

# **The Meta-Ethics of Normative Ethics**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to answer the following question:

Do our moral commitments commit us to constraints on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive?

In order to answer this question, I first demonstrate that meta-ethical theories can be criticised on moral grounds. I then argue that correctness conditions for moral claims imply the thesis of explanatory Moral Realism. I do not claim that this is an argument for the truth of explanatory Moral Realism. Rather, this is an argument for the claim that explanatory Moral Realism is a moral commitment. I then refute two objections to the claim that moral claims can have built in commitments to any meta-ethical theory. The first of these is a set of arguments that Simon Blackburn gives for Quasi-Realism. The second objection is a set of arguments given by Ronald Dworkin that attack the presuppositions of debates about Moral Realism in meta-ethics.

*For Liz Soden, Greg Cavin, and Mother Cindy Voien.*

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## **Table of Contents**

- 1. Introduction: 5-29**
- 2. Chapter 1: Meta-Ethics and Moral Criticism: 29-73**
- 3. Chapter 2: AME and (C): 73-129**
- 4. Chapter 3: Blackburn's Objections: 129-172**
- 5. Chapter 4: Dworkin, Dreier, Ehrenberg, and Archimedeanism: 172-233**
- 6. Conclusion of Thesis: 233-244**
- 7. Epilogue: 244-248**
- 8. Bibliography: 249-252**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Meta-Ethics has become an increasingly interesting topic within analytic philosophy. One thing that adds to its fascination is the disparity between the way that meta-ethicists reason about meta-ethics issues and the way that people outside of analytic philosophy sometimes discuss those very same issues. This disparity is particularly salient regarding the issue of Moral Realism. As of late, many meta-ethicists have embraced the idea that the truth or falsity of Moral Realism is irrelevant for resolving conflicting ethical or political debates. However, a cursory glance at the general public reveals that the truth or falsity of Moral Realism is an issue that does arise in heated political debates. It has become commonplace in the political domain to defend various political stances using the denial of Moral Realism as a justification. Issues such as homosexual equality, privacy laws, religious toleration, and abortion rights are routinely discussed in ways where Moral Anti-Realism is used to justify a normally left-leaning political stance. Although such political discussions don't involve the technical language of the philosopher, they are still about the relevance of a meta-ethics to some auxiliary political view. Sometimes an argument will be put forward that some civil liberty should be respected or some alternative lifestyle tolerated because there are no "objectively" right and wrong answers to moral questions. These arguments can be framed this way because the political discourse of laymen contains no distinction between meta-ethics and normative ethics.

Looking at academia outside of analytic philosophy, we see that English, Sociology and Critical Theory departments often presuppose normative ethics doctrines like subjectivism and relativism.<sup>1</sup> They too talk as though these doctrines are incompatible with Moral Realism. Like their laymen counter-parts, they too make no distinction between normative ethics and meta-ethics. In analytic philosophy, the normative ethics/meta-ethics distinction is cashed out as a distinction between 1<sup>st</sup> order and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. Claims at the 1<sup>st</sup> order are treated as the typical moral utterances that all

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this phenomena in arts education, see KIMBALL, Roger. ed. Dee, Ivan, R. *Experiments against Reality: The Fate of Culture in the Postmodern Age*, Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 2000

human beings make when engaged in moral practice. Such claims include assertions that killing is morally wrong, racial equality is better than racial inequality, sex outside of marriage is morally permissible, and so on. Claims at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order are treated as claims that deal primarily with the ontological, epistemological or semantic commitments of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Such claims may include assertions that moral claims involve the postulation of metaphysical entities, are known through a mysterious faculty of perception, or that the meaning of moral claims is in some way indefinable. In most humanities departments and in ordinary life, these 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinctions are generally not made.

Because of this, meta-ethics issues are dealt with outside of analytic philosophy in ways that can provoke disapproval from the majority of meta-ethicists. For instance, laymen, to try and show that some 1st order subjectivism is correct, often use the same explanations used by meta-ethicists to bolster Moral Anti-Realism at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order. Laymen will often say things like, “Subjectivism is true because morality is just a function of psychological dispositions we inherited from our evolutionary past. There is nothing ‘objective’ about morality.” Outside of meta-ethics, the lack of ‘objectivity’ is what people primarily cite as a defence of subjectivism. In the above example, the lack of objectivity (a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claim) is being used to defend subjectivism (a 1<sup>st</sup> order normative ethics theory).

For most meta-ethicists, the above example would constitute a piece of reasoning that is contentious at best, mistaken at worst. Amongst meta-ethicists, it is normally assumed that one’s meta-ethics is not relevant to one’s normative ethics.<sup>2</sup> Meta-ethicists don’t normally see the Realism/Anti-Realism issue as a debate between those who wish to moralize normally and those who want to replace normal moralizing with a 1<sup>st</sup> order

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that there have been some recent exceptions to this general rule. See FANTL, Jeremy. Is Meta-Ethics Morally Neutral? *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 2006, 87, 22-44. Also see KRAMER, Matthew. *Moral Realism as a Moral Doctrine*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

subjectivism.<sup>3</sup> Most meta-ethicists, whether realist or not, want to reject doctrines like subjectivism. Additionally, subjectivist positions are rarely used in normative ethics to try and justify concrete political views. The general attitude seems to be that insofar as meta-ethical issues are discussed in laymen circles in a way that is radically different from how they are discussed among meta-ethicists, the laymen are just mistaken. These mistakes are chalked up to either a lack of familiarity with meta-ethics literature or a lack of reasoning skills.

To a large extent, it is hard to deny that meta-ethical discussions that happen outside of analytic philosophy are often confused. However, there is a kernel of truth in such discussions that contemporary meta-ethicists have largely underplayed. This kernel of truth is that *we cannot completely separate the way we moralize on the one hand from the way we theorize about morality as meta-ethicists*. This separation is exemplified by the traditional 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction between normative ethics and meta-ethics. The distinction functions (among other things) as a way to allow the meta-ethicist to safeguard his moralizing from any potential threats which might come from the way he theorizes about morality. The meta-ethicist relies on this distinction to make sure that any anti-realist denouncement or repudiation of moral objectivity at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order level will leave his 1<sup>st</sup> order moralizing unaffected. Here, it appears the meta-ethicist might be in a position of being able to learn something from the laymen.

The layman does not assume that a meta-ethical theory that is attractive by the standards of the typical meta-ethicist is consistent with our moral commitments as human beings. This is an important possibility there has been little discussion of in meta-ethics literature. There may be something more to creating a meta-ethical theory that is consistent with our moral commitments than simply creating a theory that is attractive by non-moral, theoretical standards. To create a meta-ethical theory that is consistent with our moral commitments, we may have to create a theory that describes the world in a manner consistent with our moral commitments. By ‘our’ moral commitments, I mean the

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<sup>3</sup> This is because of the prevalence of the 1st and 2nd order distinction

moral commitments any agent has in virtue of engaging in the practice of morality. The crucial point is that a description of the world that is consistent with our moral commitments may involve making postulations that are theoretically unattractive.

In contemporary meta-ethics, the above possibility is rarely mentioned, let alone attacked. It is generally assumed that adequate truth tracking is a sufficient condition of creating a meta-ethical theory that is consistent with our moral commitments. Here, adequate truth tracking happens by looking at whether or not a theory is attractive according to theoretical criteria. The theoretical criteria are non-moral. Thus, the act of truth tracking by choosing theories that are attractive by these non-moral criteria is also assumed to be consistent with our moral commitments.<sup>4</sup> This is why it is rare to find a theorist who insists that morality commits us to either a meta-ethical theory or constraints on what sorts of meta-ethical theories we can postulate.<sup>5</sup> Within the orthodoxy of contemporary meta-ethics, it is assumed that our moral commitments are compatible with all the theoretically attractive ways the meta-ethicist could describe morality. Very few consider the possibility that moral commitments include commitments about how to adequately characterize morality at the meta-ethical level.<sup>6</sup> As one might already guess, it is this possibility that interests me. Hence, my research question that this thesis will answer is: Do our moral commitments commit us to constraints on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive?

As I stated earlier, by our moral commitments, I mean any claims we must affirm or presuppose in virtue of engaging adequately in moral practice. By moral practice, I mean the social, psychological, phenomenological, or linguistic activities that constitute being a moral agent. The social activities include the ability to get along with and

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<sup>4</sup> This seems to be the dominant assumption of contemporary meta-ethicists. We can observe this by noting that meta-ethical debates generally consist of clashing explanatory accounts.

<sup>5</sup> The exception to this general rule is Matthew Kramer in his latest book, *Moral Realism as a Moral Doctrine*. See Kramer (2009).

<sup>6</sup> The exception to this general rule is Jean Hampton. See HAMPTON, Jean. *The Authority of Reason*, New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1998.



coordinate with other agents. The psychological activities include the ability to internalize the right moral sentiments for making moral decisions. The phenomenological activities include the experience of making moral judgments. The linguistic components include the logical and semantic rules one must abide by in order to consistently engage in the other components of moral practice.

By “constraints” on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive, I mean what presuppositions we must accept as criteria for finding a meta-ethical theory attractive. Such presuppositions could be the very non-moral presuppositions normally accepted in meta-ethics for adjudicating between rival theories. Such presuppositions include the claim that a theory which is simpler is more attractive, the claim that a theory which explains more is more attractive, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Such presuppositions could also be ones that are not normally accepted in meta-ethics for adjudicating between rival theories. For example, such presuppositions could be controversial metaphysical or epistemological claims. What is important here is that moral commitments are not normally understood as committing us to anything about the attractiveness of a meta-ethical theory. Hence, they are not normally understood as constraints on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive.

In order to answer this question of whether we are committed to moral constraints on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive, we need to answer two supplementary questions:

(A) Can meta-ethical theories be criticized on moral grounds?

and

(B) What meta-ethical claims does morality commit us to?

We must answer (A) before we can answer (B) because any answer to (B) presupposes an

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<sup>7</sup>This is an outcome of the widespread usage of the inference to the best explanation model of explanatory reasoning. See LIPTON, Peter. *Inference to the Best Explanation*. London, UK: Routledge, 1991.

affirmative answer to (A). If meta-ethical theories cannot be criticized on moral grounds, there are no moral commitments to meta-ethical claims. This is for the following reason. If meta-ethical theories are exempt from moral criticism, moral commitments are not the sort of consideration that could be used to criticize a meta-ethical theory. Hence, in order to give an adequate answer to (B), we must assert that meta-ethical claims can be criticized on moral grounds. Giving an answer to (A) and (B) is what the first half of my thesis will consist in.

In chapter one, I will give an affirmative answer to (A). In chapter two, I will answer (B) by arguing that there is a meta-ethical claim we are morally committed to. That claim is:

(C) For any meta-ethical theory that is true, that theory must either be an explanatory moral realist theory or a theory that is compatible with explanatory Moral Realism.

Explanatory Moral Realism is a view that affirms that correct 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of morality are irreducibly moral.<sup>8</sup> In such explanations, the moral explanans can't be reduced to or summarized as something that is not moral. The explanans of explanatory Moral Realism must itself be a moral judgment. (C) constitutes the basic answer to my research question. This is because it is a moral commitment to a constraint on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive. (C) implies that insofar as a meta-ethical theory is incompatible with explanatory Moral Realism, it is a false theory. If it is a false theory, it cannot be an attractive theory.

It should be noted that in recent years, it has become difficult within analytic philosophy to specify exactly what meta-ethicists believe Moral Realism is. Moral realist theories have traditionally been understood as a group of meta-ethics theories that attempt in different ways to explain morality as being such that the world answers to our moral assertions. Recent work in meta-ethics has made this traditional understanding seem both

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<sup>8</sup> I will elaborate this view more in chapter 2

unilluminating and uninformative. Advocates of anti-realist positions like expressivism have been asserting that there are objective moral truths, and that the surface grammar of moral discourse is correct.<sup>9</sup> Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons have advocated a new anti-realist theory called cognitivist expressivism that adds to the expressivist list the claim that moral claims are assertions that express beliefs.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, very few anti-realists these days reject a view best characterized as moral objectivism. According to moral objectivism, there are correct and incorrect answers to moral questions and correct and incorrect procedures for arriving at such answers. A prominent anti-realist like Simon Blackburn is not only a moral objectivist, but states that Moral Realism is irrelevant for capturing the mind independent correctness of moral claims.<sup>11</sup> Even error theorists like Mackie who state that our moral beliefs are false can be interpreted as affirming moral objectivism within the context of moral practice.<sup>12</sup>

Given the startling range of meta-ethical positions that have been proclaimed consistent with Moral Anti-Realism, it is difficult to characterize the difference between Moral Realism and Moral Anti-Realism. The meta-ethicist Jamie Dreier has recently expressed concern over whether such a distinction is possible.<sup>13</sup> None the less, in this thesis, I will understand Moral Realism in the traditional manner. I believe Moral Realism

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<sup>9</sup>See BLACKBURN, Simon. *Ruling Passions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. See GIBBARD, Alan. *Thinking How to Live*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

<sup>10</sup>HORGAN, Terry and TIMMONS, Mark. Non-descriptivist Cognitivism: Framework for a New Meta-Ethic. *Philosophical Papers*, 2000, 29, 121-53.

<sup>11</sup> See BLACKBURN, Simon. Errors and the Phenomenology of Value. In: T. HONDERICH, ed., *Ethics and Objectivity*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992, pp.1-21.

<sup>12</sup> This is because Mackie himself states that his moral practice can go unaffected despite his affirmation of Error Theory. Yet moral practice implies the existence of objective moral facts. It is hard to imagine how a theory could imply the existence of objective moral facts without being a moral objectivist theory. See MACKIE, John L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.pp. 38-42.

<sup>13</sup> DREIER, Jamie. Meta-Ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 2004, 18, pp. 23-44.

refers to a range of meta-ethical theories that attempt to describe the world in a manner where the world answers to our moral assertions. However, a more precise point of demarcation between realist and anti-realist theories can be achieved when we have a deeper understanding of what is meant by this traditional conception of Moral Realism.

When we say that the world answers to our moral assertions, we mean at least that our moral assertions refer to something in the world. This is thus far compatible with anything a realist or anti-realist could assert. If by "the world" we mean that which is independent of human judgments, we are referring to those moral claims that are compatible with both moral objectivism and Moral Realism. To claim that the world answers to our moral assertions on moral objectivism means the world contains correct moral claims that are correct independently of human judgments. If this is the case, it follows that there are correct and incorrect moral claims. If we add the supplementary premise that humans are sometimes able to correctly identify correct moral claims, we get the component of objectivism that states that there are correct and incorrect procedures for arriving at correct moral claims. Thus far, we have a picture of the world that satisfies the demand for moral objectivity that is often associated with Moral Realism. However, as recent anti-realist theories demonstrate, the moral objectivism stated here is also compatible with most contemporary anti-realist theories. The important question becomes how to separate moral realist objectivism from an objectivism that is compatible with either realism or anti-realism.

Moral realist objectivism must be an objectivism that is only compatible with Moral Realism. It must assert something that an anti-realist theory can't also assert and explain. For instance, it is not enough for moral realist objectivism to assert the existence of moral properties. An anti-realist theory can give an explanation of moral properties.<sup>14</sup> What about the assertion that moral states of affairs are things agents track rather than ways that agents coordinate the behaviour of others? This too can be accommodated by

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, an anti-realist could state that moral properties are descriptive features of the world that cause agents to develop moral attitudes. Such features could be the pain of a tortured subject which causes an agent to develop a moral stance against torture.

error theorists who insist that agents track moral states of affairs which they describe using false moral claims. What cannot be accommodated by the anti-realist is the existence of brute normativity in the world. Hence, any moral objectivism which asserts the existence of brute normativity in the world is a moral realist objectivism.

Normativity, I take to be the property whereby a state of affairs possesses some kind of positive or negative value. When I say "brute normativity in the world" I mean normativity that cannot be reduced to or summarized as something other than normativity. The reason why such normativity is incompatible with anti-realism is that this brute normativity can only be described in a manner where one is asserting that normativity. For instance, if I say "there are objective moral properties in the world" without reducing or summarizing the normativity in this claim to something that is not normative, I am making not just an assertion of brute normativity. I am also necessarily making a moral assertion. It is only when I can reduce or summarize the "objective moral properties" to something that is not normative that my assertion may or may not be a moral assertion.

For example, suppose I say "there are objective moral properties in the world." Then suppose I qualify that assertion with, "what I mean by objective moral properties is that there are rules for maximizing what is in the long term interests of most human beings." This qualification gives my assertion of objective moral properties the capacity to be interpreted in two different ways. In the first way, I can interpret my assertion of objective moral properties as a normative assertion. In the second way, I can interpret my assertion of objective moral properties as purely factual. This is because we can imagine rules for maximizing what is in the long term interests of most human beings which are immoral. It is only if I imagine such rules and morality as being co-extensive that I can interpret the assertion of objective moral properties as a moral assertion. However, even with this latter moral assertion, there is still a Moorean open question we can ask.<sup>15</sup> This is because there seems to be no necessary identity between morality and rules for

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<sup>15</sup> This is the same open question that G. E. Moore directed against all naturalistic forms of ethics in his *Principia Ethica*. See MOORE, G.E. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903.

maximizing the long-term interests of most human beings.<sup>16</sup>

All anti-realist theories have in common the fact that they make meta-ethical assertions about moral claims which can be interpreted as factual assertions. This is because all anti-realist theories attempt to explain morality in terms of some natural state of affairs that is not moral. Hence, for every anti-realist explanation, one can always ask Moore's open question. There are, of course, reductive moral realist theories where we can ask that same open question.<sup>17</sup> However, there are also varieties of Moral Realism that are not susceptible to an open question. The most famous of these is moral platonism which states that there are objective moral properties in the world which are best explained as non-physical, action guiding, and with explanations best characterized using final cause explanations.<sup>18</sup> One can't imagine such platonistic moral properties not being moral. We can, of course, imagine non-physical, action guiding non-moral properties that are best characterized using final cause explanations. This is not, however, what the moral platonist is asserting. He is describing a variety of moral property we cannot imagine as being non-moral. Hence, we cannot ask Moore's open question when we imagine moral properties that are such as the moral platonist describes them.

This shows a crucial difference between moral realist and moral anti-realist theories: Anti-realist theories cannot explain morality by giving explanations that are necessarily moral explanations. Moral realist theories can. All varieties of Moral Anti-Realism thus give accounts of moral claims that are vulnerable to a Moorean open question. Only some varieties of Moral Realism give accounts of moral claims that are vulnerable to a Moorean open question. I am not here assuming that the open question

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, it does not follow that there actually is no necessary identity. The point is, if there is a necessary identity, it does not appear to us from the mere contemplation of the concept of morality and the concept of rules for maximizing the long term interests of most human beings. We can imagine counter-examples to this supposed necessary identity.

<sup>17</sup> For an example of this type of moral realist theory, see JACKSON, Frank. *From Metaphysics to Ethics*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1998. In this moral realist theory, Jackson tries to reduce evaluative properties to natural properties.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Hampton is the only contemporary proponent of this kind of old fashion platonism. See Hampton (1998).

argument is evidence against anti-realist theories. What I am pointing out is that moral realist theories have the capacity to explain moral claims using explanations that are necessarily moral. Anti-realist explanations do not have this capacity.

What we can see from this is the difference in explanatory function between moral realist and moral anti-realist theories. Moral Realist theories attempt to explain morality in a manner where the world answers to our moral assertions. Moral anti-realist theories attempt to explain morality in a manner where the world does not answer to our moral assertions. One sufficient condition of explaining morality in a manner where the world answers to our moral assertions is to give explanations of morality that are necessarily moral. This is why the moral realist has the option of giving this kind of explanation and the anti-realist does not. It is a necessary condition of all moral anti-realist theories that they do not give explanations of morality that are necessarily moral.

Since my thesis will be an attempt to show that morality commits us to Moral Realism, my thesis must show that morality commits us to explaining morality in a way that the anti-realist cannot explain morality. This means that my thesis must show that morality commits us to explaining morality with explanations that are necessarily moral. Therefore, this thesis will utilize a version of Moral Realism that is not moral platonism but that none the less uses necessarily moral explanations. This is the explanatory Moral Realism referred to earlier. Explanatory Moral Realism consists of two components. The first component is the moral objectivism described earlier. The second component I will refer to as moral explanationism. According to moral explanationism, any 2nd order explanation of the correctness of a moral claim must simultaneously be a moral assertion.

When a 2nd order explanation of the correctness of a moral claim is simultaneously a moral assertion, that explanation is both a meta-ethical explanation and simultaneously a moral assertion. When moral objectivism is combined with moral explanationism, we have a meta-ethics that postulates that morality is a phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained from a theoretical perspective which does not make moral assertions. We can see here that anti-realist theories that attempt to show that the world

does not answer to our moral assertions presuppose that there are no 2nd order theoretical perspectives that are simultaneously moral. This is because the moral anti-realist presupposes there is no 2nd order theoretical explanation of how the world really is that involves moral assertions. If moral assertions were a part of 2nd order theoretical explanations of how the world really is, this would imply that morality is a part of the fabric of the world. Truths about the fabric of the world are the target of 2<sup>nd</sup> order theoretical explanations of any phenomenon. A commitment to explanatory Moral Realism is therefore a commitment to morality being a part of the fabric of the world. If morality is part of the fabric of the world then the world answers to our moral assertions.

A defense of the moral commitment to explanatory Moral Realism constitutes the first half of the thesis. In the second half of the thesis, I will rebut objections to the claim that moral commitments can commit us to meta-ethical claims. Chapter three involves a critique of objections to this claim given by Simon Blackburn. These objections will be in the form of defenses of Blackburn's meta-ethical theory Quasi-Realism. I will show that Blackburn's arguments beg the question by assuming four premises his arguments require him to give explicit defenses of. Moreover, I will show that Quasi-Realism cannot justify moral objectivism. In chapter four, I will look at a different variety of objection to the claim that moral commitments can commit us to meta-ethical claims. This objection is expressed in a meta-ethical stance defended by the philosopher Ronald Dworkin that we will refer to as moral anti-archimedeanism. Moral anti-archimedeanism is the view that one cannot validate or undermine moral claims from a perspective that is not internal to 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice. At the end of section four, I will conclude that Dworkin's arguments, as well as responses to them by Jamie Dreier and Kenneth Ehrenberg, fail to hit their targets. I will argue that this is because each of these three theorists assumes components of moral archimedeanism. This is true even of Dworkin himself. In the conclusion, I will give a brief summary of the arguments presented in this thesis. In the epilogue, I will give some explanation of the ways that moral archimedeanism conflicts with (C). I will then discuss the pros and cons of siding either with moral archimedeanism or (C). I will end the



thesis not with an affirmation of moral archimedeanism or (C) but with an encouragement of the reader to make up his or her own mind.

Some of the argumentation strategies used in this thesis are not presented in the traditional style of identifying a position defended in the literature by a theorist that is then either endorsed or criticized. In sections one and four, I analyse a debate between three theorists. Rather than endorse the arguments of one of the theorists, I concede that all the theorists fail to give successful arguments. However, in explaining how each theorist goes wrong, I show how their failures inadvertently illustrate key issues in my own subsequent arguments. Sometimes the failures explicitly illustrate direct premises in those arguments. At other points they contribute to the plausibility of those premises. And yet at other points, they create a greater understanding of the theoretical context in which my arguments are being advanced. In sections 2 and 3, I adopt the more traditional dialectical strategy of laying out the positions of another theorist and criticizing them before advancing arguments of my own.

In chapter one, I look at a debate whereby three mid 20<sup>th</sup> century meta-ethicists attempt, in different ways, to show that meta-ethical theories are normative. Mary Mothersill, Alan Gewirth, and R.C. Solomon attempt to identify particular procedures that the meta-ethicist engages in which are normative. They believe that if they are successful at this aim, they will have shown that meta-ethics is normative. Mothersill identifies the procedure of correctly interpreting a meta-ethical theory so the interpretation specifies which set of normative ethics that meta-ethical theory is not compatible with.<sup>19</sup> Gewirth identifies the procedure of differentiating the moral from the non-moral. He sees this procedure as a counter-example to the two predominant assumptions of his day regarding the scope of meta-ethics. These two assumptions are:

- (1) Meta-ethics is non-normative

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<sup>19</sup> MOTHERSILL, Mary. Moral Philosophy and Meta-ethics. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1952, vol. 49, pp. 587-594.

and

(2) The same meta-ethics is compatible with all forms of normative ethics<sup>20</sup>

R.C. Solomon identifies the procedure of studying ethical language so as to differentiate those claims which are truly moral from those claims which are deemed moral by a given society at a given time.<sup>21</sup> I will show that the attempts by each of these theorists to demonstrate that these procedures are normative are unsuccessful. I will argue that each theorist assumes that a particular meta-ethical procedure is normative just because one can interpret the procedure in a manner that is normative. I then argue that while these theorists fail to demonstrate that meta-ethical theories are normative, their arguments illustrate how certain meta-ethical procedures have implications for moral claims. One important implication is that a meta-ethical theory can affirm or deny other moral claims. If a meta-ethical theory can affirm incorrect moral claims or deny correct moral claims, this means the theory can be criticized on moral grounds. This answers the question of (A).

In chapter two, I will argue that explanatory Moral Realism is a correctness condition of moral claims. By “correctness condition” I mean a claim we must presuppose in order to consistently affirm a moral claim. Correctness conditions are subsets of moral commitments because they are claims we must affirm in virtue of engaging adequately in moral practice. I am assuming here that part of engaging adequately in moral practice is to engage in moral practice in a manner that is not self-undermining. To engage in moral practice in a manner that is not self-undermining, we must presuppose the correctness conditions of moral claims. Otherwise, we wind up either denying the very moral claims we assert or we wind up agnostics about the moral claims we assert. In either scenario, our

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<sup>20</sup>GEWIRTH, Alan. *Meta-Ethics and Normative Ethics. New Series*, 1960, vol. 69, no. 274. pp.187-205.

<sup>21</sup>SOLOMON, R.C. *Normative and Meta-Ethics, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1970, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 97-107.

lack of consistency is self-undermining because we destabilize our psychological responses towards moral claims we affirm if we simultaneously deny them. Hence, in chapter two I will assume that correctness conditions for moral claims are also moral commitments.

I will then show that a version of Moral Realism is implied by correctness conditions of moral claims. I will do this by creating a variation on the argument from moral experience (also referred to as AME). The argument from moral experience attempts to show that the experience of moral practice implies or is best explained by Moral Realism. In some ways the argument's title is slightly misleading. The argument from moral experience is not an attempt to show merely that the phenomenology of making moral claims gives us presumptive evidence in favor of Moral Realism. Rather, the argument attempts to show that the experience of moral practice (which includes both its phenomenological and linguistic components) implies or is best explained by Moral Realism.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, my strategy for creating a variation on this argument will be informed by Don Loeb's criticisms of two influential versions of the argument from moral experience.<sup>23</sup> I will not be creating a variation on this argument that is designed to be a presumptive argument for Moral Realism. Rather, my variation merely aims to entail that explanatory Moral Realism is implied by correctness conditions of moral claims. When I say that Moral Realism is implied by correctness conditions of moral claims I mean that correct moral claims depend on the truth of explanatory Moral Realism in order to consistently retain their status as correct moral claims.

I will, in constructing my variation on the argument from moral experience, attempt to avoid pitfalls with the previous versions of AME pointed out by Loeb. These include the fact that proponents of AME overlook observations of moral practice that

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<sup>22</sup> For defences of AME, see David Brink and David McNaughton. BRINK, David. *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Chapters 6-7. Also see McNAUGHTON, David. *Moral Vision*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1988. pp. 19-48, 56

<sup>23</sup> LOEB, Don. The Argument from Moral Experience. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 2007, vol. 10, pp. 469-484.

imply non-objectivism. The other criticism Loeb directs at AME arguments is that they ignore the degree to which aspects of moral practice are compatible with Moral Anti-Realism. From this I construct two requirements of any successful version of AME. The first requirement is that any successful version of AME must acknowledge that the experience of moral phenomenology is not uniform enough to present us with a presumptive case for a commitment to Moral Realism. The second requirement is that the proponent of AME must acknowledge that even if the experience of moral phenomenology possessed the characteristics other proponents of AME have claimed it does, these characteristics would only imply moral objectivism. They would not imply Moral Realism. My version of the argument from moral experience will fulfill these requirements by not relying on first person reports of moral phenomenology. Rather, my version will look at the correctness conditions of moral claims.

My version of AME will consist of 3 correctness conditions of moral claims. These correctness conditions, when conjoined, will imply explanatory Moral Realism. These 3 correctness conditions are:

(D) For any correct moral claim X, X is not determined by any agent's judgments about X.

(E) For any correct moral claim X, the only appropriate explanation is one that is irreducibly moral.

and

(F) For any correct moral claim X, the only appropriate irreducibly moral explanation is one that is a final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation.

When I speak of a “final” 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation, I mean an explanation that will be undermined if there is a higher order explanation attempting to explain the final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation. Such a higher order explanation would necessarily recharacterize the final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation in a manner that would change its content. A final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation is such that, it can only fail to be undermined if its content is not modified by

any other explanations which attempt to explain it. If the arguments in section two are sound, explanatory Moral Realism is implied by the conjunction of the three correctness conditions for moral claims. This means we are committed to final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of moral claims which are either explanatory moral realist explanations or explanations that are compatible with explanatory Moral Realism. The thesis of chapter two thus answers question (B).

We now arrive at the halfway mark of the thesis. Thus far, we have worked out answers to questions (A) and (B). It has been argued in chapter two that we have a moral commitment to (C) (For any meta-ethical theory which is true, that theory must either be an explanatory moral realist theory or a theory which is compatible with explanatory Moral Realism). Chapters three and four will be spent looking at objections to a presupposition of (C). This presupposition is that moral practice can commit us to meta-ethical claims regarding the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate. Perhaps the most famous set of objections to this presupposition comes from Simon Blackburn. Blackburn's Quasi-Realism is the most well known meta-ethical theory whose justification depends on the claim that moral practice does not commit us to any meta-ethical claims.

In the first half of chapter three, I will critique the considerations Simon Blackburn raises which purport to show that Quasi-Realism is true and is a more attractive theory than its rivals. The reason I am choosing this group of considerations (apart from their notoriety) is that if they are sound, the arguments in section one and section two will fail. Because Quasi-Realism depends on the claim that moral practice cannot commit us to meta-ethical claims, arguments in favor of Quasi-Realism are arguments in favor of the claim that moral practice cannot commit us to meta-ethical claims. Thus, I will attack these considerations on the grounds that they beg the question by relying on the plausibility of assumptions that other theories call into doubt. These assumptions include:

(G) Morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality.

(H) Morality is compatible with all possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate.

(I) Philosophical naturalism is true

and

(J) Quasi-Realism is true.

I will argue that Blackburn must defend each of these assumptions in order to show that Quasi-Realism is a more attractive meta-ethical theory than its rivals.

(G) is the assertion that morality is incapable of giving us evidence of claims normally made in other non-moral domains. These domains include the natural sciences, metaphysics, or epistemology. (H) is the assertion that there are no possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate which are incompatible with presuppositions of morality. (I) is the presupposition of philosophical naturalism. Here, I take philosophical naturalism to be a conjunction of two views. The first view is metaphysical. It commits the naturalist to the denial of supernatural entities. It also commits the naturalist to the denial of entities that cannot be accommodated in descriptions of the world that are consistent with the findings and methodological principles of the natural sciences. This second aim is the epistemological component of naturalism. It amounts to the claim that an explanation is more likely to be true if it is consistent with the inference to the best explanation model of explanation.<sup>24</sup> (J) refers to the presupposition that Quasi-Realism is true which I will show is hidden in one of Blackburn's arguments for Quasi-Realism.

I will attack five of the main considerations Blackburn presents in favor of Quasi-Realism. The first consideration is the fact that Quasi-Realism allows the theorist to accept the metaphysical components of Mackie's queerness argument while simultaneously accommodating 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse.<sup>25</sup> I will argue that this

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<sup>24</sup> See Lipton, (1991).

<sup>25</sup> See Blackburn (1985) and Mackie (1977).

combination of claims presupposes (G) (morality is incapable of giving us evidence of anything external to morality) and (H) (morality is compatible with all possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate). The second consideration I will attack is the argument from 1<sup>st</sup> order meta-ethical neutrality. According to this argument, one can incorporate all the features of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse into a meta-ethical theory without making any metaphysical assertions.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, according to the argument, 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse is meta-ethically neutral. I will critique this argument on the basis that it does not show what it needs to show; namely, that a meta-ethically neutral interpretation of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims is evidence that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are meta-ethically neutral. Moreover, such an interpretation is compatible with 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims committing agents to constraints on how one should characterize a meta-ethical theory. To assume this is impossible is to presuppose, rather than defend (H) (morality is compatible with all possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate).

The third consideration I will critique is the argument from moral psychology.<sup>27</sup> According to this argument, motivational internalism and the Humean account of moral motivation are the most plausible views of moral psychology.<sup>28</sup> According to the Humean account of moral motivation, non-cognitive states are completely distinct. According to motivational internalism, moral judgments necessarily motivate agents. The conjunction of these two views entails that moral judgments must either be non-cognitive states or be cognitive states which entail non-cognitive states. Because of the plausibility of the Humean account of moral motivation and motivational internalism, Blackburn believes it is reasonable to believe that cognitive states such as moral beliefs can't entail non-cognitive states. Therefore, moral judgments must be expressions of non-cognitive states. This is an argument for the explanatory superiority of Quasi-Realism over its moral realist

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<sup>26</sup> This is the position of quasi-realists.

<sup>27</sup> See BLACKBURN, Simon, *Spreading the Word*, New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1984.

<sup>28</sup> See Blackburn (1984), Chapter 6.

competitors.

I will critique the argument from moral psychology because the claim that moral judgments necessarily motivate is derived, in part, from the claim that desires are what explain moral motivations. The difficulty with relying on any version of motivational internalism to argue against all forms of Moral Realism is that motivational internalism presupposes (G) (morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality). If morality were capable of giving us evidence of things external to morality, it would not be obvious that desires are what explain moral motivations. The obvious explanation of moral motivation would be the interaction agents had with moral phenomena (be they moral properties or moral facts) that were external to agents. If (G) were false, the interactions agents had with moral phenomena would be what morality gave agents (among other things) evidence of. Motivational internalism is only plausible if (G) is true.

The fourth of Blackburn's considerations in favor of Quasi-Realism that I will critique is the argument from supervenience.<sup>29</sup> According to this argument, it may be the case in our world that there is a moral relationship between torture and wrongness. However, the argument proceeds, there is no conceptual reason why in some other world, there is a moral relation between torture and wrongness which is not the relation that holds in our world. Blackburn then claims that a moral change regarding the correctness of a moral claim, necessarily, doesn't happen without some change in the features of the situation that underlies the correctness of that moral claim. This means it is a conceptual impossibility that there should be a possible world where two things are identical in every non-moral respect but one is better than the other. Blackburn believes that Quasi-Realism can explain this ban on mixed worlds where Moral Realism cannot. I will critique this argument without challenging its premises. Rather, I will challenge it on the grounds that it presupposes that Moral Realism gives us an unattractive explanation of the ban on mixed worlds. This characterization of Moral Realism as an unattractive explanation itself

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



assumes (I) (naturalism is true). I will show that Blackburn can't afford to assume naturalism in an argument against all forms of Moral Realism. This is because some forms of Moral Realism reject naturalism.

The final consideration I will address that Blackburn cites in favor of Quasi-Realism is the argument from practical needs.<sup>30</sup> According to this argument, Quasi-Realism is a meta-ethical theory that satisfies the practical needs of morality. Blackburn thinks there are two practical needs of morality that any meta-ethical theory must satisfy. The first is that the theory describes how morality functions correctly.<sup>31</sup> The second is that the theory is consistent with truth tracking methods from the natural sciences and analytic philosophy.<sup>32</sup> I will critique this argument by showing that the way a meta-ethical theory characterizes morality will, in part, determine what practical needs of morality any meta-ethical theory must satisfy. Hence, one cannot invoke a practical needs argument in favor of Quasi-Realism unless one assumes (J) (Quasi-Realism is true).

In the second half of chapter three, I will argue that Quasi-Realism has an additional factor that counts against it. This factor is it does not justify moral objectivism. Because objectivism is compatible with both realism and anti-realism, objectivism is a view Blackburn believes Quasi-Realism can account for at the 1<sup>st</sup> order level. I will argue that Quasi-Realism cannot do this because no anti-realist theory can justify moral objectivism. I will argue that this is for two reasons. The first reason is that one must deny (G) (morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality) in order for moral practice to have any resources to defend objectivism. The second reason is that scepticism regarding objectivism is such that it requires a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claim for the scepticism to be overcome. Such a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim, I will show, could only be a moral realist claim.

In chapter four, I will examine a different objection to the claim that moral

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<sup>30</sup>See Blackburn (1992)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

practice can commit us to meta-ethical claims regarding the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate. This objection comes from Ronald Dworkin. Dworkin advocates a position I will characterize as moral anti-archimedeanism. According to Dworkin's moral anti-archimedeanism, there are no 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims which can validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims.<sup>33</sup> Dworkin takes this to mean that the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate is constructed out of 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims that, according to Dworkin, are best characterized as 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. For Dworkin, there are no moral commitments to meta-ethical claims regarding the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate. This is because there are no 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims from which such a debate can be had.

I will critique Dworkin's position on the basis that his arguments are inconsistent. I will argue that Dworkin relies on 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims that are used in the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate. Moreover, he does this without first interpreting such 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims as 1<sup>st</sup> order claims. Dworkin cannot do this since his thesis involves the claim that there are no plausible 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims that can be used to vindicate Moral Realism or Moral Anti-Realism. After all, such claims are the very archimedean claims he is attacking. He cannot rely on a variety of 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims to establish the thesis that there are no such claims.

In the second half of chapter four, I will analyse objections to Dworkin by Jamie Dreier and Kenneth Ehrenberg. Dreier objects to Dworkin's defense of moral anti-archimedeanism by attempting to show, using matrices from the literature on analytic contingencies, that 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims can be morally non-committing.<sup>34</sup> If they are morally non-committing, according to Dreier, there is no reason to interpret them as 1<sup>st</sup> order claims. Dreier thinks his argument stands even if archimedean claims have moral implications. Kenneth Ehrenberg, on the other hand, throws a different set of

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<sup>33</sup> DWORKIN, Ronald. Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 1996, vol. 25. pp. 87-139.

<sup>34</sup> DREIER, Jamie. Meta-Ethics and Normative Commitment. *Philosophical Issues*. 2002, vol. 12. pp. 241-263.

criticisms at Dworkin. His criticisms are multiple and varied.<sup>35</sup> Ehrenberg accuses Dworkin of failing to discredit the theoretical perspective from which the meta-ethicist discussing the Realism/Anti-Realism issue makes his claims. Ehrenberg also accuses Dworkin of failing to give good reasons for the interpretation of 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims as 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Like Dreier, Ehrenberg takes issue with Dworkin's attempts to show that meta-ethical claims made in the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate are morally non-neutral. Ehrenberg also challenges Dworkin's assumption that the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate does not deal with issues that are above and beyond the issues dealt with in 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. He attempts to give counter-examples that show that there are metaphysical issues being dealt with during 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral debates that are distinct from anything discussed at the 1st order.

I will show that both Dreier and Ehrenberg's attacks on Dworkin fail. This is because both Dreier and Ehrenberg assume some component of moral archimedeanism. These components are related to the traditional characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction assumed by moral archimedeanism. Dreier assumes that meta-ethical standards about how one ought to evaluate moral standards are not themselves moral standards. He also fails to see that one of his own versions of secondary quality theory is actually a moral claim that there are 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral commitments. Ehrenberg's varied criticisms of Dworkin all fail because Ehrenberg assumes the falsity of the claim that there can be 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral commitments. At the end of chapter four, I will explain how Dworkin, Dreier, and Ehrenberg either fail to attack archimedeanism or fail to defend it because they presuppose components of it. I will then suggest what might perhaps motivate them to accept these components in such a strong way.

Each theorist, in their own way, does not question the traditional characterization of the distinction between 1st and 2nd order claims. It is a part of that characterization that 2nd order claims have a greater ability to validate or undermine moral claims than 1st

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<sup>35</sup>EHRENBURG, Kenneth. Archimedean Meta-Ethics Defended. *Metaphilosophy*. 2008, vol. 39. pp. 508-529

order moral claims do. This characterization of the justification capacities of the 2nd order claim is the basis of archimedean moralizing. This characterization is what gives the 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim the capacity to function as an archimedean claim. Even Dworkin, in the end, winds up relying on this traditional characterization. Moreover, he relies on claims that can only function the way he wants them to if he interprets them as 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims. This suggests that at some level of his thought, he thinks that 2nd order archimedean claims have a greater ability to justify 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims than other 1st order moral claims do.

I will explain how Dreier also relies on the traditional characterization of the 1st and 2nd order distinction during his attacks on Dworkin. Dreier's example of a meta-ethical claim that has moral implications but is not morally committing requires the assumption that moral standards cannot be standards regarding how to evaluate moral standards. Dreier, I will show, implicitly assumes that moral claims are only made at the 1st order. This is a component of the traditional characterization of the distinction between 1st and 2nd order claims. Additionally, I will show that Dreier fails to notice that a rejection of his version of secondary quality theory is itself a claim plausibly understood as a 2nd order moral commitment. This failure on Dreier's part is what one would expect from a theorist who holds the traditional characterization of the distinction between 1st and 2nd order claims. Ehrenberg's critique of Dworkin relies on the traditional characterization of 1st and 2nd order claims because Ehrenberg assumes that 2nd order moral claims cannot be moral commitments. Like Dreier's assumptions, this assumption by Ehrenberg is a component of the traditional characterization of the distinction between 1st and 2nd order moral claims.

Chapter 4 will end with a summary of the components of Dworkin's anti-archimedeanism that are sound and contrast these components with the components that fail. I will claim that the aspects of Dworkin's anti-archimedeanism that succeed are the aspects that deny that it is the case that moral claims must be justified from an archimedean 2nd order perspective. I will explain how Dworkin's fundamental mistake is

his inconsistent attempt at necessarily ridding ethics of 2nd order metaphysical commitments. I will also explain Dworkin's simultaneous failures and successes as an attempt to harmonize two desires. The first desire is a desire to not have the truth of 1st order moral claims contingent on the pronouncements of archimedean claims that are external to 1st order moral practice. The second desire is a desire to justify a morality that cannot commit us to a potentially extravagant metaphysics. I will explain that if (C) is correct, the harmonization of these two desires is impossible because the second desire is infeasible. This is because the truth of (C) implies that there is no moral position from which one could delegitimize potential metaphysical commitments of morality.

As noted earlier, the conclusion of this thesis will contain a summary of the arguments presented in the thesis. The epilogue will consist of a discussion of the ways in which (C) and moral archimedeanism conflict. I will end that discussion with a brief synopsis of the pros and cons of affirming either meta-ethical position. It is important to remember throughout this thesis that I am not assuming that moral commitments are evidence of anything other than claims one must affirm if one is adequately engaged in moral practice. I am merely interested in the question of whether or not we may be morally committed to constraints on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive. The affirmative answer I give to that question puts the meta-ethicist in a position of having to re-evaluate both his meta-ethical and moral commitments. This is because of the conflict between (C) and moral archimedeanism.

## **2. META-ETHICS AND MORAL CRITICISM**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I will attempt to give an answer to question (A). (A) is the question of whether a meta-ethical theory can warrant moral criticism. I will attempt to answer this question by analyzing a mid 20<sup>th</sup> century meta-ethical discussion by Mary Mothersill, Alan Gewirth, and R.C. Solomon. This discussion concerns the topic of whether meta-ethics is itself normative. Each theorist in the discussion attempts to give an argument that demonstrates that some meta-ethical procedure is normative. They attempt

to infer from this the claim that meta-ethics itself is normative. I will conclude that none of the participants in this discussion are successful at demonstrating this claim. However, each theorist, in a different way, illustrates a way in which a meta-ethical theory can affirm or deny moral claims. If a moral theory can affirm or deny moral claims, this opens up the possibility that the meta-ethical theory could deny correct moral claims or affirm false moral claims. If a meta-ethical theory does either of these things, that meta-ethical theory warrants moral criticism.

In section two of chapter one, I will give some historical background to the discussion to put it in proper context. In section three, I will explain Mary Mothersill's attempt to demonstrate that meta-ethics is normative. Mothersill observes a common meta-ethical procedure she believes is normative when she observes a meta-ethicist specifying which set of normative claims his theory is incompatible with. From this, she infers that meta-ethics itself is normative. She believes the procedure is motivated by an attempt by the meta-ethicist to enable his theory to gain explanatory power. In section four, I will critique Mothersill's argument by showing that this procedure need not be interpreted in a manner that is normative. In section five, I will explain how Alan Gewirth identifies a meta-ethical procedure that he thinks demonstrates that meta-ethics is normative. This is the procedure of differentiating the moral from the non-moral. Gewirth believes that this procedure constitutes a counter-example to the two predominant assumptions of his day regarding the scope of meta-ethics. These assumptions are:

(1) Meta-Ethics is non-normative.

and

(2) The same meta-ethics is compatible with all forms of normative ethics.

In section six, I will critique Gewirth's arguments by showing how the differentiation of the moral from the non-moral can be interpreted as a descriptive procedure. This is true even if differentiating the moral from the non-moral constitutes a counter-example to (2). The differentiation of the moral from the non-moral is not a counter-example to (1). (1) is

the important counter-example for Gewirth if he aims to demonstrate that meta-ethics is normative. In section seven, I will explain how R.C. Solomon believes he has identified a normative procedure that meta-ethicists engage in when they differentiate what is moral from what is deemed moral at a given place and time. Solomon believes that meta-ethicists develop a morally implicative model of moral language as a way of differentiating those moral claims that are truly moral and those moral claims that are believed to be moral by particular societies at particular times. Like Mothersill and Gewirth, he believes the normativity of this procedure shows that meta-ethics is normative. In section eight, I will critique Solomon's claim that the development of the morally implicative model of moral language is a normative procedure. Again, I will do this by showing that one need not interpret the creation of this model as a normative procedure. In section 9, I will conclude that these three theorists fail to demonstrate that meta-ethics is normative because of an interpretive confusion. Each theorist assumes that because they can interpret the meta-ethical procedure they observe in a manner that is normative, meta-ethics itself is normative. However, each theorist, in his or her own way, illustrates a way in which a meta-ethical theory could warrant moral criticism. Hence, the discussion under analysis inadvertently answers the question of (A).

## **2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DISCUSSION**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dominant position in meta-ethics has been that meta-ethics is a morally neutral, 2nd order study of 1st order moral judgments. This position was famously expressed in C.L. Stevenson's *Ethics and Language* (1944) where he stated that,

*"Meta-Ethics is a morally neutral study which must retain the difficult detachment of studying ethical judgments without making them"*<sup>36</sup>

William Frankena presented a more explicit formulation of the distinction between meta-

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<sup>36</sup> STEVENSON, Charles. *Ethics and Language*. USA: Yale University Press, 1944.

ethics and normative ethics in 1951.<sup>37</sup> Frankena posited that meta-ethics was the study not of ethical judgments proper, but of logical, epistemological, and metaphysical statements such as "Good means desired," "Right Stands for a Non-Natural Property", and "Ought Implies Can." Normative Ethics, according to Frankena, makes ethical judgments and asks what things of actions satisfy ethical descriptions such as "good" and "right."<sup>38</sup>

Mary Mothersill, Alan Gewirth, and R.C. Solomon challenged this orthodoxy by attempting to identify procedures within meta-ethical theorizing and demonstrate that these procedures are normative. They believed that in showing that such procedures are normative, they were also showing that meta-ethics was normative. As noted above, I will show that the attempts by each theorist to demonstrate that these procedures are normative were unsuccessful. Part of the problem, my analysis will show, is that there is little clarity over what it would mean for a meta-ethical theory to be a normative theory. This lack of clarity manifests itself in the work by these theorists insofar as each theorist assumes that a particular meta-ethics procedure is normative just because one can interpret this procedure in a manner that is normative. Each writer ignores the possibility that the procedure in question could be interpreted in a manner that is purely descriptive. However, what these theorists illustrate is that the procedures, even if descriptive, have implications for moral claims. If a meta-ethical theory can affirm or deny moral claims, this means it can deny a correct moral claim and affirm an incorrect moral claim. This is important for my thesis, since these affirmations and denials constitute a reason why one could legitimately criticize a meta-ethical theory on moral grounds.

When a meta-ethical theory can be criticized on moral grounds, I take that as a sufficient condition of the adoption of the meta-ethical theory constituting a moral act. This is for the simple reason that in order for something to be criticized on moral grounds, it has to be morally guilty of an act that is in some way morally negative. One act that a

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<sup>37</sup> FRANKENA, William. *Moral Philosophy at Mid-Century*. Philosophical Review, 1951, vol. LX, pp. 44

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



meta-ethical theory could be guilty of is either affirming incorrect moral claims or denying correct moral claims. When I say a moral theory can be morally guilty of a morally negative act, I don't want to be taken too literally here. Because a theory is not a moral agent, a theory cannot, strictly speaking, be guilty of a morally negative act. However, we do talk in every day conversation of various theories warranting moral criticism for various reasons. The most popular example is the set of historical theories concerning World War II that deny the holocaust. Here, I think the best way to interpret the claim that a holocaust denying historical theory is morally guilty is to think of this claim as another way of saying its proponents warrant moral criticism. Hence, when I discuss whether or not a particular meta-ethical theory is morally guilty, I mean that its proponents warrant moral criticism in virtue of affirming the theory.

If a meta-ethical theory is guilty of something that is morally negative, this implies proponents of the theory are in some way responsible for doing something morally negative. If this is true, this shows that affirming the meta-ethical theory in question is a moral act. It is a moral act, on one scenario, because affirming the meta-ethical theory may require an agent to either affirm incorrect moral claims or deny correct moral claims in a manner that is morally negative. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility that affirming a meta-ethical theory can warrant moral criticism for reasons other than the specific implications of the theory for 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. However, if the arguments in this chapter are correct, I will have shown that it is at least possible that the affirmation of a meta-ethical theory can warrant moral criticism. If this possibility is genuine, this opens the door for other potential reasons why affirming a meta-ethical theory can warrant moral criticism.

One might raise a worry here that there is a morally significant difference between affirming an incorrect moral claim and affirming a theory that commits us to affirming an incorrect moral claim. One could raise a similar worry about the moral difference between denying a correct moral claim and affirming a theory that commits us to the denial of a correct moral claim. According to the rationale of this worry, the choice

to affirm a theory is morally distinct from a choice to affirm a moral claim. This is because when we affirm a theory, we are primarily truth tracking. When we truth track, we are prepared to resign ourselves to truths that may be at odds with morality. On the other hand, when we moralize, we are deliberately attempting to endorse a set of views that are consistent with our moral commitments. Hence, if during the process of moralizing, one were to affirm an incorrect moral claim, this would be at odds with the aim of moralizing. On the other hand, if during the affirmation of a theory, one were to affirm an incorrect moral claim, this would not be at odds with the aim of the practice of theory selection. This is because, during theory selection, we don't assume that the world will conform to our moral commitments. When we moralize, we do. According to this rationale, since truth tracking and moralizing are both morally permissible activities, it is morally permissible to affirm incorrect moral claims as long as one only does it during theory selection and affirmation.

One can answer this worry by noting that the worry assumes our moral claims can conflict with facts about the world. This means that if we hold a correct moral claim (a) that presupposes worldly fact (b), a theory could commit us to the denial of (b) without forcing us to be morally responsible for renouncing (a). Let's assume (a) is the view that it is bad to spank children. Let's also assume that the worldly fact (b) that (a) hinges on, is the claim that spanking children psychologically damages children in the long run. Now, suppose we adopt some theory of child development that implies that spanking children does not psychologically damage them, but instead gives children numerous psychological benefits that make children healthier both physically and mentally. Here, we have our theory committing us to denying (b). If our moral commitments can conflict with the world, we would not say that affirming this theory gave us reason to renounce our moral claim that spanking children is bad. Rather, we would say that our moral commitment that spanking children is bad just happened to conflict with the facts of the world which our affirmed theory implied.

