

Ethical Non-naturalism and the Guise of the Good

1. Introduction

In recent years ethical non-naturalism has been reaffirmed in broadly two sorts of ways. One way has been mostly *defensive* or negative: the idea of non-natural moral or normative facts is not as bad as it may have seemed. The defensive line has been developed epistemologically (with the defence of the connected doctrine of intuitionism, Audi 2004), metaphysically (with the defence from queerness arguments, e.g. Stratton-Lake 2002, and from arguments based on supervenience, e.g. Shafer-Landau 2003), and on the motivational front (see again Shafer-Landau 2003). T.M. Scanlon (2014) and Derek Parfit (2011) pull these threads together into a picture that is made plausible, partly, by adopting a *metaphysically light* view of normative facts.

A second tendency has instead been *positive*—by presenting arguments *in favour of* non-naturalism—and it has seconded *metaphysically heavier* views, whereby non-natural normative facts and properties exist ‘out there’, not just as logical shadows of normative truths. Recent advocates of this approach include Graham Oddie (2005), David Enoch (2011), William Fitzpatrick (2008), and perhaps Terence Cuneo (2007, 2014) and Ralph Wedgwood (2007).

The present paper intends to cut across these two approaches by proposing a *positive* argument for a *metaphysically light* version of non-naturalism from the nature of mental states such as desires. In order to do so, it will use as its premise the time-honoured, and recently rediscovered, doctrine of the guise of the good (GG), whereby it is essential to desire (and perhaps similar mental states) that the object of desire be conceived as good or as normatively favoured under some description. In a nutshell, the argument is that if the guise of the good is a correct theory of desire, then a certain version of non-naturalism is better placed than other meta-ethical views to make sense of it.

In section 2 I define ethical non-naturalism and the guise of the good, providing also an initial defence of the latter. In section 3 I briefly survey some historical precedents and then proceed to the argument. For each major meta-ethical view I consider (reductive naturalism, error theory, non-cognitivism, and finally robust non-naturalism) I offer reasons why combining them with the guise of the good leads to undesirable consequences either for the meta-ethical view or for GG. At the end of this elimination process a form of metaphysically light non-naturalism will emerge as the view that best fits with GG.

2. Definitions

2.1 Ethical Non-naturalism

By ethical non-naturalism in this paper I understand the following view:

there are normative truths and they are objective, non-natural, and irreducible.

Normative truths include all truths which are about, or imply that there is at least, some normative reason in favour or against a certain action (where ‘action’ includes any response for which there can be a normative reason: intentional actions, intentions, desires, perhaps emotions and beliefs). For example, if truths about value imply truths about reasons for

certain attitudes or actions, then they are normative truths. The same goes for truths about what is morally or prudentially right or wrong, and truths about what is rational to do (the so-called rational requirements). In this sense I understand non-naturalism as not just a meta-ethical but a meta-normative view.

Non-naturalism conceives of normative truths as objective or stance-independent (see Shafer-Landau 2003). For instance, a claim such as ‘killing is pro tanto wrong’, if true, is not true in virtue of anyone’s stance or attitude towards this claim. People’s actual or hypothetical endorsement of the claim amounts to the recognition of a truth rather than being one of the factors which make it true or in which its truth consists.

Further, and what distinguishes non-naturalism from other stance-independent views, normative truths are non-natural. This has historically been understood in various ways, but for the purposes of this paper I mean by a ‘non-natural truth’ a claim or a proposition in which at least one of its constituent concepts does not belong to the natural or social sciences *and* does not refer to a causally explanatory property or entity. In this sense, normative truths are not chemical, biological, psychological or economical ones, nor do they play a causal role of their own in what have been called ‘moral explanations’. But there might be non-natural truths other than normative, for instance logical or mathematical ones. My criterion is also meant to exclude truths about deities, as long as deities are construed as agents having various sorts of causal powers.

But being non-natural is not enough: it is also crucial for non-naturalists that normative truths are not reducible to other sorts of truths, *be these natural or non-natural*. This was a major theme in G. E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*, though it often tends to be glossed over. Normative truths are not reducible (identical to or made exclusively true by) not only to naturalistic truths, but also to geometrical truths, modal truths, logical truths, truths about Hegel’s Spirit, truths about Being, and so on.

