raz, *Practical Reasons and Norms* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), as well as Raz's more recent *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). However, as far as I can tell, neither the arguments deployed by Dancy nor those deployed by Raz make appeal to substantive ethical theory in the way that I consider to be crucial; they certainly do not find realism about value dispensable.

[37] Rüdiger Bittner has recently rejected the idea that facts can be reasons for action. His objection is based on the highly metaphysical claim that facts do not occur at any particular place and time and that an agent's reason for doing what she does must be some aspect of her situation, i.e. something capable of occurring at a particular place and time: *Doing Things for Reasons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69. But surely the agent has to believe there *are* such aspects of her situation if she is going to act on them, and this suggests that the agent's reason for doing what she does is: *what* she believes about the situation, i.e. something capable of being the case.

be seen most clearly by noticing, as Larmore does, that McDowell's position "would appear to entail a fundamental rethinking of the reigning conception of what there is. The world, that is the totality of what exists, would have to encompass, not only the two dimensions of physical nature and minds, but also a third, normative order or reasons."[38] On my view, by contrast, an agent's reasons for acting in a certain way – at least when he is not mistaken – are the very facts of his situation themselves. While stronger in that sense than McDowell's alternative view, the view I have been developing nevertheless manages to be ultimately less contentious. This is precisely because of the "third, normative order of reasons" that Larmore mentions. From my perspective this result is completely unnecessary: a consequence of the failure to equate reasons with the very facts of the natural world.[39]

IX

We are now in a position to consider the relationship between realism about value and realism about reasons for action. My position is of course that, so far as this account of reasons for action is concerned, realism about value (as odd as it can sound) does not really matter after all. This can be seen most clearly by considering how well realism

[38] Larmore, "Attending to Reasons," in *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. N. H. Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 193–208, 201. See also *The Morals of Modernity*, chap. 5.

[39] McDowell himself sometimes expresses his own position in ways that are amenable to the view that I recommend. He writes that "we are fallible in our judgments as to the shape of the space of reasons as we find it, or—what comes to the same thing—as to the shape of the world as we find it." McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 407. This formulation is much more hospitable to the account of reasons I develop here than is the alternative formulation that has the facts of the natural world merely constituting the reasons one has for acting in a certain way.

about reasons for action can fare even if realism about value is rejected.

As a candidate reason for rejecting realism about value, consider the familiar noncognitivist conviction that "thick," culturally specific, evaluative terms can be analyzed into a descriptive component and a prescriptive component. The descriptive component makes it appropriate to apply the term only in certain sorts of cases, so that such terms will be guided by the world. The evaluative component serves to prescribe or condemn the sorts of actions picked out by the purely descriptive component, so that such terms will be capable of guiding action. The noncognitivist conviction thus rejects the claim that an experience of value is a matter of confronting something that is there to be experienced independently of any particular experience of it. Such an experience is rather a matter of projecting human sentiment onto a value-free world, and then mistaking the upshot of this process as a matter of confronting genuine aspects of reality. The noncognitivist analysis is therefore committed to maintaining that, at least in principle, any "thick" evaluative term can be replaced by a purely descriptive term that applies to all and only those cases to which the "thick" ethical term applies. If that noncognitivist analysis could be successfully defended, it would presumably provide the death-blow to any plausible form of realism about value. But that is as it may be. As the following considerations show, realism about reasons for action would nevertheless remain unscathed.

Now we have been operating under the assumption that an agent's conception of his situation can, all by itself, be that on the basis of which he acts as he does; and we have said that the content of such a conception can be the agent's "motivating" reason for acting in that way. We have therefore maintained that in the cases in which his

conception of the situation is the right conception, his motivating reason for acting as he does is also a genuine reason for acting in that way: it is some morally relevant fact of his situation. Now sometimes what an agent takes to be morally relevant about his situation is something that can be couched in non-evaluative language: he might be waiting to see whether he is HIV positive. But sometimes what he takes to be relevant about his situation is that acting in a certain way would be (say) generous. This is a case in which the value captured in the content of an evaluation is taken to be a reason for some course of action, so that the evaluation is *also* a deliberative judgment. The noncognitivist conviction precludes a realist construal of the evaluation, and insists that the actions to which that "thick" evaluative term applies can be similarly captured by some newly-coined term that is utterly free of evaluative connotations.

What would make such an analysis possible (if it is possible) is that certain facts about a situation make it appropriate to classify certain actions undertaken in that situation as generous. Those facts are purportedly available for classifying actions both by the term "generous" as well as by some purely descriptive term. But from the point of view of the sort of realism about reasons that I have been developing, the choice between the two different terms does not amount to very much. The crucially important question in this area, from that point of view, is whether such facts as are relevant to classifying actions by the terms in question are genuine reasons for acting in certain ways. The question to ask in the relevant situations will be (say) whether the fact that someone needs help is a reason to try to provide it. Here one should feel comfortable admitting that the use of the term "generous" does not really matter very much. One might even feel comfortable saying, more provocatively, that it does not really matter whether the

proposed action is generous. If the facts of the situation are genuine reasons for acting in a certain way, then the question of whether to compliment the action with the use of the term "generous" is at best only a secondary consideration.