The absurdity of this example illustrates the fact that as moral agents engaged in

moral practice, we assume that facts about the world don't conflict with our moral claims. We assume that if some moral claim we hold hinges on a fact about the world which turns out to be false, we ought to consider the moral claim one that we no longer have reason to believe is a correct moral claim. Similarly, we think that if a moral claim (a) hinges on a worldly fact (b) which obtains, any theory that denies (b) is a false theory. For example, we hold the moral claim that the Nazi's were an evil political regime (a), in part, because they exterminated six million Jews (b). If a historical theory committed us to denying (b), we would justifiably believe that historical theory was a false theory. Hence, a presupposition of moral practice is that facts about the world do not conflict with our moral claims.

Throughout this chapter, I will be using certain terms in a manner that is consistent with the way they are used by contemporary meta-ethicists. I will refer to the term "meta-ethics" to describe the set of theories whereby theorists attempt to defend and systematize 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. When I use the term "normative ethics" I will refer to the set of theories whereby moral theorists attempt to defend and systematize 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. When I use the term "normative claim" I will be referring to a claim one cannot affirm without also endorsing a normative state of affairs. To endorse a normative claim is to affirm the normative state of affairs the claim describes. For instance, to endorse the normative claim that torturing innocent children is wrong is to say, "When the torture of innocent children happens, this state of affairs *really* possesses the property of wrongness." This is distinct from merely saying, "When the torture of innocent children happens, this state of affairs possesses the property of wrongness, according to morality." It is also important to note that my definition of normative claim is not inherently realist. Terms such as "normative state of affairs", and "property of wrongness" can be understood in either realist or anti-realist ways. A normative state of affairs, for instance, can be understood as the feature of a state of affairs that makes a situation satisfy the conditions of the predicate "wrong". This conception of a normative state of affairs is neutral between Moral Realism and Moral Anti-Realism. Also, a property like

“wrongness” can be understood in a manner that is neutral with regards the issue of Moral Realism. The property of “wrongness” could simply refer to the fact that a given situation satisfies those conditions that make it wrong.<sup>39</sup> What is important is the affirmation of the normative content of “wrongness.”

In any affirmation of the normative content of “wrongness”, the relationship between the wrong act (torturing children, for example) and the wrongness must be normative. A necessary condition of such a relationship obtaining this normativity is that the relationship not be a mistake of some sort. If it were a mistake, this would amount to a denial of the wrongness in question. If what I mean by “torturing children is wrong” is that it is a mistake to think “torturing children is wrong”, my assertion amounts to a denial of the claim “torturing children is wrong”. If the claim “torturing children is wrong” is only intended to mean that morality entails the disapproval of torturing children, the claim is not normative either. This is because in this interpretation of the claim there is no specification that morality is not just a series of mistakes. If the claim “torturing children is wrong” is only intended to mean that we can classify actions into ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ categories and the torture of children fits into the ‘wrong’ category, this meaning of “torturing children is wrong” is also not normative. One can classify the act of torturing children into the category of ‘wrong’ without endorsing that the categories themselves are anything but mistakes of some sort. Hence, a necessary condition of any genuine normative claim is that the normative content of the claim must be explicitly endorsed. It cannot be ambiguous whether such content is endorsed or not.

The reason I don’t define a normative claim as merely a claim that has normative implications is that definition seems to have problematic counter-examples. There seems to be a litany of descriptive claims that have normative implications that don’t seem intuitively like normative claims. Such claims include, “Women are significantly less

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<sup>39</sup>For an elaboration of minimalist accounts of properties, facts, and truths, see RAMSEY, P.F. Facts and Propositions. *Aristotelian Society*, 1927, Supplementary Volume 7, 153-170.

intelligent than men”, “All liberals are Pedophiles”, or “The Holocaust is a myth created by Jewish media.” What is of importance here is that while it may be the case that such seemingly descriptive claims are actually normative, further argumentation is required to show this. On the other hand, to say that a normative claim involves a claim one cannot affirm without also endorsing a normative state of affairs is trivially true. There does not seem to be any obvious counterexamples here. It just seems bizarre to say that one could make a normative claim without endorsing the normative state of affairs the claim describes.

When I use the term “descriptive claim” I mean a claim that can be affirmed without committing one to endorse the normative content of any normative claim. This way, some claims about morality can count as descriptive. Such descriptive claims can include statements about what is considered moral under various moral systems. Also, when I say that a meta-ethical theory is “descriptively adequate”, I mean it is a meta-ethical theory that is in the class of theories that contains a sufficiently detailed and illuminating collection of universally affirmed moral claims. Such an endorsement is not, on my definition, normative because the endorsement does not presuppose that the universally affirmed moral claims are not in some sense mistakes

Finally, when I mention the “interpretive context” of a theory, I will be talking about the appropriate framework of interpretation that a reader should approach the theory with. Such a framework could include inclusions or exclusions of a range of normative claims. This depends on the meta-ethicist at hand. If a meta-ethicist assumes that a 1<sup>st</sup> order normative ethics like moral relativism is absurd, he could instruct the reader to interpret his meta-ethical theory in a manner where it is taken for granted that relativism is false. Moreover, there could be a tacit assumption on the part of the meta-ethicist that his reader already believes moral relativism is absurd. Hence, his meta-ethical theory could be designed to reflect the normative ethics assumptions of his readers as a way of offering a better meta-ethical account of those assumptions.

Before my analysis of Mothersill, Gewirth, and Solomon begins, it is also

important to highlight a widespread change that seems to have happened since the 50's and 60's. The contemporary desideratum of meta-ethical theories is that an adequate meta-ethical theory should both accommodate the face value of moral practice and place that practice within a wider understanding.<sup>40</sup> By accommodating the face value of moral practice, it is meant that a meta-ethical theory will describe moral practice in a manner consistent with the pre-theoretical appearances of 1<sup>st</sup> order morality that are the datum from which meta-ethical theories are constructed. By placing that practice within a wider understanding, it is normally (although not necessarily) meant that the meta-ethicist will be describing the ontological and epistemological elements of moral practice within a naturalistic framework.

What differentiates Mothersill, Gewirth, and Solomon from contemporary meta-ethicists is that contemporary meta-ethicists don't uniformly agree about whether a meta-ethical theory becomes more or less attractive in virtue of its moral implications.<sup>41</sup> These earlier writers I am analyzing, in contrast, seemed to presuppose that if a meta-ethical theory contains 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims which are incompatible with absurd 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims, this counts in favor of that theory. The idea, roughly speaking, is that a theory gains explanatory power insofar as that theory contains 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims which are incompatible with absurd 1<sup>st</sup> order claims.<sup>42</sup> This means that if a meta-ethical theory contains a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim (such as "moral universalism is a necessary condition of moral justification"), this meta-ethical theory is incompatible with absurd forms of normative ethics such as moral relativism. These writers did not see this incompatibility as an example of a meta-ethics overstepping its bounds into the field of normative ethics.

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<sup>40</sup>See the introduction of *Morality without Foundations* by Mark Timmons. TIMMONS, Mark, *Morality without Foundations*, Oxon, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999. pp. 11-12.

<sup>41</sup>I don't mean to suggest this is an uncontroversial outcome of inference to the best explanation. Also, there could be other considerations which make a morally implicative meta-ethical theory lose theoretical virtues.

<sup>42</sup>This is a consequence of the theory being able to say more if it more precisely identifies the correct set of moral claims.

Rather, for these writers, it was an example of a meta-ethical theory explaining more than its rivals. I will not attempt to take a stand on the earlier or more recent views on this issue. However, my aim in pointing out this difference is to clarify the motivations of the writers I am discussing for wanting to demonstrate that meta-ethics was normative. For these early writers, the more correct normative claims a meta-ethical theory took a stand on, the more illuminating of a meta-ethical theory it became.

To contemporary readers, many of the examples cited by these theorists may seem unlikely candidates for anything resembling meta-ethics. This is because contemporary readers have more firmly entrenched the idea that if a claim appears to be normative or have normative implications, it is, ipso facto, a non-meta-ethical claim.<sup>43</sup> This was not true of the meta-ethicists of the 50's and 60's. A much more paradoxical situation existed for them. Like contemporary meta-ethicists, they accepted, by and large, that meta-ethics was a morally neutral study of 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. However, one can find examples in the meta-ethical theories of this time of rather blatant normative claims. These claims all came from published papers and books on the subject of meta-ethics.<sup>44</sup> They were either advocated as explicit components of meta-ethical theories or advocated in a way where there was no attempt by the author to differentiate these claims from the other meta-ethical claims happening in the same piece of writing. No one thought that these claims stopped the meta-ethical theories they appeared alongside from being meta-ethical theories. Nor did they assume these claims were non-meta-ethical in virtue of being normative.

It would be quite bizarre to claim that these were not meta-ethical claims because contemporary meta-ethicists would not consider these claims as part of the province of meta-ethics. This would be confusing the beliefs of particular meta-ethicists at a given time with a necessary condition of meta-ethics. This is the equivalent of excluding Miles Davis from the category of 'jazz musician' because jazz musicians of the 1950's did not

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<sup>43</sup> For evidence of this, see the discussions in Chapter 4.

<sup>44</sup> All of the examples high lighted by all three authors do this.

believe jazz could encompass electric guitars or synthesizers. Like jazz, meta-ethics is a practice defined both by what its practitioners have done and what they currently do. Since there is no current consensus (or arguments for that matter) suggesting that the meta-ethics of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was actually normative ethics, I will assume that the meta-ethicists of the mid-twentieth century were engaging in the same practice as contemporary meta-ethicists. After all, both the original and contemporary meta-ethicists have created theories of 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims that say very little, if anything, about normative ethics. Both contemporary and older meta-ethicists ask the same kinds of questions regarding the relationship of 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. This is why the term ‘meta-ethics’ will be used in this discussion to refer to all 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral theories about 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. This is a definition of meta-ethics that is compatible with both the older and more contemporary meta-ethics theories. Whether we are dealing with a meta-ethicist of the 1950’s or of today, we can say that the meta-ethicist is attempting to advocate and explain 2<sup>nd</sup> order theories about 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims.

### **2.3 MARY MOTHERSILL**

The first major challenge I will consider to the claim that meta-ethics is non-normative came from Mary Mothersill. Mothersill noticed that exponents of various meta-ethical theories seemed to commit themselves to normative claims in the midst of their meta-ethical theorizing. She noted, for example, that intuitionists such as W.D. Ross<sup>45</sup> committed themselves to the view that states of mind are good, to the extent that they are characterized by moral virtue, intelligence, and pleasure. For her, this view was normative because it gave a normative evaluation of various states of mind.<sup>46</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>45</sup>ROSS, W.D. *The Right and the Good*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1999. pp. 122

<sup>46</sup> See Mothersill (1952), 587-594.

<sup>47</sup> PERRY, R.B. *General Theory of value*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926. pp.659-692.

<sup>48</sup> Stevenson (1944), 122.



Mothersill noted that this view appeared within the context of a discussion of Ross's intuitionist meta-ethical theory. There was no attempt by Ross to differentiate this view from his meta-ethics because this view had normative implications. Hence, Mothersill, in keeping with the assumptions of her day, assumed that Ross was simply advocating a meta-ethical theory that had a normative component. She similarly observed that the ethical naturalist R.B. Perry had concluded his meta-ethical treatise "General Theory of Value" with a chapter on "The Highest Good."<sup>47</sup> For Mothersill, this was another example of a meta-ethicist including a 1st order normative view within his meta-ethical theory.

Mothersill additionally gave a normative interpretation of a comment made by C.L. Stevenson in his famous work, *Ethics and Language*. In this work, Stevenson insisted that his meta-ethics (in this case, noncognitivism) did not 'confine one to a passive or cynical neutrality'<sup>48</sup> This comment, in particular, seemed to suggest to Mothersill that Stevenson was excluding his meta-ethical theory from compatibility with a certain sort of normative ethics. Stevenson in the same work went on to say that ethical ideals must be fought for with the words 'right' and 'wrong' and supported with 'clear minded reasons'.<sup>49</sup> This, again, looked suspiciously to Mothersill like a meta-ethical theory taking moral positions against a certain kind of normative ethics.

Part of Mothersill's interpretation of Stevenson, we can assume, is motivated by the idea that Stevenson's theory would gain explanatory power insofar as it was incompatible with a normative ethics of 'passive and cynical neutrality'. The idea here is that a meta-ethical theory gains explanatory power insofar as it explains more features of moral practice. If it turns out that one of those features is that moral practice is incompatible with a passive and cynical normative ethics, the meta-ethical theory gains explanatory power insofar as it countenances that feature. We can assume this for two reasons. The first is that Mothersill writes as though this incompatibility with passive and

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 107.

cynical neutrality is a positive attribute of Stevenson's theory. The second is that nowhere does Mothersill ever mention that there may be a lack of alignment between a theory's appropriation of a justified moral stand and that theory's assessment of the truth about ethics.<sup>50</sup> We can assume that Mothersill believed that insofar as a meta-ethical theory appropriated a justified moral stand into its explanations, the more about ethics it was explaining.

Nonetheless, her interpretation of Stevenson is obviously at odds with the interpretation of Stevenson by contemporary meta-ethicists. The contemporary meta-ethicist would interpret Stevenson as meaning that his meta-ethics (in this case, noncognitivism) simply did not entail a normative ethics of passive and cynical neutrality. However, he would not be interpreted as claiming that his meta-ethics entailed that a 1<sup>st</sup> order normative ethics of passive and cynical neutrality is false. This is because contemporary meta-ethicists would think that Stevenson's theory loses nothing in failing to deny a normative ethics of passive and cynical neutrality. For the contemporary meta-ethicist, it is probably enough for Stevenson's theory to be able to explain why relativism is wrong.<sup>51</sup> It is reasonable to assume this because there does not seem to be a widespread, recent agreement among meta-ethicists about whether or not meta-ethical theories gain explanatory power by excluding absurd normative ethics. Thus, it seems unreasonable to assume that contemporary meta-ethicists would find Stevenson's theory unattractive just because it failed to entail that relativism was false.

Mothersill admitted that the normative claims she cited from Stevenson and other meta-ethicists could be interpreted as something over and above the meta-ethics theories of the books in which these claims occur. However, she observed that there was no indication in the works themselves that these claims were meant to be taken as something

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<sup>50</sup>This feature counts in favour of this interpretation.

<sup>51</sup>This is what Blackburn's Quasi-Realism does in regards to relativism. See Blackburn (1998), Chapter 9

distinct from the meta-ethical theories being produced.<sup>52</sup> Hence, Mothersill believed that the correct interpretation of such meta-ethical theories was that they were taking stands on normative claims. She reasoned that the attractiveness of a meta-ethical theory depended on it being understood “in context“. The context, for Mothersill,<sup>53</sup> was the set of recommendations for interpreting such theories made by their proponents. This suggested that for every meta-ethical theory, there was a possible way of interpreting that theory which was compatible with a normative ethics the meta-ethicist disapproved of. The meta-ethicist, in order not to advocate a meta-ethics compatible with a dubious normative ethics, would recommend that one interpret his theory in a manner that excluded that normative ethics.

This recommendation for interpreting his theory was a way for the meta-ethicist to ensure that the reader understood his meta-ethical theory in the interpretive context of his choosing. The correct context would be whichever interpretation of the theory the meta-ethicist felt aided the overall theory. Hence, for Mothersill, this meant the interpretation that gave the theory a higher explanatory power. After all, a meta-ethics that was incompatible with a dubious normative ethics had more explanatory power than a meta-ethics that was compatible with that normative ethics. Hence, the most charitable interpretation of Stevenson would be one where his noncognitivism excluded a 1<sup>st</sup> order normative ethics based on passive, cynical neutrality.

For Mothersill<sup>54</sup>, differentiating the correct and incorrect interpretations of such noncognitivist theories was, as far as ordinary language was concerned, a normative endeavor. Curiously, Mothersill<sup>55</sup> said very little in the way of explaining why such differentiation was normative. Regardless, one can easily identify the reason why

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<sup>52</sup>See Mothersill (1952), 587-594. This distinction seems to be a product of later theoretical assumptions about the nature of meta-ethical theory.

<sup>53</sup>See Mothersill (1952), 587--594.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 587-594.

<sup>55</sup>The other theorists would pick up where she left off in this regard.

Mothersill might have thought the differentiation was normative. Figuring out the right context of interpretation for a meta-ethics theory involves asking oneself whether the interpretation is consistent with one's moral judgments. This means the agent interpreting the theory must first be able to identify the set of moral claims he affirms. In order to identify these claims, he must have some degree of confidence that they are in fact, correct moral claims. Confidence that one knows a set of correct moral claims implies a willingness to assert those claims. Thus, identifying one's moral claims is a process whereby an agent decides that he has a willingness to assert a set of moral claims. This seems rather straightforwardly like a normative activity. Any time an agent engages in an introspective act that ends with the agent affirming a normative claim, this act seems to involve a normative endorsement.

Of course, one could object that all an agent needs to do in order to correctly know a set of moral judgments is consult empirical claims regarding which moral judgments people actually hold. The difficulty with this objection is that what moral judgments society holds at a given time may be mistaken. Thus, the individual meta-ethicist must compare society's moral judgments with his own if his goal is to find the set of moral judgments that are both correct and socially accepted. This seems to be the actual goal of the meta-ethicist if the meta-ethicist attempts to create a meta-ethical theory that is incompatible with a dubious normative ethics. If Stevenson were trying to create such a version of noncognitivism, he would not want to exclude a normative ethics of passive, cynical neutrality only because western society frowned upon passive, cynical neutrality. He would also have wanted to exclude a passive, cynical, neutrality from his noncognitivism because such a normative ethics was incompatible with his own moral judgments about what is right.

#### **2. 4 CRITIQUE OF MOTHERSILL**

We can see that none of Mothersill's argument shows that the interpretive context Mothersill believes meta-ethical theories require is normative. This is because that interpretive context may just be a specification by the meta-ethicist of how he intends

the reader to interpret his theory. To give an example, suppose a meta-ethicist defends a version of Moral Realism. Let us then suppose that the meta-ethicist states that the correct interpretation of his version of Moral Realism is one where that Moral Realism does not imply moral absolutism. Here, the interpretive context merely means that the reader interpret this version of Moral Realism as a version of Moral Realism that does not imply moral absolutism. This context is not normative because the claim made was the outcome of a classification procedure. It need not have also been the outcome of the endorsement of morality where morality is excluded from being conceptualized as a series of mistakes. All the meta-ethicist endorses is the view that morality does not imply moral absolutism and that this is an interpretive assumption he wishes his reader to make in order to adequately understand his meta-ethical theory. Moreover, the reader can understand perfectly well that the meta-ethicist's version of Moral Realism does not imply moral absolutism regardless of the reader's opinions about the plausibility of moral absolutism.

To illustrate this point more clearly, let us imagine a reader sympathetic to moral absolutism. Now let us suppose the reader sees that the meta-ethicist who crafted this theory specifies that his version of Moral Realism, interpreted in the right context, implies the denial of moral absolutism. Does the reader need to agree with the meta-ethicist about the incompatibility of moral absolutism and morality in order to understand how to correctly interpret the meta-ethicist's theory? It seems not. All the reader must understand is what the meta-ethicist specifies as the appropriate context to interpret his theory. If the reader finds that this context involves 1<sup>st</sup> order moral assumptions that are dubious, this only makes the reader find the theory implausible. It does not change the reader's interpretation of the theory. The reader does not have to assume that the meta-ethicist is correct in creating a version of Moral Realism that implies the denial of moral absolutism. All the reader must do is attempt to understand what the theorist means when the theorist specifies the theory he communicates to the reader. Some interpretation may be involved in this activity, but none of it seems normative. It is not clear how one must endorse any normative claim in order to understand what someone else was trying to say.

To Mothersill's credit, her argument does show that meta-ethical theories can include or exclude certain normative ethics theories. These inclusions and exclusions may, of course, be normative. However, there is nothing in Mothersill's argument that shows that they must be. In order to show this, Mothersill would have to show that the exclusions and inclusions involve endorsements of the normative states of affairs described by normative claims. It is not clear that all judgments about the correctness or incorrectness of normative ethics theories are themselves judgments that involve the endorsements of the state of affairs described by normative claims. If a consequentialist rejects Kantianism on the grounds that Kantianism is a descriptively inadequate theory of what human beings do when they make moral decisions, it is not clear that this rejection is normative. The consideration, which led to the rejection, in this case, seems purely descriptive. Moreover, this consideration seems to suggest nothing about whether or not the moral decisions of human beings are mistakes. We can imagine a second example where a moral theorist endorsing a version of consequentialism does so because he believes consequentialist reasoning is what human beings do when they make moral decisions they are willing to endorse. It does not seem here that the moral theorist is endorsing consequentialism on the basis of any endorsement of a normative state of affairs. Both of these examples illustrate how one can affirm a normative ethics theory because of purely descriptive considerations. The affirmation of a normative ethics theory does not show that the considerations which motivated the affirmation are also normative.

In order for Mothersill's argument to be successful, she would have to show that a meta-ethicist's exclusion of a normative ethics theory from his meta-ethical theory could only happen because of the meta-ethicist's endorsement of a normative state of affairs. This would show that necessarily, when a meta-ethicist excludes a normative ethics theory from compatibility with his meta-ethical theory, that exclusion is normative. Since she fails to do this, her argument that meta-ethics theories are normative fails to succeed. If it were the case that sometimes meta-ethicists excluded a normative ethics theory from their meta-ethical theories because of the endorsement of a normative state of affairs, this

would only show that meta-ethicists sometimes engage in normative endorsements. In this case, it would be ambiguous whether or not the meta-ethicist was simply overstepping his bounds as a meta-ethicist and engaging in an act of normative ethics theorizing. In order for Mothersill's argument to be successful, she would have to show these normative endorsements are an essential component of meta-ethical theorizing.

However, the fact that the argument fails to establish what it sets out to establish does not mean it does not give us another important insight into the nature of meta-ethics. Mothersill's argument does show, among other things, that the process of trying to create a descriptively adequate meta-ethical theory can end in the rejection of moral claims. Moreover, her analysis shows that one meta-ethical theory may not be compatible with all moral claims just in virtue of being a meta-ethical theory. Furthermore, if a meta-ethical theory is not compatible with all moral claims, that means that meta-ethical theory is committed to the rejection of certain moral claims. If such moral claims happen to be true, this opens up the possibility of that meta-ethical theory warranting moral criticism.

A descriptively adequate meta-ethical theory can end in the rejection of moral claims because the meta-ethicist has to decide which set of moral claims constitutes morality. This is the case because he has to identify the phenomenon of morality before he can give his 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of individual moral claims. This identification can't be terribly comprehensive. After all, the meta-ethicist can't write a list of all the moral claims he thinks are correct that he wants his meta-ethical theory to describe. However, the meta-ethicist can eliminate certain moral claims or normative ethics theories at the beginning of the construction of his meta-ethical views. He can, for instance, eliminate moral relativism or a 1<sup>st</sup> order ethics that consists of a 'passive and cynical neutrality'. Also, the meta-ethicist can specify to the reader that he wishes to eliminate certain moral views from his reader's consideration by suggesting to the reader how to interpret his theories. Although I am not suggesting Stevenson actually does this, Stevenson *could* have suggested to the reader that the reader interpret his theory in a manner that implies the denial of a passive and cynical 1<sup>st</sup> order ethics. After all, if it turns out that a passive and

cynical 1<sup>st</sup> order ethics is not moral, a meta-ethics that countenanced this could increase its descriptive adequacy. This is one respect in which Mothersill was entirely correct.

She was correct because a meta-ethicist is attempting to give 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Insofar as that meta-ethicist starts with a more detailed set of assumptions about what the set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims must be, the more detailed his meta-ethical explanations can be. After all, different sets of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are best explained by different meta-ethical explanations. If a normative view like moral relativism were true at the 1<sup>st</sup> order, the best meta-ethical explanation of relativism would be quite different to the best meta-ethical explanation of a 1<sup>st</sup> order view like moral absolutism. The plausibility of meta-ethical explanations like motivational externalism or motivational internalism would be quite different if relativism or moral absolutism were true. If the meta-ethicist began the construction of a meta-ethical theory without first deciding whether relativism was true at the 1<sup>st</sup> order, this would limit to a large extent what the theory could say.

Mothersill is also correct that a meta-ethical theory may not be compatible with all forms of normative ethics just in virtue of being a meta-ethics. The trivial example of this is the fact that a meta-ethical theory can be incompatible with a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral relativism. A more interesting possibility is the meta-ethical theory that denies a set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims that are correct. It is this possibility that Mothersill's arguments illustrate. Moreover, it is this possibility that demonstrates the additional possibility of a meta-ethical theory warranting moral criticism. If a meta-ethical theory can be incompatible with any set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims, this means that meta-ethical theory could possibly deny correct 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Moreover, it can possibly affirm incorrect 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Whether or not it does this depends on which moral claims the meta-ethicist excludes in his attempts to identify morality prior to theorizing.

## **2.5 ALAN GEWIRTH**

This idea would be elaborated by further theorists attempting to attack the traditional characterization of meta-ethics as non-normative. Nine years after Mothersill,



Alan Gewirth presented a different challenge to this characterization.<sup>56</sup> He aimed his challenge at what he saw as the two prevailing assumptions grounding the discussion:

(1) Meta-ethics is non-normative

and

(2) The same meta-ethics is compatible with all forms of normative ethics.<sup>57</sup>

With regards to (2), Gewirth meant that for any meta-ethical theory, that theory was compatible with all forms of normative ethics.<sup>58</sup> Gewirth claimed that meta-ethicists routinely violate (2) in order to explain the difference between moral and non-moral agents.<sup>59</sup> In other words, Gewirth noted that in order to explain the meta-ethical differences between Jesus and Al Capone, meta-ethical theories had to give answers to some 1<sup>st</sup> order moral questions. These answers would be classification oriented. While a meta-ethicist, for Gewirth, would not be committed to any particular normative ethics, his rejection of certain normative claims could entail the denial of certain varieties of normative ethics. It seems, like Mothersill, Gewirth is presupposing that meta-ethical theories gain explanatory power when those theories exclude dubious forms of normative ethics (the normative ethics of Al Capone, for instance). Moreover, Gewirth believed that the meta-ethical theories of his time contained answers to moral questions in virtue of the attempt to differentiate the moral from the non-moral. Hence, for Gewirth, meta-ethicists routinely violated (1).

In order to make more persuasive his claim that meta-ethicists make moral claims, Gewirth distinguishes between ethical and non-ethical interpretations of claims. If we take a claim like, "John is a good carpenter", we can give this claim either an ethical or non-ethical interpretation. If we give the claim an ethical interpretation, we interpret it as meaning that John is an ethically *good* carpenter. Such an interpretation might be based on

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<sup>56</sup>See Gewirth (1960).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 190—191.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

the fact that John does decent carpentry at reasonable rates and provides a service that substantially assists the community that John is a part of. We can also give "John is a good carpenter" a non-ethical interpretation. Under this latter interpretation, "John is a good carpenter" is simply taken to mean that John is highly skilled at doing the work that carpenters do. For our purposes, we can say that this distinction illustrates that a single claim can be given both normative and descriptive interpretations. This is important for Gewirth because Gewirth is claiming that meta-ethicists engage in normative procedures that result in the making of moral claims. This means we should interpret Gewirth as meaning that meta-ethicists engage in procedures that result in the making of claims which are best understood as having an ethical interpretation. Moreover, those ethical claims result in the meta-ethicist violating (2). If meta-ethicists violate (2) by making claims that are best understood as having an ethical interpretation, Gewirth believes this shows that (1) is also false.

Gewirth refers to R.M. Hare in attempting to illustrate that the differentiation of the moral from the non-moral is a normative procedure.<sup>60</sup> Gewirth believes that Hare, when discussing moral justification, gives an account of a complete justification of a decision which explicitly takes a stand on moral issues.<sup>61</sup> For Hare, a complete justification of a decision consists of a complete account of its effects, together with a complete account of the principles that it observed, and the effects of observing those principles.<sup>62</sup> For Hare, an attempted moral justification of a decision that either does not consist of a complete account of its effects, the principles that it is observing, or the effects of those principles, is not an adequate moral justification. Here, Gewirth clarifies that Hare is making a distinction between good and bad moral justification. This distinction, according to Gewirth, is answering a moral question in order to give Hare's meta-ethical theory an explanatory depth absent in rival theories. Answering this question involves taking a

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<sup>60</sup>HARE, R. M. *The Language of Morals*. Oxon, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991.

<sup>61</sup>Gewirth assumed Hare's account of moral justification was part of his meta-ethical theory.

<sup>62</sup> See Hare (1991), 160

moral stand on the difference between good and bad moral justification.<sup>63</sup>

Gewirth claimed that Hare was not the only meta-ethicist to take moral stands in this way. Gewirth claimed that Stuart Hampshire took a moral stand against versions of expressivism that completely characterize moral judgments as reports of feelings and attitudes.<sup>64</sup> Hampshire's position was that such expressivism is misleadingly incomplete because it ignores the typical procedures of deliberation on which moral judgments are based.<sup>65</sup> For Gewirth, Hampshire is here accusing expressivism of confusing a non-moral procedure of deliberation with a moral one. Of course, this comment from Hampshire was published in 1949 when the versions of expressivism being offered were not as sophisticated as more contemporary versions of expressivism.<sup>66</sup> Within contemporary expressivism, there is a much more salient desire on the part of theorists to accommodate the face value of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. Nonetheless, the point remains that Hampshire was critiquing an early version of expressivism on the grounds that it failed to differentiate the moral from the non-moral.

Gewirth believed this differentiation to be normative because it is grounded in the making of a moral judgment. Because a moral judgment is an ethical evaluation, it is a claim that one can only interpret correctly as long as one interprets it as an ethical claim. Although he did not explain why, one can easily imagine why Gewirth just thought it was intuitively obvious that the differentiation of the moral from the non-moral required the making of a moral judgment. Agents, in everyday life, routinely differentiate the moral from the non-moral when they make moral judgments. A small child being pressured by his friends to steal a candy bar might respond to them with something like, "I can't do that. It would not be right." Here, the child is not merely classifying the act his friends

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<sup>63</sup>This is an example where the identification of a set of moral claims and the endorsement of a set of moral claims can seem, for practical purposes, like the same act.

<sup>64</sup> HAMPSHIRE, Stuart. Fallacies in Moral Philosophy. *Mind*, 1949, vol. LVIII, pp. 541-544.

<sup>65</sup>See Hampshire (1949)

<sup>66</sup>I am thinking of those versions of expressivism which attempt to account for the 1st order of moral practice with no revisions at all.

would like him to perform within the category of wrongness. He is endorsing the moral claim that to steal would be wrong. Because this is the endorsement of a moral claim, it is also, by definition, a moral judgment. It is this moral judgment that communicates to the child's friends the rationale behind his refusal to steal the candy bar. Likewise an adult being persuaded by a potential lover to cheat on their spouse might respond with, "As enticing as the offer is, I must decline. Cheating on my spouse would be wrong." Here, the moral judgment that the act would be wrong explains the reluctance of the agent to cheat. It seems reasonable to assume that it is common occurrences like these, which led Gewirth to believe that the act of differentiating the moral from the non-moral involves making a moral judgment.

According to Gewirth, Hampshire was not the only meta-ethicist to differentiate the moral from the non-moral. Gewirth also claimed that W.D. Falk employed the same strategy in his paper, "On Guiding and Goadings."<sup>67</sup> Falk went to great pains to assert that there is a difference between moral persuasion and what he called "unprincipled goading." Again, Gewirth interpreted the differentiation between moral persuasion and "unprincipled goading" as a differentiation of the moral from the non-moral. Although he didn't explain why<sup>68</sup>, one can plausibly assume the reason was that ordinary agents typically differentiate moral persuasion from unprincipled goading in real life situations where the differentiation involves making a moral judgment. In such situations where an agent notices he has been the victim of unprincipled goading, he does not normally say, "I was taken in by a deliberation procedure which I mistakenly believed was a moral deliberation procedure." He contrasts the unprincipled goading from the category of the moral by saying something like, "the unprincipled goading was not something I should have been taken in by. It was bad." Again, this looks like a moral judgment rather than a mere classification. For Gewirth, any meta-ethicist, who, qua meta-ethicist, elaborates on the distinction between the moral and the non-moral, is violating (1).

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<sup>67</sup>FALK, W.D. On Guiding and Goadings. *Mind*, 1953, vol. LXII, pp. 167.

<sup>68</sup>See Gewirth (1960), 197.

With regards to (2), Gewirth, like Mothersill, claimed that meta-ethicists often make claims that exclude various forms of normative ethics from being consistent with their theories. Here we can assume that Gewirth's view was motivated, like Mothersill, by the claim that a meta-ethical theory's incompatibility with an absurd normative ethics lends that meta-ethical theory explanatory power. Gewirth gave the example of a meta-ethical claim made by Duncan Jones that "a man cannot be making a moral judgment unless his attitude is free from partiality for particular places, ages, and social groups, and from self-partiality."<sup>69</sup> This claim seems to rule out varieties of normative ethics that reject impartiality. Stephen Toulmin<sup>70</sup> was another meta-ethicist Gewirth made use of to illustrate his point regarding violations of (2). Toulmin made the claim that the justification of a moral action requires that our reasons can be traced back to universal principles.<sup>71</sup> Toulmin then made the more strident claim that moral justification that refers to reasons that cannot be traced back to universal principles is not moral justification at all.<sup>72</sup> Here, Toulmin seems to be separating the moral from the non-moral in a way that rules out aretaic varieties of normative ethics.<sup>73</sup> Another example Gewirth gives of a meta-ethicist's violation of (2) comes again from R.M. Hare.<sup>74</sup> Hare makes the claim that "to become a morally adult man is to learn to reconcile competing claims of tradition and novelty by making decisions of principle." This claim, in a brazen gesture, excludes aretaic ethics from descriptions of the behavior of morally adult agents. Here, Hare seems to clearly exclude a wide range of normative ethics theories from his meta-ethics.

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<sup>69</sup>JONES, Duncan. *Butler's Moral Philosophy*. Hammondsworth, UK: Penguin Books (Pelican Philosophy Series), 1952.

<sup>70</sup>TOULMIN, Stephen. *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1950.

<sup>71</sup>See Toulmin (1950), 168

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Toulmin is basically denying that all forms of normative ethics which are not either Consequentialist or Deontological can properly said to be called ethical.

<sup>74</sup>See Hare (1991), 69

Gewirth even went so far as to claim that traditional philosophers exclude certain normative ethics from their accounts of morality by making meta-ethical claims about moral motivation.<sup>75</sup> Gewirth claimed that, for Aristotle, an account of moral motivation specified the psychological conditions in an agent in virtue of which his actions deserved an ethical predicate.<sup>76</sup> This meant that this account of appropriate moral motivation would exclude a range of normative ethics theories that were not compatible with Aristotle's account of moral motivation. According to Gewirth, the same is true for Kant. This is because, for Kant, acts motivated by principles are what differentiate good from bad acts.<sup>77</sup> In both cases, what is good in an act consists partially of mental dispositions in the agent. Thus, for Gewirth, the normative ethics of Aristotle and Kant were constrained by meta-ethical positions regarding moral motivation. Thus, it seemed even the classical philosophers violated (2) by excluding a range of normative ethics views from consideration because of meta-ethical claims.

## **2.6 CRITIQUE OF GEWIRTH**

Although Gewirth is keen to observe that one can give a meta-ethical claim an ethical or non-ethical interpretation, he fails to show that claims invoked by meta-ethicists must have an ethical interpretation. After all, a meta-ethicist could advocate a meta-ethics theory that is incompatible with a normative ethics theory for reasons which need not be claims that require an ethical interpretation. We can see here that Gewirth has not established that the violation of (2) is itself an indication that a meta-ethical theory is normative. A meta-ethical theory could be incompatible with a normative ethics theory for reasons that are descriptive. Let's imagine a meta-ethical theory that contains an Aristotelian account of moral motivation. Let us suppose that this meta-ethical theory is

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<sup>75</sup>See Gewirth (1960), 199-200. Here Gewirth notices that part of the project of traditional normative ethicists have been to specify the appropriate psychological conditions in an agent to make an action qualify as being appropriately motivated. Here, the project of contemporary meta-ethicists and traditional normative ethicists seems to overlap.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 201

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 201

incompatible with a variety of consequentialism where an agent's motivation is irrelevant to the moral goodness of his actions. Must this incompatibility be based on a moral judgment about the value of actions with certain motivations? It does not seem so. The proponent of this meta-ethics could simply affirm that a morally good act is one that requires that it be done with certain motivations. He could affirm this while simultaneously affirming that, in some sense, morality is a series of mistakes. Of course, the Aristotelian account of moral motivation could be interpreted in a normative way where, in the context of this meta-ethical theory, morality, in some sense, is not a series of mistakes. This normative interpretation of the Aristotelian account of moral motivation could be what this meta-ethical theory uses to explain why good acts must be coupled with the right motivations in order to count as good acts. But this need not be how we interpret the claim:

“A morally good act is one that requires that it be done with certain motivations.”

We can interpret it as a purely classificatory claim, on a par with the claim:

“A dance is an activity which requires that the dancer must be able to move his body.”

It is not clear that defining X as a necessary component of morality is the same thing as a normative endorsement of X being a necessary component of morality. If the former, we are merely claiming that X is a necessary component of morality. If the latter, we are making a normative endorsement of the content described by the claim that X is a necessary component of morality. The former claim can be given a non-ethical interpretation because the claim seems to be capable of being interpreted in a manner where it does not preclude morality from being a series of mistakes. Gewirth does nothing to show that the non-ethical interpretation of this claim is either untenable or that the claim itself does exclude morality from being a series of mistakes.

There is a big difference between the ethical interpretation of “X is a necessary component of morality” and the non-ethical interpretation of this claim. The non-ethical interpretation could be asserted by a sentient computer who lacks a moral sense and has

no desires. The ethical interpretation could not. This is because a sentient computer with no moral sense and no desires is incapable of making moral judgments. After all, one necessary condition of making a moral judgment is to be able to endorse rather than merely report. The only propositions the computer I have described could report about morality would be descriptive propositions about what morality consists of. If it turned out that morality was Kantian rather than Aristotelian, this computer would report, “Motivation from principles is a necessary condition of a right act.” But it is not clear that this would be the same thing as endorsing the ethical interpretation of “Motivation from principles is a necessary condition of a right act.” The computer can only report the non-ethical interpretation because this interpretation can be reported without its normative content being endorsed.

Moreover, it is not clear that all meta-ethicists cited by Gewirth who take stands on normative ethical theories must be taking such stands because of claims that can only be given ethical interpretations. This is because it is not clear that these meta-ethicists are making moral judgments qua taking such stands. For example, Hare’s account of the appropriate use of moral principles for obtaining moral justification need not be grounded in a moral judgment. It can just be a claim about what kind of principles count as moral principles that obtain moral justification. Such a claim can be based solely on the theoretical practice of observation and conjecture. The same is true for Stuart Hampshire’s stand against versions of expressivism that completely characterize moral judgments as reports of feelings or attitudes. Hampshire may not be making this claim on the basis of a moral judgment that adequate meta-ethical theories do not characterize moral judgments as reports of feelings and attitudes. What motivates the claim may be the further claim that a meta-ethical theory that characterizes moral judgments as reports of feelings and attitudes is descriptively false. But arriving at this claim seems to require nothing more than making observations and conjectures about what agents seem to mean when they make moral claims. Empirical observations, rather than moral judgments can be the driving force behind Hampshire’s claims.



What about Falk's claim that there is a difference between moral persuasion and what he calls "unprincipled goading"? Again, this claim may just be another way of saying that moral persuasion and unprincipled goading are distinct practices. Of course, what motivates Falk's claim could be a moral judgment to the effect that moral persuasion and unprincipled goading are distinct practices. But what motivates this claim could also be the purely descriptive observation that agents differentiate moral persuasion from unprincipled goading as part of their moral practice. All that is required to make this claim is the ability to observe agents and understand what they mean. The same is true for Duncan Jones' claim that a man cannot be making a moral judgment unless his attitude is free from partiality for particular places, ages, and social groups, and free from self-partiality. This claim can be derived from a purely non-moral interpretation of the claim that impartiality is a necessary condition of moral judgments. One could, again, arrive at this claim through nothing more than observation and conjecture. Moral judgments do not seem to be required.

The same is true for the claim made by Steven Toulmin that moral justification that refers to reasons that cannot be traced back to universal principles is not moral justification at all. This, of course, may strike many as a wildly implausible claim. But it is not a claim that requires a moral judgment in order to be made. All that is required in order to make this claim is a view about moral reasons and such a view can come out of observations about what agents do when they refer to moral reasons. Even Hare's strongly Kantian claim that "to become a morally adult man is to learn to reconcile competing claims of tradition and novelty by making decisions of principle" can be made on grounds that don't involve moral judgments. Hare could have made the claim because he observed that people who were referred to as "morally adult men" seemed to reconcile competing claims of traditions and novelty by making decisions based on principles.

None of this shows that any of the above claims are plausible meta-ethical claims. Moreover, it could be the case that as claims derived from descriptive judgments; they are implausible in the extreme. For instance, it could be the case that looking at how

human agents behave, we find a wide variety of moral deliberation procedures. It could be that the only meta-ethical judgments that can plausibly separate the morally correct deliberation procedures from the incorrect ones are moral judgments. But this is not obvious and needs some defense that is absent in Gewirth's writings. This is why Gewirth's claim that the same meta-ethics is not compatible with all normative ethics (and thus violates (2)) is not a conclusive reason to think that meta-ethics is normative. Making a descriptive claim that entails the negation of a normative claim is not obviously an example of making a normative claim. We can imagine all sorts of descriptive claims that entail the negation of normative claims without having to assume such descriptive claims are also normative. As Quentin Smith has observed, the claim that the universe is infinitely expanding could entail that one could never increase the overall level of value in the universe.<sup>78</sup> The latter claim implies all sorts of normative claims. For instance, it implies claims such as "good deeds do not make the world a better place" which are obviously normative. It does not seem to follow that the cosmological claim that the universe is infinitely expanding is a normative claim. Of course, it may turn out to be the case that this cosmological claim is also a normative claim. But further argumentation is needed to show this. Gewirth, as we have seen, has not provided such argumentation.

What about Gewirth's claim that meta-ethics theories that differentiate the moral from the non-moral are normative and thus violate (1)? Again, Gewirth seems to be assuming that the meta-ethical theory that makes a claim which entails the denial of a normative claim is a theory that is making a claim that cannot be given a non-ethical interpretation. As before, it is not clear why this must be the case. Perhaps a reason Gewirth assumes this is because he has not considered the possibility that different meta-ethical theories entail different interpretations of moral claims. To illustrate this point, let's examine the straightforward moral claim that "Torturing babies for fun is wrong."

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<sup>78</sup> See SMITH, Quentin. Moral Realism and the Infinite Spacetime Imply Moral Nihilism. In: Heather DYKE, ed., *Time and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*. AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003, pp. 43-54.

On one moral realist interpretation of this claim, it amounts to the statement that an agent who tortures babies for fun is an agent who is doing something that possesses a negative moral property called 'wrongness'. Thus, when the agent affirms this realist interpretation of "Torturing babies for fun is wrong" he is affirming more than just the claim that "Torturing babies for fun is wrong." He is affirming a realist characterized existence of wrongness, a realist characterized account of moral normativity, and the claim that the act of torturing babies exemplifies this realist wrongness. Any meta-ethical theory that affirms a moral claim, under this realist interpretation, is making an explicitly normative claim. This is because the agent who affirms this realist interpretation can't simultaneously affirm that the content of the claim is, in some sense, a mistake.

Yet this is not the only interpretation of the claim, "Torturing babies for fun is wrong." On a second anti-realist interpretation, "Torturing babies for fun is wrong" could just mean that an agent who tortures babies for fun is doing something that possesses a negative moral property called 'wrongness' within the context of morality. Thus, when an agent affirms a moral claim on this second interpretation, he is not also affirming the same set of additional claims as the proponent of the realist interpretation. Even though both agents who affirm, "Torturing babies for fun is wrong" on the realist and anti-realist interpretation, affirm wrongness, they mean different things by 'wrong'. The agent who affirms the anti-realist interpretation of the claim affirms that the act of torturing babies for fun exemplifies wrongness. However, it is not the same wrongness affirmed by our realist. There is room, on the anti-realist interpretation, for 'wrongness' to consist of a multitude of different things. The anti-realist need not take wrongness to be a reason not to torture babies, or even a reason to endorse the claim that torturing babies for fun is wrong. To say "torturing babies for fun is wrong" on the anti-realist interpretation can be analogous to saying, "In Christianity, prayer is a way for man to communicate with God." The difference between our realist and anti-realist interpretation is akin to the difference between someone who merely reports what Christians believe (while this person may or may not be a believer) and someone who endorses Christianity.

In much the same way that the believer can agree with everything that the person who reports what Christians believe says, our moral realist can agree with the moral anti-realist insofar as both affirm the sentence, “torturing babies for fun is wrong.” That is why it looks as though the meaning of the sentence, “torturing babies for fun is wrong” is neutral with regards the realism issue. The neutrality obviously benefits many meta-ethicists who want a way of speaking about moral claims where the most robust realist and the most staunch anti-realist can agree on what is meant when either affirm a moral claim. If we assume that the anti-realist interpretation is shared by both our realist and our anti-realist, this agreement can happen. The meta-ethicist can stand outside his everyday moral judgments and reflect on the legitimacy of those judgments. This bird’s eye view of ethics will allow the meta-ethicist to choose a theory that he believes adequately describes the nature of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of his own moral judgments. Moreover, he may or may not want to revise his conception of what those judgments are once he is in this bird’s eye perspective.<sup>79</sup> Our anti-realist interpretation of “torturing babies for fun” allows all these possibilities for the meta-ethicist while simultaneously allowing him the ability to communicate with other meta-ethicists who hold different meta-ethical positions.

What is important for Gewirth about this anti-realist interpretation of straightforward moral claims is it seems to be uncontroversially descriptive and the interpretation that enables standard meta-ethics to function normally. However, Gewirth needs to show that this anti-realist interpretation of the claim “torturing babies for fun is wrong” is either internally problematic, question begging, or at odds with what meta-ethicists actually mean when they make moral claims. This is partially because this anti-realist interpretation of straightforward moral claims is a descriptive interpretation. It is also because an alternative moral realist account can interpret straightforward moral claims in a manner that is descriptive. In order for Gewirth’s claim that meta-ethical

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<sup>79</sup> This Bird’s Eye perspective is what Dworkin refers to as moral archimedeanism. More on this will be expanded upon in chapter four.

theories that differentiate the moral from the non-moral are violating (1) to be true, Gewirth must exclude the possibility of the descriptive interpretation of straightforward moral claims. As we saw, this is because there is no reason to think that a descriptive claim that entails the negation of a normative claim is itself a normative claim. If straightforward moral claims can be given descriptive interpretations by a meta-ethical theory, it does not follow that the meta-ethical theory is normative. This is true even if the moral claims that are part of the meta-ethical theory entail the negation of other moral claims. As long as such moral claims are given a descriptive interpretation by the meta-ethical theory, that meta-ethical theory does not seem to be normative.

Gewirth does not exclude the possibility of descriptive interpretations of straightforward moral claims and thus fails to show that meta-ethics is normative. The fact that meta-ethical theories have normative implications only shows that descriptive claims have the capacity to affirm or deny normative claims. Moreover, the fact that the same meta-ethics is not compatible with all varieties of normative ethics does not show that meta-ethics is normative. It merely shows a meta-ethical theory is not morally neutral. In order for a meta-ethical theory to be truly “normative” it requires those who affirm it to endorse the content of a normative claim. In order for that endorsement to happen, a moral judgment must be made where a moral agent endorses the content of a normative claim. A necessary condition of this endorsement is that the possibility that the endorsed content is, in some sense, mistaken, must be excluded. Gewirth, as we have seen, fails to provide an argument for this exclusion.

In sum, Gewirth has not successfully shown that a meta-ethical theory’s taking a stand on normative issues is itself an example of that theory’s status as a normative theory. He has also not successfully shown that a meta-ethics theory’s incompatibility with a normative ethics theory is evidence that the former theory is normative. What Gewirth’s arguments do show is similar to what Mothersill’s argument shows. They show the multitude of different ways that a meta-ethical theory can have moral implications. The differentiation of the moral from the non-moral is one such way. As noted earlier in the

critique of Mothersill, the identification of what morality is involves preliminary rejections of false moral claims. What Gewirth's arguments add to Mothersill's insight is a further specification of the way in which a meta-ethical theory can deny normative ethics theories.

For example, Hare, in defending his meta-ethical theory, denies moral claims that are inconsistent with his view of what adequate moral justification is. This means he must reject any moral claim that presupposes a contrary form of moral justification. Let us imagine a consequentialist asserting that moral justification need not take into account moral principles in the way that Hare's views of adequate moral justification specify. This means that this consequentialist is committed to moral claims that Hare is committed to denying. The consequentialist, for instance, is committed to the moral claim that an agent can morally justify an act in a manner that is contrary to Hare's specifications. There is a range of situations where agents don't morally justify an act according to Hare's specifications that the consequentialist is committed to claiming is a set of adequate examples of moral justification. Hare on the other hand, is committed to affirming that this is not a set of adequate examples of moral justification.

We can see the same dynamic at work in Stuart Hampshire's criticism of expressivism. Hampshire in his meta-ethical theorizing commits himself to the rejection of any claim that identifies moral judgments with expressions of attitudes or feelings. This means he is committed to a potential rejection of moral claims that satisfy a possible expressivist criterion of moral justification. W.D. Falk, in his meta-ethical theorizing, can reject moral claims that are incompatible with his specifications of the differences between moral persuasion and unprincipled goading. Duncan Jones, in his meta-ethical theorizing, can potentially reject moral claims that are incompatible with his claim that moral judgments are not free from self-partiality. Hare can reject claims that are incompatible with his claim that to become a morally adult man is to learn to reconcile competing claims of tradition and novelty by making decisions of principle.

One may object here that contemporary meta-ethicists are less likely to create

meta-ethical theories that brazenly imply the denial of various positions within normative ethics. However, what is important about Gewirth is not whether meta-ethicists actually commit themselves to the rejection of such a wide range of normative ethics positions. What is important is that his arguments illustrate the ways in which meta-ethicists *can* reject these normative ethics positions just in virtue of the meta-ethical theories they affirm. Gewirth may have failed to show (1) (Meta-Ethical theories are not normative). He may also have failed to show that the falsity of (2) (The same meta-ethics is compatible with all forms of normative ethics) implies that meta-ethics theories are normative. However, he did show the falsity of (2). This is because he showed, in a multitude of different ways, how a meta-ethical theory can conflict with a variety of different normative ethics claims.

## 2.7 R.C SOLOMON

In 1970, R.C. Solomon made an attempt, in a similar vein to Gewirth, to show that meta-ethics was normative. Solomon's attack was motivated by the idea that an adequate meta-ethics cannot be a sociological study of how people (in our culture) have, in fact, used ethical terminology. This is why, according to Solomon, the meta-ethical study of ethical language is aimed at providing a criterion of evaluation for ethical arguments and utterances.<sup>80</sup> The idea here is that such a criterion will allow the meta-ethicist to differentiate between that which is truly ethical and that which is deemed ethical by a given society at a given time. Whether one thinks (as Brandt<sup>81</sup> did) that meta-ethics is the study of the justification of ethical propositions or (like Stevenson<sup>82</sup>) that meta-ethics sharpens one's tools for normative ethics, the differentiation of the ethical from the beliefs of a society is an indispensable component of an adequate meta-ethical theory. In order for this differentiation to happen, Solomon postulates that the meta-

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<sup>80</sup>SOLOMON, R.C. Normative and Meta-Ethics. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1970, vol. 31, pp. 98-99.

<sup>81</sup>BRANDT, Richard, *Ethical Theory*, New Jersey, USA: Eaglewood Cliffs, 1959.