Finally, non-naturalism is a non-sceptical, success view: some normative claims or propositions are indeed true, though of course non-naturalism as such is compatible with pretty much any view about which normative claims are true (it might even be the case, say, that moral claims are all false and only prudential claims are true, as long as they are non-natural). Recent debates have brought out how non-naturalists may disagree on the question of how non-natural truths get to be true. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau distinguish two views (2014: 403):

Minimal non-naturalism: there are non-natural moral truths, but there are no non-natural moral properties or facts. All moral properties and facts are natural.

Robust non-naturalism: there are both non-natural moral truths and non-natural moral properties and facts.

This distinction is intuitive enough. However, it counts as robust some non-naturalist views which are intended to be rather lightweight. For instance, Parfit claims that normative truths are indeed made true by correspondence with non-natural facts, but he also insists that these facts exist “non-ontologically”, i.e. neither spatio-temporally nor in any Platonic reality (Parfit 2011, vol. II: 479, 486). Whatever exactly Parfit means, he intends to distance his own

view from more robust views.¹ So I believe we need to draw a slightly finer-grained distinction than Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's (and also substitute 'normative' for 'moral'):

Metaphysically minimal non-naturalism: there are non-natural normative truths, but there are no ontologically existing non-natural normative properties or facts. All ontologically existing properties and facts are natural.

Metaphysically robust non-naturalism: there are both non-natural normative truths and ontologically existing non-natural normative properties and facts.

In section 3.5 I will show how this distinction matters for my purposes.

2.2 The Guise of the Good

The classical, scholastic formulation is that whatever is desired, is desired under the guise (aspect, appearance, form) of the good (*quidquid appetitur, appetitur sub specie boni*; see Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I–II: 1.6, 8.1; Kant 1999: 187–8). In other words, it is necessary that if *p* is desired (by *A*), then *p* is desired (by *A*) under the guise of the good. By 'under the guise of the good' it is generally meant that the object of desire is conceived by the subject as good, to some extent, under some specification. The notion of 'the good' is certainly to be understood as *pro tanto* rather than all things considered or good overall. When we desire something, we conceive it as good under some respect, not necessarily as good overall, or as the best option. Also, 'the good' is meant to include any sort of putative good (moral, prudential, aesthetical etc.) as well as comparative evaluative notions (better than, the lesser evil, etc.). The converse formulation—necessarily, if *p* is conceived by a subject as good, then *p* is desired—is not part of the doctrine, although some philosophers do endorse it as well, since they endorse the stronger thesis that desiring and conceiving as good are identical (e.g. Tenenbaum 2007).

Beyond this very general characterization, different advocates have proposed different specifications and extensions (for an overview see Author 2015 and Tenenbaum 2013). I will mention three points under discussion. First, it is debated whether the 'good' should be replaced by the notion of a (*pro tanto*) normative reason (Scanlon 1998, Gregory 2013) or not (Raz 2010). For our purposes, this difference does not matter, since Raz does accept that, even if the good is somehow conceptually prior to normative reasons, its normativity still consists in its relation to normative reasons. Second, some authors extend a GG account from desires to intentions and states of willing (Tenenbaum 2007), arguing that in the latter case the object of intention or willing is conceived as good all things considered or as something we simply ought to do. Again, this issue is not essential for the present purposes, as long as a GG account of intention doesn't expose the view to fatal objections. Third, there is debate over what kind of relation the subject must stand in to the object of desire in order to conceive it as good or as favoured by normative reasons (see Baker 2015). 'Intellectualists' argue that it is a kind of belief or judgment to the effect that the object is good (e.g. Raz 2002b, Gregory forthcoming). 'Perceptualists' argue that it is a kind of perceptual state like an evaluative appearance or seeming (Stampe 1987, Oddie 2005, Tenenbaum 2007, Hawkins 2008, Saemi 2015), which may or may not require the subject's mastery of evaluative or normative concepts. In the course of the argument below, when needed, I will take care to

¹ At the same time I hesitate to call it a metaphysically quietist view (such as e.g. Dworkin 1996), because Parfit evidently takes the ontological question seriously enough.

consider both versions of the view.