I have so far suggested a way of dispensing with realism about value in the case of "thick" evaluative concepts. One might nevertheless remain worried about the "thin" evaluative concepts – the concepts of the good and the right. One might very well insist that we lose something of paramount importance if "*x* is good" cannot be realistically construed. But there are at least two ways of avoiding whatever difficulty there can seem to be here. One radical strategy is to enlist Elizabeth Anscombe's suggestion that we simply eliminate all mention of the *moral* sense of "good," "ought," etc., and operate instead with only our "thick" evaluative concepts.[40] A less radical option is to construct the notion of good and right actions – if there absolutely must be such a notion – out of a prior understanding, however it is to be spelled out, of those actions which an agent has most reason to perform. The objectivity of "good" and "right" can be secured derivatively in that way from the objectivity of genuine reasons for action.

X

At this point it may very well be objected that, according to the realist account of reasons for action that I have been discussing, the content of a deliberative judgment – a judgment about the facts of a certain situation – cannot be *normative* content. For according to this conception of reasons for action, if the agent is not mistaken, those very

[40] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–19. Of course, given appropriate standards of evaluation, non-moral uses of "good" need not seem problematic at all, as even J. L. Mackie is prepared to admit. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 25–27.

contents just are the facts of the situation in which he finds himself. A worry arises because a reason for action must of course be something normative, and yet the world (as conceived by the natural sciences at least) does not contain anything that can serve in this normative role. The worry resembles the one J. L. Mackie famously expressed about the objectivity of value.[41] Since neither values nor reasons are recognized as genuine aspects of reality by a merely sane (enlightened, scientific, naturalistic) view of the world, they must be products of human sentiment, something we "invent." In fact we can express the worry about reasons for action in just the way Mackie expresses his worry about value: reasons for action as I have construed them must be part of the "fabric of the world" while also being such as to tell people to factor them (and perhaps also such as to *make* people factor them) into practical deliberations.

But the worry results from a particular, and disputable, conception of what the natural world is like – a restrictive conception according to which the natural world is exhausted by the physical and psychological phenomena that form the subject matter of the modern natural sciences. There should be no question that such a conception of nature is in play: without it, the inference drawn in the expression of the worry could not amount to anything more than a *non sequitor*. The premise involved is the undeniable fact that according to the dehumanized standpoint that the modern natural sciences (rightfully for their purposes) adopt, facts are not the normative entities that reasons for action must be. And the conclusion is that this precludes natural facts – such as that someone is awaiting medical results – from also being reasons for acting in certain ways. But without the further, and much stronger, premise that any genuine aspect of reality can

[41] Ibid., chap. 1.

be captured in a general scientific net, the inference is clearly invalid. Without the restrictive conception of nature, that is, the normativity of certain natural facts can just be seen as something that falls outside the purview of the modern natural sciences.[42]

The point can be sharpened by considering yet again the parallel case of reasons for belief. The natural sciences allow us to register such facts as (e.g.) that helium is lighter than oxygen. But even though that fact is a verdict that science passes about the structure of the natural world, science itself does not pronounce on whether that fact – or whether anything else – is a *reason to believe* that helium is lighter than oxygen. On the view of reasons that I have been developing, the fact that helium is lighter than oxygen is indeed a reason to believe that that is so. And while science itself is not in the business of registering its status as a reason, that should not even seem to preclude the possibility that the actual obtaining of the fact in question counts in favor of believing it.[43]

It is also helpful to compare, in this connection, Moore's famous argument for his claim that goodness is a "non-natural" property. Any attempt to define "good" in terms of some natural property, Moore said, would inevitably commit what he called the naturalistic fallacy; for it will always remain an open question whether actions possessing such a property are in fact good. This led Moore to conclude that goodness is a simple

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[42] That should not even *seem* to call into question the authority that the sciences rightly command in their proper sphere.

[43] On the apparent incoherence of total skepticism about reasons, see for instance Allen W. Wood, *Unsettling Obligations: Essays on Reason, Reality and the Ethics of Belief* (Stanford, Cal.: CSLI Publications, 2002), chap. 6. It seems plausible that there would have to be an epistemological theory here that plays a role analogous to the one played by a substantive ethical theory in the case of reasons for action. Differing epistemological theories will presumably conflict over which facts are reasons for belief, for whom, and in which circumstances.

and "non-natural" property. Here, however, it is essential to notice how Moore characterized those properties that he took to be the natural ones. Moore said that a natural property was any property "with which it is the business of the natural sciences or of psychology to deal."[44] To claim that goodness is a "non-natural" property, in that sense, is therefore only to emphasize the seemingly obvious fact that moral goodness does not belong to the subject matter of natural science. To claim that an ethical property is "non-natural," in that sense, then, is not to convict it of being something mysterious or other-worldly. Such a claim merely serves to remind us that ethics is not a branch of one of the natural sciences, something that almost everyone would want to acknowledge.