<sup>82</sup> See Stevenson (1944).

ethicist needs a model of moral language that is morally implicative.<sup>83</sup> This means that such a model must contain propositions that are both the product of the analysis of how human beings use ethical language (hence being meta-ethical) and propositions that can entail normative propositions. Hence, Solomon claims that such propositions are both meta-ethical and “normatively loaded.”<sup>84</sup>

Solomon differentiates normative ethics propositions from normatively loaded meta-ethical principles by separating normative ethics propositions into deviant and non-deviant classes. The deviant classes consist of ethical principles that are excluded on the grounds that they violate a syntactic or normative rule of ethical discourse. An ethical proposition that violates a syntactic rule of ethical discourse can include a flat out contradiction, a nonsense word, a category mistake, or an ethical utterance that violates the rules of English.<sup>85</sup> Morally unacceptable normative propositions are also included in the deviant class.<sup>86</sup> The non-deviant classes of normative ethics propositions include ethical propositions that don't get excluded on the grounds of being morally unacceptable. However, the non-deviant classes include normative ethics propositions that get excluded on one other basis not covered by the deviant classes: meta-ethical grounds. If a normative ethics proposition in a non-deviant class is unacceptable, its lack of acceptability can be explained by its violation of a meta-ethical rule.<sup>87</sup> Thus, if a normative ethics proposition can be shown to be unacceptable without either being a member of the deviant class or being unacceptable on normative grounds, this proposition

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<sup>83</sup> See Solomon (1970), 98-99. According to Solomon, this explains why ethical sentences which are problematic for meta-ethical reasons can be ruled out as being incapable of obtaining the status of an ethical utterance.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 99

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 98-99. For Solomon, meta-ethical rules have normative implications precisely because they rule out ethical utterances for being unable to satisfy the conditions of being an ethical utterance. 42. Ibid. 98-99. This is the unspoken but necessary condition of Solomon's claim regarding the ethical unacceptability of an ethical proposition in a non-deviant class.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 98-99. This is the unspoken but necessary condition of Solomon's claim regarding the ethical unacceptability of an ethical proposition in a non-deviant class.



must be unacceptable for meta-ethical reasons. The possibility that a normative ethics proposition could be excluded by a meta-ethical principle is proof, for Solomon, that meta-ethics is morally implicative. The morally implicative nature of meta-ethics also demonstrates, for Solomon, that meta-ethics is normative.

According to Solomon, there is at least one meta-ethical principle (exemplified by Hare's universalizeability<sup>88</sup> and Brandt's consistency<sup>89</sup>) that is capable of entailing that a normative ethics proposition is unacceptable. Let's call this principle (K). (K) states:

(K): If some evaluation (or evaluative term) applies in a particular case, then, for any other case exactly similar to that one, or similar in all relevant aspects, that evaluation applies. In other words, if E is any evaluative term and A and B are acts, events, or persons, then if A is E and B is relevantly similar to A, B is E.

Solomon saw this principle as a text book case of a meta-ethical principle because any ethics proposition which violated it was not unacceptable for any syntactic or moral reasons. Citing the agreements of contemporary meta-ethicists, Solomon claimed that ethical propositions that violate universalizeability are violating the rules of ethical language in a way where they are not even candidates for moral consideration. Solomon noted that Hare stated that universalizeability is a necessary condition of any ethical statement.<sup>90</sup> He referred to Brandt's claim that any ethical proposition must pass two crucial tests: consistency and generality.<sup>91</sup> He quoted Stevenson's claim that principles of generality and consistency are necessary for any intelligible ethical statement, even though these principles are psychological rather than logical.<sup>92</sup> He finally noted that Frankena<sup>93</sup>,

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<sup>88</sup> HARE, R.M. *Freedom and Reason*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963. pp. 32.

<sup>89</sup> See Brandt (1959), 16-26

<sup>90</sup> See Hare (1963), 32.

<sup>91</sup> See Brandt (1959), 16-26.

<sup>92</sup> STEVENSON, Charles, *Lectures, University of Michigan. 1964-65*

<sup>93</sup> See Frankena (1951), 43.

like Hare, endorsed consistency and universalizeability as necessary conditions of an adequate ethical judgment. In all the above examples, propositions that violate this meta-ethical principle violate the necessary conditions of being an ethical proposition.

After citing these agreements from fellow meta-ethicists regarding universalizeability, Solomon went on to claim that this principle could not be imported into a meta-ethical theory without such import being normative.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, he made the more strident claim that this principle had no content apart from normative considerations. Solomon's reason for making the former claim was that he felt that the importation of such a principle into a meta-ethical theory required that the principle had the power to negate potential normative ethics propositions. Solomon's reasoning for making the latter claim was that meta-ethical principles were best explained as very general, well accounted for moral principles.<sup>95</sup> In situations where a normative ethics principle and a meta-ethical principle clash, Solomon claimed that the meta-ethical principle could triumph over the normative ethics principle only if it was itself a well supported moral principle. This was how he explained the possibility of normative ethics propositions being ruled out on meta-ethical grounds alone. What allows a meta-ethical principle to be well supported, for Solomon, is whether every serious normative ethics theory is encompassed by it.<sup>96</sup> Solomon believes that meta-ethical claims that entail normative claims are themselves normative because they are not morally neutral. For Solomon, we cannot assume that the moral neutrality of meta-ethical claims is analytic.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Solomon believes the ultimate explanation of why a false moral principle can be an abuse of ethical language is that such a principle lacks moral justification.<sup>98</sup> This is true regardless of whether the moral principle is a normative ethics principle or a meta-ethics principle.

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<sup>94</sup>See Solomon (1970), 100-101.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 105-108

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Finally, Solomon believes that there are no good reasons to distinguish normative from descriptive ethical propositions. Descriptive ethical principles Solomon describes as principles that describe ethical discourse.<sup>99</sup> Solomon believes normative ethics propositions can't be distinguished from descriptive ethical propositions because of the dubiousness of the analytic-synthetic distinction.<sup>100</sup> Solomon believes that one can only separate normative ethical propositions from descriptive ethical propositions if the analytic-synthetic distinction holds. Although Solomon does not provide a sub-argument for this claim, we can assume he asserts it because he thinks normative ethical principles are analytic. This is because normative ethical principles are traditionally thought of as necessary propositions. Correspondingly, we can also assume that Solomon believes that if descriptive ethical propositions could be differentiated from normative ethics principles, it would have to be because descriptive ethical propositions are synthetic. This is because descriptive ethical propositions are thought to describe the contingent practices of how people actually use ethical discourse.

Solomon believes that even if it were somehow possible to distinguish between normative ethical propositions and descriptive ethical propositions in some other way, we could still not distinguish them in our own ethical discourse. This is because normative ethical propositions in which terms like 'good' are used are normally taken to be normative. This is because such principles actually tell us something about what things in the world actually are good. According to Solomon, it seems odd to say that descriptive ethical principles that mention the evaluative term 'good' also say nothing about what things in the world actually are good.<sup>101</sup> This is because one cannot give an account of the meaning of evaluative terms without also giving some indication of how these terms are to be applied. You cannot assert a descriptive ethical proposition about an evaluative term

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

without also saying something about the possible states of affairs that satisfy the description of that evaluative term. Hence, for Solomon, you cannot assert descriptive ethical propositions without asserting normative ethical propositions.

## **2. 8 CRITIQUE OF SOLOMON**

We can agree with Solomon that the study of meta-ethics must provide a criterion for the evaluation of ethical arguments and utterances. We can also agree with Solomon that such a criterion requires a model of moral language that allows us to differentiate that which is truly ethical from that which is deemed ethical by a given society. We may even accept Solomon's claim that such a model is morally implicative. Where Solomon is mistaken is in his reasons for thinking that a morally implicative model of meta-ethical language shows that meta-ethics itself is normative. The crux of Solomon's mistake is his assertion that meta-ethical propositions that are capable of negating normative propositions are themselves normative propositions. This view is mistaken because of cases where descriptive claims entail normative claims yet the descriptive claims have no obvious normative content. To illustrate this matter, let's look at the following two normative claims:

(3) If your child's tutor is planning on opening up a canister of poison gas tomorrow during a maths lesson, you should prevent your child from going to school tomorrow.

and

(5) You should prevent your child from going to school tomorrow.

As is obvious, claim (5) does not follow from claim (3). (5) can only follow from (3) if there is a second claim which, when conjoined with (3), entails (5). What could this second claim be? It seems plausible that it could be the claim:

(4) Your child's tutor is planning on opening up a canister of poison gas tomorrow during a maths lesson.

Need this claim be normative? It seems not since there is nothing in the claim that amounts to anything other than a description of a purely factual state of affairs. And yet it seems that the entailment of (5) by (4) hinges on (4) being conjoined with (3).

How is this possible? The entailment of (5) by the conjunction of (3) and (4) is explained by the fact that normative claims can be hypothetical. What this means is that a normative claim can be contingent on a descriptive state of affairs. In other words, not all normative claims are restricted to making claims about normative states of affairs in the actual world. Some normative claims can describe what normative states would obtain if the world were a certain way. A descriptive claim can then satisfy the conditions specified in the normative claim regarding what the world would have to be like in order for the normative state to obtain. The fact that these descriptive claims can satisfy the conditions specified in the normative claim does not show that the descriptive claims themselves are normative.

If they did, most descriptive claims would simultaneously be normative claims. This is because most descriptive claims can satisfy the conditions specified in hypothetical normative claims. Even claims about sub-atomic particles can do this. For instance, if certain formations of sub-atomic particles were enabling conditions of the world and the world had positive value, we could imagine the hypothetical normative claim: "If the sub-atomic particles of the universe enable the universe to be as it is, those sub-atomic particles have positive value." If descriptive claims that satisfy the conditions specified in hypothetical normative claim were themselves normative, "The sub-atomic particles of the universe enable the universe to be as it is" would be a normative claim. This seems highly implausible, given how we normally differentiate normative and descriptive claims. Given the implausibility of this scenario, some argument is needed to demonstrate that a any descriptive claim that satisfies the conditions specified in a hypothetical normative claim is itself a normative claim.

Although Solomon does not give this argument, he gives something like this argument when he states that one cannot distinguish between normative ethical

propositions and descriptive ethical propositions. Here, Solomon is attempting to demonstrate that claims made within normative ethics cannot be distinguished from claims made within meta-ethics. This demonstration is grounded in Solomon's idea that meta-ethical claims are claims about how to correctly assert claims within normative ethics. For Solomon, normative ethics claims are normative in virtue of the information they convey about evaluative terms. Meta-ethical claims also convey information about evaluative terms that Solomon does not see as different in the relevant ways necessary to establish that normative ethics is normative and meta-ethics is not.

The difficulty here is that Solomon has overlooked the possibility that the distinction between normative and descriptive ethical propositions need not require that descriptive ethical propositions cannot support or negate normative ethical propositions. The distinction between the two may be that descriptive ethical propositions report claims about evaluative terms whereas normative ethics propositions also report claims about evaluative terms that could potentially be endorsed. If this distinction holds, it may be the case that meta-ethics is non- normative despite the fact that it is morally implicative. Solomon simply assumes this distinction is untenable without giving any argument that this is the case. If it turned out that morally implicative meta-ethics propositions were, in some sense, normative, Solomon's claim about meta-ethical claims being general, well supported moral claims would be more plausible. But Solomon must provide some reason to cast doubt on the above distinction in order to provide compelling reasons to think that morally implicative meta-ethics propositions are normative propositions. His argument that one cannot distinguish between normative ethical propositions and descriptive ethical propositions fails to do this because he fails to rebut the distinction between normative and descriptive ethical propositions described above.

What about Solomon's claim that meta-ethical principles such as universalizability must be normative because they have no content apart from normative considerations? Here, Solomon needs to provide an argument as to why he believes it is obvious that such considerations can only be interpreted in a manner that is normative. As

we saw earlier, a meta-ethical principle such as universalizeability can be conceived as a rule of ethical discourse while ethical discourse can simultaneously be conceived as a series of mistakes. In that case, universalizeability could be conceived as a background presupposition of ethical discourse in much the same way that the “no hitting below the belt” rule is a background presupposition of professional boxing. Like the “no hitting below the belt” rule, there is no reason why the agent who asserts universalizeability as a background presupposition of ethical discourse must normatively endorse universalizeability.

Moreover, Solomon’s separation of ethical claims into deviant and non-deviant classes seems confused. If a meta-ethical principle like universalizeability has no content apart from normative content, it seems odd to posit that ethical claims that violate universalizeability are distinct from ethical claims that are unacceptable on moral grounds. After all, what is the difference between a meta-ethical principle that has no content apart from normative considerations? If we accept Solomon’s answer that the difference is that the former is a general, well accounted for normative principle, this has counter-intuitive consequences. If it were true that meta-ethical principles were general, well accounted for normative principles, the remaining normative principles would be the only principles that were genuine cases of normative ethics principles. In other words, only specific principles that were not well accounted for would be normative principles. This suggests that the only ethical principles we would classify as normative would be the ones that generated controversy. Solomon’s distinction between ethical propositions that violate normative principles and ethical propositions that violate meta-ethical principles creates more problems than it solves.

In sum, Solomon’s attempt to show that the classifications of meta-ethical claims are normative because such classifications differentiate the moral from the immoral is unsuccessful for a number of reasons. He asserts, without giving good reasons to the contrary, that any descriptive claim that entails a normative claim is itself a normative claim. Solomon also fails to adequately show that meta-ethical claims have no content

apart from normative considerations. Moreover, Solomon's classification of ethical propositions into deviant and non-deviant classes is confused. Solomon's distinction between claims that are unacceptable on normative grounds and claims that are unacceptable on meta-ethical grounds is difficult to cash out without making the former claim implausibly rare.

However, one should not forget that Solomon's arguments, like Mothersill and Gewirth, demonstrate that meta-ethical theories can deny moral claims. Moreover, Solomon, we recall, postulates that a meta-ethicist needs a model of moral language that is morally implicative. If a meta-ethicist were to employ such a model at a highly detailed level, it is doubtful he would not be affirming and denying a wide variety of different moral claims. Moreover, a model of moral language that was morally implicative would have to be constructed by a meta-ethicist with a good understanding of which moral claims are true and which moral claims are false. A meta-ethicist with a poor understanding of the set of correct moral claims could conceivably construct a morally implicative model of moral language that implied either that a set of correct moral claims was false or that a set of false moral claims was correct. The ways in which such a model of moral language could be reflecting a poor understanding of the set of correct moral claims is quite vast. Hence, a morally implicative model of moral language that reflected a poor understanding of the set of correct moral claims could be criticized on moral grounds.

To give an example, suppose a morally implicative model of moral language presupposed meta-ethical principles like (K). As we recall, the principle states that if E is any evaluative term and A and B are acts, events, or persons, then if A is E and B is relevantly similar to A, B is E. If this principle were false, it would commit the morally implicative model of moral language to a vast array of denied correct moral claims and affirmed incorrect moral claims. Moreover, a similar situation would arise if the meta-ethical principle was correct and a rival model of moral language presupposed its falsehood. This rival model of moral language would commit its proponents to the denial



of many correct moral claims and the affirmation of many false moral claims. For instance, if (K) were false, this would imply that the moral similarities between shooting a person and repeatedly stabbing them would not give agents evidence that repeatedly stabbing a person was morally similar to shooting them. If this were the case, some alternative reason would have to be given for the badness of stabbing someone that had nothing to do with the characteristics that make it morally similar to shooting someone. Any reason that presupposed (K) would have to be denied by the proponents of a morally implicative model of moral language that presupposed the falsehood of (K). Either model could warrant extensive moral criticism, depending on whether or not (K) is correct.

## **2.9 CONCLUSION**

As we have seen, the attempts by Mothersill, Gewirth, and Solomon to show that meta-ethics is normative have failed. However, each theorist, in their own way, illustrated a way in which a meta-ethical theory could affirm or deny moral claims. Mothersill demonstrated that meta-ethical theories could affirm or deny moral claims as a way of gaining explanatory power. Gewirth demonstrated that a meta-ethical theory could affirm or deny moral claims in the pursuit of differentiating the moral from the non-moral. His examples showed a variety of different ways in which this could be done. Finally, R.C. Solomon demonstrated how a morally implicative model of moral language could commit a meta-ethical theory to the extensive denial of moral claims that were inconsistent with the meta-ethical principles presupposed by the model. The examples illustrated by all three of these theorists showcase the ways in which a meta-ethical theory can warrant moral criticism.

However, none of the examples given by Mothersill, Gewirth, and Solomon were of contemporary meta-ethical theories that denied any correct moral claims. In the next chapter, I will show that there is a moral commitment that wide ranges of contemporary meta-ethical theories imply the denial of.

## **3. AME AND (C)**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter one, I presented an affirmative answer to question (A) (Can meta-ethical theories be criticized on moral grounds?). The reason given for this answer was that meta-ethical theories are capable of denying correct moral claims and affirming incorrect ones. However, there was no concrete example of how a range of contemporary meta-ethical theories either denies correct moral claims or affirms incorrect moral claims. In this chapter, I will give such an example. I will argue that all meta-ethical theories that deny explanatory Moral Realism are committed to the denial of all correct moral claims.

I will do this by first showing that explanatory Moral Realism is a correctness condition of moral claims. The argument used will be a resuscitated version of the argument from moral experience (referred to as AME). AME is normally an argument that attempts to show that there is presumptive evidence for Moral Realism. In my rehabilitation of the argument, I aim to show not that there is presumptive evidence for Moral Realism, but rather that Moral Realism is a commitment of moral claims. In my version of AME, the conclusion entailed will be an expression of the moral commitment to explanatory Moral Realism:

(C): For any meta-ethical theory that is true, that theory must either be an explanatory moral realist theory or a theory that is compatible with explanatory Moral Realism.

My version of AME will also demonstrate how all meta-ethical theories that deny (C) are committed to the denial of all correct moral claims. If a meta-ethical theory commits its proponents to the denial of all correct moral claims, this is a sufficient condition of the meta-ethical theory warranting moral criticism. Hence, chapter two will present the first answer to my research question. By the end of chapter two, it will be shown that (C) is a meta-ethical claim that agents have a moral commitment to. (C) will also constitute the answer to my research question. This is because (C) happens to be a moral commitment to a constraint on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive. (C) implies that insofar as a meta-ethical theory is incompatible with explanatory Moral Realism, it is a false theory. If it is a false theory, it cannot be an attractive theory.

In section two of this chapter, I will give a brief history of AME and a summary of its normal functions. I will also talk about specific issues my version of AME must address to be successful at showing a commitment to any variety of Moral Realism. These issues will include the necessity of irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations. I will give a comprehensive explanation of what an irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanation is and then discuss the compatibility of such an explanation with various normative ethics theories. This will lead into the introduction of the premises of my version of AME and explain the rationale behind them. In section three, I will discuss Don Loeb's recent criticisms of all versions of AME. I will then explain his criticisms of two particular versions of AME given by David Brink and David McNaughton. These criticisms showcase what Loeb believes is AME's fundamental weaknesses. In section four, I will evaluate Loeb's criticisms of AME, judging them to be mostly correct. I will then take heed of his insights in refinements of the defense of my version of AME. I will set out a strategy for defending my version of AME that consists in showing that the premises of my version of AME are correctness conditions of moral claims. I will show that in the case of the correctness condition of an asserted moral claim, one cannot deny that correctness condition without inadvertently denying that moral claim. In section five, I will defend my version of AME. Here, I will defend three correctness conditions of moral claims that imply explanatory Moral Realism. It will be shown that insofar as one coherently affirms any moral claims at all, one must implicitly affirm these correctness conditions. Hence, insofar as one coherently affirms any moral claims at all, one must implicitly affirm explanatory Moral Realism.

### **3.2 HISTORY AND FUNCTION OF AME**

AME, in its original form, attempts to show that the experience of moral practice implies or is best explained by Moral Realism. In some ways the argument's title is slightly misleading. AME is not an attempt to show merely that the phenomenology of making moral claims gives us presumptive evidence in favor of Moral Realism. Rather, the argument attempts to show that the experience of moral practice (which includes both

its phenomenological and linguistic components) implies or is best explained by Moral Realism. The phenomenological components include the experience of making moral judgments. The linguistic components include the linguistic presuppositions of this procedure. These linguistic presuppositions include the correctness conditions for moral claims. These phenomenological and linguistic aspects of moral practice, according to AME, constitute presumptive evidence for Moral Realism. They are presumptive in the sense that their status as evidence is capable of being defeated by considerations that suggest that these components of moral practice are false or misleading. However, the burden of proof lies on the opponents of AME to show that this is the case. This is because, according to the conclusions of AME, our moral practice is evidence for Moral Realism. According to AME, this is because our engagement in moral practice presupposes the truth of Moral Realism. This is evidence for Moral Realism, according to AME, because the act of engaging in moral practice is one reliable method of learning about moral practice.

The main assumption that AME relies on is that the commitments of morality constitute evidence (albeit presumptive evidence) in favor of the truth of those commitments. The reasoning seems to be that if morality commits us to the claim that causing pain for fun is *prima facie* bad, this is evidence for the claim that causing pain for fun is *prima facie* bad. If this moral claim presupposes some additional claim about the world, the evidence for the claim that pain is *prima facie* bad is also presumptive evidence for this additional claim about the world. To give a basic example, if the moral claim that causing pain is *prima facie* bad presupposes that there are moral facts in the world, then the fact that we say things like “pain is *prima facie* bad” is also presumptive evidence for the claim that there are moral facts in the world.

As noted earlier, I have decided to refashion AME into an argument that demonstrates the commitment of morality to Moral Realism. I have not decided to refashion AME in order to demonstrate that Moral Realism is true. This is for two reasons. The first is that I have a general worry that the conclusion that Moral Realism is

true could not be established without a systematic attack on philosophical naturalism.

Since such an attack is beyond the scope of this thesis, I am not presenting any arguments in favour of the truth of realism. The second reason I am choosing AME to show a moral commitment to Moral Realism is because AME is an argument which deals with the only features of moral practice which can establish what the meta-ethical commitments of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice are. There is nothing apart from linguistic and phenomenological components of moral practice that could conclusively establish a commitment to Moral Realism (let alone any meta-ethics).

It seems a brute fact about moral practice that we must be able to take for granted that phenomenological and linguistic components of our moral practice give us information about what the commitments of our moral practice are. If the correctness conditions of phrases like “wrong” or the phenomenological characteristics of moral revulsion tell us nothing about what morality commits us to, then we must deny moral practice as well as any meta-ethical theories about moral practice. After all, there is no other way to understand moral practice except as the practice by which moral phenomenology and linguistic presuppositions, (among other things) are used by moral agents in the act of making moral judgments. Hence, to understand the moral commitments of moral agents demands an understanding of the presuppositions agents rely on when making moral judgments. It is important to note here that in arguing that explanatory Moral Realism is a moral commitment of moral claims, I am arguing that explanatory Moral Realism is a claim we must affirm and presuppose in order to engage in moral practice adequately. I am assuming that part of engaging competently in moral practice is to engage in moral practice in a manner that is not self-undermining. To engage in moral practice in a manner that is not self-undermining, we have to presuppose the correctness conditions of moral claims. If we do not, we wind up either denying the very moral claims we assert or we wind up agnostics about the moral claims we assert. If we are agnostics this amounts to a denial, since asserting a moral claim one later becomes agnostic about amounts to a denial of the initial assertion. Since the denial of all moral

claims involves denying correct moral claims, I will assume that meta-ethical theories that deny correctness conditions of moral claims warrant moral criticism.

As noted above, my version of AME will show that explanatory Moral Realism is a commitment of moral claims because it is implied by correctness conditions of all moral claims. A “correctness condition” of a moral claim is any claim we must presuppose in order to consistently affirm a moral claim. Correctness conditions are subsets of moral commitments because they are claims we must affirm in order to engage competently in moral practice. In order for correctness conditions of moral claims to imply any form of Moral Realism, it is not enough for such correctness conditions to entail the descriptive content of either moral objectivism or Moral Realism. Moral objectivism, as we recall, is the view that there are correct and incorrect answers to moral questions and that there are correct and incorrect procedures for arriving at these answers. This is distinct from Moral Realism because moral objectivism is a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral doctrine that is compatible with both realist and anti-realist 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations. Moral Realism, by contrast, is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order doctrine that is the contrary of moral anti-realist 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations.

The correctness conditions of moral claims can’t only imply the descriptive components of moral objectivism because moral anti-realist explanations are compatible with moral objectivism. Moreover, the correctness conditions can’t only imply the descriptive components of any Moral Realism because even these components are often compatible with the content of anti-realist meta-ethical theories. In most versions of Moral Realism, there is nothing in the descriptive content of such realism that prevents an anti-realist from adding a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation to the realism which converts it to a form of anti-realism. Thus, if our correctness conditions are to imply a version of Moral Realism, it must be a version of Moral Realism that cannot be compatible with additional, 2<sup>nd</sup> order anti-realist explanations. Such a version of Moral Realism should imply that morality is undermined by 2<sup>nd</sup> order anti-realist explanations. This way, it can block any 2<sup>nd</sup> order anti-realist explanations from being tacked on to the descriptive content of Moral Realism

in a way that re-characterizes that content in a manner that is anti-realist.

In order to generate a version of Moral Realism that is incompatible with Moral Anti-Realism, our Moral Realism must be one that commits its proponent to the judgment independence of the correctness of moral claims. This is the standard view that what makes a moral claim correct is the correspondence with some moral state of affairs, not the beliefs or desires of the agent making the claim. The judgment independence of the correctness of moral claims is compatible with 1<sup>st</sup> order moral objectivism. The compatibility with 1<sup>st</sup> order moral objectivism is what gives Moral Realism the stability that stops moral agents from being able to change the correctness of moral claims by changing their beliefs and desires. It is also what stops moral claims from being completely determined by the beliefs, desires, traditions, or laws of a given society. Although many anti-realists insist that judgment independence is compatible with anti-realism, judgment independence is essential in any version of AME that attempts to show that moral practice is committed to Moral Realism.

Judgment independence is a necessary condition of the inference from moral practice to Moral Realism. There is no way one could infer Moral Realism from a 1<sup>st</sup> order subjectivist view. Hence, we need a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral objectivism if we are going to infer Moral Realism from correctness conditions of all moral claims. If the correctness of moral claims could be determined by the beliefs and desires of agents, there would be no reason to think the relationship between the correctness of moral claims and the agent beliefs and desires was judgment independent. Morality would be on a par with a game of cricket, a game whose rules were determined by and could potentially be changed by human agents. If this were the case, an explanation of morality could not itself be irreducibly moral.

Any sound version of AME that shows the commitment of moral practice to Moral Realism must include the view that any sound explanation of a correct moral claim is an irreducibly moral explanation. An irreducibly moral explanation is a moral explanation that cannot be reduced to or summarized as any other non-moral type of

explanation. Anyone who understands an irreducibly moral explanation necessarily understands a moral assertion. What this means is that any agent who adequately understands a moral explanation of a correct moral claim is also understanding a moral assertion about that claim. Conversely, any explanation of a correct moral claim that can be understood by an agent without the agent understanding a moral assertion is not an irreducibly moral explanation. A moral assertion about a moral claim is not merely an assertion of a descriptive state of affairs that induces a certain moral attitude on the part of the agent who understands this assertion. For example, it is not an irreducibly moral explanation of the wrongness of child abuse to say such abuse prevents children from being able to form romantic relationships during adulthood. Although this explanation may produce a moral attitude on the part of the agent who understands this explanation, this explanation is not irreducibly moral. The agent who understands the claim that child abuse prevents children from being able to form romantic relationships during adulthood is not understanding any moral assertion. He may, of course, infer a moral assertion from this claim. He may even have a strong moral attitude about this claim. Nonetheless, this claim about the causal relationship between child abuse and romantic relationships is still purely descriptive.

An irreducibly moral explanation of why child abuse is wrong could be an elaboration of the claim that child abuse is wrong. The elaboration could be a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation. It could involve metaphysical, psychological, or epistemological elements. However, this explanation of the wrongness of child abuse would have to be such that an agent understanding it would also understand the moral state of affairs being described in the explanation of the wrongness of child abuse. If the irreducibly moral explanation of the wrongness of child abuse involved a metaphysical component, the explanation might be: the wrongness of child abuse consists in the act possessing a non-physical moral property that gives us a reason to try and prevent child abuse. Putting aside the plausibility of such an explanation, the point remains that it would certainly count as an irreducibly moral explanation. This is because one can't understand it without also



understanding a moral assertion. That moral assertion consists in the wrongness of child abuse possessing the non-physical moral property that gives us a reason to prevent child abuse. Likewise, an irreducibly moral explanation of the wrongness of child abuse might involve a psychological component. Such an explanation might be: the wrongness of child abuse consists in the act warranting a negative psychological response from human agents. Whether or not we find this explanation plausible, we can say with certainty that it is an irreducibly moral explanation with a psychological element. It is irreducibly moral because an agent cannot understand this explanation without understanding a moral assertion about a warranted psychological response to child abuse. The fact that the explanation has a psychological element does not stop it from being irreducibly moral. Similarly, an irreducibly moral explanation of a correct moral claim can have an epistemological element without ceasing to be irreducibly moral. Such an explanation might be: the wrongness of child abuse consists of the act possessing certain features, which when observed by human agents under certain epistemic conditions, justify the belief that child abuse is morally wrong. Again, whether or not we agree with this explanation, we can't deny that it is both irreducibly moral and contains an epistemological element.

It is important to note that I am not claiming that all irreducibly moral explanations are moral realist explanations. What I am claiming is that all moral realist explanations that are incompatible with Moral Anti-Realism are irreducibly moral explanations that are meta-ethical. It should not be taken for granted that all normative ethics theories are compatible with irreducibly moral explanations that are meta-ethical. The compatibility depends on whether the normative ethics theory attempts to give accounts of the correctness of moral claims using a non-moral explanans. Whether the explanans is moral or not depends on whether the normative ethics account is a complete account of what makes correct moral claims correct or an account of how to track correct moral claims. If it is an account of how to track correct moral claims, it is compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations of correct moral claims. If it is a

complete account of what makes a moral claim correct, it is not compatible with any irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations of correct moral claims.

A Kantian may, for instance, give an account of how to track correct moral claims that is perfectly consistent with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations. He can say that to track a correct moral claim is to test whether or not the claim can be universalized according to a standard of rationality that the Kantian characterizes as the categorical imperative.<sup>102</sup> This right tracking Kantianism is perfectly compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations of correct moral claims. This is because this Kantian account only specifies how to determine which moral claims are correct. It does not give a complete account of what makes a moral claim correct. Therefore, there is space left open in this account for further irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations.

Such an irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanation will explain what it is that makes correct moral claims correct. Moreover, it will do this using a moral explanans. Such an explanation may even reference the categorical imperative. However, it won't simply assert the categorical imperative. It will assert a claim one cannot understand except as the assertion of a moral claim. Such an explanation might be that the categorical imperative possesses a special moral normativity that allows it to be the standard by which one measures whether or not a moral claim is correct. Whatever irreducibly meta-ethical explanation we invoke, it must be an explanation one cannot understand without understanding the assertion of a moral claim. If the Kantian identifies moral correctness with that which is universalizeable according to the categorical imperative, there is no room left for an irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanation. In this latter Kantian explanation, moral normativity is being identified by a procedure that can be understood without understanding a moral assertion. An agent can understand a series of moral

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<sup>102</sup> KANT, Immanuel. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor in *Immanuel Kant, Practical Philosophy*. Trans and ed. by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge, 1996.

claims being compatible with the categorical imperative without understanding that any moral assertions have been made. All non-Kantians can understand this Kantian explanation in this way. Since this latter Kantianism gives a complete account of the correctness of moral claims, it is presenting an account of correct moral claims that is incompatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical claims. There is simply no room here for an irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanation. All that can be said about correct moral claims has already been said using an explanans one can understand without understanding it as a moral assertion.

A similar situation arises for consequentialists. Consequentialist varieties of normative ethics theories postulate that the consequences of an act are the basis upon which one adequately judges the moral state of that act.<sup>103</sup> A consequentialist theory may or may not give an account of the correctness of moral claims that utilizes a moral explanans. If the consequentialist theory gives an account of the correctness of moral claims which states that looking at the consequences of an act is the only appropriate method of tracking which moral claims are correct, the account is compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations. This is because such an account of the correctness of moral claims only gives an account of how to adequately track correct moral claims. There is room for an additional irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanation of what constitutes correct moral claims. Such an explanation, as noted before, one could only understand by understanding a moral assertion. It could be an explanation to the effect that the consequences of actions possess a special normative property that makes such consequences the sole determinant of the moral states of those actions. However, consequentialism could not give a complete explanation of correct moral claims by postulating an identity between correct moral claims and those moral claims that describe

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<sup>103</sup> There are different ways of cashing out consequentialism. However, all versions of consequentialism seem to have the feature of looking at the consequences of an action in order to adequately judge the moral state of that act. See ARMSTRONG, Walter Sinnott. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Consequentialism*. Copyright 2006 (viewed February 2nd, 2011).

certain sets of consequences. In this latter explanation, there is no room to make a moral assertion that explains why there is an identity between correct moral claims and those moral claims that describe certain sets of consequences. In other words, there is no room for further, irreducibly moral explanations. Rather, the identity between correct moral claims and those moral claims that describe certain sets of consequences is the explanans. Because the explanans is an identity relation rather than a moral assertion, this consequentialist explanation of moral claims is incompatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations.

It might be objected here that this identity relation is itself a moral claim. However, it should be noted in response that the identity relation can only be a moral claim at the 1<sup>st</sup> order. This is because, at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order, it becomes an explanation of the identity between all correct moral claims and those moral claims that describe certain sets of consequences. If the 1<sup>st</sup> order identity is explained by a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claim which is a restatement of the identity, the identity is explaining the identity. If this 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation is taken to be a complete explanation of the 1<sup>st</sup> order identity, the identity is all that can be stated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order level. Whether one thinks this explanatory move is plausible or not, we cannot say that it is compatible with any irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations. The identity postulated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order is both descriptive and all encompassing. There simply is no room for any additional 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanations that are irreducibly moral. On this version of consequentialism, the identity postulated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order explains everything.

This situation remains regardless of whether we are dealing with a utilitarian variety of consequentialism or not. If the utilitarian gives an account of correct moral claims that consists in those claims describing states of affairs in which pleasure is maximized, this account may or may not be compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical claims. If the account merely consists of the claim that we track correct moral claims by identifying those claims in which pleasure is maximized, the account is compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical claims. This is because this account is

consistent with a further explanation of why correct moral claims describe pleasure maximizing states of affairs that utilizes a moral explanans. This further explanation might be that correct moral claims describe pleasure maximizing states of affairs because pleasure maximizing possesses a particular moral property. This further explanation would be incompatible with the utilitarian account if the account simply posited a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation of the correct moral claims that asserted an identity between correct moral claims and those moral claims that describe pleasure maximizing states. As noted above, there would be no room for an irreducibly moral explanation because the explanans of the complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation would be an identity relation rather than a claim that could only be understood as a moral assertion. Moreover the identity would explain everything there is to be explained.

All forms of consequentialism are in the same boat in this regard. Whether we are dealing with rule consequentialism or act consequentialism, compatibility with irreducibly moral meta-ethical claims requires that either account not give a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of the correctness of moral claims that uses an explanans which is not moral. Welfare maximizing (rather than pleasure maximizing) consequentialism is also compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations on the proviso it does not give a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of the correctness of moral claims using an explanans that is not moral.<sup>104</sup> Hence, a welfare consequentialist account is not compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical claims if it gives a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of the connection between correct moral claims and welfare maximizing by postulating an identity between the two. This same situation holds in cases where we are dealing with an agent centered consequentialist account or an agent neutral consequentialist account. In order for either account to be compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations, a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of correct moral claims can't simply postulate an identity between

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<sup>104</sup> For a collection of essays centered around the defence of Welfare Maximizing Consequentialism, see SEN, Amartya. *Rationality and Freedom*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

correct moral claims and the set of moral claims described by the agent-centered or agent neutral consequentialist account.<sup>105</sup>

In the case of contractarian normative ethics theories, the standard interpretation of such theories is that they are incompatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical claims. This is because the contractarian is (among other things) normally taken to be giving a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of correct moral claims that identifies their correctness as being identical with the outcome of a procedure. This procedure is normally taken to be a procedure that satisfies the interests of hypothetical rational agents. Such contractarian accounts are not normally taken to be giving 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanations of how to track correct moral claims viz a viz these procedures. Rather, the accounts are normally taken to be meta-ethical explanations of how correct moral claims obtain their status as correct moral claims. Such explanations utilize a non-moral explanans, since they explain the correctness of moral claims in terms of such claims being the outcome of a procedure. The procedure is non-moral, since one can understand the mechanics of any contractarian procedure without understanding that a moral assertion has been made.

However, this standard interpretation is not essential to any interpretation of contractarianism. It is still the case that whether a contractarian theory is compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations depends on how we choose to interpret the contractarian theory. This is particularly true of the famous contemporary version of contractarianism espoused by John Rawls. Although Rawls' contractarianism is only a theory of correct moral claims that relate to justice (rather than substantive conceptions of

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<sup>105</sup> For a defence of Agent-Neutral Consequentialism, see SCHEFFLER, Samuel. *The Rejection of Consequentialism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1982. For an example of Agent-Centered Consequentialism, see PORTMORE, Douglas W. Can an Act-Consequentialist Theory be Agent-Relative? *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2001, Vol. 38, 363-377.

the good), the theory none the less gives a comprehensive explanation of how those claims obtain their status as correct moral claims. According to Rawls, a set of correct moral claims is the outcome of a procedure whereby hypothetical rational agents choose to affirm moral claims under a veil of ignorance.<sup>106</sup> The veil of ignorance requires that the hypothetical rational agents in this position do not have knowledge of their economic and social position, nor do they have knowledge of any comprehensive moral or theological doctrines regarding what the good life ought to be.<sup>107</sup> This is what Rawls refers to as the original position.<sup>108</sup> While in the original position, hypothetical rational agents will choose, under fair conditions, mutually acceptable moral claims that will extend basic liberties to citizens while ensuring that permissible inequalities benefit the worst off in society.<sup>109</sup>

As we can see, the correct moral claims Rawls is attempting to explain are principles of justice that are made correct in virtue of being what hypothetical rational agents would choose in the original position. Here, we can interpret Rawls two ways. We can interpret him as giving a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of how a set of correct moral claims (principles of justice) obtain their status as correct moral claims. The explanation does not rely on a metaphysics nor does it rely on particular conceptions of the good. However, the explanation is not compatible with irreducibly moral claims that could explain how principles of justice can obtain their status as correct moral claims. The explanans for this obtainment is the procedure that hypothetical rational agents would engage in while in the original position. This explanans is not moral because one can understand this procedure without understanding that any moral assertion has been made. Since the explanans of this complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation is not moral, there

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<sup>106</sup> RAWLS, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard College, USA: Harvard University Press, 1971. pp. 102-171.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-101.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-19, 102-171.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-101.

is no room left for any further explanations that consist of irreducibly moral meta-ethical claims.

On the other hand, we can also interpret Rawls as merely giving a 1<sup>st</sup> order account of how to track a set of correct moral claims. On this second interpretation, Rawls is not giving us an explanation of what these correct moral claims consist in. Rather, he is merely outlining the procedures hypothetical rational agents must engage in order to adequately track these correct moral claims. There is still room for a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of why this procedure is the procedure that tracks the set of correct moral claims that Rawls says it does. Such a further explanation could be a claim that one could not understand accept as the assertion of a moral claim. On this second interpretation of Rawls, there is room for explanations of correct moral claims that involve a moral explanans. Hence, there is room on this interpretation for irreducibly moral meta-ethical claims. I am not meaning to take a stand as to which interpretation of Rawls is the correct one. I am merely pointing out that the compatibility of the Rawls theory with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations depends on our interpretation of Rawls. If we interpret Rawls as offering a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of this set of correct moral claims, the explanans is non-moral and incompatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations.

A similar situation arises for T.M. Scanlon's version of contractarianism. Scanlon's contractarianism attempts to give a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical account of those correct moral claims that deal with right and wrong actions.<sup>110</sup> Scanlon's central claim is that a moral claim is correct or incorrect if it could or couldn't be justified to others on grounds others could not reasonably reject.<sup>111</sup> Unlike Rawls, Scanlon imagines reasonable hypothetical moral agents rather than rational hypothetical agents in constructing his theory. Reasonable moral agents are agents that presuppose a certain body of information

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<sup>110</sup> SCANLON, T.M. *What We Owe To Each Other*. Harvard College, USA. Harvard University Press, 2000.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-33



and a certain range of reasons taken to be relevant.<sup>112</sup> To justify a moral claim is to engage in the procedure such reasonable moral agents would engage in order to justify a moral claim. That procedure, for Scanlon, is merely the procedure of pointing out that a moral claim has strong reasons in its favor.<sup>113</sup> Reasons, for Scanlon, are considerations that count in favor of a moral claim or that count against it. Wrong moral claims, for Scanlon, are those claims that such reasonable hypothetical agents would reject on the grounds that it has been shown that there are reasons that count against such moral claims. Scanlon believes that moral justification is ‘basic’ in the sense that we should take reasons as both primitive and normative.<sup>114</sup> This means that for Scanlon, the objective normativity of reasons is something that we must take as a brute fact that cannot be analyzed in terms of any set of natural facts. Moral principles, for Scanlon, are general principles about the status of various reasons for action.

Scanlon’s account, like Rawls, is compatible with irreducible moral meta-ethical claims depending on how one interprets it. If we interpret Scanlon’s account as a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of how a set of correct moral claims obtain their status as correct moral claims, Scanlon’s account is not compatible with irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations. On this interpretation, the correctness of a set of moral claims (dealing with right and wrong actions) is identical with those claims being what hypothetical reasonable agents could agree were moral claims there were strong reasons to endorse. Here again we have an explanation of a set of correct moral claims where the explanans need not be understood as a moral assertion. The process by which hypothetical reasonable agents agree that there are strong reasons to endorse a moral claim is a process one can understand without understanding that the endorsement of a moral

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

claim is being made. This is because one can differentiate the process by which agent's justify moral claims by making reference to reasons on the one hand, and the inherent justification of such reasons on the other. The latter phenomenon is certainly incapable of being understood without understanding that a moral assertion is being made. The former phenomenon, however, one can understand perfectly without understanding that a moral assertion is being made.

This is because one can conceive of it being a contingent matter whether or not reasonable agents are correct in their procedure of identifying correct moral claims by making reference to reasons. One cannot imagine it being a contingent matter whether or not a moral claim is justified if the reasons that would justify this moral claim obtain. To say that there are moral reasons to endorse moral claim X is to make a claim that can only be understood as a moral assertion. This is not true for the claim that a hypothetical group of reasonable agents agreed that there were reasons to endorse a particular moral claim. If we interpret Scanlon as offering a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of what makes a set of moral claims correct, this interpretation has no room for any further irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations. The explanans in this explanation (the procedure of the reasonable agents) is both all encompassing and capable of being understood as a claim that is not a moral assertion.

Nonetheless, we can also interpret Scanlon as merely offering a 1<sup>st</sup> order account of how to track a set of correct moral claims. If we interpret him this way, we have room for further 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanations which can contain an explanans that can only be understood as a moral assertion. Scanlon's account, on this interpretation, becomes an account of correct moral claims that accounts for how to track such claims by looking at the procedures of hypothetical moral agents for tracking such claims. It is not a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation of such claims, on this interpretation. Hence, Scanlon's account can be interpreted in a manner where it is consistent with explanatory Moral Realism. To a large extent, what determines the range of interpretations we can give to a contractarian theory is to what extent the theory can be interpreted as a purely 1<sup>st</sup>

order normative ethics theory.

Perhaps the easiest contemporary contractarian theory to interpret as a 1<sup>st</sup> order normative ethics theory is the contractarianism defended by David Gauthier in his book *Morals by Agreement*.<sup>115</sup> On Gauthier's contractarianism, morality is a rational constraint on the pursuit of self-interest.<sup>116</sup> Practical reason is a means of satisfying self-interest while rational constraints have a foundation in the interest they constrain.<sup>117</sup> Gauthier claims that in situations involving interactions with others, a moral agent chooses rationally only insofar as he constrains the pursuit of his own interests to conform to principles expressing the impartiality that is characteristic of morality.<sup>118</sup> For Gauthier, morality can be generated as a rational constraint from the non-moral premises of rational choice. A rational agent is an independent centre of activity that attempts to direct his capacities and resources to the fulfillment of his interests. A rational agent becomes a moral agent when the rational agent makes the distinction between what it is possible for him to do and what he ought to do.<sup>119</sup> When the rational agent becomes a moral agent, he adopts moral principles that are the objects of fully voluntary *ex ante* agreement with other rational agents. Although the agreement is conceptualized by Gauthier as a hypothetical agreement, the parties to this agreement are conceptualized as real, determinate, individuals who are distinguished by individual capacities, situations, and concerns.<sup>120</sup>

This agreement is such that each rational agent prefers to conform to it provided most other rational agents do. However, each rational agent prefers not to conform to it provided most other rational agents also do not conform to it. Also, rational agents prefer

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<sup>115</sup> GAUTHIER, David. *Morals by Agreement*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1986.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-21.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-13.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-157.

that other rational agents conform to this agreement rather than conform to no agreement at all. In this way, the agreement exemplifies the property of being a piece of mutually beneficial, coordinative action.<sup>121</sup> Mutually beneficial coordinative actions require constraints on the behavior of rational agents. These constraints must be such that to abide by them is advantageous for the rational agents they constrain.<sup>122</sup> For Gauthier, this requires that each rational agent is in an initial bargaining position from which to accept these constraints in the hypothetical agreement. This bargaining position is described as the least he might accept in place of no agreement and the most he might accept in place of being excluded by others from agreement.<sup>123</sup> In order for the rational agent to rationally be able to accept constraints on his behavior from his initial bargaining position, there is a requirement that the greatest concession of the rational agent (measured as a proportion of what is at stake for him), be as small as possible.<sup>124</sup> Gauthier expresses this requirement as a principle of maximum relative benefit and believes this principle captures the idea of fairness and impartiality in a bargaining situation.<sup>125</sup>

Gauthier characterizes the rational agent who rationally accepts constraints on his behavior in the initial bargaining position as a constrained maximizer. A constrained maximizer is a rational agent who puts constraints on his pursuit of self-interest that allows him to enjoy the benefits of co-operation that other agents lack. Gauthier admits that constrained maximizers sometimes are exploited when they act cooperatively in mistaken expectations of reciprocity from others.<sup>126</sup> However, Gauthier believes that

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 19-233.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 157-190.

under plausible conditions, the net advantage that constrained maximizers get from cooperation exceeds the benefits that others expect from exploitation.<sup>127</sup> Gauthier concludes from this that it is rational to be disposed to constrain maximizing behavior by internalizing moral principles that will govern one's choices.<sup>128</sup> However, no rational agent should be worse off in the initial bargaining position than he would be in a non-social context of no interaction.<sup>129</sup> For Gauthier, this is a proviso that constrains the base from which each rational agent's relative concession and benefit are measured. The constraint winds up inducing a structure of personal and property rights that Gauthier believes are basic to rationally and morally acceptable social arrangements.<sup>130</sup>

There are some superficial similarities between Gauthier's contractarianism and the contractarianism of Rawls. Both theories postulate that principles of justice are the objects of a rational choice. Like Rawls, Gauthier's contractarianism postulates that this rational choice is represented as a bargain or agreement among persons who need not be aware of their identities. Where Gauthier differs from Rawls is that Gauthier advocates an interest maximizing conception of rationality where the rational person seeks the greatest satisfaction of his own interests. This contrasts with the Rawlsian universalistic conception of rationality whereby the rational person believes that what makes it rational to satisfy an interest does not depend on whose interest it is. Also, Gauthier makes very explicit that he intends his contractarianism to be a form of 1<sup>st</sup> order normative ethics. He sees his contractarianism as a theory that justifies rather than explains moral principles.<sup>131</sup> With Rawlsian contractarianism, it doesn't seem to be the case that Rawls has excluded

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 233-268.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 11.

his theory from the ability to explain and not merely justify moral principles.<sup>132</sup>

Because of Gauthier's explicit qualification of his theory as a form of 1<sup>st</sup> order normative ethics, there is nothing in his theory that explicitly contradicts explanatory Moral Realism. Regardless of whether one finds Gauthier's contractarianism plausible, one can give irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations of the central concepts put forward by Gauthier. For instance, we can give irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations of the normativity of interest maximizing rationality. Since this is the case, the justification of the constraints rational agents accept within Gauthier's theory can be explained using irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanations. Since such constraints are justified because of their ability to maximize the interests of agents, one can give an irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanation of this justification. Again, how plausible this explanation would be is an entirely different matter. What is of importance is that one could give such an irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanation of all the concepts of Gauthier's contractarianism.

With an irreducibly moral explanation, the moral explanans is where the explanation ought to end. If anyone attempts to give a deeper explanation of the moral explanans that either reduces or summarizes the moral explanans to something else, they are, in effect, robbing the explanation of its moral irreducibility. The indispensability of irreducibly moral explanations is a requirement for any version of AME that demonstrates the moral commitment to explanatory Moral Realism. Explanatory Moral Realism must imply that the correctness of a moral claim obtains because of an irreducibly moral relationship between the facts of the world and the claim's correctness. Moreover, this irreducibly moral relationship cannot be described in terms of any states of affairs that are not moral. All anti-realist explanations of correct moral claims attempt to either reduce or summarize the correctness of those claims as a function of some state of affairs which is not moral. This is true even for deflationary forms of anti-realism. This is because the

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<sup>132</sup> This follows from the different ways one can interpret Rawls' theory.

deflationary account is, in effect, an attempt to give a summary explanation of a moral claim using something other than a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral explanans. This brings us to our final requirement for a sound version of AME.

The third requirement of any sound version of AME is the finality of 2<sup>nd</sup> order irreducibly moral explanations. What this means is that such explanations cannot be significantly re-characterized in a way where the explanation of the claim no longer describes an irreducibly moral state of affairs. The irreducibly moral state of affairs described by the claim must be the final explanation of why the claim is correct. There can be no higher order explanations that are over and above the explanation of the moral claim that is irreducibly moral. However, in order to get explanatory Moral Realism, we have to assume the finality of irreducibly moral explanations is itself 2<sup>nd</sup> order. This is, strictly speaking, because 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral explanations are meta-ethical. Moreover, meta-ethics, unlike normative ethics, deals with metaphysical issues.

Meta-ethics is also the only domain of moral inquiry that can give us ultimate explanations of how to appropriately interpret the meaning and function of moral claims. This is why the finality of irreducibly moral explanations must be a meta-ethical finality. If the finality of irreducibly moral explanations were 1<sup>st</sup> order, there could always be a 2<sup>nd</sup> order theory of that finality which re-characterizes it in an anti-realist fashion. If the finality is itself 2<sup>nd</sup> order, this re-characterization is impossible. After all, 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of moral claims are final, theoretical explanations of what moral claims are. If we take an irreducibly moral explanation as a final, theoretical explanation of what makes a moral claim correct, we have explanatory Moral Realism.

In order to be invulnerable to an anti-realist re-characterization, our version of AME must include the following moral commitments:

(D) For any moral claim X, X is not determined by any agent's judgments about X

(E) For any moral claim X, the only appropriate explanation is one that is irreducibly moral.

and

(F) For any moral claim X, the only appropriate irreducibly moral explanation is one that is a final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation.