But why take GG seriously? After all, it has been repeatedly criticized (Stocker 1979, Velleman 1992, Setiya 2010). However, even critics (such as Kieran Setiya) do point out that GG articulates a basic insight about human agency. When you act intentionally, the action must make sense to you, and therefore desiring (or perhaps ‘wanting’, see Anscombe 1963) can make sense of an action only if it involves the agent’s being in a position to answer the question ‘why did you do it?’ (or ‘why do you want to do it?’). This question is a request for the agent’s reasons rather than for an external, third-person explanation. GG takes this insight further by claiming that the agent’s reasons are considerations which—with varying degrees of clarity or explicitness—are seen by the agent as normatively justifying or favouring the action (and here is where a critic like Setiya parts ways). The thought is that views which simply invoke an agent’s desire or aim, where this is not necessarily conceived as good by the agent, fail to make sense of an action from the agent’s perspective.

My plan here is not to defend GG, but given the role it plays in my argument I should briefly illustrate its resources to counter at least one central objection. Simply put, there are actions which seem to be fully intentional although the agent does not see the action under the guise of any good, but rather takes the action to be bad and desires it *for that reason* (Stocker 1979, Velleman 1992). In reply, GG advocates may say a number of things. If we adopt the ‘guise of reasons’ version of the view, then one can simply say that such agents judge or perceive badness (evil etc.) as a normative reason to act: a possibly irrational, but quite intelligible attitude. Alternatively, GG advocates may weaken the thesis and claim that intentional action requires a disposition to desire under the guise of the good—a disposition that may on occasion remain unactualized. Finally, one may view GG as a generic truth (like “birds fly”). Any exception can be understood against a background of normality, where people act *regularly enough* under the guise of the good. What GG seems to exclude is rather intentional action in which an agent’s desire does not seem to connect *anyhow* with any perceived reason (e.g. a sudden impulse to hurt your crying baby, Hawkins 2008). But then it is less clear whether any such case can count as intentional action (the fact that the agent can be deemed responsible for such actions is of course a different matter).

In short, GG provides a powerful account of the role of desire in human action,² and has plenty of resources to handle counterexamples.

3. An Argument by Elimination

3.1 The Plan

The claim that there is an important connection between GG and ethical non-naturalism may not surprise from a historical point of view. After all, Plato defended both doctrines (see Barney 2010), and some later GG advocates (Augustine, Aquinas) arguably subscribed to meta-ethical views with plenty in common with non-naturalism. Kant seems to endorse GG as ‘the old formula of the schools’ (Kant 1999: 187-8; see McCarty 2009: ch. 1), and his meta-ethical views, despite the nowadays dominant constructivist interpretive line, may as well be interpreted as a form of non-naturalism, particularly so in the light of the distinction above between metaphysically minimal vs. metaphysically robust non-naturalism. G.E.

² A complete case for the doctrine would of course show how it accounts for, or is at least compatible with, the role of desire in contexts other than intentional action. Thanks to a reviewer for pointing this out.

Moore, in the course of his non-naturalist argument against ‘metaphysical ethics’, remarks that it “may possibly be true universally...that a perception of goodness is included in the complex facts which we mean by willing and by having certain kinds of feeling” (Moore 1993: 131, §79). And he proceeds to argue that precisely because willing (or desiring) includes perceiving something as good, the property of goodness cannot be equated with a state of willing or feeling—this would involve a confusion of what we think, the object of our thought (or the object of our perception), with our thinking or perceiving it. More recently, Graham Oddie (2005) endorses both views, except that, unlike non-naturalists as described above, he takes irreducible value properties to be causally efficacious.

However, despite these historical coincidences, I know of no sustained or explicit attempt to argue for non-naturalism *on the basis of* GG. Indeed, as far as I can see, Moore is (probably unwittingly) the one making a start on the kind of question I intend to answer: which meta-ethical or meta-normative view makes best sense of a picture of desire and action in which the good (or normative reasons), as conceived by the agent, is an essential element? I will proceed by elimination: a version of metaphysically minimal non-naturalism will emerge as the meta-normative view which best coheres with GG.³

3.2 Reductivist Views

Moore’s argument already disposes of one kind of meta-ethical reductivist view, which analyses ‘X is good’ as (roughly) ‘X is willed’. If willing X necessarily implies perceiving X as good, and if ‘X is good’=‘X is willed’, then the question ‘is X good?’ will be, at least partly, the same as the question ‘is X perceived as good?’. But—and this is yet another example of Moore’s open question—it makes full sense to ask whether what is perceived as good is in fact so. And as said above, this particular instance of naturalistic fallacy involves the more general fallacy of confusing the object of thought with our thinking it. Note that if one denied that willing X necessarily implies perceiving it as good, Moore might still object to the identity of being good and being willed on open question grounds, but he would need a different diagnosis for the mistake. This goes to show that a GG account of willing is *especially* in tension with a reductive analysis of value in terms of willing. Similar remarks seem to apply to other similar reductive analyses, such as ‘X is good’=‘X is what one desires to desire’. To the extent that second-order desires also involve perceptions of goodness, such analyses likewise confuse questions about goodness with questions about perceiving something as good.

