Ethical Mooreanism

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Abstract

In this paper I lay out, argue for, and defend ethical Mooreanism. In essence, the view says that some moral propositions are Moorean propositions and thus are epistemically superior to the conjunctions of the premises of skeptical arguments to the contrary. In Sect. 1 I explain Mooreanism and then ethical Mooreanism. In Sect. 2 I argue for ethical Mooreanism by noting a number of important epistemic parities that hold between certain moral truths and standard Moorean facts. In Sect. 3 I defend ethical Mooreanism against the objection that moral propositions are too epistemically dissimilar to standard Moorean facts to count as Moorean truths.

Keywords Commonsense · Moral skepticism · Mooreanism

1 Introduction

It is sometimes suggested that certain commonsensical moral propositions, such as that it is wrong to engage in recreational genocide, are Moorean facts and thus are epistemically superior to the conjunctions of the premises of skeptical arguments to the contrary. Another way to put the suggestion is this: a normal, cognitively mature, properly functioning human being has more reason to believe in the reality of certain moral facts, and thus in the reality of moral facts simpliciter, than she does to believe in the premises of any philosophical skeptical argument to the contrary; anyone who thinks otherwise is misappraising what it is rational for her to believe–she overestimates the epistemic credentials of the skeptical argument and underestimates the epistemic credentials of moral commonsense. Call this view "ethical Mooreanism." This seemingly natural extension of the commonsense reply to radical skepticism is usually neglected or maligned. In this paper I attempt a first stab at motivating ethical Mooreanism. In Sect. 1 I discuss Mooreanism itself and then ethical Mooreanism. In Sect. 2 I argue that certain moral facts enjoy a number of important epistemic symmetries with the standard Moorean facts, such that if it is rational to

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embrace the latter as immune to philosophical skepticism, then it is also rational to think that the former enjoy that same sort of immunity. In Sect. 3 I respond to a set of objections against ethical Mooreanism.

2 Mooreanism and ethical mooreanism

2.1 What is mooreanism?

I will here be understanding Mooreanism as a commonsense metaphilosophical response to radical skepticism, i.e. skepticism about the external world, other minds, and so forth. Mooreanism so understood consists of the following two theses:

> *Commonsense Thesis*: Some propositions are such that: (a) they are epistemically superior to philosophical skeptical arguments to the contrary such that it is more rational for us to believe in them than it is to believe that a philosophical skeptical argument to the contrary is successful and (b) if a cognitively mature, properly functioning human being S believes such propositions on the basis of their proper grounds, then S knows them.
> *Transmission Thesis*: In virtue of CT, S has a rational basis for rejecting the philosophical skeptic's argument, namely that this argument is rationally inferior to the commonsense proposition it seeks to overturn.

This construal of Mooreanism is very similar to Bergmann's, (2012) commonsensism:

> *Commonsensism*: the view that (a) it is clear that we know many of the most obvious things we take ourselves to know (this includes the truth of simple perceptual, memory, introspective, mathematical, logical, and moral beliefs) and that (b) we also know (if we consider the question) that we are not in some skeptical scenario in which we are radically deceived in these beliefs (10).

Lemos refers to these "most obvious things we take ourselves to know" as "common sense propositions," Kelly as "Moorean facts," and Armstrong as "Moorean truths."[1] I will often speak of Mooreanism in terms of the superior epistemic status of certain commonsense propositions, and what I mean by this is simply that the typical cognitively mature, properly functioning human cognizer S has more propositional justification for these propositions than she does for conjunctions of skeptical premises to the contrary. It should be kept in mind that S has a doxastically justified belief in one of these commonsense propositions, a belief that amounts to knowledge, only if she believes it on the basis of that ground which constitutes its propositional justification.

Some clear examples of Moorean truths include facts such as the existence of the external world, the reality of other minds, and that human beings are not made of

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[1] See Lemos, (2004), Kelly, (2005), and Armstrong, (2006).

strawberries. I will be arguing in due course that some moral truths can, in virtue of possessing the same epistemic credentials as these standard commonsense facts, stand alongside them in enjoying immunity from philosophical skeptical arguments against them. Moore himself gave numerous examples of commonsense; here are some of them, nicely packaged for us by Boulter, (2018: pp. 29–30):

(1)　There are in the universe an enormous number of material objects (e.g. our bodies, other people, animals, plants, stones, mountains, rivers, seas, planets, tables, chairs).

(2)　Human beings have minds inasmuch as we have a variety of mental states, including acts of consciousness. We see, hear, feel, remember, imagine, think, believe, desire, dislike, will, love and so forth.

(3)　All material objects are located in space inasmuch as they are located at a distance from each other.

(4)　Mental acts are attached to–contained within–certain bodies (human bodies and perhaps those of the higher animals).

(5)　Mental acts are ontologically dependent upon bodies.

(6)　Most material objects have no acts of consciousness attached to them.

(7)　Material objects can and do exist when we are not conscious of them.

(8)　There was a time when no act of consciousness was attached to any material body.

(9)　All objects and acts of consciousness are in time.

(10)　We know (1)–(9) to be true.[2]

Though we will discuss Moorean facts in more detail in due course, in the context of the discussion about ethical Mooreanism, I should here offer some clarifying remarks about the nature of the Moorean's anti-skeptical strategy.

The first thing to underscore is that it is the superior epistemic status of the Moorean propositions which allows us to reason from them to the negation of the conjunction of the skeptic's premises. For the Moorean, commonsense propositions have their anti-skeptical powers by virtue of their superior epistemic status rather than by virtue of their popularity or even by virtue of being known.[3] After all, not every known proposition P is such that any S who knows P is thereby epistemically entitled to reject an argument that ~P. According to Mooreans, we are epistemically entitled to reject a skeptical challenge to a Moorean fact because we are *more* justified in believing commonsense propositions than we are in believing the skeptic's premises to the contrary; the former just have more going for them, epistemically speaking, than the latter. Lemos, (2004) notes the way that Mooreans respond when faced with a skeptical argument that runs counter to a commonsense proposition: "(1) P is a common sense proposition that I and many others know. (2) Theory T

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[2] These examples come from the first lecture in Moore's, (1953) *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, which is entitled "What is Philosophy?".