### 3.3 LOEB, BRINK, and MCNAUGHTON

Don Loeb begins his discussion of AME by noting the importance that writers give to moral experience. He notes that it is part of the background assumptions of meta-ethical debate that moral experience, particularly the disposition to use our moral vocabulary in certain ways, is among the best evidence we have for what it is we are thinking about when we talk about morality.<sup>133</sup> Loeb observes that this assumption implies that moral discourse is talk about a realm of putative fact.<sup>134</sup> Loeb then goes on to explain how this assumption has been the driving force behind AME. AME, according to Loeb, usually manifests itself in two versions. The first version infers the objectivist seeming character of morality from our experience of talking about morality. The second version infers the objective seeming character of morality directly from features of the phenomenology of moral experience. Here we should interpret Loeb as meaning the phenomenology of affirming particular moral claims. According to Loeb, both versions of this argument are consistent with the idea of an inference from morality seeming a certain way (or our practices somehow presupposing it to be that way) to the reasonableness of the presumption that it is that way.<sup>135</sup>

The influence of AME has been fairly widespread because it is widely believed that the objective seeming character of our moral experiences supports a presumption in favour of objectivist meta-ethical theories. Such theories can include Moral Realism or Quasi-Realism or certain constructivist theories. According to AME, the presumption in favour of objectivist theories can be defeated only if the arguments against such theories

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<sup>133</sup> See Loeb (2007).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 469-472.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*



prove to be successful.<sup>136</sup> Loeb cites David Brink<sup>137</sup> and David McNaughton<sup>138</sup> as two contemporary authors who claim that AME shifts the burden of proof to the proponent of anti-objectivist theories. Loeb also illustrates how each author defends one of the two main versions of the argument.<sup>139</sup> For Brink, the AME is an inference from the way we speak about morality to an objectivist conception of morality. For McNaughton, the AME is an inference from features of the phenomenology of moral experience to an objectivist conception of morality.

According to McNaughton, it is part of the phenomenology of moral experience that morality appears to be in the world apart from our happening to encounter it.<sup>140</sup> He asserts that morality seems to exist independently of our subjective experiences.<sup>141</sup> This means that moral claims appear to be correct independently of the means by which agents experience them as being correct. Here, McNaughton is bringing in an epistemological dimension to the character of moral phenomenology. After all, if we know morality by experiencing it in a way where morality seems to exist independently of us, it seems as though morality is there to be experienced rather than a product of our experiences. McNaughton develops this line of thought by stating that agents have moral perceptions which are partially analogous to visual perceptions insofar as they seem to be perceptions of something outside of agents.<sup>142</sup> McNaughton then adds that the rightness or wrongness of conduct is something agents also experience as a perception of something outside agents. Moreover, when agents are moved to act morally it seems to be in virtue of their

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 471

<sup>137</sup>See Brink (1989), 25-29.

<sup>138</sup>See McNaughton (1988), 19, 48, 56.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 19, 48, 56

recognizing morality's authority over them.<sup>143</sup>

Brink, by contrast, delivers a version of the AME that is based on linguistic presuppositions of moral discourse. Brink's version of AME is based on two observations about the linguistic features of moral discourse. The first observation is that the structure of moral discourse presupposes that moral claims commit one to the objective properties of morality. In support of this observation, Brink contends that stated beliefs regarding moral claims contain implicit references to moral properties, facts, or knowledge.<sup>144</sup> Here, he means that whenever one judges a belief regarding a moral claim (such as "Giving to Charity is Good") one is also voicing a belief in the evaluative components of the state or activity described in the claim. So if one believes that giving to charity is good, one also believes that giving to charity has the property of goodness. Moreover, according to Brink, an agent who affirms this claim is also implicitly affirming that it is an objective fact that giving to charity is good and that this fact, if known, constitutes moral knowledge.<sup>145</sup>

The second of Brink's observations about the linguistic features of moral discourse is the implicit assumption that there is a correct answer to moral questions. Brink notes that moral utterances are often in the declarative mood, and thus appear to be statements of fact. Moreover, agents disagree with the moral views of others, in part because agents believe others can be mistaken. This means that agents take themselves to be capable of making mistakes as well as being correct about the answers to moral questions. This second observation is about the rules one must follow in order to be able to intelligibly participate in moral discourse. It seems impossible to participate in moral discourse without presupposing that there is a correct answer to moral questions. Moreover, agents must also assume that they are capable of knowing what such a correct answer is. Most importantly, agents must assume that they are capable of being mistaken

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> See Brink (1989), 25-29

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

about what such a correct answer could be.

Loeb's main criticism of such arguments is that the proponents of AME overlook observations of moral practice that imply non-objectivism or are compatible with Moral Anti-Realism. According to Loeb, philosophers are too ready to generalize about complex, subtle, and largely empirical matters of what constitutes moral practice. These generalizations, according to Loeb, merely reflect the experiences and intuitions of the particular philosophers and may not reflect the experiences and intuitions of humanity as a whole. Moreover, these philosophers overlook features of the experience of morality that do not support their thesis. Loeb claims that there are certain features of moral experience that suggest that agents experience morality as something that is not objective.<sup>146</sup>

For example, agents talk about moral feelings and attitudes just as much as they talk about moral beliefs. There does not seem to be any reason to think the belief talk reflects the nature of moral experience more than the talk about moral feelings and attitudes. Moreover, people often say things that reflect a seeming incompatibility with objectivism. For instance, people often say sentences like, "It's all relative" or "What is right for a person depends on that person's own decisions." Loeb insists that we cannot dismiss such statements as the products of confusion merely because they appear to conflict with a view that we think is widely accepted.<sup>147</sup> For Loeb, the burden of proof is on the proponent of AME to show that it is the anti-objectivist claims of ordinary agents, rather than the objectivist claims, which are products of confusion.

Loeb thinks there are additional problems for the claim that we experience morality as a realm of fact. First, this claim is undermined by the fact that anti-objectivist theories can explain many of the features of moral practice which objectivists claim support objectivism. The procedure of moral reasoning is something Loeb believes Moral Anti-Realism can give a plausible account of viz a viz explanations which do not presuppose objectivism. Thus, it is not clear that reasoning about the correctness of

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<sup>146</sup> See Loeb (2007), 473-474.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 474

particular moral claims entails that the moral reasoners are assuming that moral claims are a realm of fact. Loeb cites John Mackie's view that it is entirely appropriate to reason about questions of value despite the non-objectivity of values as evidence that reasoning about questions of value is a moral practice that does not support objectivism.<sup>148</sup> According to Loeb, this is why Brink's version of AME fails to demonstrate the case for Moral Realism being a presupposition of moral discourse. Since moral practice is compatible with non-objectivist explanations of it and Brink has not shown that moral reasoners experience morality as a realm of fact, Brink's version of AME fails to support Moral Realism.

Additionally, moral utterances could be in the declarative mood while not implying moral objectivism. When a sentence is in the declarative mood, this means the content of the sentence is asserted as though what is being asserted is an objective fact.<sup>149</sup> For Loeb, there is no incompatibility between moral claims being asserted in a declarative mood and those moral claims not presupposing objectivism. This is because we can talk about something in the declarative mood even though the subject matter is something we create. Discussions of topics ranging from "the best ice cream flavor" to "which sports team it is better to support" are framed within statements that are in the declarative mood. And yet no one ever assumes that such discussions involve claims whose correctness obtains independently of the preferences of agents. This is true despite the fact that we seem to have experiences of the comparative goodness of certain ice cream flavors and sports teams.<sup>150</sup>

Here Loeb is not simply saying that agents can trade in normative claims whose correctness is admitted by the agents to be determined by their own preferences. This would only show that declarative mood statements are compatible with moral objectivist forms of Moral Anti-Realism. We must take him to also be claiming that agent

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<sup>148</sup>See Mackie (1977), 30-35

<sup>149</sup>See Brink (1989).

<sup>150</sup> See Loeb (2007), 473-474

preferences can determine the correctness of these normative claims in a manner that is incompatible with moral objectivism. It is reasonable to assume here that Loeb believes agent preferences can determine the correctness of normative claims in a manner that is relativistic. On this view, reasoning about normative claims can merely be a way of deciding what one's own feelings about the correctness of the claims are. The decision need not be constrained, for instance, by the presupposition that there are objective procedures that agents must partake in, so as to reason correctly about the normative claims they are discussing. Since this kind of relativistic discourse happens all the time, Loeb sees it as a disconfirmation of Brink's claim that the way we talk when we engage in moral reasoning supports moral objectivism. If there are good reasons to think the discourse of reasoning over normative issues (like ice cream flavors or sport team allegiances) is not uniformly objectivist, it is implausible to think that moral reasoning is uniformly objectivist. If the way we talk when we engage in moral reasoning does not support moral objectivism, this reasoning certainly does not support Moral Realism.

Also, Loeb claims that the references to moral properties, facts, and knowledge that Brink observes as being part of moral discourse do not imply Moral Realism. This is because it is possible to give accounts of such things from within an objectivist, anti-realist framework. Blackburn's Quasi-Realism is the classic example of such an anti-realist theory.<sup>151</sup> Since the features of moral discourse highlighted by Brink are compatible with both objectivist Moral Realism and objectivist anti-realism, Brink needs to do more than simply point out these features in order to present a compelling presumptive argument for Moral Realism. He must show that these features can only be interpreted on a moral realist understanding. And this is precisely what he has failed to do, according to Loeb.

Likewise, McNaughton's arguments fail to show that the features of moral experience highlighted by McNaughton support Moral Realism rather than objectivism. The fact that morality seems to be in the world independently of our happening to

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<sup>151</sup> See Blackburn (1984), (1992), (1998).

encounter it is a feature of moral phenomenology that is compatible with an objectivist Moral Anti-Realism. This is because there is a distinction between versions of anti-realism whereby agents adhere to a morality that obtains because of the individual preferences of those agents and versions where agents adhere to a morality that obtains independently of the individual preferences of agents. In the second kind of anti-realism, the morality that is independent of agents is a set of norms providing the agents with the ability to satisfy the collective long-term interests of humanity. In this second version, the single agent may have beliefs and desires that are at odds with this morality. However, the morality itself is grounded in the collective desires and interests of humanity. This, according to Loeb, can account for why the agent experiences morality as being something independent of his happening to encounter it.

### **3.4 AVOIDING LOEB'S PITFALLS**

Loeb's criticisms of Brink and McNaughton can be used to generate two requirements for any version of AME. These requirements are that any successful version of AME acknowledge:

(L) The experience of moral phenomenology is not uniform enough to present a presumptive case for Moral Realism.

and

(M) Even if the experience of moral phenomenology possessed the characteristics proponents of AME have claimed it does, those characteristics would only imply moral objectivism, not Moral Realism.

With regards to (L), it seems obvious that Loeb is correct in his explanations of how Brink and McNaughton have not shown that (L) is false. Neither Brink nor McNaughton adequately deals with the lack of uniformity in the experience of moral practice. There is no serious acknowledgement in either argument that different agents routinely make different meta-ethical claims when they try to articulate the nature of what it is they do when they do morality. Some agents say that their condemnation of torture is merely an

expression of certain disapproving emotions. Other agents say that their condemnation of torture reflects the appropriate response to a categorical imperative. These controversies account for much of the debates regarding what constitutes moral phenomenology. Neither theorist attempts to show that these controversies can only be explained by Moral Realism.

With regards to (M), Loeb is correct that Brink and McNaughton have failed to show that (M) is false. As we saw, the way Brink and McNaughton interpret the characteristics of the experience of moral practice only implies moral objectivism. Objectivism, as noted above, is distinct from Moral Realism in that objectivism only entails that there are correct and incorrect answers to moral questions, and there are correct and incorrect universal procedures for deriving these answers.<sup>152</sup>

This means that objectivism is thus compatible with both Moral Realism and Moral Anti-Realism. This is because a moral anti-realist, like a realist, can claim that there are correct and incorrect answers to moral questions as well as correct and incorrect methods for arriving at those answers. An anti-realist might, for instance, say that the correct answer to the question of whether or not one should give to charity is affirmative. Moreover, they could say that the correct universal procedure for arriving at this answer is to examine the amounts of suffering alleviated by giving to charity. They can say this without having to be moral realists because the correctness of giving to charity and the procedure for arriving at it is one they can explain as being sound within moral practice. Such a procedure was done correctly, they could assert, because moral agents identified the features that warrant giving to charity. Moreover, such agents had appropriate moral sentiments and reasoned about what to do without making any moral mistakes. The agents did what one should do when engaged in moral practice. This practice, the anti-realist could argue, is just a system of attitude co-ordinations whose function is to satisfy the interests of human beings.

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<sup>152</sup>For more on these distinctions, see FINLAY, Stephen. Four Faces of Moral Realism. *Philosophy Compass*, 2007 vol. 2, pp. 820-849. Here, Finlay offers a taxonomy of all the various meta-ethical positions and their relationship to Moral Realism.

This explanatory move, incidentally, would be the very thing morality must be incompatible with in order for morality to be committed to Moral Realism. Here, the anti-realist is giving a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation of morality that is not irreducibly moral. The assumption behind this explanation is that it leaves 1<sup>st</sup> order moral objectivism without any additional linguistic, phenomenological, or moral difficulties. Thus, in order for the moral realist to show that morality is committed to realism, he has to show that this anti-realist explanatory move in some way imbues the 1<sup>st</sup> order objectivism with some difficulty that was not there before. This difficulty should be such that moral practice can't function adequately but in its absence. The only way to remove the difficulty must be in a tacit acceptance of Moral Realism. This is what a sound version of AME must ultimately show.

Of course, we should remember that a successful presumptive version of AME must also show that this tacit acceptance of Moral Realism is evidence for Moral Realism. As noted earlier, this is not my aim in rehabilitating AME. My version of AME is not a presumptive argument for Moral Realism. I am leaving open whether or not my version of AME shows that the commitment to Moral Realism has the status of presumptive evidence in favour of Moral Realism. The reader can decide that for him or herself. What I am not leaving open is the fact that my version of AME will entail the moral commitment to Moral Realism. The aim of my version of AME is to establish that commitment to Moral Realism, rather than that commitment's status as evidence *for* Moral Realism.

Taking heed of Loeb's criticisms, my version of AME must imply the denial of (L) and (M). The argument has to show that there is some element of the experience of moral practice that is uniform enough to imply a meta-ethics. Moreover, this meta-ethics must be realist, rather than merely objectivist. Furthermore, evidence for this Moral Realism can't be based on first person reports of moral phenomenology. This is because there are too many examples of agents who say things about their moral phenomenology which do not support any version of Moral Realism. If such agents do have a moral realist



phenomenology, it is not clear that they can adequately articulate it. Moreover, if such agents report that they are anti-realists, there seems to be no way of knowing whether that report is an adequate characterization of their moral phenomenology. My version of AME has to show that all moral agents, independently of their meta-ethical views or characterizations of their own moral experiences, are committed to Moral Realism. We must be able to show this commitment in ways that are not dependent on the content of 1<sup>st</sup> person reports. In order for the experience of moral practice to imply Moral Realism, it has to do so independently of whether agents are aware of the fact that the correctness conditions of their moral claims imply a version of Moral Realism. The correctness conditions of moral claims presupposed by anti-realists must be committed to this same Moral Realism as those of the moral realists.

In order to examine whether or not agents have a commitment to any meta-ethics, we should first elaborate a bit more about what correctness conditions of moral claims are. Let's imagine a hypothetical moral claim and call it X. A correctness condition of a moral claim X is an additional claim that is a presupposition of X. The additional claim enables X to be understood as such that it can do all the things that a moral claim does. To give an example, a moral claim X can entail that an agent is morally obligated to perform a certain action. One necessary condition of this entailment is that X describes a state of affairs that is a possibility. This is a simple example of a correctness condition of any moral claim. It is a correctness condition because it enables the state of affairs consisting of the agent being obligated to perform a certain action. It does this by asserting the possibility of the action itself. It also asserts the possibility of the obligation that is the moral outcome of the possibility of the action.

Moral claims describe states of affairs in virtue of what they affirm. If I, for instance, make the moral claim, "kicking dogs for fun is wrong" I am describing a state of affairs whereby if one kicks dogs for fun the act is wrong. It does not matter whether we interpret this state of affairs in a realist or anti-realist fashion. If this description refers to a state of affairs that is not morally possible, it can't be the case that kicking dogs for fun

is wrong. To say that a state of affairs is morally possible is to say that it is both naturally possible and morally possible. To say it is naturally possible is to say that the natural facts given in a description of the situation could actually obtain. To say a state of affairs is morally possible is to affirm that the moral claims affirmed in the description of it can be entailed by the natural facts that are part of the description of that state of affairs. For example, to kick dogs for fun is naturally possible because it is physically possible to kick a dog for fun. It is not morally possible that kicking dogs for fun is morally good. This is because it is not possible to kick a dog for fun (all other morally relevant conditions being normal) while engaging in an act with a positive moral status.

Moreover, there is a method for determining the correctness conditions of any moral claim an agent actually holds. All one need to do is examine what correctness conditions are presupposed by the moral claims he affirms. This method is more effective for gathering knowledge about our meta-ethical commitments than first person introspection for a number of reasons. In looking at the correctness conditions for moral claims, agents can gain direct access to at least some of their meta-ethical commitments. If agents can have said access, they can more effectively see how much their theoretical views coincide with what they affirm qua affirming the correctness conditions of moral claims. Furthermore, having access to this information will allow agents to better understand their moral phenomenology as well as their meta-ethical commitments. If an agent comes to know the correctness conditions for his moral claims, then the agent's 1st person reports of his moral phenomenology will no longer be a source of confusion.

Moreover, in examining the correctness conditions for moral claims, an agent can find himself affirming meta-ethics presuppositions without having yet formed a deliberate, well considered meta-ethical judgment. For instance, if a correctness condition of a moral claim is that the claim can only be given an appropriate 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation that is irreducibly moral, this means the agent who holds the claim holds both a moral claim and a meta-ethical judgment about that moral claim. He can't merely affirm the moral claim without also affirming its correctness conditions. This is because to affirm the moral

claim while denying the correctness conditions of that moral claim is to contradict oneself.

Although this may not seem obvious, it follows from the nature of what such an act consists in. To deny a correctness condition of a claim one affirms, logically, is to deny the claim one has just affirmed. For example, suppose I affirm that the torture of children is wrong. Let's say that a correctness condition of such an affirmation is a correctness condition X. If I affirm that torturing children is wrong and then deny X, I am denying the very thing that the truth of the wrongness of torturing children depends on. Hence, I am contradicting myself. I may not be aware that I am contradicting myself. Moreover, the fact that I am contradicting myself may stop none of my moral fervor towards the claim that torturing children is wrong. However, I am still contradicting myself if I assert a moral claim and then deny one of its correctness conditions. If I choose to affirm a moral claim while remaining agnostic on its correctness conditions, then I am, if I am consistent, an agnostic about whether or not the moral claim is correct. Of course, I can be inconsistent and claim that I am agnostic about the correctness conditions of a moral claim and simultaneously affirm that claim. On the other hand, if I am made to understand that I am agnostic about a correctness condition of a moral claim I assert, I will most likely lapse into a consistent position. I will most likely either assert the correctness condition or deny the moral claim I assert.<sup>153</sup>

If it can be shown that the moral claims an agent affirms imply explanatory Moral Realism, an agent can't consistently deny he is a moral realist without denying the moral claims he affirms. This is because a meta-ethical theory being a correctness condition of moral claims requires that agents affirm both if they choose to affirm those moral claims which have that meta-ethical theory as a correctness condition. If we can show that explanatory Moral Realism is a correctness condition of all moral claims, we would be showing that one had to affirm explanatory Moral Realism if one wished to consistently affirm any moral claims at all. Moreover, we would also be showing that a

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<sup>153</sup> This seems to be a psychological feature of human beings who come to know they are affirming contradictory propositions.

moral claim can't function as a moral claim unless explanatory Moral Realism were one of its correctness conditions.

As we noted earlier, for my version of AME to work, the state of affairs entailed by the correctness conditions of moral claims must be incompatible with any anti-realist explanation of that state of affairs. The state of affairs has to be such that describing it in an anti-realist fashion would be tantamount to undermining the state of affairs described by the moral claim. This means the correctness conditions must entail a state of affairs that is irreducibly moral. This is because an irreducibly moral state of affairs cannot be explained in a way where its irreducible morality is either reduced to or summarized as something which is not irreducibly moral. All forms of Moral Anti-Realism give explanations of moral claims that are not irreducibly moral. Whether the anti-realist theory is an attempt to account for morality as an evolutionary adaptation, a coordination procedure for maximizing the self-interests of agents, or the expression of psychological attitudes, all forms of anti-realism aim to give an account of morality in terms of some state of affairs which can be understood without understanding the description of a moral state of affairs. What differentiates more traditional forms of anti-realism (Ayer's noncognitivism<sup>154</sup> for instance) from more contemporary varieties (Blackburn's expressivism<sup>155</sup>, for instance) is that the explanations that are not irreducibly moral are only 2<sup>nd</sup> order for the latter. In the early versions of anti-realism, any aspect of moral discourse that could not be explained using a non-moral explanans was simply denied. The consequence of this was that any explanation of morality that had a plausibly objectivist interpretation at the 1<sup>st</sup> order was simply denied. This is why, for example, these early versions of Moral Anti-Realism denied that the correctness of moral claims had some sort of mind-independence that was reflected in the rules of moral discourse.

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<sup>154</sup> See AYER, A.J. *Language, Truth, and Logic*. London: Gollancz, 1936.

<sup>155</sup> See BLACKBURN, Simon. *Essays in Quasi Realism*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993

Hence, these early versions (particularly Ayer's noncognitivism<sup>156</sup>) were seen as revisionist because they rejected rules of ordinary moral discourse in order to adequately explain that discourse. The more contemporary forms of anti-realism have the ability to give a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation of moral discourse which is not irreducibly moral while simultaneously accommodating all the rules of moral discourse.<sup>157</sup>

Blackburn, for instance, is willing to countenance the fact that in moral discourse, we say that a moral claim's being correct is such that its correctness is not contingent on any agent judgments. So far, this makes it sound as though Blackburn could be a moral realist. However, where Blackburn departs from all forms of Moral Realism is in his assertion that the view that a claim's correctness is not contingent on agent judgments is itself a higher order desire that regulates other desires.<sup>158</sup> Such a desire expresses a moral commitment to the correctness of the claim not being contingent on agent judgments. However, this desire has an explanation that does not describe any moral state of affairs. This is because desire regulation is an activity that may or may not have a positive moral status. Nonetheless, regardless of its moral status, the activity can be completely accounted for using purely descriptive language. One can understand the regulation of such desires without understanding the content of any moral claim. Thus, Blackburn's explanation is not irreducibly moral. This illustrates something important for my purposes. A correctness condition of moral claims which is incompatible with this kind of anti-realism can't just imply that the correctness of moral claims holds independently of agent judgments. Rather, it has to claim that the correctness of moral claims holds independently of agent judgments *and* that this judgment independence condition cannot have a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation which is not irreducibly moral. If it is possible that agent judgment independence can be given a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation which

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<sup>156</sup> It is not part of Ayer's theory to accommodate in any way the part of moral practice where one says that a moral claim is correct in a manner that is mind-independent.

<sup>157</sup> For an in-depth treatment of this situation in the anti-realist camps, see Dreier (2004).

<sup>158</sup> See Blackburn (1992).

reduces or summarizes it as something which is not irreducibly moral, we haven't blocked all anti-realist explanations.

This is an important point because merely giving a moral realist account of moral claims does not block the anti-realist from giving a higher order anti-realist explanation of the moral realist explanation. An anti-realist can almost always add a higher order anti-realist explanation to any moral realist account. This is why it so difficult to show that some aspect of moral practice can only be explained by Moral Realism. To give an example, suppose as a naturalist moral realist, I make the claim that goodness is reducible to states of affairs that have the highest overall aggregate of pleasure over pain. An anti-realist can add a higher order explanation of my claim where he can say, "and this is true within the practice of morality whose primary function is to coordinate attitudes." In the case of a synthetic naturalist who denies that moral claims are reducible to descriptive states of affairs, the anti-realist can also attach a higher order anti-realist explanation. He can say "from within the practice of morality, moral claims cannot be reduced to descriptive states of affairs. However, the function of this practice is merely to coordinate attitudes."

Even non-naturalistic varieties of Moral Realism can be vulnerable to this strategy. Let's say a non-naturalist along Moorean lines states that moral claims refer to all actions that manifest the property of goodness. Let's assume that goodness, on this account, is a simple, indefinable, non-natural property. The anti-realist can step in and say, "From within the 1<sup>st</sup> order practice of morality, goodness is a simple, indefinable, non-natural property that actions can manifest. From the perspective of 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims, a simple, indefinable, non-natural property can't exist. However, this just shows that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims can be made true by something which does not exist." Here, our hypothetical anti-realist is giving a 2<sup>nd</sup> order account of a version of non-naturalistic Moral Realism that saves the first order component of the non-naturalism. In other words, it saves the view that actions can manifest goodness where goodness is a simple, indefinable, non-natural property. It is a thoroughly anti-realist account since it asserts

that the property of goodness does not exist. Most importantly, it attempts to preserve the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice the non-naturalism describes while dispensing with the non-naturalism.

Given that all these versions of Moral Realism can be given anti-realist interpretations, the situation looks as though it is a battle of explanations. For most versions of Moral Realism, the anti-realist can give a 2<sup>nd</sup> order interpretation of the content of what the Moral Realism affirms. The anti-realist can then proclaim that his explanation is superior because it preserves the characterization of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice present in the realist explanations. At the same time, it can dispense with the ontological, epistemological, or psychological commitments of the various Moral Realisms. It looks difficult for realism to stand a chance in this explanatory battle. The commitments of moral practice, even if they imply Moral Realism, don't yet seem to imply the falsity of Moral Anti-Realism.

In my version of AME, it won't be enough merely for the anti-realist to preserve the content of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice while giving a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation of that practice which is not irreducibly moral. My explanatory Moral Realism will demand a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation which is irreducibly moral in order for the set of all correct moral claims not to be denied. This irreducibly moral meta-ethical explanation will be both a 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation and a final explanation. It will not be capable of being given an anti-realist interpretation without its content being fundamentally changed. Hence, the anti-realist will either have to affirm explanatory Moral Realism or deny the set of all correct moral claims.

### **3.5 THE DEFENSE OF MY VERSION OF AME**

As noted earlier, in my version of AME, the correctness conditions of moral claims are as follows:

(D) For any moral claim X, X is not determined by any agent's judgments about X

(E) For any moral claim X, the only appropriate explanation of X is one that is irreducibly moral.

and

(F) For any moral claim X, the only appropriate irreducibly moral explanation of X is an irreducibly moral explanation that is a final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation.

(D) commits moral discourse to agent judgment independence conditions. Thus, (D) is a correctness condition that gives our Moral Realism the judgment independence element it needs. (E) commits moral claims to irreducibly moral explanations of the correctness of moral claims. And (F) commits moral claims to irreducibly moral explanations of the correctness of moral claims that are final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of the correctness of moral claims. Here, we can see that the implication of Moral Realism from (D)-(F) is the result of (D)-(F) implying that the only appropriate explanation for the correctness of moral claims is a final, irreducibly moral explanation. This illustrates the aspect of explanatory Moral Realism which is fundamentally incompatible with Moral Anti-Realism: The insistence that there are explanations for moral claims from within morality and that only these explanations are appropriate for explaining moral claims at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order level.

Much of the resistance to Moral Realism is grounded in the notion that using moral explanations is implausible as a method of explanation for moral claims. In fact, moral realists themselves are sympathetic to this antagonism towards Moral Realism.<sup>159</sup> This is why realists have been attempting to combine Moral Realism with an explanation of morality that reduces or summarizes moral claims as combinations of natural properties.<sup>160</sup> What is overlooked is the possibility that morality itself is committed to the explanation of moral claims being irreducibly moral. While the contemporary meta-ethicist may find irreducibly moral explanations implausible as methods of explanation,

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<sup>159</sup> There is the most plausible explanation of why the majority of moral realists are naturalistic moral realists.

<sup>160</sup> This is the view of Blackburn and most contemporary anti-realists. For the most famous enunciation of this view, see BLACKBURN, Simon. How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 1988, vol. 12, pp. 361-375.



morality itself may be committed to what the meta-ethicist finds implausible. If the arguments I present for (D)-(F) are correct, this is indeed the case.

Before we can defend claim (D), we need to, in a more detailed fashion, clarify what is meant by (D). (D) states that for any moral claim X, the correctness of X is not determined by any agent's judgments about X. When I say that X is not 'determined' by any agent's judgments about X, I mean that the agent judgments by themselves cannot imply that X is correct. By 'agent judgments', I mean beliefs or desires on the part of an agent that X is correct or incorrect. When I say that the correctness of X is not determined by such judgments, I mean that agent judgments on their own do not possess the moral justification to make X correct. This claim, however, is not a claim that denies that agent judgments about X can ever be reasons to believe that X is correct. It is, however, a claim that asserts that in order for such judgments to constitute reasons to believe X, the judgments have to be grounded in some kind of moral justification. Moreover, this moral justification must be distinct from other agent judgments. The only way we can cash out this justification is to talk about the things which give us reasons to act as having a positive or negative moral status. This moral status is what determines that such things are reasons for or against certain courses of action.

If we deny (D), moral claims cease to be correct in the manner that allows them to function adequately within moral practice. To see how this works, let us take an uncontroversial moral claim and conjoin it with the denial of (D). Take the claim, "It is wrong to torture babies for fun." Normally we think of the claim "It is wrong to torture babies for fun" as justifying the decision to not satisfy the potential desire to torture babies. This is not the case if we deny (D). If we deny that moral claims are not determined by any agent judgments, this leaves open the possibility that the claim "It is wrong to torture babies for fun" could be determined by agent judgments. If this claim could in fact be determined by agent judgments, this means an agent judgment could change this claim's correctness. If the wrongness of torturing babies is grounded in an agent (or set of agent's) judgments about torturing babies for fun, this means beliefs,

desires, or both determine the correctness of the claim. This implies that the correctness of the claim is a consequence of agent judgments being what they are and what they could be. Moreover, if the agent judgments were different from what they are, the correctness of the claim would also be different.

To illustrate matters, let's imagine that what determines the correctness of the claim "It is wrong to torture babies for fun" is an agent's desire not to cause pain to babies. Let's then assume that the agent undergoes a psychological change whereby he suddenly discovers that administering pain to babies is incredibly fun. Let's assume that the joy of administering pain is so great that the agent would prefer to experience this joy with all the possible social consequences which would result of his decision to torture a baby. If we deny (D), there seems no reason to think that the previous desire not to torture babies can override the new desire's disabling of the correctness of the claim, "It is wrong to torture babies for fun." In this scenario, the correctness of the claim is disabled precisely because it was dependent on a desire to do what the claim prescribed. In the presence of an alternate desire that induces an agent to do the opposite of what the claim prescribes, it seems the correctness of the claim has no grounds to sustain itself.

A parallel situation would happen if it was an agent's belief in the correctness of the claim, "Torturing babies for fun is wrong" which determined its correctness. In that case, we can imagine the agent undergoing a psychological change whereby he suddenly believes that the claim is false. Is there anything about his prior belief that can stabilize the correctness of this moral claim despite the change in belief? It seems not. Like the case where we imagine that an agent desire is what determines the correctness of a moral claim, here the correctness of the claim seems to be contingent on what psychological state the agent actually has. If the agent believes the claim is true, this can make it true. If he believes it is false, this can make it false. The same holds true if we imagine the correctness of the claim is grounded in the judgments of society rather than an individual agent. In this case, the correctness of the claim is still grounded in the psychological states of the agents whose judgments determine the correctness of this claim. Thus, if

society changes its judgments about the wrongness of torturing babies for fun, it can change whether or not the claim “It is wrong to torture babies for fun” is correct.

The agent judgment independence of moral claims described in (D) is what gives the correctness of moral claims stability. By stability, I mean the ability of the correctness of a moral claim to refrain from changing in the face of efforts by agents to make the claim incorrect by changing their judgments about the claim. If any moral claim can be made incorrect because of an agent’s judgments, that claim’s correctness is never stable. If the claim’s correctness is never stable, this means there are no reasons why an agent’s judgments about a moral claim should be one way rather than another. Any correct moral reason why an agent should endorse a moral claim can always be changed by the agent’s choice to form a different moral judgment. If this is the case, a moral claim can never be correct in the stable way that moral claims are correct. Thus, in order to sustain this stability of the correctness of moral claims, we must affirm (D): that the correctness is not determined by agent judgments.

At this point, it might appear as though (D) is begging the question against ideal observer theory. An ideal observer theory could challenge (D) on the grounds that the claim “x is wrong” is not a claim about what an agent desires but is a claim about what an agent would desire if the agent was rational and fully informed. Here we could respond that (D) does not beg the question against ideal observer theory but rather constitutes a difficulty for ideal observer theory. This difficulty is that it seems as though a fully rational and informed agent could have wildly unstable moral sentiments. If an agent being rational and fully informed means that he knows what combinations of natural facts constitute moral facts, then the agent is just a fully informed, fully rational moral realist. If the agent is not a moral realist but is fully rational and informed, it does not seem as though any piece of non-moral information could constrain the direction his moral sentiments go in. If the agent were to have sentiments that changed dramatically, then he could change moral claims as the negation of (D) shows. There does not seem to be anything in the concept of being fully informed and rational which involves having stable

moral sentiments. The burden of proof here is on the ideal observer theorist to show otherwise.

Claim (E) is a correctness condition of moral claims that deals with explanations for moral claims. Specifically, it states that for any moral claim X, the only appropriate explanation of X is one that is irreducibly moral. As we noted earlier, an irreducibly moral explanation is one that is an explanation of a moral state of affairs. Such an explanation is necessary to ground the correctness of a moral claim because moral claims have a moral necessity, which only an irreducibly moral explanation can describe. What this moral necessity amounts to is a set of counterfactuals about the moral claims in the world, given certain possible states of affairs. The fact that certain facts about the world obtain implies that there are moral claims about those facts. In any morally possible world, if the same set of natural facts were to obtain, you would get the same set of correct moral claims.

It should be noted that I am not advocating a particular, fleshed out theory of supervenience in my defense of (E). All I am making is the claim that any theory of supervenience, insofar as it does not undermine moral claims, must satisfy (E). (E) does not require any supplementary views about supervenience in either moral or non-moral domains. Within meta-ethics, (E) is compatible with a wide variety of supervenience theories with a moral realist cast. For instance, it is compatible with David Brink's synthetic naturalism whereby moral properties are discovered a posteriori as being identical with natural properties despite the fact that moral properties cannot be conceptually reduced to such natural properties.<sup>161</sup> It is also compatible with Frank Jackson's moral functionalism whereby moral properties are reducible to the various combinations of natural properties that instantiate them.<sup>162</sup> It is even compatible with Russ Shafer Landau's non-naturalist supervenience theory that moral properties are constituted

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<sup>161</sup> See Brink (1989).

<sup>162</sup> See Jackson (1998).

by natural properties even though they are not identical with such natural properties.<sup>163</sup>

There is no intuitive or philosophical problem with the idea that explanations of moral claims must be irreducibly moral. We need the explanation, as noted above, to ground the correctness of moral claims because moral claims have a moral necessity that only an irreducibly moral explanation can describe. The moral necessity is modal in the sense that it is a set of counterfactuals about what moral claims can be correct, given possible combinations of natural states of affairs. Moreover, the moral necessity is distinct from other kinds of necessity. It is a global rather than a local necessity. What this means is that moral necessity is a necessity of the sort that presupposes that for any two worlds  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ , if  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  are base indiscernible, they are supervenient-indiscernible. In other words, if  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  contain the same base properties (which in this case are the physical states that constitute moral situations), both worlds contain the same moral properties. This is distinct from local necessity, which presupposes that for any two objects  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  are base indiscernible, they are supervenient-indiscernible.<sup>164</sup>

The reason moral supervenience is global rather than local is that moral situations are not mere objects which can be isolated from the worlds in which they occur. Rather, moral situations are ways that the world is at a given time rather than an object or collection of objects in the world. Of course, moral situations can involve collections of objects. However, it is not the objects themselves but rather the relationship of the objects and the world that constitute moral situations. The moral relationship of an object to the world is a property of the world because the world, rather than the object, is what constitutes a moral situation. The existence of an atomic bomb is a moral situation in our world precisely because our world has causal laws that allow atomic bombs to detonate in explosions that cause massive amounts of destruction and suffering. In a world with different causal laws, the existence of an atomic bomb could create an entirely different

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<sup>163</sup> See SHAFER-LANDAU, Russ, *Moral Realism: A defence*. Oxford; Clarendon Press, 2006. pp. 55-79

<sup>164</sup> See Blackburn (1984), chapter 6.

moral situation than the one it creates in this world. Hence, the moral situation created by the object that is the atomic bomb is dependent on properties of the world that the atomic bomb exists in. The moral situation created in a world with an atomic bomb is not dependent on whether the atomic bomb merely exists in that world. Rather, it is dependent on the relationship of the atomic bomb to the causal laws of that world. Hence, moral supervenience is global rather than local.

We can distinguish between strong and weak forms of moral supervenience. A weak supervenience relation presupposes that for any world  $w$ , for any two situations  $x$  and  $y$  in  $w$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  are base-indiscernible, they are supervenient-indiscernible. Applied to moral supervenience, weak supervenience entails that for any world  $w$ , for any two moral situations  $x$  and  $y$  in  $w$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  are base-indiscernible, they are supervenient-indiscernible. For example, if for any two moral situations  $x$  and  $y$  in a world like ours, both situations involve the base properties of unwarranted cruelty to children, both  $x$  and  $y$  possess the property of wrongness. By contrast, a strong supervenience relation states that for any worlds  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ , for any two situations  $x$  in  $w_1$  and  $y$  in  $w_2$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  are base-indiscernible, they are supervenient-indiscernible. Applied to moral supervenience, strong supervenience entails that for any two moral situations  $x$  in  $w_1$  and  $y$  in  $w_2$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  are base-indiscernible, they are supervenient-indiscernible. To give an example, if for any two moral situations  $x$  in  $w_1$  and  $y$  in  $w_2$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  both involve base properties of unwarranted cruelty to children, both  $x$  and  $y$  possess the property of wrongness.

This kind of strong supervenience is inapplicable to moral necessity, because it is not obvious that the base properties of unwarranted cruelty to children would instantiate the properties of wrongness in a world that was vastly different to ours. We can imagine a world in which children are identical to children in our world in every way except that children in this world can only internalize moral sentiments on the proviso that they are exposed to high amounts of adult cruelty. We can also imagine that, in this world, the cruelty has no negative effects on the psychological well being of the children. Moreover, it is the lack of cruelty that we can imagine producing negative effects on the

psychological well being of the children. Because there is no reason to think such a world is, in any way, impossible, strong supervenience is too strong a constraint on moral necessity. Weak supervenience seems a better description of moral necessity, since such supervenience is constrained by the unique properties of our world. Weak supervenience can accommodate the fact that the universal psychological damage to children who are exposed to adult cruelty instantiates the correct universalizable moral claim that unwarranted cruelty to children is wrong. At the same time, weak supervenience can accommodate the possibility that in worlds with different causal, metaphysical, or psychological properties, it may not be correct to say that unwarranted cruelty to children is wrong. Hence, when we speak of moral necessity, we must remember we are referring to a necessity of weak, global supervenience.

It should be noted that the weak, global supervenience of moral necessity is distinct from other forms of necessity. Moral necessity is not identical with metaphysical necessity even though moral necessity is a kind of metaphysical necessity. Moral necessity can exist independently of whether we postulate other metaphysical necessities. Also, other metaphysical necessities that are not moral can exist independently of moral necessity. What moral necessity assertions demand is that insofar as we assert moral necessity, we are asserting one kind of metaphysical necessity. This means that if there is such a thing as moral necessity, there is at least one kind of metaphysical necessity. Moreover, we can distinguish between logically possible and morally possible worlds. The set of all logically possible worlds could include a world where there is no moral normativity. The set of all morally possible worlds cannot.

To give an example, if the physical facts about the world are the way they were in 1945, it follows that it is morally permissible to kill Adolf Hitler. This is true even in a possible world. The facts about the world entail that necessarily, killing Hitler is morally permissible as long as those facts obtain. There is no morally possible world where the facts about the world are the way they were in 1945 and it is not morally permissible to kill Hitler. Of course, it is not necessarily morally permissible to kill Hitler in a world

where Hitler is a medic working to inoculate children in Africa from various diseases. This is because the kind of necessity that a moral claim has normally does not obtain independently of how the world is. But when a morally possible world contains a set of facts X and X entails moral claim Y, this entailment is necessary. No morally possible world can contain X without also being a world where Y obtains. Thus the correctness of a moral claim has a necessary relationship with the facts about the world that make the moral claim correct.

The reason why only irreducibly moral explanations can adequately describe this necessity is because the necessity is itself moral. To explain a moral necessity (in a way where the explanation is not a debunking explanation) is to affirm the moral necessity. Hence, only an irreducibly moral explanation can affirm the moral necessity since only irreducibly moral explanations can morally affirm anything. Also, one cannot substitute anything but moral necessity when explaining exactly what the necessity of a moral claim is. Logical or non-normative metaphysical necessity won't do the job. This is because it is logically possible that all the facts about the world might be as they were in 1945 without those facts entailing the moral permissibility of killing Hitler. All we have to do in order to imagine this is imagine a world where an extreme version of Error Theory is true. The same goes for metaphysical necessity laws that are not normative. One can imagine a world that is the closest possible world to ours that Error Theory holds in. We can imagine this to be a world in which all the non-normative metaphysical laws are exactly the same as they are in our world. We can also imagine this as a world where all the physical facts are the same as they were in 1945 and yet there is no entailment from the physical facts to the claim that it is morally permissible to kill Hitler. Only a morally possible world in which moral claims have a moral necessity will be a world where it is morally permissible to kill Hitler, given the physical facts of 1945. In any world that is physically identical to ours where there is no moral necessity, the claim that it is morally permissible to kill Hitler will simply be false.

Also, a world which had moral necessity but which has different physical facts



could be a world in which it was not permissible to kill Hitler in 1945. To give an example, let's start by assuming that the claim, "It was morally permissible in 1945 to kill Hitler" is true. In order to explain this claim, we will describe the facts about the world that make it correct. We will also have to explain something about what it is about the features of the world that make this moral claim correct. In giving our explanation, we might first talk about how Hitler was a totalitarian dictator who violated international law, terrorized his own country, and killed 6 million Jews. Then, we might explain why it is the case that killing becomes morally permissible in the face of a man like Hitler. So far, so good. However, what if we have a very different set of hypothetical facts about the world that make this claim correct? Let's suppose that there is an international conspiracy by the Jews to dominate all the governments of the world. Moreover, let's add in additional details about their plans to massacre millions of Germans as well as some facts about the Jewish cultural tradition of torturing non-Jewish children every Sunday. Finally, let's also claim that Adolf Hitler was the only leader capable of stopping the Jewish plan of world domination. As is obvious, these hypothetical facts about the world undermine the claim that it is morally permissible to kill Hitler. The reason is that if these hypothetical facts turned out to be correct facts, it would be false that it is morally permissible to kill Hitler. The correctness of the claim "It is permissible to kill Hitler" is conditional on certain correct facts being a certain way. If, in the explanation of the correctness of our moral claim, we deny relevant facts of our world that are relevant to the correctness of that moral claim, we are in effect denying the correctness of that moral claim.

We also cannot on the one hand say that there is a set of facts about the world X that entails moral claim Y but simultaneously deny that the relationship between X and Y is one of necessity. Similarly, we can't say that X entails Y necessarily but deny that the necessary entailment is one that is moral. If we deny that the relationship between X and Y is necessary, we are indirectly asserting that the relationship between X and Y is contingent. This means that if the facts of the world are as they were in 1945, this would

not necessarily entail the permissibility of killing Hitler. Moreover, given the lack of necessary entailment between the facts of the world and the permissibility of killing Hitler, it is hard to make sense of the notion that this moral claim is correct. If it is only contingently true that the facts about the world entail the permissibility of killing Hitler, there could be a possible world where the facts are as they were in 1945 and it is not the case that it is morally permissible to kill Hitler. If there is a possible world where the facts were as they were in 1945 and it is not morally permissible to kill Hitler, this means that whatever makes this moral claim contingently true in the actual world has nothing to do with any facts of the actual world. After all, if we can get a world with all the same facts where it is not permissible to kill Hitler, it does not seem to be the facts about the world that make the claim correct. In this scenario, the facts in that world and the moral status of the facts in that world don't seem to have anything to do with one and other.

This is a point that Russ Shafer-Landau elaborates in the supervenience chapter of his book *Moral Realism: A Defense* (2003).<sup>165</sup> He states that if the moral fails to supervene on the non-moral, the non-moral world does not control the moral world.<sup>166</sup> The basic idea is that if the non-moral world does not control the moral world, the moral world becomes out of control. What Shafer Landau does not point out is the specific way that the moral world becomes out of control. If the moral does not supervene on the natural, there is an epistemological gap between moral agents and moral facts. This is because, in our current world, the physical facts fix the moral facts. Thus, to get a reading of what some moral facts are in a given situation, we consult the physical facts that constitute that situation. If supervenience did not hold, we would not be able to do this.

Moreover, in a world where supervenience did not hold, no moral claims could be identified as being correct. This is because, in such a world, there would never be any evidence of the correctness of moral claims. We could never, in this world, point to a set of physical facts which had a moral status and infer from that status a moral claim. The

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<sup>165</sup>See Shafer-Landau (2006), Chapter 4.

<sup>166</sup>He doesn't say what consequences of this are though.

hallmark of the moral status of a physical state of affairs is that the state of affairs necessarily has that status. If we can imagine that same state of affairs without the moral status attached to it, this undermines the idea that the state of affairs has this moral status. In the absence of such moral status, we cannot derive any moral claims. Hence, if we deny that the claim “It is morally permissible to kill Hitler” follows necessarily from the moral status of certain facts about the world, we are denying that the Hitler claim is correct. Thus, to give an explanation of the claim “It is morally permissible to kill Hitler” that denies the moral necessity of this claim is to give an explanation of the claim that stops the explanation from describing a moral state of affairs. If the explanation does not describe a moral state of affairs, it is not an irreducibly moral explanation. If it is not an irreducibly moral explanation, (E) is violated. When (E) is violated, this undermines the correctness of the Hitler claim.

A further important point is we undermine the correctness of moral claims even if we admit of a necessity but deny its moral status. If I give an explanation of why it is the case that “It is morally permissible to kill Hitler” and I deny that the relationship between the facts about the world and the correctness of the claim is moral, I undermine the correctness of the Hitler claim. This is because there is simply no other relationship between the facts of the world and the correctness of this claim that could create an entailment between the facts and the correctness of this claim. Logical necessity can't create an entailment between facts of the world and a moral claim. After all, we can imagine a world that is logically possible where the facts about Hitler are as they were in 1945 and yet it is not the case that it is morally permissible to kill Hitler. This is just a world where a view like Error Theory or moral scepticism happens to be true. In such a world, there is an absence of the moral necessity required to allow facts about the world to entail moral claims.

The same goes for non-moral metaphysical necessity. We can imagine a world where all the non-moral metaphysical laws are the same as they are in this world. We can also imagine all the physical facts in this world being identical to our world. And yet we

can imagine an absence of moral metaphysical laws in this world. Of course, there may be some ethical naturalists who will insist that moral laws are identical with natural laws such that if we imagine a world with all the same natural laws as ours, necessarily, this world will contain the same moral laws. The difficulty is this response begs the question against the plausible assumption that we can imagine a world in which this metaphysical identity does not hold. It does not seem terribly difficult to imagine since many error theorists not only imagine but believe we are in such a world.

Because such an identity relation is metaphysical, we can imagine a world with different metaphysical laws. In this hypothetical world, the physical features of the world the naturalist moral realist presumes are identical with the moral features are not identical. However, for all intents and purposes, the physical states of affairs would be the same as they are in this world. In such a world, only a normative metaphysical law could instantiate an identity between a physical state of affairs and a moral state of affairs. An ordinary metaphysical law would fail to instantiate this identity. Hence, only an explicitly moral necessity between natural facts and moral claims can allow a moral claim to follow from a physical state of affairs. There is no logical entailment between physical facts and moral claims. There is no metaphysical entailment that is not an explicitly moral metaphysical entailment. Hence, any explanation of a moral claim that does not either presuppose or acknowledge the necessarily moral relationship between the facts that entail the moral claim and the correctness of the moral claim undermines that moral claim. This is because the relationship between the natural facts that entail a moral claim and the correctness of that moral claim must be both necessary and normative. Any relationship that lacks either this necessity or moral status will fail to instantiate an entailment between any set of natural facts and any moral claim. Hence, we can see that claim (E) is a correctness condition of moral claims.

Claim (F) is a correctness condition of moral claims that states that for any moral claim X, an irreducibly moral explanation of X must be a final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation of X. A final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation of a moral claim is an explanation that is not open to a higher

order explanation that significantly re-characterizes the irreducibly moral status of the final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation. Final 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations are not only attempts at giving illuminating explanations of 1<sup>st</sup> order phenomena. Rather, they are necessary conditions that illuminating 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of 1<sup>st</sup> order phenomena must satisfy. If one leaves out such necessary conditions in one's 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation, one is no longer correctly identifying the 1<sup>st</sup> order phenomena one is trying to explain.

To see how this works, let's imagine that the correct explanation of the claim "It is morally permissible to kill Hitler" is that the facts of the world in 1945 entailed (in a manner that was necessarily moral) that the Hitler claim is correct. Now let's add a higher order anti-realist explanation on top of this initial explanation which re-characterizes the initial explanation. The higher order anti-realist explanation will consist of the claim that the moral necessity is a conceptual construction borne out of a relation between attitudes that holds when agents try and solve coordination problems. The problem here is not that the higher order explanation says that the moral relation between facts and moral claims is a conceptual construction borne out of a relationship between attitudes. The problem is that the explanation says that the moral relationship is *just* a conceptual construction borne out of a relation between attitudes. The problem here is that if we interpret "*just a conceptual construction borne out of a relation between attitudes*" as an explanation of moral necessity, we wind up contradicting conditions of moral necessity that allow it to entail moral states of affairs. Such conditions are properties of moral necessity that a conceptual construction borne out of a relation between attitudes lacks. A relation between attitudes, we must remember, is a contingent state of affairs. Moral necessity is obviously not contingent. Moreover, if the relation of attitudes has a moral status it does so in virtue of satisfying some independent moral standard. Such is not the case with a construction borne out of the relation of attitudes. A relationship of moral necessity, by its very nature, possesses its moral status necessarily.

It is also important to note that moral necessity is a metaphysical rather than conceptual necessity. Moral necessity is metaphysical because an explanation of moral

necessity requires the use of a moral explanans that cannot be reduced or summarized to something which is non-moral. When this kind of explanation is given, a moral situation is being described in a manner that amounts to a moral assertion. This kind of assertion is metaphysical precisely because the idea that irreducibly moral explanations can be used to describe the world correctly is metaphysical. It is metaphysical because such an explanation commits its proponents to the view that there is a way that the world ought to be. Moreover, in this context, the way the world ought to be cannot be reduced to or summarized as something that is non-moral. If there is a way the world ought to be that cannot be reduced to or summarized as something that is non-moral, the way the world ought to be can only be explained as a property of the world.

If it were a property of humans, one could summarize the way the world ought to be as a psychological disposition, evolutionary adaptation, or coordination procedure. Such explanations would be reducing or summarizing the way the world ought to be to something that is non-moral. On the other hand, if the way the world ought to be was not a property of the world, it is doubtful that humans could understand the idea. Even if we imagine the way the world ought to be as a non-physical moral property that somehow causally interacts with the world, it looks like the causal interaction is itself a property of the world. If the world contains causal interactions with non-physical moral properties, this seems to be a moral property of the world. After all, the world, on this scenario, is facilitating moral knowledge via causal interaction with non-physical moral properties. This would give the world a positive moral status, insofar as it facilitated this causal interaction. Such a positive moral status seems incapable of being described as anything other than a moral property of the world. Hence, if there is a way the world ought to be, this can only be understood as a moral property of the world. Because this moral property is a property of the world, the world contains moral properties. If not reduced or summarized to something that is not moral, the assertion that the world contains moral properties is a metaphysical assertion. Because this is a commitment of moral necessity, a condition of asserting moral necessity is that one assert something which is metaphysical.