What this shows is that the account of reasons for action that I have been developing is committed to rejecting that restrictive conception of nature. But embracing that conception of nature is far from compulsory.[45] And this leaves it unproblematic that the facts of one's situation can also be reasons for action, albeit reasons that can only be recognized from within the sort of ethical outlook that brings them into view. The lesson to be learned here is that if one does not equate the very notion of the natural with the

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[44] C. Lewy, "G. E. Moore on the Naturalistic Fallacy," in *Studies in the Philosophy of Thought and Action*, ed. P. F. Strawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 137; quoted in Barry Stroud, "The Charm of Naturalism," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 1996.

[45] This point has also been stressed by Stroud in his recent study of the metaphysics of color, where he calls attention to the difficulties of so much as formulating a conception of the world as it is "independently of us," a conception that would preclude colors from featuring as genuine aspects of reality. And he rightly emphasizes that, however difficult formulating such a conception of the world is in general, the world as described by the modern natural sciences does not by itself preclude the reality of colors. See his *The Quest for Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

subject matter of the modern natural sciences, then there is no reason to suppose that ethical considerations operate in a domain that is "non-natural." Without equating those two notions, that is, there is no reason to suppose that the normativity of facts is something mysterious or other-worldly. But then there is no need to retreat from the claim that the content of a deliberative judgment (at least if such a judgment is true) just is normative content. The worry with which we started was that, according to the conception of reasons for action that I have been developing, the content of a deliberative judgment cannot be normative content. But the worry is motivated by a restrictive conception of nature that neither fashion nor mere philosophical sanity can force one to embrace. Genuine reasons for action can indeed therefore be seen to be part of the very world that forms the subject matter of natural science, even though their status as reasons is not something that natural science itself is in a position to recognize.

XI

Perhaps this objection can, nevertheless, be recast as its familiar epistemological counterpart. This epistemological objection insists, with Larmore, that "it makes no sense to say we "see" the action's being something that *ought not to be*," that it makes no sense to say we "*perceive the reason* why the action should not be done." In reply to this objection, however, I think one should highlight the fact that in cases in which (say) acting temperately is the appropriate thing to do, one can indeed perceive the reason to act as temperance demands. One can obviously see, or at least hear, that someone said "no". So the reason itself is strictly speaking perceptible. No doubt perceiving the reason *as a reason* is not, absurdly, simply a result of the operations of the human sense

organs. But the relevant fact will indeed appear to be a reason, and so to be a normative consideration, from the point of view of those ethical agents who are sensitive to the reasons there are to act temperately. It does not matter that the relevant facts do not appear as normative considerations to those agents whose ethical upbringings have failed to equip them with the resources to recognize them as such. That is precisely what one should expect. It is really no objection, that is, to the identification of facts and reasons, that people can agree about all of the facts of a situation while nevertheless disagreeing about the existence of various reasons. For two people can also agree about the fact that it's raining outside while only one of them thinks that there is *any* reason to believe that it is. Of course it might seem paradoxical for someone to say so: "The fact that it's raining outside is no reason to believe it." But the possibility of someone's making this claim does not preclude the fact that it's raining outside from being a reason to believe that it is.[46] And similarly in the ethical case: the fact that people can disagree about whether a certain fact is a reason for action registers merely that ethical outlooks can differ. It would be unwarranted to conclude either that the facts of a situation cannot also be reasons for action, or to conclude that any ethical outlook is as good as any other. It would simply be a mistake to try to wring a metaphysical thesis from the commonplace and utterly obvious fact that the world contains unsavory individuals: "Of course she said 'no' – *but why should that matter to me*?"[47]

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[46] Compare McDowell's response to the same objection: *Reading McDowell*, 200.

[47] Perhaps it should matter because there is a sound deliberative route from the present elements in the agent's subjective motivational set to his acting temperately: see Bernard Williams, "Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame," in his *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 35–45. But on the view I have been developing, the question

XII

If what I have argued so far is correct, then the identification of genuine reasons for action with the morally relevant facts of a situation does indeed secure a form of moral realism that can dispense with defending either the secondary-quality analogy or the realism about value that such an analogy was intended to bolster. This different form of moral realism is secured, at least, if a substantive ethical theory can be successfully defended that allows for the attribution of truth to deliberative judgments as I have construed them here.[48]

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will obviously not be answered in that way. The relevant fact is a reason for the agent to desist quite independently of the present elements in his subjective motivational set.

[48] A version of this paper was presented at the Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in March 2004; I would like to thank Robert Mabrito for his helpful comments on that occasion. Thanks are also due to Julia Annas, Tom Christiano, Terry Horgan, Charles Larmore, Michael Loux, Minh T. Nguyen, Houston Smit, David Solomon, and an anonymous referee for this journal. Special thanks are due to Karl Ameriks, for his unfailing encouragement and advice. Since this paper was submitted much has been written on these topics; where possible, the notes reflect at least some of this.