[3] See Lemos, (2004: pp. 6–14).

implies that P is false. (3) Therefore, theory T is false or unreasonable" (7). Following Rowe, (1979), let's call this move a "Moorean shift."[4] One makes a Moorean shift when one reasons from one's belief in some proposition P that one takes to be epistemically superior to a conjunction C of P-unfriendly premises to a rejection of C. In general, then, when we encounter skeptical arguments, what we really have to do is make a "Moorean plausibility comparison" (98), as Lycan, (2008) puts it, between the Moorean fact at hand and the conjunction of the skeptic's premises. When we do this, the Moorean facts win, thereby licensing a licit Moorean shift to the effect that the skeptic's argument fails somewhere. And the reason the Moorean facts win is, again, that they are epistemically superior to the skeptical arguments against them. As Kelly, (2005) puts it, there is a sense in which, according to the Moorean at least, "the skeptic has lost before the game begins"; that is, "we can know even in advance of attending to the specifics of the skeptic's argument" that, because it "would never be reasonable to be persuaded by the skeptic's argument," the "skeptic cannot win" (181).[5]

Mooreanism so understood is a second-order metaphilosophical reply to the skeptic and thus doesn't itself *diagnose* the malady afflicting the skeptic's argument, nor prescribe a cure–these things need doing, of course, but they are not done by Mooreanism.[6] Thus, Mooreans may differ among themselves about just exactly where the skeptic goes wrong and may offer differing epistemological accounts of that which is required for positive epistemic statuses like justification and knowledge. And thus one can find, for example, internalists and externalists alike affirming Mooreanism, sensitivity theorists and safety theorists doing the same, and so forth.[7] Though it is fairly ecumenical, then, I should point out that Mooreanism is not compatible with just any and every non-skeptical epistemological view. Partially concessive replies to skepticism, such as contextualism (the truth of an attributor's assertion that "S knows she has hands" depends on the attributor's context), contrastivism (S knows that she has hands rather than stumps but not that she has hands rather than vat-images of hands[8]), and closure denial (S knows that she has hands without knowing

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[4] To be more precise, Rowe called it the "G. E. Moore shift" (339); Rowe was using this phrase in a different context and I don't mean to imply that Rowe was referring to or endorsing Moore's commonsense anti-skepticism.

[5] Mooreans typically do affirm–e.g. Armstrong, (2006), Kelly, (2008), and Lycan, (2001)–that arguments utilizing "careful empirical investigation and scientific theorizing" (Lycan [2001: p. 40]) can sometimes overturn commonsense propositions. Kelly's (2008) explanation of this asymmetry between purely philosophical arguments and those that utilize empirical investigation and scientific theorizing is that scientific theories can use prediction to get confirmation in a way that abstract philosophical theories cannot. Whether one accepts this explanation of the asymmetry or not, it is not hard to see that there is a big difference between, say, a BIV-style argument which utilizes empirical observations that point to my actually being a BIV and one that merely highlights the conflict between the idea that one knows that one has hands and a particular set of epistemological principles.

[6] A point also made by Pryor, (2004: p 370).

[7] See Black, (2008) for an example of a sensitivity-touting Moorean and Sosa, (1999) for an example of a safety-touting Moorean; an example of an internalist Moorean is Huemer, (2001) and an example of an externalist Moorean is Greco, (2002).

[8] The example of hands rather than stumps vs. hands rather than hand-images comes from Schaffer, (2004).

that she is not envatted) are non-Moorean views. One other non-Moorean view is something we can call "hyper-rationalism," according to which you get to keep your ordinary knowledge, say knowledge that you have hands, only if you are able to offer a successful philosophical reply to the skeptic, one that can say why the skeptic's argument fails. Mooreanism denies that you must have such a philosophical response in order to keep your ordinary knowledge, though it is open to the Moorean to say that, if presented with a skeptical challenge to an item of ordinary knowledge, you must at least register the idea that your claim to ordinary knowledge is much more plausible than what the skeptic has to offer to avoid having that belief defeated by the skeptical argument. Someone who failed to register a thought like this may well have their ordinary knowledge defeated, but from the Moorean point of view this would be due to an error on the agent's part: the agent misappraised her own epistemic situation, affording more confidence in the skeptical argument than is warranted and less confidence in her ordinary knowledge claim than is warranted.

I should point out that the understanding of Mooreanism on offer here is not meant as a piece of historical exegesis, though I do think it is fairly faithful to Moore himself, who in various places articulates his response to skepticism in just the ways outlined here. Here is one representative passage from Moore, (1962):

> What I want, however, finally to emphasize is this: Russell's view that I do not know for certain that this is a pencil or that you are conscious rests, if I am right, on no less than four distinct assumptions: (1) That I don't know these things immediately; (2) That they don't follow logically from anything or things that I do know immediately; (3) That, *if* (1) and (2) are true, my belief in or knowledge of them must be "based on an analogical or inductive argument"; and (4) That what is so based cannot be certain knowledge. And what I can't help asking, myself is this: Is it, in fact, as certain that all these four assumptions are true, as that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious? I cannot help answering: It seems to me *more certain* that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious, than that any single one of these four assumptions is true, let alone all four (221).

This passage articulates a kind of commonsensist anti-skeptical metaphilosophy that seems to underlie Moore's famous proof of the external world. Following Greco, (2002), I interpret that proof as a manifestation of Moore's commitment to two tenets of Reidian commonsensism, namely, that commonsense has authority over philosophy and that when there is a conflict between commonsense and a skeptical argument, we should examine the skeptic's arguments to see where she has gone wrong.

The idea of Mooreanism as a kind of Reidian commonsensism differs from another extant view about what Mooreanism is. Some philosophers take Mooreanism to be a version of liberalism in the epistemology of perceptual belief. Conservatism, liberalism's competitor, says that a cognizer S has justification to believe that, say, she has hands only if S has (adequate) independent justification to believe that she is not in some skeptical scenario, such as being an envatted brain or the victim of an evil demon. Liberalism denies this, affirming that S's perceptual experience

that she has hands can, all by itself, give S justification to believe that she is not in the skeptical scenario.[9] The Moorean response to skepticism is sometimes regarded as a liberal response: the thought is that the Moorean denies that S has justification to believe that she has hands only if S has independent justification to believe that she is not in a skeptical scenario.[10]

A number of epistemologists have pointed out, however, that Mooreanism is not incompatible with conservatism.[11] A liberal Moorean will say that S can use her knowledge that she has hands to rule out skeptical arguments to the contrary and also that S's having justification to believe that she has hands doesn't depend on S's having independent justification to believe that she isn't in a skeptical scenario. A conservative Moorean, by contrast, will say that S can use her knowledge that she has hands to rule out skeptical arguments to the contrary and also that S's perceptual experience that she has hands justifies the proposition that she has hands only if S also has independent justification for believing that she isn't in a skeptical scenario.[12] Of course, as a conservative *Moorean*, a partisan of this view would also maintain that such independent justification is readily available to any normal, cognitively mature, properly functioning human being. A Moorean, then, is free to say that one's justification for rejecting the skeptical scenario is independent of one's justification for believing that one has hands. Such a conservative Moorean might say that what gives one justification for rejecting the skeptical scenario is one's total evidence, or default entitlement, or a track record argument, or whatever; the Moorean point would still be the same – one's total evidence (to put the point in evidentiary terms) would favor commonsense beliefs over the controversial metaphysical and epistemological hypotheses utilized in skeptical arguments to the contrary. My view of Mooreanism as a commonsense metaphilosophy is neutral with respect to the debate between liberals and conservatives.