If we contradict the conditions of asserting moral necessity in an explanation of why a moral claim is correct, this means we are undermining that moral necessity. We are undermining it because we are subtracting properties from the moral necessity that enable it to be what entails a moral claim. Without these properties, explanations of moral necessity will cease to describe genuinely moral states of affairs. Hence, the explanations will cease to be irreducibly moral and wind up undermining the correctness of the moral claim being advanced. If we subtract the necessity from moral necessity, we lose the ability of that moral normativity to ground the correctness of a moral claim. We have seen that in the argument for correctness condition (E). Likewise, if we subtract the moral normativity from moral necessity, we lose the ability of the moral necessity to entail moral judgments. And without the ability to entail moral judgments, the moral necessity cannot entail correct moral claims from facts about the world.

This is not just for 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of moral claims which attempt to re-characterize moral necessity as a relation of attitudes. This is true of any 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation that attempts to re-characterize moral necessity as something that lacks the properties of moral necessity. The same happens if our 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanation re-characterizes moral necessity to what maximizes adaptation value on an evolutionary account. This is because the maximizing of adaptation value is an empirical, contingent state of affairs. Of course, the maximizing of adaptation value may exemplify goodness. However, such maximization is not necessarily good. This is why we can imagine behaviors that maximize adaptation value which are grossly unethical. The same situation arises if we try and re-characterize moral necessity as a coordination procedure where agents try and satisfy their collective self-interests. Again, whether or not agents satisfy their collective self-interests is a contingent state of affairs. Moreover, there is nothing about this process that is necessarily moral. We can imagine the coordination procedures that satisfy collective self-interests where those self-interests don't correspond with morality. Insofar as any coordination procedure, maximization of adaptive value, or relation of attitudes exemplifies goodness; it exemplifies goodness in a manner that is

contingent. This is why to describe moral necessity as being reducible to any of these states of affairs undermines the ability of moral necessity to entail moral claims from natural facts. If the moral necessities can't entail moral claims from natural facts, anti-realist descriptions of the moral necessities are not describing genuinely moral states of affairs. Hence, anti-realist explanations of moral claims are not irreducibly moral and so undermine the correctness of the moral claims they explain.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

We can now see that a version of Moral Realism is implied by the correctness conditions of moral claims. This means that AME can be refashioned so as to show that moral practice presupposes explanatory Moral Realism. The argument given above is an argument for the conclusion that correctness conditions of moral claims imply explanatory Moral Realism. If the above argument is sound, we have been given good evidence for the moral commitment to:

(C): For any meta-ethical theory that is true, that theory must either be an explanatory moral realist theory or a theory that is compatible with explanatory Moral Realism.

Moreover, all meta-ethical theories that deny (C) warrant moral criticism. As a moral commitment, (C) may constitute a presumptive argument for Moral Realism if one thinks the premises I listed entail the conclusion that Moral Realism is true. A much better strategy would be to provide an additional premise which shows that (D), (E), and (F) constitute presumptive evidence in favor of Moral Realism. As noted earlier, my refashioned version of AME does not do this. Some readers may think it is odd to call it a version of AME if it is not designed to show that there is presumptive evidence for Moral Realism.

One reason for referring to it as a rehabilitated version of AME is that it *could* be interpreted as a traditional version of AME. In other words, there is nothing in the argument, as it stands, that prohibits it from being interpreted as a traditional version of AME. One could look at the argument and judge that the argument constitutes presumptive evidence that Moral Realism is true. Although I do not make this judgment, I



do not rule out the judgment either. Another reason I refer to it as a rehabilitated version of AME is it is an argument constructed out of the same basic strategy as the classic version of AME. It uses aspects of moral experience (defined as both phenomenology and linguistic practice) to show that we are committed (prior to theorizing) to a particular meta-ethics. Yet another reason is it shows one of the things that any sound version of AME must show: namely that we are, in fact, committed to Moral Realism in virtue of our moral experience (defined as both phenomenology and linguistic practice). My final reason for referring to it as a refashioned version of AME is it is an argument created out of failed versions of previous versions of AME.

If my version of AME is sound, the anti-realist will no longer be able to use the strategy of giving explanatory arguments to demonstrate that the correctness of moral claims need not presuppose Moral Realism. This strategy is only a viable option for the anti-realist if there is not already evidence in favor of moral practice committing practitioners of moral discourse to Moral Realism. If such evidence does show that moral discourse is committed to Moral Realism, any challenge to the commitment to Moral Realism can't simply claim that the commitment constitutes an unattractive explanation. This is because evidence, by its very nature, is not the sort of thing that can be explained away by the attractiveness of denying the evidence. Rather, the denial of the evidence must be argued for on grounds other than its explanatory attractiveness.

#### **4. BLACKBURN'S OBJECTIONS**

##### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I will analyse the meta-ethical views of Simon Blackburn, the most famous contemporary proponent of the idea that normative ethics does not commit moral agents to particular meta-ethical positions. As noted earlier, the reason I am choosing this group of considerations (apart from their notoriety) is that if they are sound, the arguments in chapter one and two cease to work. Because Quasi-Realism depends on the claim that moral practice cannot commit us to moral claims, arguments in favor of Quasi-Realism are arguments in favor of the claim that moral practice cannot commit us

to moral claims.

For Blackburn, the idea that normative ethics does not commit moral agents to particular meta-ethical positions is an outcome of his own meta-ethics. Blackburn holds a combination of 2<sup>nd</sup> order anti-realism and 1<sup>st</sup> order moral objectivism he refers to as Quasi-Realism. Quasi-Realism is an attempt to account for the practices characteristic of moralizing while simultaneously ridding those practices of any moral realist commitments.<sup>167</sup> This is why the quasi-realist account of morality involves an interpretation of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims that interprets them as being metaphysically neutral. If 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are understood as making no metaphysical (and thus no meta-ethical) claims, the quasi-realist can then give an anti-realist explanation of the practice of morality that is a variation of Humean projectivism.

Humean projectivism is the view that ethical judgments are the product of conative, not cognitive psychological processes.<sup>168</sup> Such conative psychological processes can be described as attitudes or dispositions. On projectivism, moral reasoning is not a cognitive psychological process whereby agents apprehend some mind independent feature of the world and then discover something about it through the use of reason. Rather, agents develop attitudes or dispositions towards features of the natural world and then reason about the interconnections between those attitudes or dispositions. These attitudes or dispositions are not themselves the products of those features of the world agents have attitudes or dispositions in relation to. Rather, the dispositions are the product of agents projecting their sentiments onto the world in a manner that, for the agent, suggests that it is the world rather than the projections that explains those sentiments.<sup>169</sup> Quasi-Realism is Simon Blackburn's attempt to combine Humean projectivism with an attempt at capturing all the important features of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse.

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<sup>167</sup> Blackburn explicitly states this in Blackburn (1992) pp. 1--22.

<sup>168</sup> For more elaborate explanations of the relationship between Quasi-Realism and Projectivism, see Blackburn (1984).

<sup>169</sup> This is one respect in which the Humean view seems to have much in common with Error Theory.

In this chapter, I will critique Blackburn's justification of Quasi-Realism on the grounds that it relies on the plausibility of assumptions that rival theories call into doubt. These assumptions include:

(G) Morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality.

(H) Morality is compatible with all possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate

(I) Philosophical Naturalism is true

and

(J) Quasi-Realism is true.

(G) is the claim that morality can only give us evidence of the truth or falsity of moral claims. If (G) is true, morality cannot give us evidence of the truth of any empirical, metaphysical, epistemological, or psychological claims. If (H) is true, morality is not undermined by any meta-ethical claims a meta-ethicist could make qua affirming a meta-ethical theory. Hence, if (H) is true, morality is not in any way dependent on such meta-ethical claims. (I) is the assertion that either metaphysical or methodological naturalism is true. (J) is self-explanatory.

I will argue that Blackburn must defend each of these assumptions in order to show that Quasi-Realism is a more attractive theory than its rivals. However, I will show that Blackburn merely relies on the plausibility of (G) through (J). This is inappropriate if Blackburn's goal is to show that Quasi-Realism is superior to other meta-ethics theories. This is because (G) through (J) are precisely what the other theories deny or can deny. To assert that any theory that denies (G) through (J) is implausible is to assert, rather than defend, the superiority of Quasi-Realism to its rivals.

In section one of this chapter, I will look at five considerations Blackburn gives in defense of Quasi-Realism. I will first look at his motivation to give an anti-realist

theory that avoids the stipulation that morality is in error. Then, I will look at Blackburn's attempt to show that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are meta-ethically neutral and that mind independence can be given an anti-realist account. I will then look at two arguments Blackburn gives against Moral Realism: the first will rely on the plausibility of motivational internalism while the second will deal with considerations from supervenience. Finally, I will look at the argument Blackburn gives that Quasi-Realism is an attractive theory because it satisfies the needs of those engaging in morality. I will show that, in all of these considerations Blackburn invokes to defend Quasi-Realism, Blackburn is relying on either (G), (H), (I), or (J). Moreover, I will argue that in order for any of these considerations to lend support to Quasi-Realism, (G), (H), (I), and (J) must be explicitly defended.

In section 2 of this chapter, I will show that Quasi-Realism does not support a defense of moral objectivism. This is because it is rational to be an agnostic about 1<sup>st</sup> order morality. Moreover, if one is an agnostic about 1<sup>st</sup> order morality, it is rational to require that 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims justify 1<sup>st</sup> order morality. This entails it is rational to require that 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims justify 1<sup>st</sup> order morality. Finally, I will argue that the only meta-ethical theories which offer 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims which could potentially justify 1<sup>st</sup> order morality are moral realist theories. This is because moral objectivism is not something that can be justified by observing the differences between the 1<sup>st</sup> order views of different moral agents. Moreover, anti-realist theories can't justify moral objectivism on the grounds that objectivism is in everyone's interests because of the variety of different interests human beings have. Also, anti-realist theories can't justify the claim that human beings have universal moral sentiments without criticizing the radically different ways in which human beings value their moral sentiments. The latter project, I will show, is infeasible, if one does not presuppose moral objectivism.

#### **4.2. MOTIVATIONS OF QUASI-REALISM**

Simon Blackburn's Quasi-Realism attempts a novel synthesis of three elements. On the one hand, the theory purports to be an anti-realist theory of ethics that accepts the

metaphysical conclusion of John Mackie's queerness argument.<sup>170</sup> On the other hand, the theory attempts to be a theory which is not revisionist. It wants to account for all the features of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse that constitute the phenomenon all theorists agree on when they talk about morality. Thirdly, Quasi-Realism is a variety of noncognitivism. It posits that moral judgments are the expression of non-truth apt attitudes rather than truth apt beliefs. One of the primary features of Quasi-Realism is it attempts to show, among other things, that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitments are meta-ethically neutral.

Simon Blackburn gives an interesting defense of the quasi-realist project of accounting for moral discourse in a manner that eliminates any possible meta-ethical commitments of that discourse. Blackburn frames his defense of this project as a response to John Mackie's Error Theory.<sup>171</sup> Here, Blackburn simultaneously supports Mackie's queerness argument while trying, much more so than Mackie, to distance himself from any revisionism of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. According to Mackie, the ordinary user of moral language is committed to the notion that there are objective moral values which presents the user with an absolute call to action which is not contingent on any preference or policy choice of human agents.<sup>172</sup> Mackie believes that ordinary users of moral language are committed to such objective values and that they are part of the meaning of moral terms. However, the crux of Mackie's Error Theory is that there are no objective values. Hence, the practice of moral discourse is a useful procedure that involves the making of literally false claims.

Blackburn challenges Mackie's view by first noting that if a vocabulary of moral discourse embodies error, it would be more useful to either replace the vocabulary with one that avoids the error or use the present vocabulary in a manner in which the error is

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<sup>170</sup> The metaphysical conclusion of Mackie's argument is that there are no objective moral properties. This is compatible with both Quasi-Realism and Mackie's own Error Theory. See Mackie (1977).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 33

avoided.<sup>173</sup> We could then use the vocabulary of moral discourse in a way that meets our needs but avoids the prior mistake. Here, Blackburn is claiming that a moral vocabulary that makes no metaphysical mistakes is one that could better serve the theoretical needs of the meta-ethicist than one with a metaphysical error built into it. It is somewhat ambiguous here whether Blackburn is talking about the need to combine the features that constitute Quasi-Realism or whether he is talking about the needs of those engaging in morality. Either way, what is clear is that Blackburn thinks that a more plausible meta-ethical theory will be one that does not assert that ordinary moralisers are in error.

The main metaphysical error Blackburn wants to avoid is something like a non-naturalistic Moral Realism. This is the idea that there are mind-independent, non-natural, objectively prescriptive moral properties that motivate some set of agents to perform moral acts. I am characterizing non-naturalist Moral Realism in this way because this kind of non-naturalism is Blackburn's target. Although there have been recent attempts to formulate non-naturalism in ways that do not generate the objections the version I articulated does, it is this version which is primarily the variety of non-naturalistic Moral Realism Blackburn wants to avoid. We can assume that there are two primary reasons Blackburn wants to reject such a view: the view is at odds with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of naturalism. As noted earlier, I take philosophical naturalism to be a conjunction of two views. The first view is metaphysical. It commits the naturalist to the denial of supernatural entities. It also commits the naturalist to the denial of entities that cannot be accommodated in descriptions of the world that are consistent with the findings and methodological principles of the natural sciences. This second view is epistemological. It states that an explanation is more likely to be true if it is consistent with the inference to the best explanation model of explanation.<sup>174</sup> Both of these views are two conditions of naturalistic inquiry that we can assume are the standards by which a naturalist judges a theory attractive.

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<sup>173</sup>Blackburn, (1992), 2-3.

<sup>174</sup> See Lipton (1991).

The metaphysical component of naturalism is distinct from the epistemological component in that the former is merely specifying that non-naturalistic Moral Realism is at odds with a naturalistic metaphysics. The latter threatens non-naturalistic Moral Realism because the entities that theory postulates purportedly lack simplicity, explanatory power, and are incompatible with background assumptions the naturalist finds plausible. These epistemological features of a theory, one should note, are the standard criteria within naturalism used to adjudicate between rival theories.<sup>175</sup> The reason why we can assume that naturalism is what motivates Blackburn to reject non-naturalistic Moral Realism is because he explicitly states that he is both a naturalist and that any good meta-ethical theory should also be.<sup>176</sup>

The non-naturalistic Moral Realism I described is at odds with the metaphysical component of naturalism because it postulates a non-natural set of entities to explain physical behavior. Moreover, these non-natural entities are supposed to have a psychological pull on human agents; a pull which motivates them to perform moral acts. This element of the non-naturalistic Moral Realism I described is also at odds with Blackburn's internalist views of moral motivation.<sup>177</sup> Additionally, it is this "pull" that Mackie described as queer<sup>178</sup> in his defense of Error Theory. Although there has been some criticism of the claim that all non-naturalist moral realists must characterize moral properties in this way, there has been little defense of the notion that this psychological "pull" is not queer. The closest a contemporary theorist has come to asserting this is Robert Audi, who claims that queerness is not an argument for or against the existence of entities.<sup>179</sup> Audi claims that every theory presupposes something and what goes against the

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<sup>175</sup> These are a presupposition of Blackburn's project since the majority of the project consists of explanatory argument Blackburn defends while presupposing the inference to the best explanation model.

<sup>176</sup> See Blackburn, (1992), 1-11.

<sup>177</sup> See Mackie, (1977), 50-63.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> See AUDI, Robert. *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 101.

fundamental presupposition of a particular theory is likely to seem queer to its opponents. Here, Audi seems to be saying that the queerness of an explanans is relative to the theoretical starting points of a theorist. After all, what is queer to the moral anti-realist may not be queer to the non-naturalistic moral realist. Although Audi's claim is technically true, this is a poor attack on the argument from queerness. This is because it is possible to have justified theoretical starting points that additional claims can conflict with. Insofar as a theorist can recognize his own justified starting points, he can be justified in rejecting a theory that does not fit with those starting points.

The non-naturalistic Moral Realism I described is deeply at odds with the epistemological component of naturalism. This is because the non-naturalistic Moral Realism I described explains moral properties using a moral explanans. Furthermore, this explanans cannot be identified with any natural facts. When one is trying to give an account of any phenomena using an explanans that cannot be identified, summarized, or reduced to any natural facts, such an account will be difficult to describe in detail. This is because an explanans that cannot be identified, summarized, or reduced to any natural facts is difficult to understand. Moreover, insofar as such an explanans can be understood, one can't describe it in as much detail as one could a physical mechanism. Because phenomena that can be identified, summarized, or reduced to natural facts are closer to physical mechanisms than phenomena that can't, explanatory accounts that involve the former will be more detailed and comprehensive. Hence, they will have more explanatory power and scope. This is why the version of non-naturalistic Moral Realism that Blackburn wants to reject is a less attractive theory than any naturalist theory, according to the epistemological assumptions of naturalism.

#### **4.3. CRITIQUE OF QUASI-REALIST MOTIVATIONS**

Blackburn's discontent with Mackie's Error Theory is, as we saw, partially motivated by the idea that it is implausible to assume that those who disagree about the metaphysical commitments of ethical discourse are not all engaging in ethical discourse when they make moral claims. Blackburn wants to avoid the view that the theorist who



correctly affirms the metaphysical commitments of morality while making moral claims is the moraliser and the theorist who denies those commitments while making moral claims is the schmoraliser. The difficulty here is it is reasonable to find Mackie's view implausible only if we assume (G)(morality is incapable of giving us evidence of anything external to morality) and (H) (morality is compatible with all possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate). If (H) were false, then it would not be clear that morality was compatible with all ontologies. If (G) were false, it would not be obvious that morality could not give us evidence of some ontology. Hence, in order for Blackburn to defend his views about the implausibility of the schmoralising meta-ethic, he must first defend (G) and (H). This is quite important because Error Theory asserts that (H) is false and most versions of Moral Realism assert that (G) is false.

Are there any reasons Blackburn could give in defense of (H)? Here, Blackburn might assert the fact that we observe plenty of equally ethical agents with fairly divergent views on what the metaphysics of ethics is. The fact that they have different notions of what the metaphysical commitments of ethics are does not seem in any way to infringe on their ability to adequately engage in moral practice. Moreover, if we assume half of those agents are correct in their views about the metaphysics of ethics, there is no discernible ethical difference between both groups insofar as they engage in moral practice. The staunchest non-naturalistic moral realists seem to be no more or no less ethical than error theorists like Mackie. All meta-ethicists seem, for the most part, like good people.

The problem with this reasoning is it ignores two possibilities. The first can be described as follows. Jim and Jeff are both meta-ethicists with wildly divergent meta-ethical views. Jim is a staunch non-naturalistic moral realist and Jeff is a staunch error theorist. Jim and Jeff are both competent practitioners of moral discourse. Moreover, they are roughly equivalent in their moral status as good human beings. However, each meta-ethicist, because they are human, occasionally does something that they shouldn't. One of the things that Jeff does which he morally should not do is deny the metaphysical commitments of moral discourse. Jim does something equally bad but unrelated to meta-

ethics. Hence, both Jim and Jeff are roughly morally equivalent as people and are equally competent at engaging in moral discourse. However, we can say that Jeff, unlike Jim, is doing something wrong insofar as Jeff denies the metaphysical commitments of moral discourse. This example shows that the moral equivalence of meta-ethicists who disagree about the metaphysics of ethics is not evidence that there is nothing wrong with denying the correct metaphysics of ethics. And if there is something morally wrong with denying the correct metaphysics of ethics, this certainly shows that ethics commits agents to a metaphysics.

The second possibility that Blackburn ignores is that it may not be obvious that the affirmation of a meta-ethical view damages one's moral character. After all, many moral claims we now think of as morally abominable were considered perfectly acceptable for years. It is conceivable that Jim in the 17<sup>th</sup> century could have disagreed with slavery while Jeff agreed with it. However, Jim might have thought that Jeff was in no way negatively affecting his character by endorsing slavery. His reasoning might have been that, in all other relevant respects, Jeff was a perfectly moral, nice human being. This illustrates a difficulty with identifying when a belief negatively effects one's moral character. If a belief that negatively affects one's character is controversial or highly contested in a given society, that belief may not appear to negatively affect the moral character of those who hold it. This may even be true from the perspective of individuals who don't have the belief. In these cases, it would be difficult to point to some feature of the moral character of someone who holds the belief as evidence that the belief corrupted one's moral character. This is because the belief itself is what explains the character defect. If one cannot see the morally negative nature of the belief, it's difficult to see how that belief would negatively affect other aspects of one's character.

Are there any additional reasons to think morality is compatible with any way a theorist could describe the world? One possible line of argument might be the claim that morality, by its nature, does not conflict with the truth of how the world is. Naturalism, one might argue, is what most philosophers believe to be true. Therefore, ethics could not

possibly commit agents to claims that potentially conflict with naturalism. The problem with this attempted justification is that it assumes the compatibility of truth and morality is a *necessary* compatibility. This seems obviously false. We can imagine worlds in which it is true that there are no reasons for action. We can imagine worlds where it is true that it is impossible to increase rather than decrease value. We can imagine worlds in which it is true that agents have none of the components of free will that would facilitate moral responsibility. How do we know that we are not in one of these worlds? The fact that naturalism may be true in our world is not evidence that we are not in one of the worlds described above. The fact that we appear to live in a world in which agents practice morality does not show that our world is incompatible with the possible worlds described above. The fact that agents practice morality is not evidence that no version of Error Theory is true. Moreover, there is nothing about Error Theory worlds that precludes naturalism from being true in them.

Here, one could respond that although morality is not necessarily compatible with all meta-ethical truths, it is necessarily compatible with all meta-ethical truths which are metaphysical. This response fails because we can imagine a possible world that is like ours in every way except that moral justification only works if there are non-naturalistic moral properties in the universe. In this world, it is not enough to justify refraining from bear baiting by talking about the fact that the bear baiting causes pain. One also has to justify the pain having a negative moral status that enables it to be a reason to refrain from bear baiting. The only thing that can justify this negative moral status is for the pain to exemplify the non-naturalistic moral property of 'moral badness'. Of course, we can also imagine that naturalism is true in this world and there are no non-naturalistic moral properties. The only way that we can show this possible world to be incoherent is to show that non-naturalistic moral properties, by their very nature, do nothing in the way of justifying moral claims.

Can we think of any reasons to affirm (G)? Is morality incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality? Certainly an invocation of naturalism would

not supply an adequate defense of (G). This is because (G) presupposes (I) (naturalism is true). For the naturalist, the only evidence in favor of (G) is the fact that the naturalist can give a good explanation of the world that involves the affirmation of (G). The difficulty here is that the naturalist's notion of a good explanation does not seem to be able to be defended on grounds that are independent of naturalist premises.<sup>180</sup> If Blackburn thinks that naturalist premises are premises that any reasonable human being would accept, he needs to give an argument for this. This is particularly important, since such an argument would be an indirect accusation that many moral realists are unreasonable people.

#### **4.4 ARGUMENTS FOR THE META-ETHICAL NEUTRALITY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> ORDER**

Quasi-Realism is a variety of projectivism. The projectivist project itself is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order description of morality where it is assumed that we have sentiments and other reactions caused by natural features of things and we then describe the world as though the world contained features answering to those sentiments.<sup>181</sup> At first glance, projectivism seems compatible with Mackie's Error Theory. However, as we noted above, Blackburn's Quasi-Realism strongly differentiates itself from error theories by describing moral discourse in a way that attempts to rid the discourse of any possible metaphysical commitments. Blackburn's strategy for doing this is to first look at the set of claims made by ordinary users of moral discourse that suggest moral realist metaphysics. Such claims may include things like, "It is an objective fact that abortion is wrong" or "The practice of torture is wrong independently of what anybody thinks on the matter." Blackburn then re-interprets these claims as 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims where the speaker is just expressing a moral judgment that is metaphysically neutral.

Blackburn will interpret a claim like, "It is an objective fact that abortion is wrong" as meaning that abortion has some feature which makes it wrong.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, the

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<sup>180</sup>See Kramer (2009). This is one of the claims Kramer makes in this book.

<sup>181</sup> See Blackburn (1992), 8-11

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 1-22

term “objective fact” will be interpreted as a mind independence qualification on the claim. What this means is that the sentence specifies that abortion has features which make it wrong and thus the wrongness of abortion is independent of what anybody thinks. So far, this sounds no different to realist interpretations of such claims. However, the difference lies in two key features of the quasi-realist interpretation. The first is that when the person who asserts the sentence uses the phrase “objective fact”, the quasi-realist is not interpreting the person as referring to any fact which is external to 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice. External here refers to something counterfactual. To say that something is external to moral practice means that it would exist independently of whether or not moral practice had evolved the way it did. The second feature that differentiates the quasi-realist interpretation of the person asserting, “It is an objective fact that abortion is wrong” is the quasi-realist interpretation of mind independence. Again, the quasi-realist wants to interpret mind independence without referring to anything that is external (in the sense specified above) to 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice.

Thus, for the quasi-realist, claims of mind-independence will have both a 1<sup>st</sup> order meaning and a naturalist explanation. The 1<sup>st</sup> order meaning will be that mind independence refers to the property of the moral claim which makes it correct independent of anyone’s beliefs or desires. The explanation will be that mind independence expresses a higher order attitude that regulates lower order attitudes.<sup>183</sup> In other words, it is an attitude that commits moralisers to the desire to retain the values and semantic rules of moral discourse that allow them to arrive at a claim like “it is an objective fact that abortion is wrong.” It is this distinction between moral meanings and meta-ethical explanations that I believe is a fundamental key to understanding the quasi-realist project.<sup>184</sup> For the quasi-realist, moral meanings deal with justification, which is internal to the 1<sup>st</sup> order practice of morality. Meta-ethical explanations, on the other hand, are completely distinct from moral meanings. This distinction happens because, for the quasi-

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> This is my distinction, not Blackburn’s.

realist, meta-ethical explanations have no role to play in moral justification. Moral justification happens during the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice whereby certain situations are identified as having features that make them good or bad, right or wrong, and so on. Meta-ethical explanations have no bearing on whether or not the situations specified at the 1<sup>st</sup> order level have or do not have the features which make them good or bad, right or wrong, and so on. Thus, for the quasi-realist, meta-ethical explanations are not relevant to moral justification. Moral meanings, on the other hand, are relevant to moral justification. This is because moral meanings specify both the features of situations that give them their moral value but also dictate the semantic rules for making moral identifications of such situations.

This explains why the quasi-realist believes he can give anti-realist explanations of moral practice without undermining anything that happens at the 1<sup>st</sup> order level of moral practice. This practice of giving anti-realist explanations while purporting to not undermine any aspect of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice is relatively new in the history of moral philosophy.<sup>185</sup> Traditionally, it has been thought that meta-ethical explanations are much more intricately tied up with moral justification. This assumption even infected noncognitivism. In earlier versions of noncognitivism, meta-ethical explanations which robbed moral claims of truth value or posited that moral judgments were just expressions of desires were thought to undermine the 1<sup>st</sup> order of moral practice. Hence, early versions of noncognitivism self-identified as revisionist forms of meta-ethics.<sup>186</sup> Quasi-Realism is unique in that it attempts quite forcefully to distance noncognitivism from its early history of being a revisionary meta-ethics. However, the key to understanding this distancing is in understanding the quasi-realist distancing of moral justification from meta-ethical explanations.

Quasi-Realism gives a meta-ethical explanation of moral claims in terms of their ability to function so as to change or preserve certain attitudes. This is at odds with the

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<sup>185</sup> Throughout most of the 20th century the situation was the opposite.

<sup>186</sup> See Ayer (1936).

perspective of the moral realist who insists that the most important function of morality is its ability to get agents to make decisions in ways that correspond to moral states of affairs in the world. For Blackburn, it is only psychological facts about humans and non-moral facts in the world which explain why human agents have the moral attitudes they possess. As far as meta-ethical meanings are concerned, Blackburn wants to interpret all the commitments of moral discourse in such a way as to exclude any information about anything other than what features of the world make a moral claim correct or incorrect. To give an example, Blackburn would say that what makes bear baiting wrong is the pain it causes the bear. He thinks this is a sufficient explanation and justification of why bear baiting is wrong. There is no need, on his view, for any additional information about bear baiting being at odds with the demands of mind independent moral facts. If agents talk like this when explaining why they think the opposition to bear baiting is justified, Blackburn will simply interpret them as expressing their higher order desires.<sup>187</sup> For Blackburn, there only need be one level of justification for a moral claim. If bear baiting is wrong, the justification of this claim consists wholly in the fact that it causes the bear pain. If we ask for a justification for the badness of pain, we are simply asking more than is required. Blackburn thinks it is just a brute fact that, within the practice of morality, pain is bad.

#### **4.5. CRITIQUE OF ARGUMENTS FOR META-ETHICAL NEUTRALITY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> ORDER.**

As noted earlier, the quasi-realist attempt to account for all the features of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse involves a separation between 1<sup>st</sup> order moral meanings and 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanations. This is because, as noted earlier, moral meaning is the arena the quasi-realist wants to show is the sole area in which moral justification happens. For the quasi-realist, 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation does not in any way undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral justification. The quasi-realist tactic for justifying this strategy is to interpret claims that are normally understood as moral metaphysical claims as 1<sup>st</sup> order claims that

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<sup>187</sup> See Blackburn, (1985), 8-21

are metaphysically neutral. The main difficulty with this quasi-realist tactic is that if morality commits agents to a moral metaphysics, Blackburn would still be right in his contention that one could interpret such claims in a metaphysically neutral fashion. Hence, his characterization of 1<sup>st</sup> order claims does not show what it needs to show; that a metaphysically neutral interpretation of a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim is evidence that the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim is metaphysically neutral. To illustrate, let's take the claim, "Bear baiting is wrong independently of what anybody thinks of it." Blackburn wants to interpret the agent who says this as an agent who is expressing his higher order desires.<sup>188</sup> For Blackburn, the agent who asserts this claim is just expressing a desire that everyone continue to desire to refrain from bear baiting because it harms the bear. The problem for Blackburn is that morality could commit agents to a metaphysics while his interpretation of the meaning of the bear baiting claim would still be part of what agents meant when they said "Bear baiting is wrong independently of what anybody thinks of it." The agents would, however, also mean that the wrongness of bear baiting is a metaphysical property of the world that exists independently of anyone's attitudes. So merely pointing out that the meaning of the claim has this higher order desire component does nothing to undermine the possible metaphysical component of the claim's meaning.

As we have seen, Blackburn's belief that moral speakers do not presuppose this metaphysical meaning is grounded in his view that the metaphysics of the latter meaning is false. Blackburn also thinks that it is possible to interpret speakers without the metaphysical meaning and nothing morally relevant would change about their moral practice. The problem with this strategy is that it only works if moral metaphysics are irrelevant to moral justification. And simply asserting the falsehood of such metaphysics is not evidence that such metaphysics is *actually* irrelevant to moral justification. This move begs the question against Error Theory. If Error Theory were true, it could be possible that moral discourse commits moral agents to a metaphysics that is false. Moreover, this could be true even though one could interpret the discourse in a way that

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<sup>188</sup> See Blackburn (1992), 1-21.



excluded this metaphysics. All that would be required for this is that the mind independence meaning of moral claims contained two components: the first, dealing with higher order desires and the second component referring to a metaphysics. To point out that the mind independence claim contained the higher order desires component would not show that the moral metaphysics was not also part of the meaning of this claim.

In order to show that moral metaphysics is irrelevant to moral justification, Blackburn can't, as noted above, simply observe that those who affirm and deny moral metaphysics seem to have roughly equivalent moral characters. He has to show that without the assumption of a moral metaphysics, no moral practice would change in a morally significant way. The difficulty here is that he can't simply assess morality in a metaphysically neutral way to see what moral practices would change in a morally significant way. It is possible that the quality of a moral act can be determined by the presence or absence of a metaphysics. If the pain bear baiting causes a bear is bad because of metaphysical moral properties, this means the pain is not bad in a world that lacks such properties. Of course, in such a world, there could be philosophers who believe that metaphysical properties are irrelevant to justification. They could believe, like Simon Blackburn, that it is the pain bear baiting causes a bear that makes it wrong and nothing more. Of course, in this world they would be mistaken. The important point is one could not evaluate the moral status of their claims in a manner which bypassed the metaphysics issue. This is because both the worlds with metaphysical moral properties and the Error Theory worlds without them look and feel the same. Blackburn's interpretation of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims merely demonstrates that it is possible, given how things look and feel, that Blackburn is in a world where Quasi-Realism is true. That possibility does nothing to undermine the contrary possibility that Blackburn is in either an Error Theory world or a world with a moral metaphysics that is relevant to moral justification. Given any of these three possibilities, the world would look and feel the same.

In this way, Blackburn's interpretations of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims beg the question against both non-naturalistic Moral Realism *and* Error Theory. It may be true that

morality has no metaphysics, in which case denying moral metaphysics is a perfectly acceptable thing to do. However, if a certain non-naturalistic Moral Realism is true, it may indeed be a morally bad thing to deny the metaphysics that morality commits us to. The more intriguing possibility is that the same might be true in an Error Theory world. On this scenario, there might be no moral metaphysics but morality may commit us to a metaphysics in a way where denying that moral metaphysics is still morally bad. What is important about the possibility of this Error Theory is it also casts doubt on (H) (morality is compatible with all meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate). Blackburn may find it implausible to think that moral commitments are at odds with the truth, but that just shows he finds Error Theory implausible. Merely finding Error Theory implausible is not itself an argument against that theory. Blackburn must provide an argument that morality can only commit us to things which are true in order to show that nothing morally significant changes when agents refrain from affirming or presupposing a moral metaphysics. Blackburn has not provided such an argument.

This argument, while it would constitute a rebuttal to Error Theory, would do nothing to undermine any form of Moral Realism. This is because all the above argument would show is that morality commits us to things that are true. It does not show that there are no moral metaphysics. A second argument for (I) (naturalism is true) would have to be conjoined with this first argument in order to show that metaphysics is irrelevant to moral justification *and* morality does not commit agents to a metaphysics. At this point, it might be tempting to think (I) is the one claim Blackburn does not need to defend in the context of this argument. This is not, however, the case. One can't simply rely on the fact that the majority of meta-ethicists are naturalists as a way to avoid having to defend naturalism. This is because a few contemporary meta-ethicists<sup>189</sup> self-identify as non-naturalistic moral realists. To say that one offers an account of morality that is superior to non-naturalistic Moral Realism is to say that there are compelling reasons not to be a non-naturalistic moral realist. In order to present such compelling reasons, you first have to

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<sup>189</sup>See Shafer-Landau (2006), and Hampton (1998).

address non-naturalistic Moral Realism without first assuming that naturalism is true. This may involve not assuming supplementary views that are made plausible because of naturalism. Such views may include views about supervenience, moral motivation, or constraints on the assertions of an ontology.

To give an analogy, suppose I am a theist working in analytic philosophy of religion. Suppose I observe that the majority of my colleagues are also theists. Let's also suppose I want to give a theistic account of the apparent design in the universe. Now let's suppose that there are a few prominent philosophers of religion who are atheists. Let's assume that they argue for an atheistic account of the apparent design in the universe where they explain such apparent design away. If I wish to give a theistic account of apparent design that is superior to their account, I can't defend my account in a way where I assume, without argument, that atheism is implausible. The fact that the majority of my colleagues are also theists does not absolve me of the need to defend theism. This is because once atheists have stepped into the fray giving rival accounts of what I wish to explain, atheism has become a potential defeater of theism. In order to show that theism stands strong in the face of even a small number of atheist attacks, I have to defend theism. Similarly, Blackburn must defend naturalism if he believes his account of morality is superior to even a handful of his non-naturalist colleagues.

#### **4. 6 THE ARGUMENT FROM MORAL PSYCHOLOGY**

So far, we have only attacked the considerations Blackburn cites which purportedly allow him to show that Quasi-Realism is superior to both non-naturalistic Moral Realism and Error Theory. Blackburn, it is worth noting, also gives substantive arguments in opposition to all versions of Moral Realism. Blackburn gives two arguments against all versions of Moral Realism that rely on the plausibility of Humean accounts of motivation and motivational internalism. Blackburn's Humean motivational internalism comprises two main claims.<sup>190</sup> It firstly states that moral motivation is best explained as

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<sup>190</sup>See Blackburn, S. 1984, "Spreading the Word", Oxford University Press, New York. See chapter 6.

being the product of the non-cognitive states (desires) of agents. According to this account, our desires are what explain our moral motivations. To give an example, if we make a moral decision to give to charity, it will be our desires to give to charity that will explain our decision. In this respect, Humean motivational internalism is no different to standard motivational internalism. The second claim of Humean motivational internalism is that moral beliefs and desires are logically distinct.<sup>191</sup> This claim is the distinctively Humean element of Humean motivational internalism. What this amounts to is a lack of entailment between moral beliefs and desires. According to Blackburn, the outcome of these two claims is that moral judgments *necessarily* motivate.<sup>192</sup>

When moral judgments *necessarily* motivate, this means that necessarily, if someone makes a moral judgment, they will have moral motivation. This view has some interesting implications for the characterization of sociopaths. Sociopaths are agents who understand the meaning of moral claims but have no accompanying motivation to satisfy the moral demands of those claims. If any version of motivational internalism is true, it is the case that the concept of a sociopath, as stated above, is conceptually impossible. This is because, on motivational internalism, an agent is failing to understand a correct moral claim if that agent fails to be motivated by it. For the motivational internalist, to understand a correct moral claim is to be motivated by it.

Many motivational internalists have considered this a problem for the theory. This explains why there has been a crop of conceptual qualifications put forward by various proponents of motivational internalism. Some motivational internalists, for instance, identify themselves as unrestricted motivational internalists. This means they take the relationship between moral judgments and moral motivation to obtain in all agents.<sup>193</sup> Restricted motivational internalists, by contrast, only commit themselves to this

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> For an indepth analysis of the varieties of motivational internalism, see SMITH, Michael. *The Moral Problem*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1994. Also see MILLER, Christian. Motivational Internalism. *Philosophical Studies*, 2008, Vol. 39, No. 2, 233-255.

relationship when it comes to a specific class of moral agents.<sup>194</sup> Such a class is most often characterized as the class of moral agents who are normal, practically rational, and virtuous by ordinary standards. Moreover, the relationship between understanding a moral claim and being motivated by its demands is qualified to a degree that it is not the case with regards unrestricted motivational internalists. This qualification is typically cashed out in the postulation that normal moral agents, in virtue of understanding a correct moral judgment, have some degree of motivation to act in accordance with it.<sup>195</sup> However, this does not exclude the possibility of other psychological motivations or factors that prevent the moral motivation from being efficacious.<sup>196</sup>

Another conceptual qualification within motivational internalism is the distinction between weak and strong motivational internalism.<sup>197</sup> Weak motivational internalists claim that there is a necessary relationship between moral motivation and moral judgments such that, at least in some rough way, it is a necessary truth that if a moral agent makes a moral judgment, he is motivated (to some extent) to act in accordance with that judgment. Because weak motivational internalism is only committed to this necessary connection, weak motivational internalism is compatible with the source of an agent's moral motivation being something other than his moral judgment. Strong

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<sup>194</sup> See Miller (2009).

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

motivational internalism, by contrast, claims that there is both a necessary connection between moral judgments and moral motivation and that the only source of an agent's moral judgments is his moral motivation.

Blackburn's reliance on Humean motivational internalism to attack Moral Realism does not require that Blackburn defend any of the specific versions of motivational internalism stated above. Hence, Blackburn's argument is compatible with all the above versions. All that Blackburn needs for his arguments against realism is the claim that non-cognitive states and beliefs are logically distinct and the claim that moral judgments, in some way, necessarily motivate agents. This sets the stage for Blackburn's two arguments against all forms of Moral Realism. In the first argument, Blackburn asserts both of these claims and maintains that if they are correct, moral judgments must either be non-cognitive states or be cognitive states that entail non-cognitive states. Because of the plausibility of motivational internalism, Blackburn believes cognitive states (such as moral beliefs) can't entail non-cognitive states. This implies that moral judgments must be expressions of non-cognitive states. All versions of Moral Realism are at odds with non-cognitivism. Hence, for Blackburn, Moral Realism is implausible on explanatory grounds.<sup>198</sup>

#### **4.7 CRITIQUE OF ARGUMENT FROM MORAL PSYCHOLOGY**

In Blackburn's first argument from moral psychology against Moral Realism, Blackburn relies on the plausibility of motivational internalism. The claim that moral judgments necessarily motivate is derived, in part, from the claim that desires are what explain moral motivations. The difficulty with relying on motivational internalism to rule out a meta-ethics is that motivational internalism presupposes (G) (morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality). This is because if morality were capable of giving us evidence of things external to morality, it would not be in any way obvious that desires are what explain moral motivations. The obvious explanation of moral motivation would be whatever morality gave us evidence for. Morality, if (G) were

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<sup>198</sup> See Blackburn (1984), Chapter 6.

false, could be a perceptual mechanism that allowed agents to see things that explained why they had the moral motivations they did. Desires would, of course, be part of such an account. However, they would not be the salient feature that explained moral motivations.

Can we construe the claim that desires explain moral motivations in a way where the claim becomes evidence for (G)? This seems problematic since a desire can only explain a moral motivation if it is the salient feature of a moral motivation. In order to be the salient feature of a moral motivation, there can't be any competing salient features. If the evidence of the correctness of moral claims contained entities that were in some sense external to moral practice, it is unlikely that we could say that this feature was less salient than the mere fact that agents had desires. After all, the desires would simply be desires to do what was in accordance with what this entity prescribed. Is the fact that many people find motivational internalism plausible evidence that moral motivation has no competing salient considerations apart from desires?

It may initially seem as though we could answer yes to this question if we could first establish that the reason people find internalism plausible is because it seems plausible that (G) is true. However, the truth of (G) is not the sort of thing that can be established on the basis of how plausible contemporary philosophers find it. This is because (G) is a largely unargued assumption in arguments that presuppose it is true. The substantive philosophical debate over whether (G) is true has largely not happened. Since the plausibility of Moral Realism and Quasi-Realism both hinge on (G), relying on the plausibility of (G) in an argument against either position is inappropriate. Blackburn, in relying on (G), is relying on the very assumption his opponents find implausible. Similarly, if moral realists were to give an argument for Moral Realism on the grounds that (G) was implausible, they would be relying on the very assumption Blackburn finds implausible.

#### **4.8 THE SUPERVENIENCE ARGUMENT**

Blackburn also offers an argument against all forms of Moral Realism based on

supervenience.<sup>199</sup> In order to understand this argument, we have to first understand what Blackburn believes to be the plausible assumption that natural facts can't entail moral ones. In other words, it may be the case in our world that there is a relationship between torture and wrongness. However, there is no conceptual reason why in some other world, there is a relation between torture and wrongness that is distinct from the relationship between torture and wrongness that holds in our world. Another aid to understanding Blackburn's argument is the observation that moral changes regarding the correctness of a moral claim, necessarily, don't happen without some change in the features of the situation that underlies the correctness of that moral claim. To illustrate, suppose I claim capital punishment for children is wrong while simultaneously claiming that capital punishment for adults is right. Any normal moraliser who hears these claims will assume there is some morally relevant difference between children and adults I am pointing to which explains why I assert that capital punishment is right in the case of adults and wrong in the case of children.

If I were then to assert that there was no morally relevant difference between children and adults which explains why capital punishment is right for the latter and wrong for the former, I could be justifiably accused of not understanding how to make moral judgments. This illustrates that a feature of moral discourse is that a change regarding the correctness of a moral claim, necessarily, doesn't happen without some change in the features of the situation that underlies the correctness of that moral claim. This feature of moral discourse Blackburn labels the feature of supervenience.<sup>200</sup> Blackburn explains supervenience in terms of a conceptual impossibility to suppose that if two things are identical in every other respect, one is better than the other.<sup>201</sup>

Blackburn believes the quasi-realist can explain supervenience by talking about

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<sup>199</sup> For older and newer modal expressions of this argument, see Blackburn (1984), Chapter 6 and BLACKBURN, Simon. Supervenience Revisited. In: Geoffrey SAYRE-McCORD, ed. *Essays on Moral Realism*. New York, USA: Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 59-75.

<sup>200</sup> See Blackburn (1984), 181-189

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.



practical constraints on the way agents express value predicates. The practical constraint is explained in terms of a counterfactual. Blackburn asserts that if we allowed ourselves a system of morality that was like ordinary moral practice but subject to no such supervenience constraint, it would allow us to treat naturally identical situations in morally different ways. Such a system of morality would be unfit, according to Blackburn, for being a guide to practical decision making.<sup>202</sup> This constitutes an explanation of why, given the truth of Quasi-Realism, our moral practice would have evolved to respect supervenience. If it had not, morality would cease to function. Blackburn then contrasts this explanation of supervenience with the moral realist explanation. Blackburn's contention, to put it bluntly, is that moral realists have no explanation for supervenience. This is because there is a component of supervenience that Blackburn believes Moral Realism to be an inherently inadequate explanans of. This feature is the supervenience claim that if a set of natural facts are significantly similar then moral similarities regarding those natural facts must be identical. If we look at competing meta-ethical explanations of this fact, we can see that the moral realist can offer a view that postulates a necessary connection between the moral facts and the natural facts. However, this is incompatible with the plausible assumption that natural facts don't entail moral ones. If the realist is to respect the assumption that natural facts don't entail moral facts, there is no way, according to Blackburn, that the realist can give a plausible explanation of supervenience.<sup>203</sup> This is because the moral realist link between moral facts and natural ones is mysterious.<sup>204</sup> The quasi-realist, by contrast, can give a detailed explanation of supervenience by talking about how, given noncognitivism, language evolved to respect supervenience.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> This explanation cleverly uses anti-realism to explain the arbitrariness of the ban on mixed worlds.

#### 4.9 CRITIQUE OF SUPERVENIENCE ARGUMENT

With regards Blackburn's supervenience argument against Moral Realism, we don't even have to challenge the premises to see how it assumes (I) (naturalism is true). Let's assume that Blackburn is right that, on the moral realist view, it is a mystery why there is a ban on mixed worlds. Let's also assume that on the quasi-realist view, we can eliminate this mystery by talking about how this ban on mixed worlds was a semantic precondition of human beings being able to utilize morality in practical decision making. How is this evidence against Moral Realism? It isn't, unless we assume that (I) is true.

This is because there is nothing apart from naturalism which suggests that a less detailed explanation of a given phenomena is an explanation which is more likely to be false than it's more detailed rivals. To say that an explanation is mysterious in the way that Blackburn does is just to say that an explanation has less to say than a rival explanation. Blackburn believes that the quasi-realist explanation of the ban on worlds has more to say (and can say it less mysteriously) because the quasi-realist can talk about the practicality of the ban. The realist, by contrast, has to insist that the ban is just a brute given of the metaphysical features of moral discourse. But why is a brute given explanation less likely to be true than an explanation that postulates a brute given further back? It does not seem as though there is any way to answer this question apart from giving a comprehensive defense of naturalism.

Yet naturalism is one of the issues up for debate in any confrontation between rival meta-ethical theories. This is partly because one meta-ethical theory that the quasi-realist wants to deny is non-naturalist Moral Realism. The other reason is the assumption that moral realist accounts become more or less plausible depending on whether naturalism is true or false. For instance, moral realists sometimes assume the falsity of (G) (morality is incapable of giving evidence of things external to morality). However, if naturalism is true, this assumption loses much of its plausibility. This is because naturalistic ontology is descriptive rather than normative. Moreover, naturalistic explanatory methodology, even if normative, is not moral. There are simply no non-moral

phenomena for morality to give us evidence of if naturalism is true. Moreover, if naturalism is true, there are no epistemological mechanisms that morality has for doing this in the first place.

#### **4.10. THE PRACTICAL NEEDS ARGUMENT**

An additional argument Blackburn gives for Quasi-Realism is the claim that Quasi-Realism satisfies the practical needs of morality for a meta-ethics in two different ways.<sup>206</sup> The practical needs of morality for a meta-ethics include:

(N) That the theory describes how morality functions correctly.

and

(O) That the theory is consistent with truth tracking methods from the natural sciences and analytic philosophy.

(N) basically states that a practical need of morality is that any meta-ethics which describes it must describe it in a way where the description does not show morality to be faulty in some way. (O) states that a practical need of morality is that the meta-ethical theory which describes it must be consistent with what the methods of truth tracking in the natural sciences and analytic philosophy tell us. (O) is a practical need because it would cause various troubles for philosophers and scientists if morality were to contest their claims.

Blackburn thinks Quasi-Realism satisfies (O) because it is attractive on a naturalistic world view.<sup>207</sup> Blackburn believes Quasi-Realism satisfies (N) because it includes a description of a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral vocabulary that retains all the rules and self-regulations of the practice of morality.<sup>208</sup> Presumably Blackburn thinks that (N) and (O) constitute genuine practical needs of morality for meta-ethical theories because he thinks meta-ethics must vindicate morality. Meta-ethics, in order to vindicate morality, must describe morality in a way where the meta-ethical description of morality does not

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<sup>206</sup> See Blackburn (1992), 1-21

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

undermine morality in any way. This means the description must describe morality as functioning consistently, coherently, and such that human agents have good reason to engage in moral practice. Also, Blackburn must presumably think that morality, in order to be vindicated, must not be guilty of any metaphysical error. If a meta-ethical theory describes morality as being guilty of such an error, it seems as though for Blackburn, the theory is not satisfying the practical needs of morality.

#### **4.11 CRITIQUE OF ARGUMENT FROM PRACTICAL NEEDS**

The difficulty for this argument is it is implausible that the practical needs of morality for a meta-ethics include (N) (that the theory describes how morality functions correctly) and (O) (that the theory is consistent with truth tracking methods from the natural sciences and analytic philosophy). After all, one can't do an assessment of what the moral needs of a meta-ethical theory are prior to creating the meta-ethical theory. This is because the way the meta-ethical theory characterizes morality will, in part, determine what the practical needs of a meta-ethical theory are.

If Moral Realism is true, for instance, it is not clear that one can separate meta-ethical explanations from moral meanings. If the two have a more intimate relationship with each other than the quasi-realist describes, this has the potential to radically change what the practical needs of morality are. Because Moral Realism is itself an explanation of moral claims and Moral Realism sees itself as an explanation that vindicates morality, Moral Realism already has a characterization of the practical needs of a meta-ethical theory which is different from Quasi-Realism. What this difference amounts to is the moral realist is not committed to (O). This is because it is an open question as to whether or not (O) will vindicate Moral Realism. If it does not, on the realist view, it is an open question as to whether or not (O) is consistent with (N). For Moral Realism, realism is the only correct explanation of how morality functions correctly. If (O) does not blatantly support Moral Realism, (O) is not satisfying (N). In this scenario, the moral realist would have no reason to consider (O) a moral need.

Also, rival meta-ethical theories have different interpretations of what (N)

amounts to. We can see this quite saliently in observing the reasons why Blackburn reject's Mackie's Error Theory. Blackburn claims<sup>209</sup> that if moral discourse is in error, Mackie's own exposure of the error changes the category of his own moral claims. If Mackie is right, then Mackie, in promoting his Error Theory, is promoting the rejection of a commitment to moral discourse. Since such commitments are a requirement for speakers when they moralise, Mackie's own moral claims can no longer be examples of moralising. According to Blackburn, they are examples of schmoralising.<sup>210</sup> Schmoralising resembles moralizing in most ways apart from its rejection of the metaphysical commitments which moral speakers are committed to. Blackburn thinks that if Mackie is right about moral discourse being dependent on dubious metaphysical commitments, then one cannot simultaneously engage in moral discourse and satisfy the demands of (O). Since Mackie, as a philosopher, is satisfying the latter need, he must be engaging in some discourse that is not moral discourse when he makes moral claims.

This illustrates the way in which Mackie and Blackburn have different interpretations of (N) which are the outcomes of their respective theories. For Mackie, to describe how morality functions correctly is simply to describe how morality actually is. For Blackburn, to describe how morality functions correctly is, in some sense, to vindicate the commitments of morality. Mackie's view comes out of his Error Theory precisely because on that theory, it is morally permissible to be an error theorist.<sup>211</sup> Blackburn, on the other hand, seems to think there is at least a moral problem with denying the commitments of morality. Why else would he try to vindicate what he takes to be the salient commitments of morality? If this aim were purely descriptive, there would be no reason to justify the claim that Quasi-Realism satisfies the moral needs of a meta-ethical theory. Blackburn simultaneously wants to say that an error theorist is not engaging in

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> This is what Mackie seems to imply when he suggests that he can moralize the same as anyone else in the beginning of his defence of the queerness argument. See Mackie (1977), 30-35, 50-63.

something other than morality when the error theorist moralises. This is presumably because Blackburn does not want to say that a theorist is no longer moralising just because they have advocated a false meta-ethical theory. How does Blackburn harmonize these tensions?