Not so fast, however. Mark Schroeder (2007) defends a reductive account of normative reasons (for A to do something) in terms of facts about A’s (relevant) desires. At first blush, Moore’s argument applies to this account too. If desires are understood according to the guise of reasons, then to desire X is, *inter alia*, to see certain considerations as reasons to do or to promote X. But then Schroeder’s reductive account would explain normative reasons in terms of seeing considerations as reasons, which does not seem promising. It seems he would need a conception of desire that *doesn’t* tap into the guise of reasons (Schroeder 2007: 155).

Schroeder, however, believes his reductive account can in fact *explain* why “when a desire leads some consideration to strike us in the salient way that is characteristic of desire, that counts as the consideration seeming to us to be a reason” (*ibid.* 158). He uses a

³ This argument has structural affinities with Enoch’s argument from deliberative indispensability (2011: ch. 3, and see also fn. 61). But he concludes in favour of robust non-naturalism.

‘triangulation’ argument: (1) it is typical of desire that certain things strike us as salient; (2) as guise of reasons theorists want, the content of such states of “striking as salient” must be about reasons to do things. And (3) the best way to explain (2), given (1), is to appeal to a view, such as his, that forges a tight, reductive link between reasons and desires.

But GG theorists should and can resist this argument, for two reasons. One is that the argument leaves the truth of GG (or the guise of reasons in this case) at the mercy of a substantive theory about what constitutes reasons. One would have hoped that the analysis of desire could proceed independently of such normative disputes. Secondly, a GG theorist has her own explanation of how (1) and (2) connect: the fact that certain things strike us as salient when we desire something, and the fact that this salience has the contours of normative reasons, are connected precisely because it is in the nature of desire to present us with (apparent) reasons to do things.

At any rate Schroeder does recognize that his reductive account of reasons cannot coexist with an *analysis* of desire in terms of reasons (*ibidem*). What he tries to do is to rather capture the spirit of GG within his own reductive framework, without importing the doctrine full and wholesale. In this sense, his argument is a testament to the first point of this section: one cannot at the same time explain or define value or reasons in terms of desire *and* explain desire in terms of value or reasons.⁴

The reductivist may instead identify value or reasons with properties which *do not* include attitudes liable to a GG account. One plausible candidate here is a hedonist view according to which goodness is (whether analytically or not) the property of being pleasant or productive of pleasure—where pleasure is a sensation or a mental state which does not include any perception of goodness. So, in desiring X we conceive of X as good, and our conceiving of X as good is vindicated when X is pleasant or productive of pleasure—it might be our own pleasure if we desire X as good for us, or others’ pleasure if we desire X as morally good, for instance. (A similar naturalist account can be given of aversion against X as including conceiving X as bad, and understanding ‘being bad’ as ‘being painful’.)

Such a combination of views escapes Moore’s argument above. But GG advocates should reject a hedonist reductive account of goodness. Here is why. Sometimes we are motivated hedonistically: on GG, this means that sometimes we take the prospect of pleasure (for ourselves or others) as what makes a certain action good or desirable, and even more often we take the prospect of pain or discomfort (for ourselves or others) as what makes an action bad or undesirable. In other words, we desire or are averse to an action under the guise of a specific good (pleasure) or a specific evil (pain). Now compare two worlds: in A people act under the guise of the good, which for all of them happens to be the good of pleasure; in B people act simply under the guise of pleasure. The GG theorist would say that A-people are importantly different from B-people: their desires have the sort of evaluative orientation necessary for their actions to count as intentional—indeed, only A-people have states worth calling “desires”. But for the reductive hedonist there cannot be such a difference: since being good and being pleasant are the same property, then both A- and B-people have desires, and indeed, desires which, for any substantial purpose, have the same content. The fact that A-

⁴ This point seems to apply to, *inter alia*, voluntarist reductions of good to what is willed by God. This poses a choice to make for those religiously inspired philosophers who have endorsed GG. For reasons of space, I cannot here address other views in this vicinity, such as ideal observer theories, although I suspect the same point would apply as well.

people see their actions as good (on top of seeing them as producing pleasure), if anything, makes their desires less straightforward than B-people's desires.