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[9] There are minor differences in how these positions are formulated, but my formulations capture the way these terms are typically used. For discussions of liberalism and conservatism, see Pryor, (2004), Silins, (2008), Tucker, (2010a), Neta, (2010), and Willenken, (2011). The choice of the terminology here is unfortunate, in my view, for Huemer, (2001) had coined the term "phenomenal conservatism" just before those engaged in debate about perceptual justification started using the phrases "liberalism" and "conservatism." Huemer used, and uses, "phenomenal conservatism" for the view that, roughly, a seeming that P gives one prima facie justification to believe that P. Owing to Pryor, (2000) and Tucker, (2010b) that view is often called "dogmatism." A dogmatist about perceptual justification says that a perceptual seeming that P is enough, all by itself, to give one justification to believe that P–no independent justification to rule out skeptical hypotheses incompatible with P is needed for one's perceptual seeming that P to give one justification to believe that P. It is sometimes thought that anyone who is a dogmatist must therefore also be a Moorean, but this also seems untrue; see Fuqua, (2017) for the details.

[10] This thought seems to be due in large part to Pryor, (2004), who entitled one of his defenses of liberalism "What's Wrong with Moore's Argument?", and Wright, (2008), who pits conservatism against Mooreanism.

[11] See Silins, (2008), Tucker, (2010a), Neta, (2010), and Willenken, (2011).

[12] There are two ways that having an independent justification for rejecting the idea that S is in a skeptical scenario might bear on S's having justification to believe she has hands. First, it might be that S's having independent justification for rejecting skepticism is an enabling condition on S's having justification to believe that she has hands; second, it might be that S's having independent justification for rejecting skepticism is part of S's justification for believing that she has hands. These distinctions, and others, are drawn in Silins, (2005).

If Mooreanism is compatible with conservatism, then it seems mistaken to identify Mooreanism with a view that Wright refers to as "neo-Mooreanism," which he takes to be the view that Moore's proof doesn't suffer from transmission failure. In a case of transmission failure, the premises of an argument, though themselves justified, would fail to pass along this justification to the conclusion they entail such that, even if some cognizer S (i) justifiably believes the premises, (ii) competently deduces the conclusion from the premises which entail them, and (iii) then bases her belief in the conclusion on its being entailed by the premises, she would not thereby have a justified belief in the conclusion. A Moorean might well affirm that transmission failure occurs whenever the justification one has for a premise is parasitic on the justification one has for the conclusion, and that in fact this is precisely what is going on with Moore's proof. This Moorean will say that we've got plenty of independent reasons for thinking that skepticism is false as (again to put the point in evidentiary terms) our total evidence clearly favors commonsense propositions over skeptical ones. This Moorean affirms that, in virtue of our total evidence and our evidence for specific Moorean truths, we can rationally reject skeptical philosophical arguments against those truths.

On my construal of Mooreanism as a commonsense metaphilosophy, then, one need not endorse liberalism nor even the view that Moore's proof doesn't suffer from transmission failure. The essence of the view, rather, is the epistemic superiority of commonsense beliefs over the controversial conjunctions of philosophical principles needed by skeptical arguments to the contrary; filling out the details may be done in different ways by different Mooreans.

2.2 What is ethical mooreanism?

Ethical Mooreanism is the view that some Moorean propositions are moral propositions and thus are, like commonsense more generally, epistemically superior to philosophical skeptical arguments to the contrary. An implication of ethical Mooreanism is that it isn't rational to abandon moral beliefs in order to embrace the conjunction of the moral skeptic's premises. So, for example, you shouldn't be swayed by arguments for moral nihilism, which imply that none of your moral beliefs are true and thus that none of them amount to items of knowledge. It is more rational for us to believe in, say, the wrongness of recreational genocide than it is to believe in all of the controversial philosophical premises needed by the moral skeptic.[13] When faced with such arguments you should, says ethical Mooreanism, make a (licit) Moorean shift and reason from your epistemically superior belief that recreational genocide is wrong to a rejection of the conjunction of the skeptic's premises – the

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[13] More rational, again, only if: (i) we are normal, cognitively mature, properly function human beings; (ii) we have proper grounds for certain moral propositions which are the contents of certain of our moral beliefs; and (iii) we base these moral beliefs on their proper grounds. The example of recreational genocide is adapted from an example of a "moral fixed point" identified by Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, (2014), namely that "it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.".

proposition that recreational genocide is wrong simply has more going for it, epistemically speaking, than philosophical skeptical arguments to the contrary.

I said at the outset that this view is at times suggested but is usually ignored or maligned; this is perhaps in part because those who suggest that ethical Mooreanism is attractive usually don't do much to develop or defend the view. Such undeveloped suggestions are not too hard to find in the contemporary literature on metaethics. Antony encapsulates the core of ethical Mooreanism when she says, "Any argument for moral scepticism will be based upon premises which are less obvious than the existence of objective moral values themselves."[14] Bedke, (2014) makes a similar suggestion, arguing that "we are more certain or justified in normative claims… than we are of the premises of the skeptical argument" (122). Bedke's suggestion, moreover, is an explicit deployment of a similar move made by Parfit.[15] Shafer-Landau, (2013: p. 8), in responding to the evolutionary debunking argument, makes a Moorean-style move when he argues that the premises needed by the debunker enjoy less warrant for us than do our moral beliefs. In Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's, (2014) essay on "moral fixed points," they deploy a Moorean strategy against error theory, arguing that the error theorist makes a methodological mistake by "rejecting highly evident first-order moral propositions" in favor of "highly controversial metaethical claims" or "speculative empirical claims" (438). And in response to moral error theory's implications about the reason-giving power of love, Keller, (2017) argues that if we need to embrace the existence of "queer entities" to save morality and love from moral skepticism, then "that is a price worth paying" (718). Finally, Baggett, (2018), in the course of developing a moral argument for theism, states and very briefly discusses the following response to moral skepticism about moral obligation:

(1) Rational skepticism about moral obligations must depend on reasons.
(2) Those reasons are not as obviously true as are moral obligations themselves.
(3) So it is not rational to be a skeptic about moral obligations (264).

Unfortunately, none of the philosophers just mentioned ever go on to develop an epistemological case in favor of the Moorean suggestions they make. Though the view has been in the air, then, it has not been developed or defended by anyone in the contemporary literature.[16]

One partial exception to this trend can be found in Cuneo's *Speech and Morality* (2014), where he takes on Joyce's (2001: p. 92ff.) argument against moral facts,

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[14] Antony made this comment in 2008 in a public debate with William Lane Craig, which is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6WnliSKrR4. Unfortunately, in Antony's, (2009) written response to Craig, she doesn't mention or develop this Moorean response to the moral skeptic.

[15] See Parfit, (2011: p. 525ff.).