He interprets Mackie's theory as affirming that denying the commitments of morality amounts to engaging in a practice that is not moralising.<sup>212</sup> Although Blackburn sees this as an implication of Mackie's Error Theory, he frames it as a *reductio* of Mackie's view. Blackburn finds it incredibly implausible that we should call a moralising error theorist a schmoralist rather than a moralist.<sup>213</sup> Blackburn finds it much more intuitive to suppose that both error theorists and ordinary speakers are engaged in the same activity when they moralise. Blackburn would also prefer to say that both ordinary speakers and error theorists are engaged in the same moral practice despite the different interpretations they may have of what that practice is.<sup>214</sup> We can assume that part of what makes Blackburn think that the error theorist and the ordinary moral speaker are engaging in the same practice is the fact that this interpretation of the situation allows morality to satisfy quasi-realist practical needs. After all, if morality excluded Mackie from the category of 'moraliser' this would imply a tension between (O) (which assumes compatibility of morality and the truth tracking procedures of the natural sciences and analytic philosophy) and the commitments of morality. Such a tension would leave morality in a position of not fulfilling the quasi-realist practical needs. This lack of fulfillment would presumably undermine the justification for morality's dominance in human affairs. Since Blackburn believes that morality's dominance is justified and he believes (O) is a practical need for a meta-ethical theory, Blackburn thinks a plausible account of morality will be one that allows morality to satisfy (N) and (O). Hence, his argument from practical needs assumes the truth of Quasi-Realism in order to show that

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<sup>212</sup> Blackburn (1992), 1--22.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

Quasi-Realism satisfies the moral needs of a meta-ethical theory. After all, if Quasi-Realism is true, not only are (N) and (O) practical needs of a meta-ethical theory, but Quasi-Realism also satisfies (N) and (O). As we have seen, it is not clear that this would be the case if Quasi-Realism were false.

Blackburn's reliance on (O) is also indirectly a reliance on (H) and (I). (H), as we recall, asserts that morality is compatible with any possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate and (I) is an assertion of philosophical naturalism. This is partially because (O) presupposes (I). It presupposes (I) because if (I) were false, (O) would simply not be a moral need of a meta-ethical theory. This is because the incompatibility of morality with a possible outcome of naturalism would be a counter-example to the claim that the truth tracking methods of the natural sciences and analytic philosophy are consistent with morality. If they are not consistent with morality, morality's consistency with them is no longer a human need. The human need becomes the consistency of the truth tracking mechanisms with morality, not the other way around. Also, if (H) were false, the truth tracking mechanisms of analytic philosophy and the natural sciences would no longer be mechanisms that it was one of our moral needs that morality be consistent with. Rather, it would be the case that it was one of our needs that such truth tracking mechanisms be consistent with morality. There would be no need to try and make morality consistent with naturalism or any practice that presupposed naturalism.

#### **4.12 QUASI-REALISM'S FAILURE TO SUPPORT MORAL OBJECTIVISM**

As has been noted, the quasi-realist project (in both its motivations and the main arguments in its favor) presupposes (G) (morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality). If (G) is true, morality, can't give agents evidence of anything metaphysical. The difficulty with (G) is it is an epistemological claim that, if true, undermines other elements of Quasi-Realism Blackburn wishes to retain. For instance, Blackburn wants to be able to say "bear beating is wrong because it causes the bear pain." Moreover, he wants to say the above claim is correct in a way that cannot be

changed by a sudden change in collective opinion. This is because Blackburn wants to avoid a relativist 1<sup>st</sup> order view.<sup>215</sup> As noted earlier, he wants to remain a 2<sup>nd</sup> order anti-realist and 1<sup>st</sup> order objectivist simultaneously.

The quasi-realist separation of 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanation and 1<sup>st</sup> order moral meaning is what allows the 2<sup>nd</sup> order anti-realism to leave 1<sup>st</sup> order discourse unaffected. If the 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical explanations are completely separate from the 1<sup>st</sup> order account, no amount of 2<sup>nd</sup> order anti-realism within the quasi-realist meta-ethics can change the objectivism of the 1<sup>st</sup> order. However, moral objectivism is at odds with (G). If we assume (G) is true, it seems implausible to think morality can somehow give us evidence that particular moral claims are true in an objectivist sense. As Mackie's argument from relativity shows, it is difficult to explain how the diversity of intractable ethical opinion can be adequately accounted for by the hypothesis that certain agents just have got things wrong.<sup>216</sup> This is especially true if one takes the line that morality gives us no evidence for any metaphysics or mind independent relationship between natural properties and moral facts. What kind of evidence could morality possibly give agents that the pain that bear baiting causes a bear makes bear baiting wrong? It can't simply be an internalized aversion to causing a bear pain since there are agents with an internalized desire for causing a bear pain. How can morality give us evidence that the agent with an aversion to giving pain has gotten things right?

Blackburn can't simply say that it is just obvious to anyone with good moral sensibilities that causing pain to another living creature for one's own amusement is wrong. This is because Blackburn has not yet shown that morality gives us evidence for such a thing as "good sensibilities" in an objectivist sense. Moreover, many moral claims were considered obviously correct in other centuries that we now find morally abhorrent. One of the appeals of Moral Realism is that it purports to supply morality with something that could potentially justify the separating of moral claims into correct and incorrect

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<sup>215</sup>See Blackburn (1998), Chapter. 9

<sup>216</sup> See Mackie (1977), 36-38.



categories. In the case of non-naturalistic Moral Realism, it is the non-naturalistic metaphysical properties that justify the differentiation. In the case of naturalistic Moral Realism, it is the mind independent identity between natural properties and moral facts. But with Blackburn's Quasi-Realism, there does not seem to be anything like this that can give agents evidence for the correctness or incorrectness of moral claims. Moral Realism tries to vindicate moral practice by showing that morality gives us evidence that the practice of objectivist morality is justified. It does this by attempting to show that there are 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justifications of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Quasi-Realism does not seem to be able to do this because there is no place for morality to give us any evidence of a meta-ethical claim which could justify any 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. On the quasi-realist view, meta-ethical explanations and moral justification are completely separate. Moreover, 1<sup>st</sup> order morality can't, on this view, give us any evidence that a particular meta-ethics is true either.

The importance of a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justification of moral objectivism should not be understated. After all, the reason most sceptics of moral objectivism are sceptics is not because a number of their 1<sup>st</sup> order moral beliefs have come into doubt. It is not as if there are sceptics of objectivism because people have stopped believing that bear baiting is wrong. Rather, sceptics get created when people start to question how it can be true that causing pain has a negative value and thus is an objectively bad thing to do. This scepticism is not created because of any doubts about features of the world that make a moral claim correct. It is created because of doubts about the moral justification of this relationship between natural states of affairs and objective reasons for action. The moral sceptic may have an aversion to bear baiting because they dislike the act of causing pain. However, the 1<sup>st</sup> order claim that this aversion is a morally appropriate reaction to an objective moral reason not to cause pain is one they question the justification of. They don't see 1<sup>st</sup> order morality as something that gives them evidence of the correctness of any particular 1<sup>st</sup> order claim. They almost always require something outside of morality to justify morality. They are sceptics because they believe the universe is bereft of the

external justifier of 1<sup>st</sup> order morality that they seek. If such a thing were to exist and it could justify 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims, it would obviously be a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justification.

At this point, it might be objected that moral sceptics just have gotten things wrong. By assuming that morality needs a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justification, they have made the mistake of assuming that the features which make a thing wrong depend on some 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justification in order to entail the wrongness in question. It just seems obvious that what makes sadistic torture, for instance, wrong is the psychological and physical pain it causes. To ask for anything more than that is itself to make both a meta-ethical and 1<sup>st</sup> order moral mistake. According to this objection, the natural features that make sadistic torture wrong at the 1<sup>st</sup> order are all that is needed to justify the moral wrongness of sadistic torture. The difficulty with this objection is it ignores the fact that the sceptic agrees that if 1<sup>st</sup> order morality were vindicated, the features that make sadistic torture wrong at the 1<sup>st</sup> order would be all that was needed to show that torture is wrong. However, the sceptic is a sceptic about morality precisely because the sceptic became an agnostic about the moral relationship between those features and 'wrongness' described at the 1<sup>st</sup> order. Because of this agnosticism, a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justification is what the sceptic sought and failed to find. This is how he became a sceptic. There are two important issues here for Blackburn. The first is whether or not it was rational for the sceptic to go into the position of agnosticism regarding 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. The second is whether the sceptic, once in the position of agnosticism, was rational in thinking the vindication of morality could only be saved by a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justification.

With regards to the first issue, it seems there is nothing irrational in the sceptic's agnosticism about 1<sup>st</sup> order morality. Of course, it would be easier to make the claim that there was something immoral about the sceptic's retreat into moral agnosticism. However, we'd be hard pressed to find anything irrational about moving into such a position. It does not seem to be at odds with the moral interests of the sceptic to be an agnostic about

morality. This agnosticism, in most respects, not need affect his moral behavior or sentiments in any substantive way. He could even moralize about various issues in much the same way that Mackie did.<sup>217</sup> Moreover, moral scepticism does not seem to be inconsistent with any uncontroversial natural facts about the world. Nor is it inconsistent with any of the methods of the natural sciences or analytic philosophy. Such scepticism might be morally wrong (and I'm here leaving open whether or not it is) but the only perspective from which moral scepticism seems outrageous is the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral perspective. This is because it is a challenge to the commitments of that 1<sup>st</sup> order perspective. It is not a challenge to the behavior or sentiments that one who endorses the 1<sup>st</sup> order perspective might exhibit.

With regards to the second issue, it seems perfectly rational, if one is a sceptic about morality, to think that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse could be vindicated by a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claim. This is because, once in the agnostic position, it really is the only option on the table. If any metaphysical or epistemological claim could vindicate 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse, that claim would itself become a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claim. There does not seem to be any way that an empirical claim could vindicate 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. If one were to try and vindicate 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse using an empirical claim, one might point towards the uniformity of moral practices or intuitions in humans. However, this purported uniformity could be compatible with lots of error theories that undermine the vindication of 1<sup>st</sup> order morality. The only claims that would be incompatible with such error theories are moral realist metaphysical or epistemological claims. Being such that they are moral realist, they would be 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claims.

Since it seems perfectly rational to be both a sceptic about morality and to think 1<sup>st</sup> order discourse could only be vindicated by 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claims, this shows that it is not irrational to think 1<sup>st</sup> order morality requires 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical

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<sup>217</sup>See Mackie (1977). In *Inventing Right and Wrong*, Mackie deals with a number of ethical and political issues in the chapters where he isn't defending Error Theory.

justification in order to be vindicated. Since it is not irrational, we can ask, what other reasons might there be for thinking that 1<sup>st</sup> order morality does not require 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justification? The only answers left come in two varieties. The first variety is the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral answer. This goes something along the lines of, “Correct 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims do not morally require 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical justifications in order to be correct.” The second variety of answer comes in the form of an explanation. This explanation goes something along the lines of “It is a fact about competent moral practice such that a competent practitioner internalizes sentiments which stop him from requiring 2<sup>nd</sup> order justifications for 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims.”

The 1<sup>st</sup> order moral answer blatantly begs the question. This is because one can't use 1<sup>st</sup> order discourse to legitimize 1<sup>st</sup> order discourse if one is trying to persuade someone who does not already accept the legitimacy of 1<sup>st</sup> order discourse. The second explanatory answer does not beg the question, but if given by a quasi-realist, is entirely unpersuasive. Just what reasons are there, apart from a moral reason, to believe this explanation? It does not seem like there are any. Moreover, this moral reason is itself at odds with many aspects of moral practice. Human beings, since the dawn of human civilization, have routinely flirted with moral scepticism. One could argue that meta-ethics and philosophy itself are products of the attempt to deal with this scepticism. Most moral sceptics are not sociopaths. They retain most of their moral sentiments prior to the scepticism and behave in a manner that reflects the same moral character they had prior to the scepticism. If 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice were not in need of 2<sup>nd</sup> order justification, how could this scepticism, in mostly normal moral agents, be possible?

If it really were the case that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse was in no need of any 2<sup>nd</sup> order justification, it seems unlikely that moral scepticism would have struck normal moral agents. Moreover, if it did strike them, it would likely have done so without being so widespread and with a much smaller impact on moral philosophy. Moreover, moral scepticism would have most likely been interpreted as a moral failure rather than the form of intellectual questioning it has been characterized as throughout the years. Additionally,

the fact that Quasi-Realism is such a recent position on the philosophical scene suggests the view that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse needs no 2<sup>nd</sup> order justification is not the most plausible position for most moral agents. For two thousand years, moral philosophers generally assumed that ethics was not a practice whereby accounts of 1<sup>st</sup> order morality and 2<sup>nd</sup> order explanations of it could completely come apart. This is why noncognitivism started out as a revisionist meta-ethics and its non-revisionist versions came on the scene relatively late.<sup>218</sup>

Perhaps at this point, Blackburn might respond that 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims, by their very nature, are not the sort of thing that gives us evidence for 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Rather, 1<sup>st</sup> order morality is just a practice that, by its very nature, assumes certain things as a given. One of the things it assumes is causing another living thing pain for one's own amusement is just incompatible with the requirements of morality. One can draw an analogy here between the practice of 1<sup>st</sup> order morality and the practice of playing chess. It is not the case that chess gives us evidence that a bishop ought to move along the diagonal spaces of the board. Rather, chess is just the sort of game that, if one wishes to play it, one must move the bishop along diagonal spaces on the board. Blackburn could say the same about morality. Insofar as one engages in the practice of morality, one must take for granted that causing another living creature pain for one's own amusement is just bad. Hence, insofar as one engages in the practice of morality, one must assume the 1<sup>st</sup> order is vindicated.

The problem with this rejoinder is that it ignores the fact that internal to the practice of morality, there is a glaring disanalogy between morality and chess. This disanalogy consists in the fact that morality is categorical. It is not the case that one ought to accept that causing another living thing pain for one's own amusement is bad *if* one wishes to practice morality. Rather, one ought to accept this whether or not one wishes to practice morality. Moreover, one should practice morality regardless of whether one wishes to. Unlike chess, morality prescribes that one ought to both follow every rule of

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<sup>218</sup> Throughout most of the 20th century, noncognitivism was mostly a revisionist ethics.

morality and choose to engage in the practice unconditionally. This raises the following problem: How can this categorical prescriptivity be a reason for us to heed the demands of morality if moral objectivism is given no 2<sup>nd</sup> order defense?

If the answer is just that it is in the long-term interests of all humans to do so, this answer can only gain plausibility once a specific morality is defended as “THE MORALITY” that is in everyone’s interests.”The difficulty is that with all the varieties of moral systems to choose from, there does not seem to be any criteria with which we can identify the long-term interests of absolutely everyone. If we crafted a moral system for everyone based on cultural norms every human society could agree with, we wind up with a morality that looks too thin. After all, slavery, forced marriages, incest, and authoritarian politics are practiced all throughout the world. We would have to come up with a morality that does not exclude such practices from moral acceptability. But this is hardly what an anti-realist moral objectivist has in mind when defending the idea that there is a single morality that is in the long-term interests of everyone.

Anti-realists objectivists usually mean something subtler than this. What they mean is that there are basic moral sentiments in all cultures that are inconsistent with practices such as slavery or authoritarian politics. According to this line of thought, the existence of such practices as slavery or authoritarian politics in certain societies just shows that these societies are being inconsistent with their own moral sentiments. If such societies could see the implications of their moral sentiments, they would realize that practices such as slavery or authoritarian politics are at odds with those sentiments. The problem with this line of thought is it assumes that the society would identify their moral sentiments with their interests rather than their traditions and current political practices. There is always a chance particular societies may modify their moral sentiments to coincide with their traditions and practices rather than the other way around. Such societies could claim that their traditions and practices represent their interests more than the moral sentiments they may possess which clash with those traditions and practices.

This is the difficulty with justifying moral objectivism on the basis of the self-

interest of all humans. Self-interest, unlike moral objectivism, has a degree of flexibility that moral claims on an objectivist framework do not. John and Mary can both have an internalized moral sentiment that makes them predisposed towards liberal democratic societies. However, let's say both of them find themselves in a liberal democratic society that becomes an authoritarian one. Mary finds the political situation intolerable because of the social and political freedoms that the new government restricts. John initially agrees with her but then begins to change his opinion after observing the remarkable drop in crime levels. The defender of universal self-interest, here, would like to say that John is simply ignoring his own moral sentiments (which are in his interests) and supporting a position that is at odds with those sentiments (which is not in his interests). The difficulty is that John, upon recognizing the inconsistency, can simply stop valuing his anti-authoritarian moral sentiments because he comes to realize the benefits of living in an authoritarian society.

On what basis can the anti-realist objectivist say that it is in John's long-term interest not to do this? Here the anti-realist objectivist might say that John should be appalled at an authoritarian government because that very government could some day punish him for violating one of its unjust laws. John could respond that the crime decrease in his society justifies the regime's authoritarian laws and that if he were to be found guilty for violating them, he would gladly be punished by his government. On what basis could the objectivist respond that John is still failing to satisfy his own interests? It does not seem that there is much the objectivist could say here apart from the fact that John is just badly mistaken in his valuations of freedom vs. lower crime rates. But to say that John is wrong in his valuations is just to assert moral objectivism, not defend it.

The problem here is that for any moral sentiments John has, John can always modify them in light of his new experiences. He may initially be a democrat but after being dissatisfied with the levels of crime in his society, switch his allegiances to an authoritarian form of government. He can say "I understand why people value free societies and oppose authoritarian ones. But people value freedom so highly that they will

tolerate unacceptable levels of social decay in order to preserve it. Experiencing the crime of a liberal society has made me see that no amount of freedom can compensate for living in a society with crime levels like those in a liberal democratic society. Therefore, I am willing to accept whatever drawbacks that come from living in a low-crime authoritarian society.” We can’t say that John’s extremely high valuing of low crime is at odds with his interests. He is interested in living in a low crime society and will accept authoritarian measures to get that. What we can say is that his experiences have caused his interests to change. Whether or not this change was a mistake is not something interest talk alone can settle.

The non-naturalistic moral realist in this situation can make recourse to the fact that there are non-natural moral facts that John is not sufficiently tracking. The naturalistic moral realist can talk about how John fails to track the natural facts in the world that constitute the relevant moral facts. The anti-realist objectivist can say neither of these things. As we have seen, appeals to universal self-interest won’t help either. All the anti-realist can say, at this point, is that morality just is the practice whereby agents value the freedoms of a liberal society more than low crime. We know when the anti-realist asserts this that *he* affirms a morality whereby the freedoms of a liberal society are more valuable than low crime rates. Yet there are plenty of moral agents living in the world who don’t. There does not seem to be any 2<sup>nd</sup> order basis on which the anti-realist can say that his morals coincide with “THE MORALITY” that is in everyone’s interests.

The anti-realist might say here that it is only agents with sufficiently working, properly internalized moral sentiments that “THE MORALITY” is in the interests of. But this begs the question against moral relativists. It assumes that objectivists rather than relativists are agents with sufficiently working, properly internalized moral sentiments. This of course, may be true. Yet in order to be taken seriously, there must be evidence given in favor of this claim. If one is an anti-realist, this evidence can’t come from inside the practice of morality because the objectivist and relativist will have a different 1<sup>st</sup> order moral point of view. On the other hand, the evidence can’t come from a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral



metaphysics because on an anti-realist view, there is no such metaphysics. It also can't come from a 2<sup>nd</sup> order view about the identity relation between natural properties and moral facts. The only possible source of evidence, which could favor objectivism for an anti-realist, is empirical evidence.

Empirical evidence alone won't do any good because a cursory examination of the empirical evidence regarding the practice of morality will bear out a multiplicity of different moral practices. It might be that these different practices are just variations on the same practice. However, in order for the objectivist to justify this claim, we would have to isolate some feature, which is common to all moral practices, that seems to imply objectivism. This would raise a further difficulty. On what basis could we take this feature as *central* to morality rather than just the actual 1<sup>st</sup> order views people hold? To give an example, suppose that a correctness condition of the consistency of all moral claims is that moral objectivism is true. Now suppose that all liberal Europeans are avowed non-objectivists. Suppose that they admit that there is a correctness condition of the consistency of moral claims that implies moral objectivism. But let's imagine they say that their non-objectivism is more central to morality than the correctness conditions that their moral claims require in order to be consistent. Let's also suppose that they have provided a compelling case to many non-Europeans and European conservatives who are becoming increasingly sympathetic with non-objectivism. Let's imagine that there is a real possibility that in the next 30 years or so, the persuasive case made by the liberal Europeans could result in the majority of the world affirming non-objectivism.

Let's stipulate that in this situation, the majority of African conservatives are objectivists. They believe that the objectivism implied by the correctness conditions of moral claims is *central* to morality. Let's assume that, like the liberal Europeans, they are providing a compelling case to the world for moral objectivism. Many members of different nations and political affiliations are becoming sympathetic with moral objectivism. It is a real possibility that in the next 30 years or so, the persuasive case made by the African conservatives could result in the majority of the world affirming

moral objectivism. How do we decide who is correct here? The problem for Blackburn is, however we make the decision can't be determined by empirical evidence alone. This is because the claim "moral objectivism is *central* to morality" is a claim that can't be determined by empirical evidence. If we assume the claim is true, there is no way of guaranteeing that the majority of humans will practice morality as though the claim is true. Hence, the truth or falsity of the claim is something that can only be demonstrated on moral grounds alone.

As we can see, Quasi-Realism does not support moral objectivism against sceptical challenges because Quasi-Realism is a form of anti-realism. Anti-realist meta-ethics have no basis on which to assert moral objectivism except on 1<sup>st</sup> order explanatory grounds. Such grounds can't be justified from a perspective that is not already affirmative about the validity of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. As we have seen, it is not irrational to be a moral sceptic. Moreover, talk of self-interest or empirical observations of moral agreement can't justify moral objectivism if one is an anti-realist. If a moral sceptic is doubting 1st order moral claims, all that is left to persuade him to affirm the 1<sup>st</sup> order are 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. Such claims are, by definition, meta-ethical claims.

#### **4.13 CONCLUSION**

As we have seen, the main considerations Blackburn gives in favor of Quasi-Realism assume either (G), (H), (I) or (J). For Blackburn's arguments to have any force in supporting Quasi-Realism, he must offer supplementary arguments in favor of (G), (H), (I), or (J). As we have also seen, Quasi-Realism does not support moral objectivism because it is a variety of Moral Anti-Realism. Given these extravagant problems with Blackburn's Quasi-Realism, it seems initially bizarre that such a theory could even be taken seriously by a good number of meta-ethicists. However, it is not so difficult to understand once we see that the theory begs the question by relying on some of the dominant assumptions of 20<sup>th</sup> century analytic philosophy. (G), (H), (I), and (J) have become so prevalent in philosophy that some aspects of them seem to have filtered down into popular culture. Many people, for instance, hold that (G), (H), and (I) are what is

now considered part of the collective common sense of educated, non-religious persons in the West. As we have seen, the difficulty with simply relying on these assumptions to justify a meta-ethics theory is that many contemporary meta-ethics theories imply the denial of these assumptions. To rely on them to justify one's meta-ethics (rather than defend them) is analogous to a philosopher of religion who relies on the plausibility of theism to argue against an atheist account of apparent design in the universe.

At this point, the reader may still think that there is something slightly funny about the inability of contemporary meta-ethicists to see that Quasi-Realism defends itself by relying on assumptions that are called into question by the variety of meta-ethics positions taken seriously. Here, another observation about the nature of analytic philosophy may be of some help. Analytic philosophers, as is well known, typically think of themselves as engaging in a form of knowledge inquiry that aligns itself more with the natural sciences than the humanities. One of the hallmarks of the natural sciences is an attempt at rigorously generating knowledge about a given phenomena in a way which is free from personal bias. Within the natural sciences, personal bias is normally thought to include one's moral or political commitments. The underlying assumption here seems to be that the world *in it itself* is neutral with regards the ethical and political commitments of the human beings who study it. This is why even those natural sciences that study morality (i.e evolutionary psychology) never use the truth of moral claims as an explanans.<sup>219</sup>

Yet positions in meta-ethics such as Moral Realism are, when understood properly, a challenge to constraints on explanations within the natural sciences. Since this is the case, one would think analytic meta-ethicists to do one of two things: They would either admit that plausible ethics theories call into question the dominant assumptions of the natural sciences or stop taking moral realist theories seriously because they call into question the dominant assumptions of the natural sciences. To take the first option is to

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<sup>219</sup> See STREET, Sharon. A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value. *Philosophical Studies*, 2006, vol. 1, pp. 127.

allow analytic philosophy a critical distance from the natural sciences that enables analytic philosophy to occasionally challenge the claims of the natural sciences. If we employ this strategy, it seems we have to question the popular dogma that the success of the natural sciences either verifies or makes reasonable the assertion that all of the methodological assumptions of the natural sciences are correct. If we take the second option we must assume that analytic philosophy is a discipline that presupposes, rather than engages with claims made by the natural sciences. Moreover, there will be no need to defend meta-ethical theories which challenge the presuppositions of naturalism. Insofar as naturalist meta-ethical theories will be discussed in meta-ethics debates at all, the discussions will centre on which versions of naturalistic meta-ethics are the most plausible.

What has happened in reality is an awkward attempt at having things both ways: Meta-ethicists try to refrain from embracing any theory that challenges the methodological assumptions of the natural sciences. On the other hand, versions of non-naturalist Moral Realism are taken seriously in debates about what constitutes the most plausible meta-ethical theory. The combination of these two practices creates a strange situation: On the one hand, Moral Realism is seen as a plausible contender for an adequate account of morality. On the other hand, Moral Realism is seen as more theoretically attractive insofar as the account says nothing that could conflict with the methodological assumptions of the natural sciences. This creates a bias in favor of dismissing the aspects of Moral Realism that conflict with the assumptions of the natural sciences. On the other hand, Moral Realism is motivated by the attempt to create a theory that most comprehensively matches our moral commitments. It is these very commitments that are overt threats to the methodological assumptions of the natural sciences.

## **5. DWORKIN, DREIER, EHRENBERG, AND ARCHIMEDEANISM**

### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

In chapter four, I will examine Ronald Dworkin's objection to the claim that moral practice can commit us to meta-ethical claims that imply Moral Realism or Moral Anti-Realism. According to Dworkin, there are no 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims which can

validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. This is because, for Dworkin, most of the purportedly 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims are actually a set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims.<sup>220</sup> The remaining 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims which can validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are implausible.<sup>221</sup> On Dworkin's view, there are no moral commitments to meta-ethical claims that could validate or undermine Moral Realism or anti-realism. This is because there simply are no 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims which could validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. If there are no such 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims, a debate between moral realists and anti-realists is, most of the time, happening at the 1<sup>st</sup> order level of moral discourse. The only exceptions to this are when the participants of such a debate trade in implausible 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims.

Dworkin uses the term "archimedean" to denote the set of 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims that can be used to validate or undermine moral realist or moral anti-realist views. He believes such claims are either 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims that are mistaken for 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims or they are implausible 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims. By implausible moral claims, Dworkin means claims it is implausible to make or attribute to ordinary moralisers.<sup>222</sup> Dworkin then criticizes three theories he takes to be archimedean. They are secondary quality theory, expressivism, and Quasi-Realism. He criticizes each theory for making 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims the theory mistakenly identifies as 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. Dworkin criticizes secondary quality theory for implying counterfactual claims that are morally non-neutral 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims.<sup>223</sup> He next criticizes expressivism for denying plausible 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims in the name of revising our explanations of 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims in order to make such claims more plausible.<sup>224</sup> He finally criticizes Quasi-Realism for denying 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> See Dworkin (1996).

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 104-105

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 101-105

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 108-112

order moral claims that the quasi-realist mistakes for 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims.<sup>225</sup>

Dworkin's aim is to show that all good meta-ethical theories are non-archimedean theories.<sup>226</sup> This leaves the meta-ethicist with no room to discuss Moral Realism or Moral Anti-Realism. Without archimedean claims, meta-ethics cannot make judgments that are external to 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice which validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. All validating or undermining of 1<sup>st</sup> order claims must be done from the 1<sup>st</sup> order perspective. Hence, if Dworkin's view is correct, there can be no 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim that validates or undermines any particular moral claim. All a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim could do is articulate meta-ethical issues relating to the claim "Murder is wrong" that have no bearing on whether the claim is validated or undermined.

In section one, I will present Dworkin's arguments. In section two, I will criticize his arguments on the basis that they are inconsistent. Dworkin relies on 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims that are used to validate or undermine moral realist and anti-realist theories. This is the very set of claims his arguments purport to show do not exist. In section 3, I will analyze objections to Dworkin's arguments given by Jamie Dreier. In section four, I will summarize Dreier's objections to Dworkin's arguments. Dreier objects to Dworkin's defense of anti-archimedeanism by attempting to show that some 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims can be morally non-committing. Dreier attempts to show that some 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims that are morally non-committing are non-preposterous 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. Moreover, Dreier thinks these 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims could be used to validate or undermine moral realist or anti-realist positions. Dreier believes that if any 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims are morally non-committing, there is no reason to interpret them as 1<sup>st</sup> order claims. This is true, according to Dreier, even if those 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims have moral implications.

Kenneth Ehrenberg, by contrast, throws a very different set of criticisms at Dworkin. In section four, I will summarize these criticisms. Ehrenberg maintains that

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<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 110-112

<sup>226</sup>This is the reasonable conclusion to draw given that he has no beef with ethics per se and his criticisms are all aimed at archimedean theories.

Dworkin has failed to discredit the 2<sup>nd</sup> order perspective from which the meta-ethicist discussing the merits of Moral Realism or anti-realism makes his claims. Ehrenberg accuses Dworkin of failing to give persuasive reasons for the interpretation of a set of 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims as a set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Ehrenberg, like Dreier, takes issue with Dworkin's attempts to show that non-preposterous 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims used to justify Moral Realism or anti-realism are actually 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. This is because Dworkin, according to Ehrenberg, has failed to give good reasons for showing that such claims are morally non-neutral. Ehrenberg also criticizes Dworkin's contention that non-preposterous debates regarding Moral Realism and anti-realism do not deal with issues which are above and beyond those issues dealt with in 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. Ehrenberg gives counter-examples that he believes demonstrate that there are metaphysical issues dealt with during non-preposterous debates over whether particular versions of Moral Realism or Moral Anti-Realism are true. These issues, he contends, are distinct from anything discussed at the 1<sup>st</sup> order.

In section five, I will show that both Dreier and Ehrenberg's attacks on Dworkin fail to hit their targets. This is because both Dreier and Ehrenberg assume some component of moral archimedeanism. These components are related to the traditional characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction assumed by moral archimedeanism. Dreier assumes that meta-ethical standards about how one ought to evaluate moral standards are not themselves moral standards. He also fails to see that one of his own versions of morally non-committing secondary quality theory is actually a theory there are moral reasons not to hold. Moreover, these moral reasons are simultaneously 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claims. Ehrenberg's criticisms of Dworkin all uniformly fail because Ehrenberg assumes the falsity of the claim that there can be 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral commitments. At the end of chapter four, I will explain how Dworkin, Dreier, and Ehrenberg either fail to attack archimedeanism or fail to defend it because they presuppose components of it. I will then suggest what might perhaps motivate them to accept these components in such a strong way.

An important preliminary issue to clarify is the way the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim and 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim definitions will be handled. When I discuss the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim distinction, I will not be referring to the distinction between moral and non-moral claims. Since that distinction is partly the target of Dworkin's arguments, I will be distinguishing 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims throughout this chapter in a different way. 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims I will presuppose are moral claims that are internal to the practice of morality. 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims I will presuppose are meta-ethical claims about 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. To say that a claim is a meta-ethical claim about 1<sup>st</sup> order claims is to say that the claim illuminates either implications or presuppositions of the 1<sup>st</sup> order claim. These implications or presuppositions have a non-moral component.

An example of such a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim might be, "The 1<sup>st</sup> order claim 'It is wrong to torture children' presupposes the existence of mind independent non-natural moral properties." This claim is an example of a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim because it is a claim about the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim, "It is wrong to torture children." Moreover, it is also a claim that implies that a presupposition of the claim "It is wrong to torture children" has a non-moral component. The non-moral component would be the fact that the 1<sup>st</sup> order claim presupposes the existence of mind-independent non-natural properties. The moral component would be the moral nature of the mind independent non-natural properties.

As a matter of definitions, I will remain agnostic about whether 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims are also moral, since that is one of the topics at issue in this discussion. Also, when I refer to moral commitments, it should be reminded that I am referring to any claims we must affirm or presuppose in virtue of engaging adequately in moral practice. I am leaving it open in my definition of moral commitments whether moral commitments must be 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims or whether they can be both 1<sup>st</sup> order and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims.

## **5.2 DWORKIN'S ANTI-ARCHIMEDEANISM**

Ronald Dworkin attacks a position he describes as moral archimedeanism. According to Dworkin, archimedeanism is a class of theories that purport to stand outside a whole body of belief and judge it as a whole from premises or attitudes that owe nothing



to it. Moral archimedeanism refers to the class of views that purport to stand outside a body of moral beliefs and judge it as a whole from premises or attitudes that owe nothing to it. Dworkin develops a lengthy attack on moral archimedeanism on the grounds that any successful, intelligible argument that moral propositions are either true or false must be internal to the moral domain rather than archimedean about it.<sup>227</sup> This means, for instance, that an archimedean theory that makes the claim that there is no right or wrong answer to the question of whether abortion is wrong is making a moral claim. Furthermore, such a claim is a claim that should be judged and evaluated no differently than any other moral claim.

It is plain to see that Dworkin uses the term ‘archimedeanism’ to refer to meta-ethical theories that are either moral realist or moral anti-realist. This is because these are the only meta-ethical theories that purport to stand outside a body of moral beliefs while simultaneously judging those beliefs as true or false. Even those meta-ethical theories that conclude that moral judgments are neither true nor false normally start from a perspective that purports to judge moral beliefs from a theoretical perspective that is external to 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice.<sup>228</sup> In his arguments against archimedeanism, Dworkin directly attacks archimedean theories that he believes are sceptical about 1<sup>st</sup> order morality. He contends that any sceptical theory of morality can only be sceptical from within the practice of 1st order morality. This is because Dworkin believes it is not philosophically tenable to make claims from outside of 1st order moral practice that either validate or undermine 1st order moral claims.

This is a criticism of archimedean scepticism that applies just as much to moral realist archimedean theories as it does to moral anti-realist theories. After all, if Dworkin’s thesis is correct, it is just as untenable to validate 1st order moral claims from a perspective outside of morality as it is to undermine them. Hence, it is best to interpret

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 87-139

<sup>228</sup> Moral Realism, as well as anti-realism, are both attempts to potentially validate or potentially undermine (in the case of some anti-realist theories) moral commitments.

Dworkin as offering a critique of all forms of archimedeanism, rather than just a critique of sceptical varieties of archimedeanism. Dworkin begins his attack by challenging the traditional distinction between 1st and 2nd order moral claims. This challenge begins with a criticism of what Dworkin calls internal morally sceptical and external morally sceptical positions. For Dworkin, an internally sceptical position denies some group of familiar positive moral claims and justifies that denial by endorsing a different positive moral claim. Dworkin gives as an example of an internally sceptical position, the view that many liberals have about conventional sexual morality. Such liberals believe that sexual acts are not inherently good or bad or right or wrong. However, they believe this because they are presupposing that suffering is the only thing that is inherently bad, and they doubt that either heterosexual or homosexual acts promote suffering.<sup>229</sup> This is an example of an internal morally sceptical view that rests on a counterfactual moral claim. It is a counterfactual claim because it claims that certain conditions, which it presupposes would support positive moral ascriptions if they did hold, do not hold. Additionally, Dworkin claims that internal morally sceptical views have direct implications for action. Dworkin believes that this is normally how internal morally sceptical views are differentiated from external morally sceptical views.<sup>230</sup> External morally sceptical views are typically portrayed as morally neutral insofar as they, unlike internal morally sceptical views, do not take sides in moral controversies. Additionally, external morally sceptical views are supposedly austere, in the sense that they do not rely on other moral claims. External morally sceptical views are a subset of archimedean views since they are used in the defence of various forms of Moral Anti-Realism. Dworkin's strategy here is to deny external morally sceptical views by denying an archimedean characterization of a meta-ethical distinction external morally sceptical views rely on.

This distinction is what Dworkin refers to as the distinction between I and E

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<sup>229</sup>Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 92

propositions.<sup>231</sup> Dworkin claims that archimedean distinguish E propositions from I propositions by claiming that I propositions are 1st order moral propositions internal to the practice of moralising and E propositions are 2nd order metaphysical statements about I propositions. This distinction should not be mistaken for one that corresponds roughly to the traditional distinction between meta-ethical propositions (E propositions) and normative ethics propositions (I propositions). Archimedean claims are not identical to meta-ethical claims because not all meta-ethical claims deal with the possible metaphysical commitments of moral claims.<sup>232</sup> Some meta-ethical claims deal with issues of meaning, psychology or epistemology. Archimedean claims do not deal with these non-metaphysical issues that meta-ethical claims often do. I am taking it for granted here that E propositions consist entirely of 2<sup>nd</sup> order metaphysical statements about normative ethics propositions (I propositions).

Dworkin believes archimedean mistakenly characterize the distinction between E and I propositions in a way that allows them to claim that E propositions are morally neutral and austere. According to Dworkin, archimedean believe that insofar as they are asserting E propositions, they can claim moral neutrality. They claim austerity because they purport to rely on non-moral premises to support their views. Dworkin illustrates what he believes is the mistaken characterization of this distinction by looking at Richard Rorty's description of moral archimedean as being in a state of 'irony'.<sup>233</sup> By 'irony', Rorty means that archimedean believe that they have the capacity to have their moral convictions in one sense and lose them in another sense. Specifically, he means that archimedean believe they have the capacity to have their moral convictions in a 1st order sense but not in a 2nd order sense. This belief is what Dworkin wants to attack. He wants

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 92-33. Here, it should be noted the distinction between I and E propositions is roughly equivalent to the distinction between meta-ethics and normative ethics.

<sup>232</sup> It should be noted that one could challenge this view on the grounds that all other meta-ethical issues ultimately can be reduced to or summarized as meta-physical issues. However, I am not making this claim.

<sup>233</sup> See RORTY, Richard. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989

to show that if we were to adequately characterize the distinction between I and E propositions, archimedean could not claim moral neutrality. Most of the time, they could not claim austerity either. In order to show this, Dworkin devises an interesting strategy.

He believes he can show 1. All plausible E propositions can be plausibly interpreted as I propositions and 2. There can be no interpretations or translations of any plausible claims such that those claims wind up being best interpreted or translated as E propositions.<sup>234</sup> In order to show 1, Dworkin contends that it is possible to interpret plausible E propositions as either clarifying, emphasizing, elaborating or metaphorically restating I propositions.<sup>235</sup> In order to show 2, Dworkin contends that the range of meta-ethical statements typically thought to be E propositions, are philosophically problematic in some way unless interpreted as I propositions. Dworkin believes that the truth of 1 and 2 show that archimedean moral theories are philosophically bankrupt.<sup>236</sup> Moreover, any moral theory that asserts E propositions will be philosophically bankrupt until such E propositions are either eliminated or understood as I propositions. It is here that it should be noted that Dworkin is advocating a thesis that is not a meta-ethical minimalism about moral truths. Crispin Wright, perhaps the most famous proponent of minimalism about truth, has argued that the concept of truth is that which is fixed by the disquotational schema “P is true if and only if P.”<sup>237</sup> This is minimalism precisely because the disquotational schema exhausts all that can be said about what it is for a proposition to be true.<sup>238</sup> This concept is what Wright refers to as minimal truth. It looks superficially as though Dworkin is advocating the claim that a moral claim X is true if and only if X.<sup>239</sup> After all, Dworkin seems to be denying many of the meta-ethical explanations

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<sup>234</sup> This is one of the conclusions of Dworkin’s various criticisms of archimedeanism.

<sup>235</sup> Dworkin (1996), 97

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-117

<sup>237</sup> See WRIGHT, Crispin. *Truth and Objectivity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> Dworkin, (1996), 98.

philosophers traditionally use to elucidate what it means for a moral claim to be true. His anti-archimedeanism has no place in it for affirmations or denials of Moral Realism or Moral Anti-Realism. There is also no room for a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim to validate or undermine any 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim. Like a minimalist meta-ethics, Dworkin's views block many of the traditional questions about the ontology of a moral claim.<sup>240</sup>

However, Dworkin's views are not minimalist because there is room on Dworkin's views for meta-ethical discussions. This is because there is room on Dworkin's views for some 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claims. These meta-ethical claims, however, cannot be archimedean claims. In other words, they cannot be claims which are made from a 2<sup>nd</sup> order perspective which validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. However, we can assume there are plenty of semantic, psychological, and epistemological meta-ethical claims which do not validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Moreover, there are plenty of meta-ethical claims that don't justify or deny particular moral realist or moral anti-realist theories. What Dworkin's views are consistent with is a meta-ethics where there is no place for discussions of what moral realist or moral anti-realist theories are true. This is because, for Dworkin, all the plausible moral claims that have the capacity to validate or undermine other 1st order moral claims are themselves, 1<sup>st</sup> order claims.

As we saw earlier, all plausible moral claims, whether affirmed at the 1st or 2nd order, wind up being I propositions for Dworkin. Hence, all philosophically plausible moral claims, for Dworkin, are morally non-neutral. In his defense of I, Dworkin considers supposed E propositions made in a conversation where a proponent of the view that abortion is wrong makes his case by asserting these supposed E propositions. At one point in the conversation, the proponent says, "It is just true that abortion is wrong." According to Dworkin, this can be interpreted as an impatient restatement of his substantive moral position, not an E proposition.<sup>241</sup> Dworkin then imagines this speaker

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<sup>240</sup>It certainly blocks questions about the possible ontology of moral facts.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 99. On an interesting side note, Dworkin has not sufficiently argued that philosophers are not simply borrowing from certain ordinary moralisers when they make claims about moral facts

going on to say “It is objectively the case that abortion is wrong” and “Abortion *really* is wrong”. Dworkin thinks these two claims can also be interpreted as attempts to clarify the 1st order view that abortion is wrong by distinguishing it from other opinions that are subjective matters of taste. This is because the proponent of the claim that abortion is wrong could make the claim that “Soccer is a worthless game” while intending the claim to be an assertion of his subjective tastes. In other words, he could assert “Soccer is a worthless game” without committing himself to the claim that soccer is in some objective sense more worthless than games he prefers to watch.<sup>242</sup> He might say that he has a reason for not watching soccer but it is also the case that no one whose soccer tastes are different has the same reason. Such is not the case with his views on abortion.

Dworkin then imagines our proponent of the claim that abortion is wrong going on to say that “the wrongness of abortion is a moral absolute.” Here, Dworkin contends that this claim can be interpreted as the claim that abortion is always wrong in principle and that its wrongness is never overridden by competing considerations.<sup>243</sup> Dworkin then imagines our proponent making the even more baroque claim that “The wrongness of abortion is a moral fact that exists in an independent realm.” Before Dworkin translates this claim into an I proposition, he asserts that such a claim is not something that ordinary people (i.e. non-philosophers) actually say.<sup>244</sup> However, Dworkin claims that we can make sufficient sense of this kind of claim as something people might say, by understanding it as an inflated, metaphorical way of repeating what other 1st order claims say more directly.<sup>245</sup> For instance, the claim “the wrongness of abortion is a moral fact that exists in an independent realm” can be understood as an inflated, metaphorical way of saying “The

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existing in an independent realm. It is not clear that this metaphysical claim is solely the product of philosophers since Plato.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 99

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 98

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 99-100

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 103-105

wrongness of abortion does not depend on anyone's thinking it wrong."

In defense of 2 (there can be no interpretations or translations of any plausible claims such that those claims wind up being best interpreted or translated as E propositions), Dworkin critiques the traditional practice of archimedean to read E propositions as meta-ethical claims about value judgments.<sup>246</sup> Dworkin asserts that these E propositions are read as such by archimedean because archimedean look to E propositions to take stances on metaphysical questions. These questions include the question of whether or not there are moral properties in the universe and if so, what kind of properties these are.<sup>247</sup> Dworkin thinks archimedean see themselves as being capable of answering "no" to this question. However, they do not see the act of answering "no" as asserting any moral claim. They see both a "yes" or "no" answer as leaving morality as it stands.

Dworkin contends that the question, "Are there moral properties in the universe?" is a question that can only plausibly be understood as a weak I proposition. Even if we understand it as a question about what natural properties moral properties consist of, Dworkin still believes it is best interpreted as an I proposition. This is because Dworkin believes the identity of a natural and moral property is a synthetic (rather than semantic) identity and is discovered through empirical investigation.<sup>248</sup> According to Dworkin, there is nothing metaphysical that is being postulated when someone asserts that there is an empirically discovered, synthetic identity between moral properties and natural properties. To illustrate this point further, Dworkin imagines two utilitarians having a dispute. In this dispute, one utilitarian thinks the only thing that can make an act right is its pleasure maximizing power and the other utilitarian thinks that the property of rightness and the property of pleasure maximizing power are the same property.<sup>249</sup> According to

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 89-94

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 99-101

Dworkin, the second utilitarian is not saying anything that adds anything to what the first utilitarian is saying. Rather, the second utilitarian is merely using the jargon of metaphysics. For Dworkin, the second idea appears to have the characteristics of an E proposition but is in fact, an I proposition. For him, a claim needs more than the language of metaphysics to be genuinely metaphysical. It needs to say something over and above a claim that could be re-expressed as an I proposition without metaphysical language. Dworkin does consider a range of 2nd order claims about morality that are metaphysical insofar as they can't be re-expressed as I propositions without their metaphysical language. However, he also claims that these are both difficult to make sense of and claims no normal moraliser would make. These 2nd order claims posit a causal relationship between moral properties and moral beliefs where the moral properties cannot be reduced to natural properties. Moreover, on this causal relationship account, the moral properties cause the moral beliefs.<sup>250</sup> These claims constitute what Dworkin calls a Platonist "moral field thesis." On the moral field thesis, there are non-natural moral properties that exist in the universe. They exist alongside protons and neutrons (Dworkin calls them 'morons'), having a causal impact on human receptors.

For Dworkin, archimedean have one of three ways of interpreting the moral field thesis. They can interpret it as a metaphysical claim, in which case there is not much that can be said about it on account of it being so difficult to make sense of. If they interpret the moral field thesis as a physics thesis, it simply becomes a bad piece of physics worthy of rejecting on scientific grounds. If they interpret it as a moral claim, it seems more metaphor than a statement that refers to anything literal. This is why the moral field thesis is one of the few claims Dworkin believes an archimedean could deny while maintaining both austerity and moral neutrality.<sup>251</sup> The rub, as we just saw, is that the moral field thesis is a claim no ordinary moraliser would actually make. For Dworkin,

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 103-105. It is worth nothing that there are multiple interpretations of what it would mean to say that moral properties cause moral beliefs. Dworkin himself notices this.

<sup>251</sup> This is because he interprets it as a non-moral view that is false. This is partially why he finds the moral field thesis such an implausible claim to attribute to moralisers.



it is an implausible creation of philosophers and as such, should be denied insofar as one can make sense of it.<sup>252</sup> However, this is not the case with the majority of supposed E propositions. Such propositions, according to Dworkin, are plausibly interpreted only as I propositions. Thus, for the archimedean to deny them is for the archimedean to give up his moral neutrality.

Dworkin's views imply that archimedean philosophers generally trade in I propositions except in cases when they are trading in implausible E propositions. This implies there is no such thing as an archimedean philosophical debate where philosophers are trading in plausible E propositions. Meta-ethical theories, which appear to be putting forward an archimedean hypothesis, are either unwittingly asserting I propositions or asserting implausible E propositions. This means that for Dworkin, all the plausible discussions of morality happen at the 1<sup>st</sup> order. This illustrates how Dworkin's views are similar to meta-ethical minimalism. Dworkin seems to be advocating the claim that a moral claim X is true if and only if X. However, he is qualifying this claim with the subsequent claim that to affirm X is to affirm X at the 1<sup>st</sup> order. This qualification is what demonstrates how the traditional meta-ethical questions about the ontology of X get blocked before they even get off the ground.

If Dworkin is right, the meta-ethicist has three types of propositions to choose from when giving an account of morality. He can choose from 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims (I propositions), 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean moral claims (E propositions), or 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims that are not archimedean. Such 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims could include claims about the meaning of moral terms or the logical relations embedded in moral propositions. Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean moral claims are excluded on the grounds of implausibility, all the meta-ethicist has left is 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims that are not archimedean. This means a decent meta-ethical theory, on Dworkin's view, can only make moral claims or make meta-ethical claims that are irrelevant to the project of assessing whether or not Moral Realism is true.

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 103-105

Dworkin then goes on to claim that various meta-ethical theories thought to be archimedean actually trade in I propositions which take stands in moral disputes. Dworkin's two main targets for this attack are secondary quality meta-ethics theories and expressivist meta-ethics theories. Dworkin claims that proponents of secondary quality theory are taking stands in moral disputes because they are committed to counterfactual claims about which moral propositions would be true in certain situations.<sup>253</sup> Although Dworkin admits the potential diversity of secondary quality theories, he insists that all secondary quality theories will commit proponents to affirming that the extension of moral properties is fixed to some extent by our natural history.<sup>254</sup> Dworkin claims that the most natural form of secondary quality theory states that what makes an act morally wrong is that contemplating the act in fact produces a particular kind of reaction in most people or most members of a particular community.<sup>255</sup> According to Dworkin, it follows from this formulation that if one day people in general, or in the stipulated community, ceased to react in that way to genocide, genocide would cease to be wicked. Dworkin believes that this thesis is a controversial moral claim.<sup>256</sup> Secondary quality theories, for Dworkin, are not morally neutral theories that only trade in E propositions.

Dworkin considers a more sophisticated variation of secondary quality theory. He considers a secondary quality theory that posits that what makes genocide wrong is the reaction, not of whichever kind of people happen to exist from time to time, but of "us". Dworkin defines "us" as people with the physiological structure, basic interests, and general mental dispositions that people actually have now.<sup>257</sup> On this secondary quality theory, it would no longer follow that genocide would cease being wicked if human

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 101-103

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. The controversy, for Dworkin, comes from the fact that our current views about genocide, on the secondary quality view, are not justified by any facts which are independent of the way human communities have evolved.

<sup>257</sup> It should be noted that this is quite vague.

beings developed very different general interests or different neural wiring.<sup>258</sup> However, Dworkin insists that such a secondary quality theory would cease to be philosophically illuminating precisely because it would lack counterfactual claims about the circumstances in which genocide would not be wicked.<sup>259</sup> Nonetheless, controversial claims would still follow. For instance, this theory would entail the claim that genocide would not have been wicked if economic or other circumstances had been different as human reactions evolved, so that creatures with our general interests and attitudes had not been revolted by genocide.<sup>260</sup>

Here, Dworkin is not including the latter sort of claim within the class of moral counterfactual claims that are controversial. Presumably, this is because the claim about what would be the case if human beings had developed differently (in the past) would not be morally relevant to contemporary human beings if it were true. Counterfactual claims about the future given by secondary quality theories would be morally relevant. This is because such counterfactuals tell us possible circumstances we could find ourselves in where genocide may not be wrong. Counterfactuals about the past do not do this. Dworkin is careful to qualify that he is not meaning to suggest that moral properties are primary in giving this critique of secondary quality theories. Rather, he thinks that the question of whether or not moral properties are primary is a moral question. This is because Dworkin believes the question of what kinds of moral properties exist in the world is also a question about the circumstances in which institutions are just or unjust or people are good or bad and why.<sup>261</sup> For Dworkin, there is no philosophically substantive metaphysical way of talking about moral properties. Hence, Dworkin believes that any

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 102-103

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. Here, Dworkin has a notion of what it would mean for a philosophical theory to be illuminating that he doesn't specify or defend.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 102-103

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 103. It should be noted that this claim by Dworkin can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Even archimedean moral realists can agree with it, if they interpret it as a claim about the relationship between natural facts and moral properties.

philosophically illuminating account of moral properties will be one that is both morally non-neutral and an account that trades in I propositions. Dworkin also believes the only kind of illuminating discourse one can have about moral properties is 1st order discourse.<sup>262</sup> He assumes that all 1st order discourse is by definition, morally non-neutral. Talk of moral properties for Dworkin amounts to 1st order talk about the moral circumstances in which moral properties obtain.

Dworkin here goes on to criticize expressivism on the grounds that it unwittingly trades in contentious, morally non-neutral I propositions. Dworkin maintains that expressivism winds up denying plausible morally non-neutral I propositions in the name of revising our explanations of such I propositions. According to Dworkin, expressivists maintain that positive moral judgments that make up the I propositions of morality are not actually propositions. They belong to a different semantic category. They are expressions of approval or disapproval or recommendations of rules of conduct.<sup>263</sup> Dworkin states that expressivism is committed to the view that the moraliser who asserts that torture is wicked is not describing anything. Rather, on the expressivist account, he is only expressing a negative attitude towards torture and perhaps endorsing a standard of conduct that would condemn torture. Dworkin believes such theories are ‘dramatically’ revisionist because they contradict what people actually mean when they assert I propositions.<sup>264</sup> For Dworkin, people who say that torture is wicked do not think they are just expressing an attitude or accepting a rule or standard as a kind of personal commitment. Dworkin accuses the expressivist of forcing the ordinary moraliser to change his understanding of his asserted I propositions by claiming that if the ordinary moraliser does not, he will mean nothing at all. However, Dworkin believes there is a specific reason why expressivism is so strident in the manner it tries to revise moral discourse. This reason is where Dworkin pushes the bulk of his criticism of expressivism.

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<sup>262</sup> This is an outcome of his views.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 108-112

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

Dworkin cites Alan Gibbard in claiming that the expressivist is a revisionist about moral discourse because he is motivated by the worry that if one treats normative judgments as descriptive reports, one will have to embrace Platonism.<sup>265</sup> Platonism, according to Gibbard, is the idea that truths about what is rational or just or good are among the facts of the world. For Gibbard, such an idea is fantastic to an ordinary sensibility and if anyone believed it, such a belief should be debunked.<sup>266</sup> Expressivism becomes an attempt to rescue morality from platonism by proposing that morality is not a descriptive project but instead an expressive enterprise. Dworkin contends that the motivation behind expressivism begs the question against his anti-archimedeanism by assuming that the platonist E propositions of morality are not themselves I propositions. Moreover, Dworkin claims that if platonism, as Gibbard defines it, is something that should be debunked, this means morality must be debunked along with it.<sup>267</sup> Hence the expressivist, in order to find a plausible reading of any moral claim, must create a reading of the claim that takes away what the claim is traditionally thought to assert.<sup>268</sup>

Unlike his views on expressivism, Dworkin concedes that there are some sophisticated versions of non-cognitivism that try and countenance the face value of moral discourse by interpreting it as non-cognitive. Here, Dworkin is referring to Blackburn's Quasi-Realism. According to Dworkin, Quasi-Realism attempts to countenance counterfactual claims about morality that sound like E propositions within the domain of the non-cognitive. The quasi-realist, for instance, will agree with the ordinary moraliser that slavery would be wrong even if evolution and history had proceeded in a way where almost no one thought it was.<sup>269</sup> However, this claim, within the quasi-realist re-

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<sup>265</sup> GIBBARD, Alan. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgement*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990. pp. 154

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Dworkin., 1996, p.110

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Blackburn, (1993), 172-173.

interpretation, will simply express a somewhat more refined attitude than the attitude expressed in the claim, “Slavery is Wrong.”<sup>270</sup> By “more refined attitude” we mean that it is a higher order attitude of the 1<sup>st</sup> order which regulates other lower attitudes of the 1<sup>st</sup> order.<sup>271</sup> The purpose of this attitude regulation is to allow agents to develop moral sentiments that in turn allow them to engage in the practice of mutual attitude coordination the quasi-realist identifies with morality.<sup>272</sup> This expression of a higher order 1st order attitude, on the quasi-realist framework, is a non-cognitive I proposition rather than a platonic and false E proposition.

For the quasi-realist, there can be higher order attitudes which are non-cognitive I propositions rather than cognitive E propositions. Thus, a higher order moral attitude need not be a metaphysical, 2nd order claim for the quasi-realist. Blackburn’s strategy for this maneuver is to distinguish between oblique contexts in which we can affirm higher order attitudes as I propositions and other oblique contexts in which we can affirm them as non-cognitive E propositions.<sup>273</sup> Oblique contexts are 1st and 2nd order contexts in which a given proposition can have different truth values. For Blackburn, there is an oblique context internal to the practice of moral discourse in which we can say the wrongness of slavery is not dependent on anyone’s attitudes. Yet there is another oblique context external to the practice of moral discourse in which we can talk about causal relations between people. It is in this context that we can deny the claim that the wrongness of slavery is not dependent on anyone’s attitudes. It is also in this oblique context that we can say that philosophical naturalism is true because there are no moral properties. There are only attitudes of people.<sup>274</sup>

For Blackburn, the denial of the claim that there are moral properties is no threat

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 174

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Blackburn (1992), 5, 13-1

<sup>273</sup> Blackburn (1993), 172-174

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

to the claim that “Slavery is Wrong.” This is because what makes slavery wrong is not slavery’s instantiation of moral properties but rather the features of slavery that make it morally objectionable. These features include the fact that it causes pain, denies autonomy to human agents, is unjust, and so on. For Blackburn, none of these features depends on the existence of moral properties in order to make it the case that slavery is morally objectionable.<sup>275</sup> For Dworkin, if we interpret Blackburn as simply denying moral properties, this is not strong enough for Quasi-Realism to be inconsistent with the sort of platonism that Gibbard describes.<sup>276</sup> Under that platonism, there are moral properties that exist in the universe and are independent of human will or attitude. Moreover, on that platonism, moral claims are correct insofar as they correspond to or represent these properties. If Blackburn wants to defend Quasi-Realism as something stronger than the denial of platonistic moral properties, Dworkin thinks he must abandon the claim that the wrongness of slavery is independent of anyone’s attitudes.<sup>277</sup>

Dworkin thinks the wrongness of slavery must depend on attitudes if attitudes are all it can depend on and this is true regardless of context.<sup>278</sup> Here, Dworkin is accusing Blackburn of an incoherence. On the one hand, Blackburn wants to assent to the claim that “There are no moral properties, only attitudes.” On the other hand, Blackburn wants to assent to the claim that “The wrongness of slavery does not depend on attitudes.” Dworkin sees the former claim as entailing the denial of the latter claim. This is because “the wrongness of slavery does not depend on attitudes” is a claim that is correct from within the practice of morality. As such, Dworkin believes it cannot be the case that this claim is, in another context, a false E proposition. This is partly an outcome of Dworkin’s rejection of archimedeanism. For Dworkin, there simply is no philosophically plausible way of interpreting any context other than the 1st order moral context in which “the wrongness of

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Gibbard (1990), 154

<sup>277</sup> Dworkin, 1996, 110-112

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

slavery does not depend on attitudes.” There is no context in which such a claim could be intelligible without committing ordinary moralisers to a wildly implausible hypothesis. For Dworkin, Blackburn has given us no reason to think that a correct I proposition can simultaneously be an incorrect E proposition. After all, on Dworkin’s view, there is no philosophically plausible account of moral E propositions in the first place.

In summary, we can see that Dworkin’s anti-archimedeanism implies that there can be no moral commitments to archimedean claims. Archimedean claims, on Dworkin’s view, are E propositions and all E propositions are implausible 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. The constraint on the attractiveness of meta-ethical theories argued for in chapter 2, we should remember, was an archimedean claim. It was an assertion of explanatory Moral Realism, the very sort of assertion Dworkin would describe as an implausible E proposition. If Dworkin’s views are correct, this would imply the negation of the constraint defended in chapter 2 of this thesis.

### **5.3 CRITIQUE OF DWORKIN**

Dworkin’s argument is inconsistent. Dworkin relies on the very 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean propositions that his argument attacks. Dworkin says that 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean propositions are implausible unless interpreted as I propositions. On what basis does Dworkin think such propositions are implausible? As we saw, it is because they attribute extravagant claims to ordinary moralisers that such moralisers would never make. These are claims such as the moral field thesis that, to the extent that they can be made sense of, seem to be bad physics. Dworkin asserts that the moral field thesis is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim there is good reason to cast doubt on. This means Dworkin’s characterization of the moral field thesis is itself a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim. I will show that this 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim is an archimedean 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim. This is for the reason that the act of casting doubt on an archimedean claim requires the assertion of a claim that is, among other things, an archimedean claim. Hence, Dworkin’s argument against the moral field thesis inadvertently relies on an archimedean claim his views entail is an implausible claim.

To see clearly why this is the case, we need to consider the options for someone



wishing to cast doubt on an archimedean claim. It looks like there are three. One can use a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim to cast doubt on the archimedean claim. One could, for instance, assert the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim “moral sentiments are more valuable than moral principles” in order to cast doubt on any meta-ethical theory which is inconsistent with that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim.<sup>279</sup> The second option is to employ a different archimedean claim to cast doubt on the initial archimedean claim. One could, for instance, employ the archimedean claim, “Quasi-Realism is the most attractive theory” to cast doubt on the archimedean claim, “Error Theory is true.” The third option is to employ a claim which is not moral to cast doubt on the archimedean claim. Here, one could employ the non-moral claim, “There is evidence against the existence of non-natural properties” to cast doubt on the archimedean claim, “There are non-natural moral properties.”

Dworkin is definitely not using 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims to cast doubt on the moral field thesis. If Dworkin were to employ this tactic, he would have one of two strategies. Both strategies could not be viable options for him. The first strategy would be that he try and show that there are 1<sup>st</sup> order moral reasons to doubt the moral field thesis despite the fact that the moral field thesis is also a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitment. The second strategy would be to try and show that the moral field thesis was not a moral commitment. The first strategy would not work because whatever 1<sup>st</sup> order moral reasons he could assert that cast doubt on the moral field thesis would be inconsistent with other 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitments to the moral field thesis. Thus, there would be no way he could consistently assert 1<sup>st</sup> order moral reasons to doubt the moral field thesis.

The second strategy would not work because he would have to assert an archimedean claim if he chose the second strategy. This is because the second strategy would involve defending four claims. The first claim would be a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral reason to the effect that we ought to believe what is true. The second claim would be a non-moral claim to the effect that physics is an authority on what is true. The third claim would be an additional non-moral claim to the effect that physics casts doubt on the moral field

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<sup>279</sup>This is an example of how 1st and 2nd order moral claims can conflict.

thesis. The fourth claim would be an archimedean claim to the effect that physics is *more* of an authority than 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitments when it comes to affirming the set of descriptive truths that morality takes for granted. The reason why this fourth claim is essential is the first three claims only show that we ought to doubt the moral field thesis *if* the moral field thesis were not a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitment. It does not show what Dworkin would be intending to show: namely, that there is no 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitment to the moral field thesis. The fourth claim is essential for showing that in the event of a clash between 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitments and physics commitments, physics would win out. It is only in such a scenario that we could guarantee that the moral field thesis is not a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitment merely because physics casts doubt on it.

The fourth claim that physics is more of an authority than 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitments when it comes to affirming the set of descriptive truths that morality takes for granted is an archimedean claim. It is archimedean because it is a claim made outside of the perspective of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice. We can see this by observing the fact that it is, in part, an epistemological claim about the comparative evidential capacities of physics and moral commitments. It is also archimedean because it is a claim made from outside 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice which attempts to validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Specifically, it is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim which is both descriptive and attempts to show that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral commitments can be undermined by physics commitments. In sum, it is exactly the kind of claim Dworkin prohibits himself from being able to invoke.

The only option left for Dworkin is an attempt to use a non-moral claim to undermine the moral field thesis. However, the difficulty with this third option is there is no real distinction between a non-moral claim and an archimedean claim if the non-moral claim casts doubt on an archimedean claim. To illustrate this, let's examine a standard archimedean claim like, "Error Theory is true." It is a claim that is made from a perspective that is not internal to 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice. It is a claim that affirms that the set of all moral claims is false. In all these respects, it satisfies the criteria for being an archimedean claim. However, it simultaneously satisfies the criteria for being a non-moral

claim. It is, after all, a claim made from outside of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. It is a claim made on the basis of non-moral considerations. It is a claim that seems to be capable of being interpreted as a descriptive claim. After all, the claim that Error Theory is true entails that all moral claims are false. One need not interpret this claim as entailing that all moral claims *ought* to be false. Moreover, one need not interpret the claim as entailing that the falsehood of moral claims has any effect on what one should believe the demands of morality are. Because of these considerations, there does not seem to be any way that this claim could be said to be more of a non-moral claim than an archimedean claim. It seems to be both.

Similarly, the claim that contemporary physics implies the denial of the moral field thesis is both a non-moral claim and an archimedean claim. It is a non-moral claim because it is a descriptive claim made from within a natural science. On the other hand, it satisfies the criteria for being an archimedean claim. It is a claim made from outside 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discourse. It is a claim, which potentially validates the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim “One ought not believe the moral field thesis”, and potentially undermines the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim “One ought to believe the moral field thesis.” The claim that contemporary physics implies the denial of the moral field thesis one can certainly interpret as a physics claim. However, one could also interpret it as a meta-ethical claim. After all, it is a claim made from outside of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral practice that denies a set of possible meta-ethical theories. It does this on the basis of descriptive considerations, but this makes it no different than Error Theory.

Perhaps one might object that the fundamental difference between the physics claim about the moral field thesis and Error Theory is that the physics claim gives us information about physics whereas Error Theory only gives us information about morality. According to this reasoning, this is why we can call Error Theory an archimedean meta-ethical claim but we only call the physics claim a non-moral claim. The problem with this objection is that Error Theory does not only give us information about morality. Because of Mackie’s queerness argument, Error Theory is involved in making metaphysical

assertions.<sup>280</sup> There seems to be no reason to think that a theory that makes metaphysical assertions is archimedean and yet a theory which only makes physical assertions is not. There is certainly nothing in Dworkin's characterization of what an archimedean claim is which suggests this distinction.

This is why Dworkin's defense of anti-archimedeanism is inconsistent. He wants to defend the assertion that archimedean claims consist either of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims that are mistakenly identified as 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims or implausible 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims. Yet his defense of this dilemma must rest on a 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claim. As we have seen, it can't rest on a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim because Dworkin would have to first show that the moral field thesis is not a moral commitment. He would have to defend an archimedean claim in order to do this. His defense of the dilemma can't rest on a 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claim because Dworkin believes 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims are implausible. Finally, the dilemma can't rest on a non-moral claim because there is no difference between such non-moral claims and an archimedean claim when the non-moral claim is used to deny an archimedean theory. In this context, the non-moral claim is, for all intents and purposes, also an archimedean claim.

This means that Dworkin, in his defense of anti-archimedeanism, is using 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims to try and show that 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims are implausible. His anti-archimedeanism can only be adequately defended if he shows that discussions of the validating or undermining of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims can justifiably happen only at the 1<sup>st</sup> order. Yet his reasons for showing that discussions at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order can't justifiably validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are ultimately archimedean. In other words, Dworkin is inconsistent in his defense of his version of anti-archimedeanism because he relies on the very claims he wants to show are implausible.

#### **5.4 JAMIE DREIER'S CRITIQUE OF DWORKIN**

In his paper "Meta-Ethics and Normative Commitment," Jamie Dreier presents a

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<sup>280</sup> This is the outcome that the queerness argument is an argument about which metaphysical properties are likely and unlikely to exist.

novel critique of Dworkin's attack on archimedean theories. Drier uses possible world matrixes to show that the normative commitments of a theory are distinct from its normative implications.<sup>281</sup> For Dreier, this is a strategy for showing that some meta-ethical theories are morally non-committal, despite the fact that they have moral implications. For Drier, if such theories are morally non-committal, they are morally neutral. The purpose of this strategy is to demonstrate that some of the meta-ethical theories that are morally non-committal are plausible theories that are properly situated in the moral realist/moral anti-realist debate. Dreier also wants to show that even if Dworkin is right about the moral non-neutrality of plausible meta-ethical theories, it does not follow that those theories are conjunctions of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. This constitutes an attack on Dworkin's anti-archimedeanism because if Dreier is right, some plausible archimedean theories can't be reduced to 1<sup>st</sup> order claims. This entails that it is not only implausible archimedean theories (like the moral field thesis) that cannot be reduced to 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. If some archimedean theories are plausible at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order, this constitutes a refutation of Dworkin's views.

Dreier claims that a statement is morally committing if and only if it is true according to some moral standards and false at others at any world in which it is affirmed. This means that if you listen to someone make a moral statement that is morally committing, you will be able to narrow down the class of moral standards that would make their statement true. This is important for Dreier because he aims to show that there are archimedean theories that consist of 2nd order claims that do not let one who affirms them narrow down the class of moral standards that they hold. Dreier believes that a version of secondary quality theory is an example of such a morally non-committal archimedean theory. Moreover, Dreier believes that Dworkin has misunderstood secondary quality in failing to consider plausible versions of secondary quality theory that are morally non-committal.

Dreier begins his critique of Dworkin by trying to get a grip on what a normative

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<sup>281</sup> See Dreier (2002), 241-263

commitment is. He initially considers Hume's Law which states:

HL: There is no logically valid argument with only non-moral premises and a normative conclusion.

However, Dreier rejects HL because of a refutation given by A.N. Prior in 1960.<sup>231</sup>

According to Prior, we can imagine a disjunction  $D \vee M$  where  $D$  stands for a descriptive claim and  $M$  stands for a moral claim. If the disjunction is itself a moral claim, it is logically entailed by  $D$  so Hume's Law is false. On the other hand, if it is not moral,  $\neg D$  conjoined with  $D \vee M$  entails  $M$ . Again, Hume's Law is false. At this point, Dreier considers a rehabilitated variation of Hume's Law given recently by Toomas Karmo.

Karmo's Law states: KL: There is no sound argument with only non-moral premises and a moral conclusion.

According to Karmo, we classify a sentence as moral at a possible world,  $w$ , if and only if, it is true at  $w$  according to one moral standard and false at another. For the notion of a moral standard, we take the class of uncontroversial moral sentences. To illustrate this idea, Karmo considers the disjunction:

B: Benito is Evil or New Zealand is a Communist Republic.

In our world, this sentence is moral because it is true according to any moral standard that assigns the value true to "Benito is Evil" and false according to any other moral standard. According to Karmo's reasoning, a proposition is non-moral at a world  $w$  if you can tell whether it is true at that world without any moral investigation.<sup>282</sup> For Dreier, a counterintuitive feature of Karmo's taxonomy is it fails to close the class of non-moral sentences under entailment.<sup>283</sup> In other words, a sentence may be moral while still being entailed by a sentence that is not moral. To illustrate, the B disjunction is moral in our world and is entailed by "New Zealand is a Communist Republic", which is not moral. However, this counterintuitive feature does not count against Karmo's theory for Dreier

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<sup>282</sup> KARMO, Toomas. Some Valid (But Not Sound) Arguments Trivially Span the Is/Ought Gap. *Mind*, 1988, vol. 97, pp. 252-257.

<sup>283</sup> Dreier, 2002, 246.

because it simply amounts to a denial of Hume's Law.<sup>284</sup> None the less, Karmo's Law, together with his classification of statements, avoids Prior's refutation by insisting that at least one true premise in any argument which goes from a descriptive premise to a normative conclusion will be false.<sup>285</sup> For example, the valid argument from "New Zealand is a Communist Republic" to B has a false premise in this world. If we consider the argument in a world where New Zealand is a Communist Republic and the argument becomes sound, the conclusion gets classified as non-moral relative to that world. Let us instead consider the disjunctive syllogism:

1 .B

or

2. "New Zealand is not a Communist Republic"

Therefore Benito is evil.

We find that in our world it may be sound. It is sound if Benito is evil and because B is one of its premises, it counts as a moral statement. If we take this disjunctive syllogism to a world where New Zealand is a Communist Republic, then the premises will all be non-moral. However, the argument will no longer be sound. However, this salvage does not make Karmo's Law legitimate for Dreier's purposes yet. At this point, Karmo's classification still counts Newtonian mechanics as having moral consequences because Newtonian mechanics is false.<sup>286</sup> In fact, as the law stood, all false statements will have Karmo-moral consequences. Dreier illustrates this by imagining the following material conditional, which is a logical consequence of Newtonian mechanics:

(P): If Newtonian mechanics is false, then eating yams is morally wrong.

(P) is a Karmo-moral implication of Newtonian mechanics. This is not what Drier wants

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 246-248

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 247

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 247.

from such a law. Rather, Dreier wants a conception of “carrying moral commitment” in which meta-ethical theories do and Newtonian mechanics theories do not carry moral commitment. Dreier can’t get such a conception by letting moral commitments be Karmo-moral implications. Moreover, there is an additional way in which an intuitive conception of “carrying moral commitment” is at odds with Karmo’s Law. The idea of an assertion committing someone to something is, according to Dreier, not the same as the idea of a proposition’s having something as an implication.<sup>287</sup> To illustrate this idea, Dreier considers a relative of Moore’s paradox:

(Q): It is raining but I don’t believe it is raining.

(Q) is not a contradiction even though in some sense it feels like one. This is because the claim commits whoever asserts it to the belief that it is raining even though the sentence does not logically imply this.<sup>288</sup> For Dreier, (Q) is over committing. So instead, he considers

(R): Either it is raining or I don’t believe it is raining.

(R) is under committing for Dreier because anyone could assert it regardless of what their actual beliefs are. Dreier takes it for granted that a conversation has the primary function of informing the various interlocutors about the beliefs of others.<sup>289</sup> On this criterion, (R) fails to inform.

Dreier then considers what he takes to be a plausible representation of an agent’s beliefs. He represents an agent’s beliefs as the big set of all the possible worlds that correspond to the beliefs the agent might have. He makes it a point at the start not to eliminate possibilities. This way he can use the sincere assertions of the agent to whittle

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 241-263 This is one of the main theses of Dreier’s article.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 247

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 248.



down the set of possible worlds that might be the agent's belief set. For instance, if the agent sincerely asserts it is raining, Dreier rules out all those worlds in which it is not raining. But if the agent asserts (R), Dreier claims it is not clear whether or not we can rule anything out.

He starts by considering the proposition:

(S): Jamie's first grade teacher is identical to Jamie's actual first grade teacher.

Dreier observes that (S) is not a necessary proposition. This is because (S) is not true in a world where Jamie's first grade teacher is Arnold Schwarzenegger. If we assume that (S) expresses a proposition and we can assume that we can use sets of possible worlds to represent propositions, then (S) expresses a set containing all those worlds which are like the actual one in respect to who teaches Jamie in first grade. (S) implies, in the sense of strict implication, that Jamie's first grade teacher is a woman. None the less, Dreier asserts that there is a fairly ordinary sense of an assertion committing one to something in which asserting (S) does not at all commit anyone to the proposition that Jamie's first grade teacher is a woman. In this ordinary sense, Dreier asserts that (S) is non-committal.<sup>290</sup> In order to further explain this idea, Dreier appeals to an apparatus developed by theorists at the intersection of semantics and pragmatics.<sup>291</sup> If we pretend that we have a standard enumeration of possible worlds, we can think of a proposition as a row of cells, each containing a T or F. Whether or not they contain T's or F's depends on whether the proposition is true or false at the world corresponding to that cell. Dreier then suggests we compare:

(T): Jamie's first grade teacher is a woman.

and

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 248-249

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 249.

(U): Jamie's actual first grade teacher is a woman.

(T) can be represented by the set of all worlds in which Jamie has a woman for a first grade teacher. (U) cannot because the proposition expressed by it is the set of all worlds in which Mrs. Proctor exists. Dreier suggests we represent sentences containing indexicals like 'actually' by two dimensional matrices. Each row of the matrix is a proposition so that each column gets labeled by a world. A given row is filled in with T's and F's that depend on whether the proposition of the row is true or false at the world labeling the column. The rows are labeled by contexts of utterance and a sentence expresses a proposition at one context and maybe another at a different context. For Dreier, the contexts are the possible worlds. Dreier suggests to the reader that we consider three worlds. At world 1, Jamie's first grade teacher is Mrs. Proctor. At world 2, Jamie's first grade teacher is Arnold Schwarzenegger. And at world 3, Jamie's first grade teacher is David Kaplan. Drier then gives us the matrix representing (U).

	World 1	World 2	World 3
(U)	T	F	F
(S)	F	T	F
(T)	F	F	T

Citing Bob Stalnaker, Dreier remarks that the diagonal of (U) is a necessary proposition.<sup>292</sup> (U) is noncommittal because of the necessity of this diagonal. According to this line of reasoning, one is expressing something knowable apriori when a sentence has

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<sup>292</sup> See STALNAKER, Robert, "Assertion", *Syntax and Semantics*, ed. P. Cole, New York: Academic Press, 1978. pp. 315-32.

necessary diagonal propositions. This is finally the conception of something's "carrying moral commitment" that Drier is after. Drier claims that asserting a proposition is committing oneself morally whenever the proposition counts as moral (in Karmo's sense of when a proposition counts as moral) relative to the world the speaker believes he is in. In other words, we classify a sentence as moral at a possible world, *w*, if and only if, it is what the speaker believes is true at *w* according to one moral standard and false according to another moral standard. Dreier concedes that a speaker does not generally believe that he is in a particular world. This is because to believe that one is in some particular world is to have unimaginably detailed beliefs.<sup>293</sup> Rather, Dreier claims that the beliefs of speakers are best represented by a set of worlds. Drier also admits that he is idealizing to some extent the epistemic states of agents by representing their total system of beliefs as sets of possible worlds.<sup>294</sup> Dreier concedes that the actual moral beliefs of moral agents are far less systematic than is depicted in his matrix. To measure moral commitment, Drier wants something like the diagonal of the matrixes used above. However, the matrixes cannot be the kind used to represent the semantic values of ordinary, non-moral sentences that contain no moral vocabulary.

Dreier's matrixes are eventually used to represent his own variation on Karmo's

Law:

VKL: A statement is morally committing if and only if it is true according to some moral standards and false according to others (at that world).

The idea is that if one listens to an agent make a statement that is morally committing, one will be able to narrow down the class of moral standards that would make their statement true. Dreier here deliberately ignores the plurality of possible worlds and instead uses the speaker to stand for the context of assertion. This is because the same sentence might express different propositions depending on the speaker. Combining these two features,

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<sup>293</sup> Dreier (2002), 252.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

(moral standards delivering truth values from moral propositions and contexts delivering propositions from indexical sentences), Dreier constructs his new matrix to express the semantic value of a moral sentence. He chooses the following sentence:

M1: Abortion is wrong only if it is wrong according to my moral standard.

Dreier in this example specifies that A1 and A2's moral standards permit abortion while A3's do not. Thus, the matrix we get for M1 is:

	M1	M2	M3
A1	T	T	F
A2	T	T	F
A3	F	F	T

The first row is the moral proposition "Abortion is wrong if and only if it is counted wrong by A1's moral standard." This, according to Dreier, is counted true (because the right side is false and the left side is false by both M1 and M2) and counted false (because the right side remains false while the left side is counted true by M3). The same holds for the other two rows. Again, what is of importance is that the diagonal of the matrix is all T's. This means the assertion "Abortion is wrong only if it is wrong according to my moral standard" is, for Dreier, morally non-committal. One can assert it independently of what one's moral standards actually are. Dreier then claims that we can make assertions that constitute a secondary quality theory which are not morally committing. One such assertion is what Dreier calls ASQ:

ASQ: For every X, necessarily, X is wrong if and only if X is wrong according to my actual moral standards.

ASQ is morally non-committal because even when we evaluate instantiations of this

formula at other worlds, the standards we use are the ones to which the agent who asserts it actually subscribe. They are not the standards to which he subscribes at the world of evaluation. Dreier claims that if we were to express this claim within his matrix, it would be true at every point on the diagonal. This is because for each choice of X and each world, the two sides of the biconditional will say the same thing. Thus, the biconditional will be true everywhere, satisfied by every object.<sup>295</sup> Drier concedes that Dworkin is correct that some versions of secondary quality are morally committing but ASQ is designed to show that this is not true for every version. The version that Dworkin himself refers to, Dreier claims, is not such a version. In that version, what makes genocide wrong is that people with our physiological structure, basic interests, and general mental dispositions have a certain reaction to genocide.<sup>296</sup> Dworkin, as noted above, believes that substantive and controversial claims follow from this version. Such a claim is that genocide would not have been wicked if economic or other circumstances had been different as human reactions evolved so that creatures with our general interests and attitudes had not been revolted by genocide.<sup>297</sup> Dreier thinks Dworkin's explication of this version of secondary quality involves an incoherence. For Dreier, in any world where creatures are as we are, genocide would cause in them a feeling of moral revulsion. It makes no sense to imagine a world where we have the general interests and attitudes we have now but are not revolted by genocide. For Drier, any world where circumstances evolved so that creatures with our general interests and attitudes had not been revolted by genocide would be a world that does not contain creatures with our general interests and attitudes. For Dreier, Dworkin's notion of what we are is not constrained enough by our actual moral standards and the contingent circumstances that allowed them to evolve. If a secondary quality theory such as the one Dworkin imagines is so constrained, Dreier believes it will not have any of the substantive and controversial claims that Dworkin

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 260-261

<sup>297</sup> Dworkin (1996), 102-103

believes follow from it.

## 5.5 CRITIQUE OF DREIER

The difficulty with Dreier's usage of his variation on Karmo's Law VKL is not that VKL is false. Rather, the difficulty is that Dreier has an unduly narrow interpretation of what a 'moral standard' is. Moreover, he offers no justification for this narrow interpretation. For Dreier, a moral standard can't include a claim about how to morally evaluate other moral standards. We can see this because if Dreier were to allow that moral standards could include claims about how to morally evaluate other moral standards, his examples could be examples of such moral standards. If this were the case, it would mean that Dreier had failed to show that archimedean propositions can be morally neutral. Thus, in order for Dreier's argument in favour of the possible neutrality of archimedean claims to be successful, he must offer additional arguments for the moral non-neutrality of his examples. To illustrate, let's take one of the claims that comes out with a diagonal of T's in Dreier's matrix: Abortion is wrong if and only if it is wrong according to my moral standard. Dreier is correct that this claim does not commit us to a range of 1st order moral claims dealing directly with the moral status of abortion. However, Dreier has not shown that this claim does not commit us to 2nd order moral claims about how to morally evaluate moral standards relating to abortion. In other words, Dreier has not shown that this claim does not commit us to a claim that is 2nd order and simultaneously moral. To see this, let's observe the claim "Abortion is wrong if and only if it is wrong according to my moral standard." This claim implies the denial of

(V) Abortion is wrong independently of whether it is wrong according to my actual moral standards

and

(W) It is incorrect that "abortion is wrong only if it is wrong according to my actual moral standards."

(V) and (W) seem, on the face of it, like 2nd order claims. On the other hand, they also

seem to be capable of being read as moral claims. (V) says if one chooses to evaluate my actual moral standards, one should not assume that my moral standards determine whether or not abortion is wrong. (W) says that if one were to assert that abortion was wrong iff it were wrong according to my actual moral standards, they would be mistaken. Of course, it is true that one could give a purely descriptive reading of (V) and (W). The point is the moral reading has to be excluded for Dreier's use of VKL to adequately demonstrate that archimedean theories can be morally neutral. Moreover, merely claiming that (V) and (W) are 2nd order would not be sufficient to do this. This is for two reasons. The first reason is that that Dreier's claim about abortion appears to be both 2nd order and morally non-neutral. The second is that Dworkin's whole point is that plausible moral claims that appear to be 2nd order claims can be interpreted as 1st order claims. Dreier needs to exclude the moral reading of his abortion claim in order to show that the 1st order interpretation does not work.

I will leave it an open question for now whether or not (V) and (W) actually are 1st or 2nd order. Quasi-Realists like Simon Blackburn would probably want to classify them as 1st order moral claims that express higher-order attitudes. Other theorists like Mackie would probably want to classify them as 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims which happen to be false. Regardless of which order one chooses to interpret them as being, Dreier must show how a moral interpretation of them is either impossible or implausible. One cannot simply point out that the claim tells us little about additional moral standards the agent who affirms it may or may not hold if one is attempting to demonstrate the moral neutrality of the claim. One must show that it is not a moral claim about how to evaluate other moral claims. This is because a claim about how to evaluate abortion claims may be moral on the one hand and on the other hand silent about the specific views the agent who affirms it holds about abortion.

If we don't rule out this possibility, we can certainly say that such claims commit whoever affirms them to a range of moral claims in that world. They may not be claims about whether or not one should take a pro or anti-abortion stance. However, they could

be claims about how it is appropriate to evaluate moral claims that take pro or anti-abortion stances. Moreover, in the absence of an argument that (V) and (W) must be read as descriptive, we could say that if we heard a speaker affirm or deny (V) or (W) in any world, we would be able to narrow down the set of moral claims they believe in. If a speaker affirmed “Abortion is wrong if and only if it is wrong according to my moral standard”, we would know he denies (V) and (W). If he affirmed (V) or (W), then we would know he denies “Abortion is wrong if and only if it is wrong according to my moral standard.” If there are no arguments to show that (V) and (W) are descriptive, it seems that Dreier’s abortion claim involves moral commitments after all. They are just not substantive pro-abortion or anti-abortion commitments. Here, Dreier might reply that the kinds of moral commitments we are highlighting are irrelevant to his project. He might protest that his aim was simply to show that there is a criterion for deciding when a moral claim is morally neutral in the sense of not committing its proponents to 1st order moral claims. Such claims, he may insist, are not also claims about how to morally evaluate moral standards. Perhaps this is what Dreier meant by the set of all uncontroversial moral sentences. If Dreier were to give this rejoinder, he would be begging the question against Dworkin. One of the key claims of Dworkin’s argument is the assertion that many claims that sound like 2nd order archimedean claims are, in fact, 1st order moral claims. If archimedean theories commit those who assert them to these moral claims that sound as though they are 2nd order, those archimedean theories are not morally neutral. Dreier needs to show that no archimedean theories commit their proponents to 2nd order moral claims about how to evaluate moral standards. In order to defeat Dworkin, he also has to show no archimedean theories commit their proponents to any moral claims whatsoever.

As we recall, part of Dworkin’s strategy is to do two things. He wants to say that any 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims that validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order claims can be reduced to 1st order moral claims. On the other hand, he wants to say that those 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims which validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims *and* cannot be reduced to 1st order moral claims are implausible claims to assert. These latter 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims are the



archimedean claims Dworkin opposes. If Dreier can show that all these archimedean claims are morally neutral, he will have shown that there are no 2nd order claims which can validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. Because Dreier fails to make the above attack, his reply to Dworkin's views on secondary qualities is particularly problematic. As we recall, Dreier tries to generate a version of secondary quality theory that is able to get 3 diagonal T's in his matrix. His aim, as noted earlier, is to show that Dworkin is mistaken in thinking that there is something inherent in secondary quality theories that generates moral claims. Therefore, he constructs a version of secondary quality (which he labels ASQ) which is expressed by a proposition he believes is morally neutral regarding abortion:

ASQ: For every X, necessarily, X is wrong if and only if x is wrong according to my actual moral standards.

While Dreier is correct that ASQ can get 3 diagonal T's in his matrix, this again fails to show that ASQ is morally neutral. This is because, like the above claim about abortion, ASQ can be read as a moral claim about how it is morally appropriate to evaluate moral standards. Like Dreier's abortion claim, ASQ implies the denial of two claims:

(X) X can be wrong if X is wrong according to my actual moral standards.

and

(Y) It is incorrect that "For every X, necessarily, X is wrong if and only if x is wrong according to my actual moral standards."

Like (V) and (W), it looks on the face of it that (X) and (Y) are capable of being read as moral claims. (X) says if one chooses to evaluate my moral standards, one should not assume that my moral standards determine whether or not X is wrong. (Y) says that if one were to assert that X was wrong if and only if it were wrong according to my moral standard, they would be mistaken. Like (V) and (W), it is true that one could give a purely

descriptive reading of (X) and (Y). Again, the moral reading must be excluded for Dreier to use VKL to adequately demonstrate that ASQ is morally neutral. As we can see, Dreier has failed to exclude this moral reading. Hence, ASQ fails to show that a version of secondary quality is morally non-committal.

## **5.6 KENNETH EHRENBURG'S ATTACK ON DWORKIN**

Kenneth Ehrenberg mounts a different attack on Dworkin's claims. For Ehrenberg, Dworkin fails to discredit the theoretical stance from which the archimedean makes his claims. Here, I am using "theoretical stance" to mean the theoretical assumptions that the archimedean makes while attempting to assert his archimedean claims.<sup>298</sup> Ehrenberg throws a barrage of criticisms at Dworkin. All of them, in different ways, attempt to demonstrate this failure on Dworkin's part to discredit the theoretical stance of the archimedean. The first of these criticisms is that Dworkin fails to show that one can reduce all plausible E propositions to I propositions. One of the theoretical assumptions of the archimedean, we should remember, is that he can assert E propositions he believes are plausible and incapable of being reduced to I propositions. That means the archimedean believes he can assert 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims about the metaphysics of I propositions which can potentially undermine or validate 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. If Ehrenberg is right in this criticism of Dworkin, he has shown that Dworkin has failed to demonstrate that the archimedean holds any false assumptions regarding E propositions.

Like Dreier, Ehrenberg takes issue with Dworkin's claims that archimedean theories that purport to be morally neutral are making moral claims. If Ehrenberg is right in this criticism, archimedean justifiably assume that they are morally neutral insofar as they make archimedean claims. Ehrenberg also disputes Dworkin's claim that secondary quality theory is morally non-neutral because the theory takes positions on counterfactual conditionals about morality. If Ehrenberg is right in this criticism, he has shown that Dworkin has failed to demonstrate archimedean are mistaken in assuming that at least some archimedean theories are morally neutral. Ehrenberg also attacks Dworkin's claim

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<sup>298</sup> See Ehrenberg (2008), 508-529

that Quasi-Realism is not morally neutral. Dworkin claims this moral non-neutrality stems from the impossibility of Quasi-Realism to maintain the distinctions between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral perspectives from which the quasi-realist makes his multiple claims. Ehrenberg claims that these distinctions are possible and attempts to explain how. If Ehrenberg is right, quasi-realists are archimedean who make no false assumptions about the meta-ethical distinctions they rely on to make their claims.

Ehrenberg also attacks Dworkin's various attempts to show that archimedean are not dealing with philosophical issues that are above and beyond the issues dealt with in 1st order moral discourse. These issues include whether one or not one can adequately cash out the notion of moral objectivity in terms of causal relations. Ehrenberg maintains that this issue is not one that is happening at the 1<sup>st</sup> order. If Ehrenberg is correct in this criticism, he has shown that Dworkin has failed to demonstrate that archimedean make false assumptions when archimedean believe themselves to be having 2<sup>nd</sup> order philosophical discussions. This is the first tactic Ehrenberg utilizes in his critique of Dworkin. He begins with this tactic, I believe, as a way of making his other criticisms increasingly persuasive. After all, if one starts out believing the claim that archimedean philosophical issues are distinct from discussions of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims, the other criticisms Ehrenberg aims at Dworkin increase in plausibility.<sup>299</sup>

Ehrenberg begins his critique of Dworkin by examining Dworkin's claim that discussions about moral properties are not best understood as examples of metaphysical, 2nd order discussions. As noted earlier, Dworkin posits that moral properties are not to be understood metaphysically but as part of the 1st order moral claims internal to moral practice. He claims, for instance, that to make the apparently metaphysical claim that being right is just the property of maximizing happiness is analogous to making the claim that being water is the same as being H<sub>2</sub>O. In both cases, the reductions are synthetic and not semantic reductions of identity claims. Moreover, such reductions work because of

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<sup>299</sup> Sometimes plausibility of a claim is determined by background assumptions that a debate is challenging. In these circumstances, relying on plausibility is inappropriate.

scientific discovery. For Dworkin, the claim about rightness being the maximization of happiness is best understood as the result of a substantive moral thesis (utilitarianism) and is just a part of that 1st order moral theory.<sup>300</sup>

To further defend this claim, Dworkin, as noted earlier, claims that there is no difference in what two people think if one utilitarian thinks that the only thing that can make an act right is maximizing power and the second utilitarian thinks that the property of rightness and the property of maximizing power are the same property.<sup>301</sup> For Dworkin, the only difference is that the second utilitarian's view uses the jargon of metaphysics. However, it does nothing to add any substantive idea to the view of the first utilitarian's view. Ehrenberg criticizes Dworkin for choosing an example which does not adequately showcase possible 2nd order differences between two utilitarians who agree that what makes an act right is its maximizing power. Ehrenberg invites us to imagine a different example with a new pair of utilitarians. The first utilitarian says that there is a fact of the matter about which actions are good because goodness is the same property as the maximization of happiness and there is some empirical truth about which actions maximize happiness. The second utilitarian believes there is a fact of the matter about which actions are good and also believes the 1st order claim that goodness is the maximization of happiness. Where the second utilitarian disagrees with the first is that the second believes that goodness is the maximization of happiness because moral sensibility is the result of an evolutionary process that functionally favours valuing certain actions over others as happiness maximizing.<sup>302</sup> Ehrenberg states that while the two utilitarians agree on first order questions about which actions are good, they disagree on the second order question of why happiness maximization determines which actions are good. Ehrenberg then states it is implausible to interpret each utilitarian as holding a different version of 1st order utilitarianism. Rather, he thinks the best explanation of the situation is

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<sup>300</sup> Dworkin (1996), 101.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 99-101

<sup>302</sup> Ehrenberg (2009), 515

that both utilitarians hold the same first order doctrine. However, they disagree on the second order meta-ethical theory that best accounts for the 1st order utilitarianism they both hold.<sup>303</sup>

Ehrenberg thinks this is the case because both utilitarians agree on every 1st order claim that could be called part of a utilitarian theory. Ehrenberg finds it implausible to claim that both utilitarians are holding distinct forms of utilitarianism because of the widespread agreement at the 1st order level. Moreover, Ehrenberg finds the 2nd order disagreement between both theorists a disagreement that is morally neutral. Hence, Dworkin can't claim that each version of utilitarianism is 1st order. Ehrenberg thinks the reasoning that motivates the first utilitarian to reject the second's Darwinian reasoning is not moral reasoning. To illustrate, Ehrenberg considers the possibility that the evolutionary utilitarian might be claiming that happiness maximization is morally best because we are evolutionarily disposed to believe that. In this hypothetical scenario, the evolutionary utilitarian would be making a moral claim. But in the scenario that Ehrenberg has just had us consider, this is not the case. According to Ehrenberg, the evolutionary utilitarian is only explaining why we consider it to be morally best. The evolutionary utilitarian is not making any moral endorsements and thus one can evaluate his claims about evolution in a way that is entirely distinct from his 1st order evaluative endorsements. Hence, Ehrenberg believes he has shown that Dworkin has failed to establish that the 2nd order discussions involving explanations of why we hold the moral beliefs we do are actually 1<sup>st</sup> order moral discussions.

Ehrenberg also attacks Dworkin on the grounds that Dworkin has not sufficiently shown that particular 2nd order meta-ethical theories are committed to making moral claims. According to Ehrenberg, this is particularly true regarding Dworkin's analysis of both secondary quality theory and Quasi-Realism. With regards to secondary quality theory, Dworkin states that the distinction between primary and secondary properties is that the former are properties that things have in themselves while the latter are just

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<sup>303</sup>Ibid.

capacities to provoke defined sensations or reactions in sentient creatures.<sup>304</sup> This, as we saw above, is what Dworkin believes commits secondary quality theories to substantively moral counterfactual claims. Among these are the claim that if humans had developed along different historical lines, reactions to things like genocide could be very different from the reactions humans currently possess. In such hypothetical situations, genocide would cease to have the same moral status it has now. As we saw earlier, Dworkin takes this to be a substantive moral claim. Ehrenberg claims that Dworkin has given no persuasive reason to think that the counterfactual claims he believes secondary quality theories are committed to are moral. He has merely shown that such claims could be interpreted as moral claims. However, according to Ehrenberg, the burden of proof is on Dworkin to show that it is somehow impossible or implausible to interpret such counterfactuals as purely descriptive. Ehrenberg also claims that Dworkin has unfairly assumed that secondary quality would commit its proponents to such counterfactual moral claims in the first place. This is because Dworkin assumes that there is no difference between saying something has the capacity to provoke a reaction and saying it would not have that capacity if it did not produce the reaction in situations where the reaction currently occurs.<sup>305</sup>

Referencing secondary quality proponent John McDowell, Ehrenberg notes that there is a mind independence element of secondary quality descriptions that Dworkin ignores.<sup>306</sup> According to McDowell, a situation's being wrong is independent of its seeming wrong to anyone on any particular occasion. For McDowell, to experience something as being wrong can count as a case of being presented with a property that is there independently of the experience.<sup>307</sup> This means, for Ehrenberg, that a secondary property is just the ability of an object to give rise to a reaction. However, this reaction

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<sup>304</sup> Dworkin (1996), 101

<sup>305</sup> Ehrenberg (2008), 520-523

<sup>306</sup> McDOWELL, John. Values and Secondary Qualities, in *Morality and Objectivity* (ed.) Ted Honderich, London, UK: Routledge, 1985. pp. 110-129.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

may not ever take place.<sup>308</sup> Ehrenberg illustrates this claim by inviting us to imagine a newly discovered mineral called “nauseum”.<sup>309</sup> Nauseum has the property of making the viewer of nauseum feel nauseated when light is refracted off its surface at a specific angle and enters the eye. For Ehrenberg, this is clearly a secondary property in both Dworkin and McDowell’s sense. However, nauseum has this property prior to and independently of anyone ever experiencing nausea elicited by nauseum. We can even imagine situations in which everyone is warned beforehand of the nausea that nauseum elicits and everyone takes precautions such that no one ever experiences nausea caused by nauseum. Even in these circumstances, Ehrenberg maintains that nauseum still has the secondary property of having the capacity to make a viewer of nauseum feel nauseated. Hence, secondary quality does not commit its proponents to counterfactual claims that a particular secondary quality would not exist under different conditions.<sup>310</sup>

Ehrenberg also critiques Dworkin’s assessment of Quasi-Realism on similar grounds. As noted earlier, Dworkin thinks there is an inherent tension between the act of making quasi-realist 2nd order claims while simultaneously trying to accommodate the face value of 1st order moral discourse. This tension arises because 1st order claims such as “Genocide would be wrong even if no one thought it such” depend on mind independent facts. This is because, in the absence of mind independent facts, Dworkin believes there would be no justification for believing that genocide would cease to be wicked if people’s attitudes were different. Ehrenberg here accuses Dworkin of having a falsely dichotomous thinking when it comes to the perspectives available from which to analyze value concepts.<sup>311</sup> He accuses Dworkin of believing you are either in or out of a practice<sup>312</sup> with regard to the subject of your analysis. Moreover, Ehrenberg claims that

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<sup>308</sup> Ehrenberg (2009), 515-230

<sup>309</sup> Ibid

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, 527-229

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

practices have a wide variety of ‘nested levels’ in which one can participate or remain outside.<sup>313</sup> Ehrenberg illustrates his contentions by claiming that one can say “Genocide is morally reprehensible”, “Utilitarianism is the best theory of moral judgments”, and “Moral statements have no truth value.” For all three claims, Ehrenberg claims there is no precise way of differentiating which claims are 1st order and which claims are archimedean. This is because each claim, according to Ehrenberg, appears archimedean from a claim pitched at a perspective that is closer to 1st order moral discourse. Ehrenberg even accepts that there may be tensions among our beliefs at different levels of perspective. However, Ehrenberg states that these tensions are not contradictions. Rather, he posits that the criteria by which we assess the validity of descriptions shift, depending on the level of abstraction from which one approaches a description.<sup>314</sup>

Dworkin, as noted above, attempted to show that claims like “Slavery is objectively wrong” don’t say anything of metaphysical substance which is over and above “Slavery is wrong interdependently of what anybody thinks.” Dworkin criticizes the archimedean for assuming this claim is metaphysical so that the archimedean can deny it in the name of wanting to craft an attractive ontology.<sup>315</sup> However, as we saw earlier, Dworkin believes that not only are such claims not metaphysical but that denying them amounts to denying the claim “Slavery is wrong independently of what anybody thinks.” Dworkin is not just criticizing archimedean but moral realists as well. For Dworkin, both positions attempt to occupy a 2nd order theoretical space outside of moral practice from which both positions attempt to validate or undermine moral claims. For Dworkin, all 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims which attempt to validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order claims are implausible. Dworkin criticizes attempts by meta-ethicists to cash out “moral objectivity” in terms of causal relations where there is a correspondence between moral beliefs and the properties of moral states of affairs. If this causal relation amounts to the claim that the

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 527-528

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> See Dworkin (1996).



practice of slavery causes one to judge it wrong, there is no way to interpret this at the 2nd order level which leaves the claim with any plausibility. If one interprets the claim as a claim about the causal relationship between one's moral beliefs and moral states of affairs, the claim amounts to "I believe certain moral states of affairs are bad because my observations of those states of affairs causes me to think that the states of affairs are bad." If the archimedean were to deny this claim, this would amount to an admission of non-neutrality regarding moral claims. On the other hand, if one interprets the causal relation as the moral field thesis, one has made a preposterous moral claim.

Ehrenberg agrees here with the preposterousness of the moral field thesis. However, he challenges Dworkin's assumption that it is a moral claim. He invites us to imagine another set of disagreeing utilitarians. Both of them say that what makes an action right is that it tends to maximize happiness. Ehrenberg now suggests we imagine that each has a different answer to the question of how they know that what makes an action right is its tendency to maximize happiness. The first utilitarian claims that her views of rightness are the result of utilitarianism getting the closest balance between her considered moral judgments and theoretical constructions about those judgments. The second utilitarian says his views on rightness are grounded in the fact that there is a moral field surrounding actions in which happiness has been increased. If we ask this second utilitarian what his response would be to an action that increases happiness that is not surrounded by the moral field, he can give two answers. He could say that the moral field trumps since that is the way in which he knows what is moral or he could say the increasing happiness trumps since that is a good theory which should not be discarded on the basis of a few counter examples.<sup>316</sup> Ehrenberg claims that the former answer indicates the person is no longer a utilitarian and the latter answer indicates the person is engaging in theory construction using meta-theoretical considerations.<sup>317</sup> The former answer would mean that the moral field thesis was a moral thesis for the second utilitarian. However, the latter answer would

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<sup>316</sup> Ehrenberg (2008), 516-520

<sup>317</sup> Ibid

not and this answer still represents a possible interpretation of the situation.<sup>318</sup> Again, Ehrenberg believes this shows that Dworkin has failed to provide a good case that objectivity claims must be interpreted in a first order manner. All Dworkin has shown is that such a first order interpretation is possible. However, Ehrenberg claims he has not shown that a completely descriptive, 2nd order interpretation is impossible or implausible.<sup>319</sup>

Ehrenberg then goes on to suggest that what differentiates 1st order from 2nd order moral questions are levels of justification. For Ehrenberg, the 2nd order moral claim justifies the 1st order moral claim in a manner that another 1st order moral claim cannot do. When a utilitarian is asked why he believes that right actions are happiness maximizing actions, he will typically give answers that consist of 1st order claims. However, when asked to justify such answers by answering the question of whether or not the utilitarian knows that utilitarianism is an objective matter of fact or expression of his subjective opinion, the answers given will typically be 2nd order. They will be archimedean in the sense that they will be judgments made from a 2<sup>nd</sup> order perspective which is outside the 1st order perspective of moral practice. Moreover, they will be 2nd order answers that Ehrenberg claims are not dependent on any of the 1st order justifications that the utilitarian may give. Ehrenberg leaves open whether or not these 2nd order debates are relevant for moral decision making. However, he makes a point to claim that such debates are intelligible debates that cannot be reduced to 1<sup>st</sup> order debates.