[16] Lemos's, (2020) fine essay, "Morality and Common Sense," is no exception. Though Lemos makes it clear that, on his view, some moral truths amount to items of commonsense and that such a view can be found in the commonsense tradition, he does not give an argument for the view that there is such a thing as moral commonsense. Further below, in the main text, I develop such an argument, one that appeals to the epistemic symmetries that hold between non-moral examples of commonsense (e.g., "I have hands" and "I know I have hands") and moral examples of commonsense.

which goes as follows: (i) if there are moral facts, then there are categorical reasons; (ii) but there are no categorical reasons; (iii) so, there are no moral facts. Cuneo makes a Moorean-friendly move against Joyce, one that he dubs "the Moorean-style Objection" and which goes as follows: (iv) if someone intends not to honor a promise simply because she doesn't feel like, then she exhibits a moral demerit; (v) she exhibits a moral demerit only if moral facts exist; (vi) so, moral facts exist. Cuneo defends his Moorean-style Objection by arguing that a moral theory which includes the existence of moral facts scores much better on a widely accepted criterion used for assessing moral theories, namely, that ethical theories do an "adequate job of preserving deeply embedded features of ordinary thought and practice" (200); realism fares better on this score than error theory owing to the fact that belief in moral facts (which is obviously part of moral realism) is one such deeply embedded feature. Cuneo also faults the error theorist who embraces Joyce's argument on the grounds that she accepts one set of appearances (those congenial to error theory) as veridical whilst rejecting another set of appearances (those congenial to moral facts) as delusory when the latter are in fact just as plausible as the former. Cuneo's Moorean-style Objection, however, falls short of ethical Mooreanism, nor does he offer an epistemological account of the epistemic credentials enjoyed by moral propositions like the one he uses in his Moorean-style Objection such that we are able to see whether such propositions are on an epistemic par with standard Moorean facts.

Going back just a bit, Renford Bambrough did give a full-on argument for the claim that commitment to the legitimacy of Moore's proof of an external world implies commitment to a similar proof for the existence of moral truth. Bambrough, (1979) reasoned as follows: "We know that this child, who is about to undergo what would otherwise be painful surgery, should be given an anesthetic before the operation. Therefore we know at least one moral proposition to be true" (15). Bambrough accused those who would accept the existence of non-moral commonsense facts but reject the existence of moral commonsense facts of being epistemologically inconsistent on the grounds that commonsense includes moral truths just as surely as it includes non-moral truths. Unfortunately, Bambrough's argument fell on deaf ears, receiving virtually no attention by philosophers in his time or ours. Going back a few decades more, Ross, (1930) argued that it is as "self-evident as anything could be, that to make a promise…is to create a moral claim on us in someone else." Though conceding that he could not prove the truth of this principle, Ross argued that our knowledge of it, like the "main moral convictions of the plain man" more generally, is a datum that moral philosophy must take into account rather than something that it might "prove or disprove" (21). Ross's contemporary A. C. Ewing, (1947) also made a very Moorean-esque move in his critique of ethical skepticism, noting that philosophers who reject the "cases of knowledge and reasonable belief in ordinary life" do so on the basis of "philosophical arguments which will hardly be as certain as the propositions which they are used to deny" (32); the context here is Ewing's critique of ethical skepticism and it is clear that he means to include commonsense moral beliefs among the items of "knowledge and reasonable belief in ordinary life."

Moral commonsense was not an invention of twentieth century philosophy, however. Moore's own commonsense, anti-skeptical metaphilosophy was at the time simply the latest incarnation of commonsensism in a long tradition of commonsense

philosophy, a tradition that frequently made room for various moral propositions. Ross's more recent views on the matter are quite reminiscent of Reid's, (1788/1983), who long ago suggested that there are self-evident moral truths which belong in the category of commonsense, truths such as "Some things in human conduct merit approval and praise, others merit blame and punishment" and "We ought to prefer a greater good, though more distant [in time], to a lesser good; and a lesser evil to a greater" (pp. 352–53). Even Hume did not deign to take moral skepticism seriously, writing in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) that moral skeptics were no more than "disingenuous disputants" and should therefore be left alone rather than argued with in the hopes that they would eventually "come over to the side of common sense and reason" (13).

Given the foregoing, it should be obvious that ethical Mooreanism, or something very close to it, is not a new position in metaethics; rather, it is a view with a fair amount of historical pedigree that is suggested by some today, developed by almost no one, and neglected or maligned by those unsympathetic to it (more on the maligning down below). While the literature on the Moorean response to external world skepticism is large and taken very seriously in non-moral epistemology, there is no comparable body of literature, nor a comparable taking-seriously-of, the ethical Moorean view in metaethics. This is an odd lacuna, for five reasons: (i) the preeminent and influential work of Reid and Ross, both of whom endorse something like ethical Mooreanism, (ii) the seemingly very natural extension of the Moorean response to external world skepticism to moral skepticism (as can be seen in Bambrough; more on this below), (iii) the acknowledgment in the contemporary literature (canvassed above) of the possibility and desirability of the ethical Moorean response, (iv) the large and growing body of literature on ethical intuitionism, which can very easily accommodate the ethical Moorean insight, and (v) the admission in the metaethical literature more generally that the view that there really are moral truths is the commonsense view of morality.[17] My aim here is to address the lacuna

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[17] Regarding (iv), I have in mind especially the work of Audi's Ross-inspired brand of intuitionism, as in his *The Good and the Right* (2004). Evidence for (v) can be seen in the fact that in the three chapters of *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* that deal explicitly with moral realism and its contraries, realism is characterized, in one way or another, as the "default position." Nihilism is said to be "violently contrary to common sense" and relativism to be "revisionary of common sense." "Many philosophers" are said to "fear" expressivism because they believe that "our language, thought, and practice are premised on the idea that there is a normative order" of moral facts. See, respectively, Sayre-McCord, (2006:p. 42), Dreier, (2006: pp. 241), and Blackburn , (2006: p. 152). Though armchair judgments about what the folk think are sometimes derided by more experimentally oriented philosophers, Dunaway et al., (2013) provide empirical evidence for thinking that philosophers' armchair judgments about what the folk think are highly accurate. In any case, empirical evidence for the ubiquity of moral realism as the default folk metaethic can be found in Cummins, (1996), Nichols and Folds-Bennett, (2003), Nichols, (2004), and Goodwin and Darley, (2008). Knobe et al., (2011) provide some evidence that there is a partial drift toward moral relativism during the college years, but Beebe and Sackris, (2016) show that this partial drift is course-corrected for during the post-college years. I should point out that Beebe and Sackris very explicitly stress that, in their view, the easygoing armchair assumption that everyone is a moral realist about every evaluative claim is not supported by the empirical evidence. They argue that people in general are more relativistic in their college-age years (teens and twenties) and that people are not always uniformly realistic about every moral matter. This is of course consistent with its being the case that moral objectivism, understood as the claim that some moral truths are not up to us, is the dominant folk metaethic.

in the literature by placing ethical Mooreanism and its plausibility squarely before our eyes.

3 Why ethical mooreanism?

Now that we have a rudimentary understanding of ethical Mooreanism, we should consider the following questions: Why should we take the view seriously? Which moral propositions count as Moorean truths? This latter question is an instance of the larger question facing Mooreanism more generally, which is: What is the criterion for distinguishing Moorean propositions from non-Moorean propositions? Unfortunately, I cannot here try to give a full-blown commonsense epistemology, moral or otherwise. Having said that, we do need some idea of the sort of moral propositions that might count as Moorean propositions. One helpful way to begin probing this matter is to compare the epistemic features of stock examples of Moorean propositions with the epistemic features of some seemingly obvious moral propositions, propositions which look to be good candidates for being items of moral commonsense. The fruit of this comparison will be that there is a strong prima facie reason to think that certain moral propositions are also Moorean propositions. The strong prima facie reason is this: some moral propositions share important epistemic symmetries with standard items of commonsense and thus appear to exhibit epistemic parity with those items. This parity gives us a good reason to think that these moral propositions are also Moorean propositions.

The moral propositions I have in mind are things like this: parents should normally care for their children, it is wrong to torture babies for fun, and it is wrong to engage in recreational genocide. I'm also inclined to think that Reid's examples (mentioned above) are Moorean propositions, namely, that (i) some things in human conduct merit approval and praise, others merit blame and punishment and (ii) we ought to prefer a greater good, though more distant [in time], to a lesser good; and a lesser evil to a greater. I think that some of Ross's prima facie duties are also Moorean propositions, such as the proposition that we have a prima facie duty not to harm others. And I'm partial to the thought that some of the "moral fixed points" identified by Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, (2014) also count as Moorean propositions, such as the proposition that it is pro tanto wrong to satisfy a mild desire if this requires killing many innocent people. Lemos (2020: p. 272) gives the follow example of some moral knowledge that he possesses, beliefs that he thinks enjoy the same epistemic advantages over skeptical arguments as mundane, non-moral examples, such as knowing that you have hands:

> [A] few years ago, a man living in a town not far from mine had a dispute with his sister over some money he claimed she owed him. He went to his sister's apartment to collect the money he thought she owed him. She was not home, but her fourteen-year-old daughter and her two-year-old son were. The uncle slit the throat of his niece, took both children and drove them to a local bridge, and threw them in the creek below. His nephew drowned, but his niece survived. She wandered out to a highway where a passing couple found her and

rushed her to a local hospital. Now, I would say (a) that it was wrong for that man to slit his niece's throat and to drown his nephew, and (b) that it was right for the passing couple to help the wounded niece. Moreover, I would say that I know both (a) and (b). Almost everyone familiar with the facts of this case also knows (a) and (b).

Though my examples above concern ethical propositions which are universal and generic, Lemos's examples show that moral commonsense can include propositions which are singular and specific.[18] For purposes of comparison and discussion I will very often work with the proposition that recreational genocide is wrong (henceforth "R"). This is probably as good a candidate for an ethical Moorean proposition as any (if you happen not to like it for some reason, feel free to substitute one of the other examples). I say that R and its allies are Moorean propositions and thus are immune, or nearly so, to (philosophical) skeptical arguments to the contrary.

I do *not* say that only a robust version of moral realism is compatible with ethical Mooreanism; rather, I'm inclined to think that most metaethical views which have a place for knowledge of moral truth, even non-realist moral truth, are compatible with ethical Mooreanism.[19] Ethical Mooreanism doesn't extend to the second-order question about the metaphysics of morality, hence proponents of realist ethical Mooreanism (to which I am partial) will have to defend realism on more traditional metaethical grounds rather than by appealing to the notion that realism is

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[18] Many easy and standard examples of non-moral, mundane Moorean truths are singular propositions, e.g. that I have hands or that my mother is not a cockroach and so forth. Many of my examples of ethical Moorean propositions are universal or generic, and this might seem to undermine somewhat the symmetry between the two groups. However, Lemos's examples clearly show that moral commonsense does and can include particular propositions as well. A reader concerned about the generality of my moral commonsense examples can take comfort in the fact that the singular and non-generic "versions" of the ethical Moorean propositions I've mentioned in the main text would also count as ethical Moorean truths. So, for example, it is a piece of moral commonsense that I should not engage in the recreational slaughter of my neighbor, that my neighbors have a prima facie duty to care for their children, that my brother has a prima facie duty to keep his promises to his wife, and so on and so forth. Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me see the need to address this worry.

[19] I have to say "most" rather than "all" here because there are certain very strong anti-realisms which seem to be incompatible with ethical Mooreanism. For example, in contrasting his "radically subjectivist" theory of ethics with the "orthodox subjectivist" view (109), Ayer, (1952) noted that a proponent of the latter view holds that "the sentences of a moralizer express genuine propositions…about the speaker's feelings." On such a view, a speaker's utterance of "Murder is wrong" means "I disapprove of murder," which seems to be something the speaker could know. This is not the kind of moral knowledge – "moral" knowledge – envisioned by ethical Mooreanism. Compare this example, for instance, with a non-moral one: a thoroughgoing external world skeptic could say that her utterance of "I have hands" simply means "I approve of the idea that I have hands" or "I have a seeming that I have hands" and then could follow that up by noting that she knows she has hands in virtue of knowing that she approves of the idea that she has hands, etc. Clearly no one else would count what such a skeptic knows as a genuine piece of knowledge about the external world. Likewise, knowledge about what you approve or disapprove of is not the sort of knowledge defended by ethical Mooreanism; knowledge about what you approve or disapprove of is fully compatible with the standard sort of arguments for moral skepticism that the ethical Moorean rejects. In short, then, though ethical Mooreanism per se is not a metaphysical position on the ontology of moral facts, it is nonetheless incompatible with certain very strong anti-realisms, e.g. the "orthodox subjectivist" view mentioned by Ayer. Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful comments on this point.

also a Moorean proposition. The revisionary view targeted by ethical Mooreanism is moral skepticism, which says that we lack moral knowledge. An argument for moral skepticism could be presented as an undercutting defeater, claiming that, whether any of our moral beliefs are true or not, they don't amount to knowledge. An argument for moral skepticism could also be presented as a rebutting defeater, claiming that all our moral beliefs are false because, say, there is no moral reality to be known in the first place. Ethical Mooreanism takes aim at these views and is not intended to provide grounds for deciding between different metaethical accounts of the moral facts.[20]

The first epistemic symmetry between standard Moorean propositions and Moorean-looking moral propositions like R is that they both seem to have, to quote from Huemer's, (2001) description of commonsense truths, "the highest initial plausibility" (33). It is initially very highly plausible for me to think that I exist and that I have hands; these facts certainly seem more plausible than the controversial philosophical principles needed by skeptics. Likewise, it is very highly plausible to think that R is true. In fact, it is difficult to think of a belief of mine that is more plausible than my belief that recreational genocide is wrong.[21] Certainly, it seems that no controversial philosophical proposition from metaphysics or epistemology, of the sort needed by the skeptic, will have as much going for it, epistemically speaking, as does R–and certainly no *conjunction* of controversial philosophical principles, of the sort needed by the moral skeptic, will be epistemically on par with R. Moorean propositions just have more going for them, epistemically speaking, than the conjunction of the skeptic's premises.[22] We might say, then, with Rescher (2005), that Moorean propositions are, due to their lofty epistemic status, "beyond reasonable doubt" (29). Because of this, we can say that commonsense propositions *should be* accepted, in the normal case, even if, for some strange reason, they aren't widely

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[20] Cuneo, (2011) argues that "realism deserves to be the default metaethical position" (341), a view which he says is part of Reidian metaethics. Ethical Mooreanism should not be confused with this view, for two reasons. First, as noted in the main text, ethical Mooreanism does not itself take a stand on whether realism is the correct metaethical account of moral truth or even whether realism is the default metaethic; so, someone could endorse ethical Mooreanism without endorsing realism or its alleged default status. Second, someone could agree that realism is the default metaethical position whilst also saying that the presumption in favor of the existence of moral truth is overridden by powerful skeptical arguments to the contrary.