### **5.7 CRITIQUE OF EHRENBURG'S CRITIQUE OF DWORKIN**

Ehrenberg challenges Dworkin's assertion that discussions of the identities of metaphysical properties are happening at the 1<sup>st</sup> order. As we saw above, Ehrenberg delivers this challenge with an example of two utilitarians who hold the same 1<sup>st</sup> order moral views. However, the first utilitarian believes that goodness is the same property as the maximizing of happiness. The second utilitarian thinks goodness is the same property

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

as maximizing happiness but this is because moral sensibility is a result of an evolutionary process that functionally favours valuing certain actions over others. The first utilitarian does not hold the view that the second utilitarian does about why utilitarianism is true. Ehrenberg assumes that this disagreement is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order disagreement that leaves all the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral views of both utilitarians unchanged. Hence, it is an archimedean disagreement that is morally neutral.

The difficulty with this argument is it does not establish what it is supposed to establish. This is because the example Ehrenberg uses does, on the one hand, seem like a 2<sup>nd</sup> order discussion. On the other hand, it seems like it could be read as a morally non-neutral disagreement as well. This is because the second utilitarian's view can be read as a moral claim. To say that utilitarianism is true because moral sensibility is a result of an evolutionary process that favors valuing certain actions over others is to say that an evolutionary process can determine what is moral. If an evolutionary process can determine what is moral, this suggests that the evolutionary process is capable of justifying moral claims. If this is the case, claims that explain moral truths in terms of an evolutionary process, seem to be explaining those moral truths as being *morally justified* because of the evolutionary process. Of course, there is the alternative reading of the claim of the second utilitarian that is completely non-moral. Although Ehrenberg finds the alternative reading more plausible, he does not demonstrate to the reader that the first reading is implausible.

This seems to be either a product of Ehrenberg's failure to notice the moral interpretation of the beliefs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> utilitarian or Ehrenberg's rejection of the moral interpretation. If Ehrenberg has failed to notice the moral interpretation, he needs to reconstruct this particular argument against Dworkin to deal with it. If Ehrenberg rejects the moral interpretation because he finds it implausible, he needs to explain why. Ehrenberg does neither. Also, there is a difficulty with a non-moral interpretation of the views of the second utilitarian that Ehrenberg has not addressed. This difficulty is the views of the second utilitarian involve explaining why a 1<sup>st</sup> order normative ethical theory

is true by making reference to evolutionary processes. If Ehrenberg interprets the evolutionary processes as not being a moral justification of utilitarianism, then he is interpreting the evolutionary processes as just being a non-moral explanation of the truth of utilitarianism. To the extent that the evolutionary process does any justification of the truth of utilitarianism, it will somehow be non-moral justification.

The problem with this view is it presupposes the normal characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction. It presupposes that one can validate a set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims from 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims that are morally neutral. This is the very possibility that Dworkin's views are challenging. Dworkin's whole point is that 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims which can validate or undermine 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are implausible 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims. Ehrenberg's example only shows that one may interpret a utilitarian as making a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim that validates a set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. It does not show that this assertion by the utilitarian is plausible. This is what Ehrenberg would have to show in order to use this argument as a challenge to Dworkin. All Ehrenberg does is invoke a hypothetical example of two disagreeing utilitarians which presupposes the normal characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction. This begs the question against Dworkin because Dworkin's views concerning what constitute an implausible 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim attempt to challenge the normal characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction. Namely, they attempt to challenge the aspect of that normal characterization which implies that plausible 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims can validate or undermine a set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims.

Ehrenberg makes a different set of mistakes in his attempt to defend McDowell's secondary quality theories from Dworkin's attack. Ehrenberg claims that on secondary quality theory, the claim that to experience something as being wrong can count as a case of being presented with a property that is there independently of the experience.<sup>320</sup> For Ehrenberg, a secondary property is just the ability of an object to give rise to a reaction that may never take place. Hence, for Ehrenberg, a secondary quality theory need not

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<sup>320</sup>Ehrenberg (2008), 515-520

involve counterfactual claims. Are these sufficient conditions of a morally neutral secondary quality theory? It seems not. This is because any meta-ethical theory that attempts to give an identity between the experience of something being wrong and being presented with a property that is there independently of the experience of the property is morally non-neutral. It is morally non-neutral because it implies moral claims. Namely, it implies that any meta-ethical theory that is incompatible with the secondary quality theory is giving an incorrect characterization of wrongness. The claim that a theory is giving an incorrect characterization of wrongness is a moral claim because it is implicitly giving necessary conditions of a correct characterization of wrongness. In other words, the claim is asserting that in order to be a genuine instance of wrongness, the experience of wrongness has to coincide with being presented with a property that is there independently of the experience of the property. Any experience of wrongness that does not coincide with being presented with a property that is there independently of the experience of it is not a genuine instance of wrongness. The act of giving necessary conditions of a correct characterization of wrongness is a moral act because it implies that a purportedly wrong claim that fails to satisfy these necessary conditions is not actually wrong. If Ehrenberg wants to show that despite these entailments, his version of secondary quality is somehow morally neutral, the burden of proof is on him to provide supplementary arguments. He fails to do this.

Ehrenberg makes a similar blunder in his attempt to show that Dworkin has failed to demonstrate that a debate about the causal explanation of moral beliefs can be a morally neutral one. As we recall, Dworkin claims that causal explanations of moral claims must either be understood as 1st order moral claims or as absurd 2nd order moral claims. For Dworkin, this counts against them being understood as 2nd order moral claims. Ehrenberg tries to show here that we can interpret a utilitarian as holding one of Dworkin's absurd 2nd order claims (the 'moral field thesis') for reasons that are theoretical rather than moral. Ehrenberg believes that the burden of proof is on Dworkin here to show that the above scenario is impossible. Yet Ehrenberg's own example fails to

show what it is supposed to show: that the agent who holds the moral field thesis for theoretical reasons is not engaged in a moral act. Ehrenberg makes no attempt to deal with the issue of whether the moral field thesis gives necessary conditions of morality that wind up implying moral claims. Nor does he deal with the issue that the moral field thesis may be a 2<sup>nd</sup> order view about how to morally evaluate moral claims.

Ehrenberg fails to adequately defend his attacks on Dworkin's treatment of Quasi-Realism. As we recall, Dworkin criticizes quasi-realists like Blackburn who attempt to make mind independence claims such as "Genocide would be wrong even if no one thought so" because they simultaneously deny the existence of mind independent moral facts. Ehrenberg defends the quasi-realists here by insisting that the denial of mind independent moral facts is happening at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order level of theory whereas the "Genocide is wrong even if no one ever thought so" claim is happening at the 1<sup>st</sup> order level of theory. This defense begs the question against Dworkin because it assumes the quasi-realist understanding of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction.<sup>321</sup> Yet it is this very understanding that Dworkin is calling into question. Although Dworkin is not a moral realist, he clearly thinks moral claims about mind independence have to (in some sense) be taken at face value. Dworkin expects the moral theorist to be something *like* a moral realist at the 1<sup>st</sup> order level. This means that, for Dworkin, the kinds of views moral realists typically hold as 2<sup>nd</sup> order justifications of their 1<sup>st</sup> order moral views Dworkin wants to hold at the 1<sup>st</sup> order level. Dworkin does not think "X is wrong independently of what anybody thinks" can be interpreted as an attitude that regulates other attitudes. Rather, Dworkin thinks the only appropriate interpretation of such a mind independence moral claim is that it be interpreted as a claim about mind independent moral facts. Specifically, Dworkin wants to claim that "X is wrong independently of what anybody thinks" is a moral claim that cannot be analyzed or summarized as anything other than a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim. As soon as a quasi-realist starts to give an account of mind independence that offers a summary of mind independence in terms of the attitude-

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<sup>321</sup> Blackburn repeats this point in nearly every defence of Quasi-Realism.

coordinating role it plays in moral practice, Dworkin believes the quasi-realist has misinterpreted mind independence. For Dworkin, the mind independence of moral claims is simply the mind independence of moral claims. Nothing more that is not moral can be said about it without a fundamental misinterpretation going on. Although Dworkin is offering a meta-ethics that is similar to minimalism, it is also like realism in these crucial respects. He wants moral claims to be taken at face value without additional analysis or summaries which are not also just 1st order moral claims.

Although Dworkin disavows the typical metaphysics of Moral Realism, he wants to hold the claims that moral realists typically hold. Moreover, he sees most of them as moral claims, since he believes the denial of most moral realist claims amounts to a denial of moral claims. For Dworkin, the affirmation of an account of mind independence, which is not moral realist, is tantamount to the denial of the claim that “Genocide is wrong independently of what anybody thinks.” Because Dworkin thinks a claim about mind independent moral facts is a moral claim, he assumes that it must be a 1st order claim. Regardless of which order Dworkin believes the claim to be, Dworkin does not allow for a legitimate interpretation of mind independence that is not moral realist. In order for Ehrenberg’s attack on Dworkin to be successful, Ehrenberg needs to show that there are legitimate non-realist interpretations of mind independence claims. Rather than show this, Ehrenberg merely points out that theorists theorize as though there are legitimate non-realist interpretations of such claims. Instead, Ehrenberg needs to actually justify what these theorists are doing.

Ehrenberg is keen to note that there may be tensions that exist between 1st and 2nd order levels of moral discourse. However, he maintains the tensions are not contradictions because the validity of the description shifts, depending on which level one is making moral claims. This response again begs the question because it assumes that because theorists theorize as though there can be tensions between claims made at the 1st and 2nd order, this is a justification for the claim that the tensions are not contradictions. If Dworkin challenges a commonly accepted practice among meta-ethicists, Ehrenberg

cannot simply repeat that the theorists theorize as though the practice is legitimate. He must show that the practice is legitimate by showing that 1st order moral claims don't commit moralisers to realist interpretations of those claims. The fact that quasi-realists assume that this is not the case is no argument for the claim that 1st order moral claims don't commit moralisers to realist interpretations of those claims.

### **5.8 EHRENBERG ASSUMPTION OF THE FALSITY OF (Z)**

One of the interesting things about Ehrenberg's failures to offer a persuasive counter-attack on Dworkin is that all the failures can be explained by an assumption Ehrenberg is making throughout his arguments. This assumption is that (Z) (2nd order moral claims can't be morally non-neutral) is true. This assumption persists whether it's Ehrenberg's arguments concerning his utilitarian examples, his arguments defending archimedean secondary quality and quasi-realist theories, or his arguments attempting to show that meta-ethical discussions of causal explanations of moral beliefs are morally neutral. This is even true in his arguments that attempt to show that there are 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order levels of moral justification. One would think that in these latter arguments about levels of justification that Ehrenberg would provide a defense of (Z). He does not.

In his hypothetical example of the disagreeing utilitarians, Ehrenberg fails to show that the utilitarian who believes utilitarianism is true because of evolutionary processes is affirming a morally neutral 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim. His failure is the result of his assumption that (Z) is true. He presupposes (Z) because his defense of the claim that the second utilitarian holds a non-moral view is partly the claim that the 2<sup>nd</sup> utilitarian is affirming a 2<sup>nd</sup> order view. If (Z) were false, this would not be evidence that the second utilitarian was affirming a morally neutral view. If (Z) were false, 2<sup>nd</sup> order views could be morally non-neutral views. The other part of Ehrenberg's defense of the second utilitarian holding a non-moral view is Ehrenberg's ability to interpret the second utilitarian as holding a non-moral view. If (Z) were false, this interpretation would not be evidence that the second utilitarian was holding a non-moral view. Ehrenberg makes the same mistake when he claims that an agent can affirm the moral field thesis without affirming a moral



claim.

When Ehrenberg claims that a 2<sup>nd</sup> order view like the moral field thesis is non-moral, he is again assuming (Z) is true. He claims that the moral field thesis is non-moral because it is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order view that is held for reasons which are theoretical rather than moral. If (Z) were false, the fact that a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim was affirmed for theoretical reasons would not be evidence that the claim was non-moral. This is because if (Z) were false, 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims could be moral claims. If 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims could be moral claims, 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims which were believed for theoretical reasons could also be moral claims. After all, 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims can be believed on the basis of theoretical reasons. For instance, I can assert the 1<sup>st</sup> order claim that monogamy is good for human beings on the basis of the theoretical claim that monogamy explains social stability. There does not seem to be any relevant difference between 1<sup>st</sup> order and 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims which would allow a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim to be justifiably believed on theoretical grounds while not allowing this for 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. If (Z) were true, 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims by their very nature, could not be moral claims. This seems to be what Ehrenberg assumed in constructing this argument.

As we have seen, Ehrenberg's critique of Dworkin's attack on archimedean secondary quality theories fails because Ehrenberg assumed (Z). Ehrenberg's own supposedly morally neutral version of secondary quality theory had what looked like moral implications. Ehrenberg did not discuss these implications or show that they were actually non-moral in some important way. Ehrenberg could have given some sufficient conditions of non-moral claims and asserted that his version of secondary quality satisfied those conditions. However, he did not do this. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume he must have thought that all he needed to show in order to demonstrate that a secondary quality was morally neutral was show it was a 2<sup>nd</sup> order theory that lacked counterfactuals of the sort Dworkin worried about. If (Z) is false, the lack of counterfactuals of the sort Dworkin worried about would not be evidence that Ehrenberg's secondary quality was morally neutral. This is because the lack of implied moral counterfactuals of the sort Dworkin accused secondary quality of would not exclude the possibility of other moral

implications Ehrenberg's secondary quality theory might have.

In Ehrenberg's response to Dworkin's critique of Quasi-Realism, he also assumes the truth of (Z). As we recall, Ehrenberg claimed that Dworkin failed to see that the quasi-realist could affirm a moral claim at the 1<sup>st</sup> order that he simultaneously denies at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order. This would not result in a contradiction, according to Ehrenberg, because there are different levels of justification at which a claim can be affirmed or denied. Ehrenberg conceded that there could be tensions between claims that were affirmed at the 1<sup>st</sup> order and denied at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order. However, he denied that these tensions were contradictions. If (Z) were false, the tensions that Ehrenberg describes between levels of moral justification could be contradictions. This is because the 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims made in meta-ethical theories could be just as moral as the 1<sup>st</sup> order claims they were trying to explain. In this scenario, both the 1<sup>st</sup> order and the 2<sup>nd</sup> order would have an equal capacity to *morally* justify a given claim, since they would both be moral claims. There would be no reason to assume the 2<sup>nd</sup> order was a more trustworthy source of moral justification than the 1<sup>st</sup> order.

### **5.9 DREIER'S FAILURE TO NOTICE RASQ**

As we saw in section 5.5, Dreier missed Dworkin as his target because he assumed, rather than defended the assertion that claims about how one should evaluate moral standards are morally neutral 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims. However, Dreier's arguments illustrate an important point that neither Dworkin nor Dreier seem to grasp. It appears that (Z) is false. We can envision a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim that is also a moral commitment. Dreier's arguments illustrate this because once we examine claims like ASQ it seems apparent that we have a moral commitment to a claim that amounts to a rejection of ASQ. Let's call this claim RASQ. RASQ states that for every X, necessarily, X can fail to be wrong if X is wrong according to my actual moral standards. This claim amounts to an assertion that it is a necessity that an agent can be wrong regarding his own moral standards used to make a moral judgment about X. This is a claim we certainly have to presuppose in virtue of engaging in moral practice. The reason we must presuppose it is if we do not, we don't

assume that we or other agents are capable of making moral mistakes. If we fail to assume that we or other agents are capable of making moral mistakes, moral debate becomes a truly useless procedure. In the absence of moral debate, agents never take seriously the constraints that others suggest they use during their moral deliberations. If agents have this attitude, it is unlikely they will develop the moral sentiments that allow them to make good decisions and behave in a moral manner towards others. What is important here is there are powerful reasons to interpret RASQ as a claim which is both a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim and a moral commitment.

The above reasons explain why RASQ is a moral commitment. However, they do not explain how RASQ is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim. If we interpreted RASQ as a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim, we would be ignoring the properties of RASQ that put it in the class of 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims. Those properties include the fact that it is a moral claim about moral claims rather than just a moral claim. This means rather than just tell us which moral claims are true or false, it puts a constraint on the way we attempt to differentiate true or false moral claims. This constraint is one where we don't exclude moral claims from being not wrong if they are wrong according to my actual standards.

The second property of RASQ which suggests it is in the class of 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims is the fact that it gives us semantic information about the sufficient conditions of any moral claim not being wrong. Specifically, it tells us that necessarily, x can fail to be wrong even if x is not wrong according to my moral standards. That is semantic information about what constraints there are on when a moral claim can be asserted. It tells us there is a class of not wrong x's such that being wrong according to my actual moral standards is compatible with the x's failing to be wrong. Because my actual moral standards are unspecified, this claim could hardly be considered a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim. This is because claims of the 1<sup>st</sup> order deal in the specification of moral standards, principles, and values. RASQ does not do this. It only specifies the conceptual relationship between my actual standards and wrongness. We would be hard pressed to imagine a 1<sup>st</sup> order claim that only specifies the conceptual relationship between some

unspecified standards, principles or values and wrongness. The third property of RASQ which suggests it is in the class of 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims is it is incompatible with ASQ. This is not because 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are incapable of being evidence against a meta-ethical theory. Rather, it is because, more often than not, it is 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims which imply the denial of other 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims. The final reason that suggests that RASQ is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim is it is not a correctness condition of moral claims. We don't have to presuppose RASQ in order to affirm correct moral claims or deny incorrect moral claims. If a claim with the properties of RASQ is a moral commitment but not a correctness condition, this leaves only two options left. Either it is a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim. The above reasons jointly make that speculation implausible. The other option is it is both a 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim and a moral commitment. Given the above observations of RASQ, that seems like the more plausible scenario.

## 5.10 CONCLUSION

Dworkin did not, in this debate, adequately defend a possible objection to (C) For any meta-ethical theory that is true, that theory must either be an explanatory moral realist theory or a theory that is compatible with explanatory Moral Realism.

The fascinating thing about the exchange between these theorists is the ways in which none of the arguments defended by one of the theorists hits its target. Dworkin presented a challenge to archimedean moral philosophy that he could not meet. Dworkin's arguments failed to hit their target because they relied on the very archimedean claims they implied were implausible E propositions. Dreier's arguments against Dworkin failed because Dreier assumed an unduly narrow interpretation of what a moral standard is. Ehrenberg's objections to Dreier failed because of his assumption that moral commitments could not be 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims. Moreover, Dreier's example of ASQ inadvertently suggested another claim that was plausibly interpreted as a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral commitment.

What explains all these mistakes? It seems the most reasonable answer is that moral theorists who work in the analytic tradition have a difficult time consistently

questioning the traditional characterization of the distinction between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims. On the traditional characterization, 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims have more of an ability to validate or undermine moral claims than 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims do. This characterization of the justification capacities of the 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claim is at the heart of archimedean moralising. Even a theorist like Dworkin who was challenging the traditional characterization of the distinction between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims could not help but rely on 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims. The way he relied on them implied that 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims had a greater ability to justify 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims than other 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims. He even relied on 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims to argue for the claim that the moral field thesis, interpreted literally, was implausible. He did not rely on 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims or 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims that were not archimedean in order to do this.

Dreier relied on the traditional characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction in his attacks on Dworkin. His example of a meta-ethical claim that had moral implications but was not morally committing involved making the assumption that moral standards could not be standards about how to evaluate moral standards. Thus, he seemed to be implicitly assuming that moral claims are only made at the 1<sup>st</sup> order. This comports with the traditional characterization of the distinction between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order. Dreier also failed to notice that a rejection of ASQ was itself a claim plausibly understood as a 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral commitment. This, again, is consistent with the traditional characterization of the distinction between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order. It is understandable that Dreier did not notice RASQ since on the traditional characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction, 2<sup>nd</sup> order claims can't be moral commitments. We can also see why Ehrenberg's critique of Dworkin failed when we see how Ehrenberg assumed that 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims cannot be moral commitments. All of this is terribly consistent with the traditional characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim.

In order for any theorist in this discussion to have hit their multiple targets, they would have had to question this traditional characterization of the distinction between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims. If they did question the traditional characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup>

and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction in the manner described above, it is unlikely any of them could reject the moral field thesis if it were a genuine moral commitment. This is because each of them relies on some aspect of archimedeanism to reject the moral field thesis. Dworkin relies on archimedean 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claims to show that the moral field thesis is implausible. If he were to consistently reject archimedean claims, the grounds from which he could make this judgment would disappear. Dreier relies on archimedeanism in both his assumption that moral commitments can't be 2<sup>nd</sup> order and that moral standards can't consist of standards about how to evaluate other standards. Ehrenberg relies on the assumption that moral commitments can't be 2<sup>nd</sup> order in virtually all of his attacks on Dworkin's anti-archimedean arguments.

The fact that the rejection of the moral field thesis hinges on aspects of archimedean characterizations of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction seems to explain why all three theorists fail either to defend or challenge archimedeanism. Moreover, the fact that the rejection of the moral field thesis hinges on aspects of archimedeanism illuminates a more important feature of archimedeanism. Archimedeanism is what allows the meta-ethicist the capacity to challenge moral commitments when other 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims are insufficient for doing the job. The archimedean perspective is a perspective that is purportedly invulnerable to moral criticism. This is because of the archimedean characterization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order distinction.

That characterization allows the meta-ethicist to consistently affirm moral claims at the 1<sup>st</sup> order level that he can reject at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order level. Moreover, this characterization allows the meta-ethicist to affirm that his 2<sup>nd</sup> order rejections of moral claims are morally neutral. In traditional meta-ethical practice, the 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim is thought to have an ability to justify the objectivity of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims that the 1<sup>st</sup> order claim itself does not have. This is why meta-ethicists like John Mackie can begin a meta-ethics discussion by noting the distinction between a meta-ethicist's affirmation of a particular moral claim and that meta-ethicist's view about that claim's objective justification. The 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim is traditionally thought to be an affirmation of the

face value of moral practice. It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim that is traditionally thought to have the power to objectively justify the face value or show that the face value lacks objective justification. This creates a justification hierarchy for the traditional meta-ethicist. The justification capabilities of the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim are constrained by what the justified 2<sup>nd</sup> order claim says about the 1<sup>st</sup> order claim. This means that on the traditional practice of meta-ethics, the 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claim can only give the meta-ethicist information about which moral claims are correct or incorrect in a manner that is neutral with regards the objective justification of those claims. The information which gives the meta-ethicist explicit knowledge about the objective justification of a moral claim comes from the 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral claim. It is this facet of archimedeanism that all three theorists want to hold onto. This is what explains why they either beg the question against arguments that challenge archimedeanism or they fail to consistently attack archimedeanism.

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to defend the claim that we are morally committed to constraints on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive. Namely, I have argued that we are morally committed to the meta-ethical claim (C) that states that for any meta-ethical theory that is true, that theory must either be an explanatory moral realist theory or a theory that is compatible with explanatory Moral Realism. (C) is a 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claim that gives us constraints on which meta-ethical claims are consistent with morality. On the other hand, it is a moral commitment. This means that (C) is a variety of 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claim that Dworkin, Dreier, and Ehrenberg assume is an impossibility. The assumption of the impossibility of (C) ultimately rests on the view that the objective justification of 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claims cannot come from our moral commitments. This is because the denial of this view presents us with the paradoxical situation of moral commitments justifying 2<sup>nd</sup> order meta-ethical claims. What (C) suggests is that this unusual reversal of typical meta-ethical practice is actually part of our moral commitments. If (C) is one of our moral commitments, this means we are morally committed to denying the commonly held tenant of meta-ethical practice which states that moral claims must be justified from an archimedean 2<sup>nd</sup> order perspective.

This is the aspect of Dworkin's anti-archimedeanism that is fundamentally sound. As we saw earlier, Dworkin's fundamental mistake is in his inconsistent attempt at ridding ethics of the 2nd order archimedean claim. What is of importance is that the factor that motivates Dworkin to attempt this move is a desire to harmonize two aims. The first aim is to not have the truth of 1st order moral claims contingent on the pronouncements of archimedean claims that are external to 1st order moral practice. The second desire is to adhere to a morality that does not commit us to a meta-ethics that could contain a potentially extravagant metaphysics. If (C) is correct, the harmonization of these two aims is impossible. This is because the truth of (C) implies that there is no moral position from which one could delegitimize potential metaphysical commitments of morality. Of course, this does not mean that explanatory Moral Realism itself commits its proponents to an extravagant metaphysics. It may or may not, depending on what additional features of explanatory Moral Realism it turns out we are committed to.

What is of importance is that if there turned out to be moral commitments to features of explanatory Moral Realism that were metaphysically extravagant, there would be no moral position from which one could criticize these features. There could, of course, be theoretical positions from which one could attack such extravagant metaphysics. But there would be no moral position precisely because the extravagant metaphysics would be coming out of moral commitments. They would not be mere ways of explaining such commitments that one could jettison if one found the explanations unappealing in some respect. Only a non-moral theoretical perspective would allow this move.

If (C) is correct, such a non-moral theoretical perspective would no longer be what we call meta-ethics. This is because (C) implies that the only ethical perspectives that exist are perspectives which are incapable of delegitimizing moral commitments. If the arguments presented for (C) are sound, this means Dworkin's second aim is actually inconsistent with our moral commitments. We cannot adhere to a morality that allows us to dispense with moral commitments if those commitments turn out to be meta-ethical claims that imply an extravagant metaphysics. On the other hand, the soundness of the



arguments presented for (C) implies that Dworkin can achieve his first aim. If the arguments for (C) are sound, it turns out that the truth of 1st order moral claims is not contingent on archimedean claims that are external to moral practice.

This puts Dworkin in an uncomfortable position. On the one hand, Dworkin does not want moral commitments to be held hostage to the demands of an economic metaphysics. On the other hand, Dworkin wants to say that moral commitments don't demand any metaphysics to begin with. If the arguments for (C) are sound, Dworkin can accept that moral commitments cannot (in some moral sense) be held hostage to the demands of an economic metaphysics. However, he cannot expect from moral commitments that they only commit users of moral language to claims that most philosophers or natural scientists would find plausible. If the arguments for (C) are sound, morality is a package deal. One must accept all our moral commitments in order to consistently affirm moral claims. Either Dworkin must accept moral commitments with all their potentially implausible sub-commitments or he must reject moral commitments. He cannot have it both ways.

## **6. CONCLUSION OF THESIS**

This thesis began with an attempt to answer the question of whether our moral commitments commit us to constraints on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive. The meaning of 'moral commitments' here meant any claims we must affirm or presuppose in virtue of engaging in moral practice. The meaning of 'moral practice' here meant the social, psychological, phenomenological, and linguistic activities that constitute being a moral agent. The meaning of 'constraints' on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive here meant what presuppositions we must accept as criteria for finding a meta-ethical theory attractive.

It was decided that in order to show which moral commitments commit us to constraints on what meta-ethical theories we find attractive, we would have to answer two supplementary questions. Those questions were (A) (Can meta-ethical theories be criticized on moral grounds?) and (B) (What meta-ethical claims does morality commit us

to?). It was decided that we must answer (A) before we answer (B) because any answer to (B) presupposes an affirmative answer to (A). This was because a meta-ethics must be capable of being criticized on moral grounds in order for there to be moral commitments to meta-ethical claims. Thus, the first half of this thesis was devoted to first giving an answer to (A) and then giving an answer to (B).

Chapter one gave an answer to (A). The answer was that meta-ethical theories can be criticized on moral grounds because meta-ethical theories can affirm incorrect moral claims and deny correct moral claims. This capacity of meta-ethical theories was not taken to be the only reason why a meta-ethical theory could be criticized on moral grounds. However, it was taken to be a sufficient condition of a meta-ethical theory warranting moral criticism. The capacity of meta-ethics theories to deny correct moral claims and affirm incorrect moral claims was demonstrated through the analysis of a debate by three mid-twentieth century meta-ethicists over the issue of whether meta-ethics was itself normative. These three mid-twentieth century meta-ethicists were Mary Mothersill, Alan Gewirth, and R.C. Solomon. Each theorist, in their own way, tried to demonstrate that meta-ethics was itself normative.

Mary Mothersill attempted to show that meta-ethics was normative by claiming that the meta-ethical procedure of correctly interpreting a meta-ethical theory so the interpretation specifies which set of normative ethics claims that meta-ethical theory is not compatible with is a normative procedure. Alan Gewirth attempted to show that meta-ethics was normative by identifying the meta-ethical procedure of differentiating the moral from the non-moral. R.C. Solomon attempted to show that meta-ethics was normative by identifying the meta-ethical procedure of developing a model of ethical language so as to differentiate between those claims which are truly moral and those claims which are believed to be normal by a society at a given time.

We saw that each of these three theorists were unsuccessful at demonstrating that meta-ethics was normative because each, in their own way, committed the same mistake. Each assumed that because they could interpret a meta-ethical procedure in a manner that

was normative, this showed that meta-ethics itself was normative. They each failed to consider that just because they could interpret a particular meta-ethical procedure in a manner that was normative, that same procedure could be interpreted in a manner that was not normative. Hence, the attempt by each theorist to demonstrate that meta-ethics was normative failed. However, each of their failures inadvertently demonstrated that a meta-ethics could be criticized on moral grounds. This was because the procedures identified by each theorist demonstrated that a meta-ethics theory was capable of denying correct moral claims and affirming incorrect moral claims. Thus, by the end of chapter one, we had answered the question of (A).

Chapter two attempted to answer (B) (What constraints on the attractiveness of a meta-ethical theory does morality commit us to?). The answer presented was (C) (For any meta-ethical theory that is true, that theory must either be an explanatory moral realist theory or a theory that is compatible with explanatory Moral Realism). The answer was derived on the basis of explanatory Moral Realism being a correctness condition of moral claims. Here 'correctness condition' was taken to mean a claim we must presuppose in order to consistently affirm a moral claim. It was assumed that part of engaging adequately in moral practice is to engage in moral practice in a manner that is not self-undermining. To engage in moral practice in a manner that is not self-undermining, we must presuppose the correctness conditions of moral claims. Otherwise, we wind up either denying the very moral claims we assert or we wind up agnostics about the moral claims we assert. In either scenario, our lack of consistency is self-undermining because we destabilize our psychological responses towards moral claims we affirm if we simultaneously deny them. Hence, in chapter two we assumed that correctness conditions for moral claims are also moral commitments.

The strategy for demonstrating the moral commitment to explanatory Moral Realism was to use a rehabilitated version of the Argument from Moral Experience (referred to as AME). The argument from moral experience attempts to show that the experience of moral practice implies or is best explained by Moral Realism. As noted

earlier, the argument from moral experience is not an attempt to show merely that the phenomenology of making moral claims gives us presumptive evidence in favour of Moral Realism. Rather, the argument attempts to show that the experience of moral practice (which includes both its phenomenological and linguistic components) implies or is best explained by Moral Realism. Moreover, the strategy for creating a variation on this argument was informed by Don Loeb's criticisms of two influential versions of AME. The version of AME created in this thesis was not a version designed to be a presumptive argument for Moral Realism. Rather, the version defended in this thesis merely entailed that explanatory Moral Realism is implied by correctness conditions of moral claims. As was shown, to say that Moral Realism is implied by correctness conditions of moral claims is to say that correct moral claims depend on the truth of explanatory Moral Realism in order to consistently retain their status as correct moral claims.

The version of AME created in this thesis avoided the pitfalls of the traditional formulations of the argument pointed out by Don Loeb. These included the fact that proponents of AME overlook observations of moral practice that imply non-objectivism. The other criticism Loeb directed at AME arguments was that they ignore the degree to which characteristics of moral practice are compatible with Moral Anti-Realism. From this I constructed two requirements of any successful version of AME. These requirements were that any successful version of AME must acknowledge:

(L) The experience of moral phenomenology is not uniform enough to present a presumptive case for the commitment to Moral Realism.

and

(M) Even if the experience of moral phenomenology possessed the characteristics proponents of AME have claimed it does, those characteristics would only imply moral objectivism, not Moral Realism.

The version advocated in this thesis consisted of 3 correctness conditions of moral claims. These correctness conditions, when conjoined, implied explanatory Moral Realism. These

three correctness conditions were:

(D) For any correct moral claim X, X is not determined by any agent's judgments about X.

(E) For any correct moral claim X, the only appropriate explanation is one that is irreducibly moral.

and

(F) For any correct moral claim X, the only appropriate irreducibly moral explanation is one that is a final 2nd order explanation.

The conjunction of (D), (E), and (F) gave us the conclusion that we are committed to final 2nd order explanations of moral claims which are either explanatory moral realist explanations or explanations that are compatible with explanatory Moral Realism.

At this point, we arrived at the halfway mark of the thesis. In chapters one and two, we had worked out answers to questions (A) and (B). It had been argued in chapter two that we have a moral commitment to (C). Chapters three and four were spent looking at objections to a presupposition of (C). This presupposition was that moral practice can commit us to meta-ethical claims regarding the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate. The famous set of objections to this presupposition came from Simon Blackburn. Blackburn's Quasi-Realism is the most well known meta-ethical theory whose justification depends on the claim that moral practice does not commit us to any meta-ethical claims.

In the first half of chapter three, we critiqued the considerations Simon Blackburn raised which purport to show that Quasi-Realism is true and is a more attractive theory than its rivals. The reason we chose this group of considerations (apart from their notoriety) is that if they are sound, the arguments in section one and section two fail. Because Quasi-Realism depends on the claim that moral practice cannot commit us to moral claims, arguments in favour of Quasi-Realism are arguments in favour of the claim that moral practice cannot commit us to moral claims. Thus, we attacked these considerations on the grounds that they beg the question by relying on the plausibility of assumptions that other theories call into doubt. These assumptions were:

(G) Morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality.

(H) Morality is compatible with all possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate.

(I) Philosophical naturalism is true

and

(J) Quasi-Realism is true.

We argued that Blackburn must defend each of these assumptions in order to show that Quasi-Realism is a more attractive meta-ethical theory than its rivals. We attacked five of the main considerations Blackburn presents in favour of Quasi-Realism. The first consideration was the fact that Quasi-Realism allows the theorist to accept the metaphysical components of Mackie's queerness argument while simultaneously accommodating 1st order moral discourse. We argued that this combination of claims presupposes (G).

The second consideration we attacked was the argument from 1st order meta-ethical neutrality. According to this argument, one can incorporate all the features of 1st order moral discourse into a meta-ethical theory without making any metaphysical assertions. Therefore, according to the argument, 1st order moral discourse is meta-ethically neutral. We critiqued this argument on the grounds that it does not show what it needs to show; namely, that a meta-ethically neutral interpretation of 1st order moral claims is evidence that 1st order moral claims are meta-ethically neutral. Moreover, such an interpretation is compatible with 1st order moral claims committing agents to constraints on how one should characterize a meta-ethical theory. To assume that this is an impossibility is to presuppose, rather than defend (H) (morality is compatible with all possible meta-ethical truths a theorist could advocate).

The third consideration we attacked was the argument from moral psychology. According to this argument, motivational internalism and the Humean account of moral motivation are the most plausible views of moral psychology. According to the Humean

account of moral motivation, non-cognitive states are completely distinct. According to motivational internalism, moral judgments necessarily motivate agents. The conjunction of these two views entails that moral judgments must either be non-cognitive states or be cognitive states which entail non-cognitive states. Because of the plausibility of this conjunction, Blackburn believes it is reasonable to think that cognitive states such as moral beliefs can't entail non-cognitive states. Therefore, moral judgments must be expressions of non-cognitive states. This is an argument for the superiority of Quasi-Realism over its moral realist competitors.

We attacked this argument because the claim that moral judgments necessarily motivate is derived, in part, from the claim that desires are what explain moral motivations. The difficulty with relying on any version of motivational internalism to argue against all forms of Moral Realism is that motivational internalism presupposes (G) (morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality). If morality were capable of giving us evidence of things external to morality, it would not be obvious that desires are what explain moral motivations. The obvious explanation of moral motivation would be the interaction agents had with moral phenomena (be they moral properties or moral facts) that were external to agents. If (G) were false, the interactions agents had with moral phenomena would be what morality gave agents (among other things) evidence of. Motivational internalism is only plausible if (G) is true.

The fourth of Blackburn's considerations in favour of Quasi-Realism that we attacked was the argument from supervenience. According to this argument, it may be the case in our world that there is a moral relationship between torture and wrongness. However, the argument proceeds, there is no conceptual reason why in some other world, there is not a moral relation between torture and wrongness which is not the relation that holds in our world. Blackburn then claimed that moral changes regarding the correctness of moral claims, necessarily, don't happen without some change in the features of the situation that underlies the correctness of the moral claims. This meant it is a conceptual impossibility that there should be a possible world where two things are identical in every

non-moral respect but one is better than the other. Blackburn asserted that Quasi-Realism could explain this ban on mixed worlds where Moral Realism cannot. We attacked this argument without challenging its premises. Rather, we challenged it on the grounds that it presupposed that Moral Realism gives us an unattractive explanation of the ban on mixed worlds. This characterization of Moral Realism as an unattractive explanation itself assumed (I) (naturalism is true). We showed that Blackburn could not afford to assume naturalism in an argument against all forms of Moral Realism. This is because some forms of Moral Realism reject naturalism.

The final consideration we attacked that Blackburn cited in favour of Quasi-Realism is the argument from practical needs. According to this argument, Quasi-Realism satisfies the practical needs of morality for a meta-ethical theory. Blackburn asserted that there are two practical needs of morality for a meta-ethical theory. The first was that the theory describes how morality functions correctly. The second was that the theory is consistent with truth tracking methods from the natural sciences and analytic philosophy. We attacked this argument by showing that the way a meta-ethical theory characterizes morality will, in part, determine what the needs of a meta-ethical theory are. Hence, we showed that one cannot invoke a practical needs argument in favour of Quasi-Realism unless one assumes (J) (Quasi-Realism is true).

In the second half of chapter three, we argued that Quasi-Realism has an additional factor that counts against it. This factor is it does not justify moral objectivism. Because objectivism is compatible with both realism and anti-realism, objectivism is a view Blackburn believes Quasi-Realism can account for at the 1st order level. We argued that Quasi-Realism cannot do this because no anti-realist theory can justify moral objectivism. We argued that this is for two reasons. The first reason was that one must defend (G) (morality is incapable of giving us any evidence of anything external to morality) in order for moral practice to have any resources to defend objectivism. The second reason was that scepticism regarding objectivism is such that it requires a 2nd order meta-ethical claim for the scepticism to be overcome. Such a 2nd order claim, we



showed, could only be realist.

In chapter four, we examined a different objection to the claim that moral practice can commit us to meta-ethical claims regarding the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate. This objection came from Ronald Dworkin. Dworkin advocated a position we characterized as moral anti-archimedeanism. According to Dworkin's moral anti-archimedeanism, there are no 2nd order claims which can validate or undermine 1st order moral claims. Dworkin takes this to mean that the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate is constructed out of 2nd order claims that, according to Dworkin, are best characterized as 1st order moral claims. For Dworkin, there are no moral commitments to meta-ethical claims regarding the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate. This is because there are no 2nd order moral claims from which such a debate can be had. We critiqued Dworkin's position on the basis that his arguments were inconsistent. We argued that Dworkin relies on 2nd order claims that are used in the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate. Moreover, he does this without first interpreting such 2nd order claims as 1st order claims. Dworkin cannot do this since his thesis involves the claim that there are no 2nd order claims that can be used to vindicate Moral Realism or Moral Anti-Realism. He cannot rely on a variety of 2nd order moral claims to establish the thesis that there are no such claims.

In the second half of chapter four, we analyzed objections to Dworkin by Jamie Dreier and Kenneth Ehrenberg. Dreier objected to Dworkin's defence of moral anti-archimedeanism by attempting to show, using matrices from the literature on analytic contingencies, that 2nd order claims can be morally non-committing. If they are morally non-committing, according to Dreier, there is no reason to interpret them as 1st order moral claims. Dreier, as we saw, believes his argument stands even if 2nd order claims have moral implications. Kenneth Ehrenberg, on the other hand, advanced a different set of criticisms at Dworkin. Ehrenberg accused Dworkin of failing to discredit the theoretical perspective from which the meta-ethicist discussing the Realism/Anti-Realism issue makes his claims. Ehrenberg also accused Dworkin of failing to give good reasons for the interpretation of 2nd order moral claims as 1st order moral claims. Like Dreier, Ehrenberg

took issue with Dworkin's attempts to show that meta-ethical claims made in the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate are morally non-neutral. Ehrenberg also challenged Dworkin's assumption that the Moral Realism/Anti-Realism debate does not deal with issues that are above and beyond the issues dealt with in 1st order moral discourse. Ehrenberg attempted to give counter-examples that show that there are metaphysical issues being dealt with during 2nd order moral debates that are distinct from anything discussed at the 1st order.

We then showed that both Dreier and Ehrenberg's attacks on Dworkin fail. This is because both Dreier and Ehrenberg assumed some component of moral archimedeanism. These components, we saw, were related to the traditional characterization of the 1st and 2nd order distinction assumed by moral archimedeanism. Dreier assumed that meta-ethical standards about how one ought to evaluate moral standards are not themselves moral standards. He also failed to see that one of his own versions of secondary quality theory was actually a moral claim that there are 2nd order moral commitments against. Ehrenberg's varied criticisms of Dworkin all failed because Ehrenberg assumed the truth of (Z) (there can't be 2nd order moral commitments). At the end of chapter four, we explained how Dworkin, Dreier, and Ehrenberg either failed to attack archimedeanism or failed to defend it because they presupposed components of it.

We ended chapter 4 with an explanation of why Dworkin, Dreier, and Ehrenberg presented arguments that radically missed their targets. The explanation was that each theorist, in a different way, does not question the traditional characterization of the distinction between 1st and 2nd order claims. Within that characterization, 2nd order claims have more of an ability to validate or undermine moral claims than 1st order moral claims do. This characterization of the justification capacities of the 2nd order archimedean claim is the basis of archimedean moralising. Even a theorist like Dworkin who challenges the traditional characterization of the distinction between 1st and 2nd order claims finds himself relying on 2<sup>nd</sup> order archimedean claims. Moreover, the way he relies on such claims implies that they have a greater ability to justify moral claims than

do claims made at the 1<sup>st</sup> order.

Dreier relied on the traditional characterization of the 1st and 2nd order distinction during his attacks on Dworkin. His example of a meta-ethical claim that has moral implications but is not morally committing requires the assumption that moral standards cannot be standards regarding how to evaluate moral standards. Thus, Dreier seemed to be implicitly assuming that moral claims are only made at the first order. This comports with the traditional characterization of the distinction between the 1st and 2nd order. Dreier also failed to notice that a rejection of ASQ was itself a claim plausibly understood as a 2nd order moral commitment. This failure, again, is consistent with the traditional characterization of the distinction between the 1st and 2nd order. It is understandable that Dreier did not notice RASQ since on the traditional characterization of the 1st and 2nd order distinction, 2nd order claims can't be moral commitments. As we saw, most of Ehrenberg's criticisms of Dworkin failed because he also assumed that there could be no 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral commitments. This, again, is consistent with the traditional characterization of the 1st and 2nd order moral claim.

Chapter 4 ended with a summary of the aspects of Dworkin's anti-archimedeanism that are sound and contrasts these aspects with the aspects that fail. I claimed that the aspects of Dworkin's anti-archimedeanism that succeed are the aspects that insist that it is not the case that 1<sup>st</sup> order moral claims must be justified from an archimedean perspective. Dworkin's fundamental mistake is his inconsistent attempt at ridding ethics of 2nd order archimedean commitments. I explained Dworkin's simultaneous failure and success by looking at Dworkin's project as an attempt to harmonize two aims. The first aim was a desire to not have the truth of 1st order moral claims contingent on the pronouncements of archimedean claims that are external to 1st order moral practice. The second aim was a desire to justify a morality that could not potentially commit us to an extravagant metaphysics. I explained that if (C) is correct, the harmonization of these two aims is impossible because the second aim is infeasible. This is because the truth of (C) implies that there is no moral position from which one could

delegitimize potential metaphysical commitments of morality.

## **7. EPILOGUE**

Throughout this thesis, it has been repeated that one difficult consequence of accepting (C) is it seems to be at odds with philosophical naturalism. It is at odds with philosophical naturalism because naturalism seems to be inherently archimedean. On a naturalist world view, insofar as there is room for an account of morality at all, there must be non-moral reasons given for the attractiveness of this account. Furthermore, on a naturalist worldview, moral commitments don't have the ability to justify ontological claims that (C) implies are moral commitments. If (C) is true, any moral commitment, no matter how crazy, gives us a moral reason to accept the commitment. This is perhaps the primary intuitive difficulty with (C).

A related difficulty that has been discussed is that (C) is at odds with the methodological assumptions of the natural and social sciences. After all, no physicists or biologists interpret moral commitments as sources of evidence about the world. Hence, no physicist or biologist, when constructing a theory, wonders if there is any evidence against it resulting from clashes with moral commitments. Also, social scientists and evolutionary biologists, when constructing theories of human behavior, don't consider moral commitments as evidential.

Thus far, it looks like archimedeanism is the more plausible view. However, when we consider some consequences of affirming archimedeanism, the situation becomes much murkier. For instance, one consequence of affirming archimedeanism is it seems as though we can deny moral commitments just because they cease to constitute philosophical or scientific explanations we find attractive. A moral commitment, we should remember, is a claim we must affirm or presuppose in virtue of engaging adequately in moral practice. It seems odd that the archimedean should not warrant any moral criticism for this. Why is there nothing wrong with denying a moral commitment as long as one does it in the name of affirming an attractive explanation of morality? After all, moral commitments don't seem like the sort of thing we can justifiably deny for

explanatory reasons.

Here, the archimedean might object that we should separate moral commitments into two classes. Moral commitments like “sentient beings ought not be caused unnecessary pain” are commitments we cannot deny without warranting moral criticism. However, commitments like “explanatory Moral Realism is true” are claims we should be able to deny without warranting moral criticism. The problem with this rejoinder is the burden of proof is on the archimedean to explain what the relevant moral difference is between the two moral commitments which makes the latter acceptable to deny. If the archimedean insists that he can deny “explanatory Moral Realism is true” without hurting other sentient human beings, this response will be unconvincing. This is because denying the sentient beings claim does not require that the archimedean hurt anybody either. In fact, the archimedean could affirm the sentient beings claim in a manner that is totally removed from the good standards he uses in interacting with others, the good way he votes, or his good cultural values. Likewise, the archimedean could negatively change his character after realizing that a moral scepticism he espouses implies the denial of all correct moral commitments. It is true that the latter scenario is less likely than the former, but likelihood is not really the relevant issue.

The relevant issue is that moral commitments are subsets of moral claims. Affirmations and denials of moral claims are moral acts. Whether or not the affirmations and denials lead to the harm of others is an important consideration for determining whether these moral acts are good or bad. But they are not the only consideration. Sometimes, denying a correct moral claim is practically harmless. Yet that doesn't stop us from believing that the person who denies this correct moral claim warrants moral criticism. We can imagine individuals who believe women are less valuable than men but never reveal this belief nor act in ways that involve the mistreatment of others. We can imagine people who think that the homeless deserve to be kicked in the face. Yet we can imagine these people never revealing this belief to others or mistreating others as a result of it. We can imagine neo-fascist deniers of the holocaust who never reveal or act on their

beliefs so as to lead quiet, uninterrupted lives with family and friends. We can imagine people who think a sexual attraction to children is normal and healthy although they never reveal or act on this belief. More importantly, it is hard to imagine these moral agents not warranting moral criticism. The moral criticism that these individuals warrant is not a criticism for having harmed another human being. It is a criticism for having denied something it was morally important not to deny. It's as if there are certain moral states of affairs that these individuals are disrespecting by failing to affirm them. Within philosophy, archimedeanism seems like it could be a high minded excuse for this kind of disrespect.

Of course, affirming a justification for acts of pedophilia will upset people more than affirming a meta-ethical theory that implies the denial of all moral commitments. At the same time, there doesn't seem to be an identifiable moral difference in the act of affirming either of those claims that makes archimedean scepticism look any better. The archimedean claim is just at a higher level of abstraction than the pedophilia claim. If anything, the archimedean claim seems worse, since it implies the negation of a much bigger range of correct moral claims. It seems odd that someone who affirms that pedophilia is not wrong is met with outrage. And yet someone who says that there is no such thing as wrongness should be met with moral indifference. After all, the person who affirms that there is no such thing as wrongness is, ipso facto, affirming that pedophilia is not wrong.

It's difficult to imagine how it can be morally justified to learn about the 2<sup>nd</sup> order truths of morality, if one of those truths may be that all moral commitments are false. Simultaneously, it is difficult to imagine why we should affirm moral commitments if they are false. After all, the demonstration that a moral claim is false we normally take as an ethical (and not just rational) reason to stop affirming the claim. Except in very rare cases, we find any claim's falsehood a moral reason not to affirm the claim. As noted earlier in this thesis, we look to the facts of the world to determine what moral claims we should affirm. We take the truth of Hitler's extermination of 6 million Jews as a reason to

think the moral claim "Hitler was a great man" is a false claim. Moreover, we see its falsehood being at least one of the primary moral reasons for us not to affirm such a claim. The falseness of moral claims is normally an indicator that such claims are hazardous in some way to affirm. This explains why truth is valued so highly in moral discourse and practice.

What are we to do, however, if truth turns against all moral commitments? It is not as simple as siding with truth on the grounds that it is more useful to do so. This is for two reasons. The first reason is that it is difficult to conceive of how the act of affirming that all moral commitments are false could be useful. Additionally, it is difficult to conceive of how 'usefulness' could be a reason to consider something morally acceptable if it turns out that all moral commitments were false. In the absence of true moral commitments, the concept of 'usefulness' would wither away in a quagmire of intractably subjective perspectives. For some agents, it might be useful to discover the truth that all moral commitments are false. For other agents, it might be useful to deny this. There would be no way of determining which kind of 'usefulness' was better than any rival conception of 'usefulness'.

It is worth noting that an archimedean could be sympathetic to the worries I am outlining here. In fact, as goes without saying, an archimedean need not be some variety of moral sceptic. An archimedean could affirm that truth supports rather than undermines our moral commitments. An archimedean meta-ethicist could be an explanatory moral realist. Furthermore, an archimedean could affirm a moral metaphysics more extravagant than anything advocated in this thesis. What an archimedean could not do is affirm: (C) For any meta-ethical theory that is true, that theory must either be an explanatory moral realist theory or a theory that is compatible with explanatory Moral Realism.

This is because the archimedean perspective prohibits the archimedean from making the moral assumption that a true meta-ethical theory must be a certain way. For the archimedean, it is a contingent matter which meta-ethical theory turns out to be true. The archimedean examines the evidence and then decides upon a meta-ethical theory he

thinks the evidence favours. He does not pronounce that all true meta-ethical theories must be a certain way because we are morally committed to meta-ethical theories being this way. For the archimedean, it is truth, rather than moral commitments, that settle the matter. Moreover, the archimedean believes it is truth, rather than moral commitments, that justify whether or not we have moral commitments.

This is troubling because this suggests that the archimedean ultimately values truth more than his moral commitments, whatever those commitments turn out to be. If truth supports moral commitments, the archimedean will side with morality. If it does not, the archimedean will side with truth alone while trying to find ways for this not to negatively affect his moral decisions as a human being. This is why it is normally assumed that morality's commitment to truth is so strong that it is morally permissible for the archimedean to affirm true claims at the expense of denying the set of all moral commitments. If the arguments in this thesis are correct, the moral commitment to truth is not this strong. If (C) is a genuine moral commitment, the supplementary moral commitment to truth is still very strong. However, it is not so strong that it holds even if truth turns against morality.



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