[21] I should make it clear that I am not assuming or asserting, qua (ethical) Moorean, that Moorean propositions are *known* simply in virtue of being more plausible, or even much much more plausible, than skeptical arguments to the contrary. Qua (ethical) Moorean, I take no stance on just exactly how propositions like R are known. Mooreanism is a metaphilosophical view rather than a first-order epistemological account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. As Lemos, (2020: p. 273) points out, a Moorean philosopher could have a mistaken epistemological account of why commonsense beliefs often count as items of knowledge without thereby imperiling her own commonsense knowledge. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify this point.

[22] As Rescher, (2005) puts it, "we are well advised to concede the credibility of common-sense teachings not because we happen to like them but because there are good reasons for doing so" (90).

accepted. To repeat: R does as well on this score as do standard Moorean propositions; just like them, R appears to have more going for it than skeptical premises to the contrary.[23]

The second epistemic symmetry between standard Moorean propositions and ethical propositions like R is that both can be justifiedly believed apart from any specialized, domain-specific expertise. This is because Moorean propositions in general concern the common affairs of ordinary life, not the "expertise-admitting" (Rescher's phrase) domains of physics, economics, neuroscience, and so on.[24] For example, it doesn't require any special expertise for me to know or justifiably believe that I exist, that I have hands, and so forth. Things are the same with R: R's truth does not belong to any expertise-admitting domain; any normal person (who is mature enough and whose faculties are functioning properly) can see that R is true.

The third epistemic symmetry between standard Moorean propositions and Moorean-looking ethical propositions like R is that both are typically believed in the basic way, i.e. noninferentially. Moreover, this manner of holding the beliefs in question appears to be *properly* basic rather than improperly basic. I believe and know that I have hands on the basis of a perceptual experience, not as the conclusion of an argument. Likewise with R: I believe and know that R is true apart from any philosophical argument for its truth. We shouldn't, of course, rule out the possibility of an inferentially held Moorean belief.[25] Moorean propositions, though typically believed in the basic way, *can* be argued for, it's just that in the typical case this needn't be done, the reason being that the premises of an argument for a commonsense proposition would be less obviously true than the commonsense conclusion itself.[26] This certainly seems to be true of the commonsense ideas that I exist and that I have hands, and also of R: it is difficult to think of a set of propositions more obviously true than R that could be used as premises in an argument for R.[27]

Though we *sometimes* do argue for propositions like R, we should not misunderstand what is typically going on here. In the first place, we might argue for a proposition by way of responding to putative defeaters of our belief in that proposition. Suppose that Olivia believes R in the basic way, hears of a defeater for her belief that R, and then responds to that defeater with a defeater-defeater. As Ballantyne and Thurow (2013) argue, that does not entail that Olivia's belief that R is now something she believes inferentially rather than non-inferentially. Rather, as they

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[23] My characterization of Moorean facts in this paragraph owes a great deal to and combines elements from Wolterstorff, (2001), Lemos, (2004), Rescher, (2005), and Grant, (2001).

[24] See Rescher, (2005: p. 37).

[25] According to Rescher, (2005), "even if reasoning is involved…the matter can still be one of common sense provided that the reasoning is sufficiently obvious that its availability is effectively universal" (24). Audi, (2008: 486) argues that almost anything that can be non-inferentially believed can also be inferentially believed.

[26] As Rescher, (2005) puts it, "The fact that common-sense beliefs are obvious and evident means that they do not require further substantiation because no substantiating consideration could be markedly more evident and unquestionable than that belief itself" (pp. 33–34).

[27] Audi, (2008): "I have argued that certain moral propositions…can be justifiedly believed non-inferentially. This does not preclude their *also* being justifiedly believed inferentially; the point is that in such cases justified belief is not premise-dependent" (480).

contend, it is better to say here that Olivia's defeater-defeater preserves her original non-inferential justification for believing that R. We don't need to be presented with a defeater, however, to engage in arguments for basically held beliefs. As Audi points out, when presented with a simple why-question for a basically held belief B, we may come up with premises that support B but are not in fact the basis on which we hold B.[28] Another option here, when confronted with a why-question, is to engage in the "propositional act" (Audi's phrase) of pointing to our non-inferential ground for B as an explanation of our holding B. In neither case does it follow that B is now an inferentially held belief. As Audi further points out, we should not confuse the disposition to find a premise in support of belief B, a disposition that manifests itself when confronted with why-questions, with actually believing but just not articulating that premise. It is important to keep in mind here that, as Audi points out, believing a proposition like R in the basic way need not mean that we believe it in a groundless way. In his terminology, a properly basic belief in R would not be "premise-dependent" but would be "ground-dependent."[29]

The fourth epistemic symmetry between standard Moorean propositions and Moorean-looking ethical propositions like R is that both, when they are the sort of thing that is and has been widely and explicitly considered, are nearly universally endorsed. It is important to note here that Moorean propositions, though readily accessible to "the vulgar"–and thus not too complicated–need not be widely held. For example, a little-known orphan boy stranded on a deserted island might believe that he has four limbs, but this needn't be a widely held belief. However, when the Moorean proposition in question is the sort of thing that is and has been widely and explicitly considered, it will be nearly universally believed. Nearly everyone, for example, believes that other people exist and that $1 + 1 = 2$. Likewise, nearly everyone believes that parents have a prima facie duty to care for their children and that recreational genocide is wrong.

A fifth and final symmetry: commonsense propositions are so obviously true that they are taken for granted by nearly every sane person (or: every sane person who is intellectually mature enough to consider their truth). Some Moorean propositions are so obviously true and thus taken for granted that they are rarely explicitly considered, and therefore rarely occurrently believed or even uttered. Such commonsense propositions, when not explicitly acknowledged, are things we simply take for granted, such as that material objects continue to exist when unperceived by us and

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[28] See Audi, (2008: p. 484). Greene, (2008) and Haidt, (2012), among others, would consider this to be a case of confabulation, and this is not supposed to be a good thing. However, it seems clear that confabulation need not always be epistemically pernicious, especially when the confabulator is a lay person rather than a professional philosopher. A lay person, when confronted with a why-question regarding her belief that P, may mistakenly think that the only way to answer such a question is to give premises from which P could be deduced. If her belief that P is based on an intuition rather than the given reasons, this will be a case of confabulation. So considered, it needn't always be a bad thing. It is consistent with the agent's belief that P being based on a reliable but non-inferential ground.

[29] Giving an account of the grounds of our basically held moral beliefs is important, but the details go beyond ethical Mooreanism itself and is the proper task of first-order moral epistemology. I'm sympathetic to intuitionist accounts; some plausible intuitionist moral epistemologies can be found in the following: Audi, (2004, 2013), Huemer, (2005), Cowan, (2013), Kauppinen, (2013), and Besong, (2014).

that (say) recreational genocide is wrong. They are so obviously true that we don't need to explicitly acknowledge them or say them out loud. I don't go around uttering "I have hands" or "recreational genocide is wrong." These things are so obviously true that they don't normally need uttering. If we think of a self-evident truth as a truth that one comes to know just on the basis of understanding it, then we can say that some Moorean propositions will be self-evident, but others won't.[30] It is at least arguable that R is self-evidently true in this sense. In any case, Moorean propositions are things we are *disposed* to believe, things we would readily assent to were they to be brought before the mind's eye–things we *do* assent to when they are brought before the mind's eye. The denial of such Moorean propositions will come off as absurd, and even those who profess to deny them will typically act as if they believe that they are true. R, like the standard Moorean propositions, comes off swimmingly here: almost every sane person would assent to R were it brought before the mind's eye, and it does appear absurd to deny its truth. Something has clearly gone wrong with the person who denies that recreational genocide is wrong. In the case of a person who rejects or abstains from believing R on philosophical grounds, it is clear, from the Moorean point of view, what has gone wrong: the R-skeptic has mistakenly placed more confidence in a conjunction of controversial skeptical propositions than in R. As Sliwa, (2012) colorfully describes such a skeptic, she is someone who "has clearly overdosed on some of the skepticism literature and has lost touch with reality" (186).

On the basis of these symmetries it is reasonable to conclude that moral propositions like R display epistemic parity with standard Moorean propositions and thus that we are justified in believing that some ethical propositions are Moorean propositions. The superior epistemic status of these ethical Moorean propositions paves the way for a licit Moorean shift against philosophical arguments for moral skepticism. Before proceeding to consider some objections, I should make a few brief remarks about what Moorean propositions need *not* be. These "negative" remarks will help to prevent needless misunderstandings.

First, Moorean propositions needn't be psychologically irresistible: a philosophical essay might persuade someone that no perduring selves exist, and thus that she doesn't persist longer than a moment. Likewise, someone might be (mistakenly) persuaded that the premises of some skeptical argument have more epistemic support than do ethical propositions like R. Second, Moorean propositions do not necessarily include anything anyone might think of as a matter of commonsense. The fact that something is widely believed in a given culture or society is not, by itself, enough to make it a Moorean proposition.[31] Third, Moorean propositions need not be necessary truths. They can be necessary truths, but they can also be contingent (my having hands is a contingent matter). In similar fashion, Moorean propositions

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[30] See Audi, (1999).

[31] As Bergmann, (2008) says, "We tend to classify as 'common-sense beliefs' beliefs that are peculiar to our own culture or upbringing. Reid does not–or at least does not want to. His intention is to include only propositions that almost everyone believes (and knows) non-inferentially–things that are immediately accepted by sane persons once considered and understood" (62).

can be known a priori or a posteriori. R appears to be a necessary truth that is known a priori. Finally, it must be borne in mind that a belief in a Moorean proposition is not immune to any and all refutation whatsoever. Rather, the standard Moorean line is that Moorean beliefs are immune to being overturned by *philosophical* arguments to the contrary. This leaves it open that more empirically grounded skeptical arguments might undermine one's moral beliefs; for example, if one gained evidence against the reliability of that part of one's cognitive faculties responsible for moral belief formation, one's moral beliefs might well be undercut.

4 Objections and replies

As mentioned above, ethical Mooreanism is typically either ignored or maligned. In fact, it is mostly ignored. One published criticism of ethical Mooreanism comes from McPherson, (2009).[32] McPherson claims that we shouldn't consider any moral propositions to be Moorean propositions. His argument for this claim rests on alleged epistemic asymmetries between non-moral Moorean propositions and allegedly-Moorean moral propositions. First, unlike standard items of commonsense, we don't see broad non-philosophical consensus in morality. Second, unlike standard Moorean propositions, rejecting moral propositions doesn't require significant revision to our noetic structure. Third, unlike rejections of standard Moorean propositions, rejecting moral propositions doesn't threaten "epistemic paradigms" like science. Finally, unlike standard Moorean propositions, moral propositions are vulnerable to debunking arguments. The charge, then, is that moral propositions in general face epistemic asymmetries vis-à-vis standard commonsense propositions severe enough to warrant rejecting them as Moorean. It seems obvious and unproblematic that this asymmetry claim will hold for many moral propositions, but does it hold for R and its allies?

Regarding McPherson's claim that we don't see broad non-philosophical consensus on moral propositions, this just seems false when we consider propositions like R. Almost everyone who is not a moral nihilist or a psychopath embraces R, or at least would embrace R were it to be brought to their attention. In fact, R is so obviously true that it's hard to think of propositions that would be more widely embraced than it in just about any domain. And there are many other moral propositions that are just like R in this respect. The propensity to affirm moral truths like this is so deeply embedded in human beings that some philosophers, such as Joyce, (2006: pp. 133–39), use it to argue for the innateness of morality. It is true that some people are

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[32] Lemos, (2020) constructs and then (quite ably) responds to three challenges to the idea that there is such a thing as moral commonsense. Interestingly, none of these challenges come from published critiques of moral commonsense. As I said above, ethical Mooreanism is usually ignored or quickly and blithely dismissed. Lemos's essay is a good companion to my argument here. The three objections he considers are: (i) non-cognitivism implies that commonsense moral knowledge is not possible, (ii) one cannot have moral knowledge about particular actions (say) without first having a general moral criterion from which one could deduce that a particular action is wrong (right), and (iii) it is methodologically and epistemically inappropriate to use ordinary moral intuitions when doing moral philosophy.

inclined to give a relativist or constructivist account of the truth of R, but this second-order disagreement on moral metaphysics does not necessarily undercut first-order agreement on the truth of R.

I also don't agree that moral skepticism wouldn't require significant reorganization of our noetic structure. First, certain kinds of moral skepticism entail a direct revision to much of our thought and practice. The eliminativist version of error theory says that moral thought and moral language should be eliminated from our practices. That would be a pretty significant revision to our noetic structure and our everyday practices![33] Second, many of our moral beliefs are among the most important beliefs we hold. On the basis of them, we punish, reward, blame, praise, act, and so on. In truth, they have tremendous power in directing our lives. And if morality bears some important connection to God, then skepticism about morality might well threaten religious belief and practice as well, or at least certain kinds of religious belief and practice. In general, a world without moral knowledge is very different than a world with it, so moral skepticism *would* seem to entail revisionary consequences.

Regarding McPherson's third claim, that rejecting moral facts wouldn't lead to a rejection of epistemic paradigms like science, we can say two things. One is that it is true that rejecting R won't, all by itself, lead to worrisome skepticism about successful methods of inquiry like natural science. The second thing to say, however, is that one doesn't just reject R all by itself; one does so on the basis of arguments and positions, and these arguments and positions may well threaten to justify broader forms of skepticism. A good example of this problem is the evolutionary debunking argument for moral skepticism; many philosophers have argued that evolutionary debunking considerations threaten to justify broader forms of skepticism which undermine other "epistemic paradigms."[34] Crow, (2016), for example, maintains that the evolutionary debunking argument implies the success of Plantinga's, (1993) evolutionary argument against naturalism, which threatens global skepticism; if this is right, then *every* epistemic paradigm is in trouble. Clark-Doane, (2012) contends that the evolutionary debunking arguments implies trouble for mathematical realism. Railton, (2000) argues that the evolutionary debunking argument threatens our confidence in science on account of the fact that the cognitive faculties used there are subject to the same evolutionary pressures as our moral faculty. According to Crisp, (2016), the evolutionary debunking argument also undermines philosophy itself, a point which, if it holds, would also undermine philosophical arguments for moral skepticism. Finally, if, as Cuneo, (2007), Vavova, (2014), and Lemos, (2020) have argued, the domains of epistemic and moral normativity are linked in such a way that arguments against the latter tend also to function as arguments against the former, then accepting moral skepticism might epistemically oblige one to accept epistemic skepticism. And this would certainly be a revolutionary shift and would

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[33] See Keller, (2017: p. 711ff.) for a discussion of eliminativist moral error theory.

[34] The two most influential formulations of an evolutionary debunking argument are Street, (2006) and Joyce , (2006); it should be noted that Street uses her version to argue for constructivism and against realism, and not to push a general moral skepticism or something like moral nihilism.

assuredly undermine our normal epistemic paradigms, natural science included. Obviously, we cannot adjudicate all these contentious matters here. The point is simply that arguments for moral skepticism rely on all sorts of controversial philosophy which may undermine other epistemic paradigms as well.

McPherson's fourth alleged asymmetry is that moral propositions are, unlike standard Moorean propositions, vulnerable to debunking arguments.[35] Whether this asymmetry actually holds is a matter of intense dispute, however. If Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism goes through, then *all* our beliefs are capable of being evolutionarily debunked. And we have just mentioned Clark-Doane's worry the debunking of math, Railton's worry about the debunking of science, Crisp's debunking worry about philosophy, and that final worry about the debunking of epistemic normativity. The unfortunate truth is that we can mount plausible debunking arguments against beliefs in a variety of domains. However, the real question isn't whether we can *mount* a plausible-sounding debunking argument against moral belief in propositions like R; the real question is whether these debunking arguments *succeed*. Obviously, non-skeptics don't think they do, and offer quite sophisticated arguments on behalf of this claim. If they are right, why should it be the case that belief in R suffers an epistemic demotion on account of the fact that there are *failed* arguments against our knowledge of it? There are sophisticated skeptical arguments against all knowledge claims, including claims about the standard Moorean propositions; but nobody worries that these standard Moorean claims can't be items of commonsense just because there are clever but failed arguments against them. Moreover, as anyone familiar with the literature on debunking arguments against morality knows, there is no straightforward "scientific" argument for moral skepticism from evolutionary science or even empirical moral psychology; rather, the debunking arguments themselves rely heavily on highly controversial philosophical claims, and even many of the empirical claims made in these arguments are themselves subject to intense disagreement. Thus, the ethical Moorean strategy applies just as much to debunking arguments for moral skepticism as they do to other arguments for it: namely, that the ethical Moorean propositions targeted by such arguments, such as that recreational genocide is wrong, simply have much more going for them, epistemically speaking, than does the controversial conjunction of premises needed by the debunker.

In conclusion, then, McPherson's claim that allegedly-Moorean ethical propositions suffer from problematic epistemic asymmetries vis-à-vis standard commonsense seems incorrect. Moreover, McPherson's negative case overlooks the positive epistemic symmetries and thus the epistemic parity between standard commonsense and Moorean-looking ethical propositions like R. Given the existence of the positive symmetries and the non-existence of the negative ones, there is no good epistemological reason to think that certain ethical propositions like R are not good

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[35] Olson, (2014: pp. 141–148), in his critique of the idea of moral commonsense, cites McPherson's paper and then goes on to argue, as McPherson does, that moral beliefs are not fit for work as Moorean propositions because they are vulnerable to debunking arguments. What I say in the main text in reply to McPherson applies *mutatis mutanda* to Olson.

candidates for being Moorean propositions, epistemically akin to standard items of commonsense such as that other minds exist, that the past is real, and that (contra Zeno) motion is real.

5 Conclusion

The main burden of this paper has been to show that the standard Moorean response to radical skepticism can be, even should be, extended to the moral domain. According to standard Mooreanism, your belief that you have hands, like many other mundane commonsense beliefs, amounts to knowledge, assuming that it is based on its proper ground; moreover, the proposition that you have hands has more going for it, epistemically speaking, than any conjunction of skeptical premises which would deny you this knowledge; finally, your knowledge that you have hands can be used in a licit Moorean shift against the skeptic–you have more reason to believe that you have hands than you do to believe the radical conjunction of skeptical premises offered by the skeptic. The extension of this commonsense anti-skeptical position to the moral domain gives us a view I've been calling "ethical Mooreanism," a view on which some Moorean propositions are moral propositions and thus are, like commonsense truths more generally, epistemically superior to philosophical skeptical arguments to the contrary. Moreover, like the standard Moorean view, ethical Mooreanism holds that our ordinary moral beliefs, if based on their proper grounds, amount to knowledge and, in virtue of their epistemic superiority, can be used in a licit Moorean shift against philosophical arguments for moral skepticism.

I have not tried, in this paper, to provide a positive argument in favor of Mooreanism in general epistemology, nor to provide a lengthy exposition of it; those are tasks for another day and have been ably done elsewhere.[36] Rather, I have tried to apply and extend that general Moorean picture so as to include certain commonsense-seeming moral propositions, such as that recreational genocide is wrong, and then to defend that extension against McPherson's objections. In short, I have simply tried to show that certain moral facts are on an epistemic par with certain standard Moorean facts, such that *if* it's rational to take the latter to be immune to philosophical skepticism, it's also rational to take the former to be immune to philosophical skepticism.[37]

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[36] For book-length expositions and defenses, see Lemos, (2004), Rescher, (2005), and Boulter, (2007).

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