This point generalizes to any reductive view. For any property P supposedly identical to goodness, there can be two worlds A and B where people in A act in response to P under the guise of the good and people in B act simply in response to P. The reductive theorist will hold that worlds A and B are substantially identical, whereas they differ according to a GG advocate.

It might be replied that the present argument ignores the distinction between reference and sense. The reductivist may want to say that, while the desires of people in A and B are identical as regards their *objects*, still the *modes of presentation* of such objects differ—pleasure (and any action connected to it) is presented as good to A-people, but not to B-people. So the reductivist can draw the distinctions that GG wants to draw between A and B.⁵

This reply, however, would expose the reductivist to a serious difficulty. The fact that A-people see their actions under the guise of the good contributes not only to explaining how their actions might differ from B-people's actions—in the sort of way that different modes of presentation of the same content normally explain differences in behaviour. GG also marks a difference in *status* between A- and B-people: only A-people have desires, and only A-people can act intentionally. In other words, it is because their thoughts *involve value*, on top of natural facts about pleasure, that A-people are different. But if value, even if only as “apprehended in thought”, is capable of making such a difference, then this fact would seem to strongly militate against a reduction of value to something else. According to GG, the notion of the good (or that of normative reasons) plays a role in defining desire (and action) that cannot be played by other, non-evaluative or non-normative notions.⁶ If the reductivist were fully to embrace this insight, it seems that she could do so only at the cost of casting her own view into doubt. For this reason, I conclude that the reductivist had better steer clear of endorsing GG (and of course, vice-versa too) and opt rather for a theory of desire and action that is officially free of evaluative components.

3.3 Error Theory

Next I will discuss meta-normative theories which deny the existence of any normative reality, namely error theory and non-cognitivism. It seems that GG advocates and error theorists would have at best a very complicated relationship. If desires aim at the good, in the sense of involving evaluative appearances or judgments apt to be true or false, and if, as error theory claims, all such appearances or judgments are false, then desire, and in turn intentional action, imply a massive illusion or mistake *as such*. This is certainly not a welcome result for GG. Nor is the error theorist herself likely to look forward to such a sweeping implication of her view.

There might seem to be a way to avoid such a dramatic conclusion. Error theory normally targets only certain kinds of values or reasons, for example those that involve ‘objective prescriptivity’ (Mackie 1977) or categorical reasons (Joyce 2001). So only those desires

⁵ Thanks to a reviewer for pressing this point.

⁶ This point echoes Enoch's argument from deliberative indispensability (2011: ch. 3). I should add that this reply to the reductivist can be made whether the good is understood as part of the content of desires, or as the “formal object” of desire—like truth is often regarded as the formal object of belief, without necessarily appearing in the content of any particular belief (Tenenbaum 2007: 6; 2008, Schroeder 2008, Schafer 2013).

whose guise of the good involves such concepts would be mistaken. Desires whose evaluative guise has to do with other kinds of values or reasons would be safe.

However, this would be an unacceptable compromise for GG, for two reasons. First, the link between desire and value is typically affirmed as part of an attempt to show how we can genuinely experience *objective* value—value that is not dependent on us (this theme is emphasized, among others, by Oddie 2005). If error theory is correct, and it leaves room for only less-than-objective values to be experienced, then a central motivation for GG is defeated. Second, and perhaps more significantly, it seems that the values or reasons which (supposedly) are not affected by the error theory will ultimately be grounded in desires of some sort, at least if we think of them along the lines of internal reasons (Williams 1981). But for GG desires are precisely the place where one cannot stop. Those final or intrinsic desires which ultimately ground our reasons will involve evaluative appearances or judgments, and the question will arise again, whether the values thus perceived fall under the error theorist's axe or not.⁷ In sum, while in principle logically compatible, GG and error theory do not sit together well.

3.4 Non-cognitivism

Things are less straightforward with non-cognitivism. Some authors have remarked that GG may be compatible with a non-cognitivist account of evaluative or normative thought (Raz 2010: 113; Setiya 2007: 93; though see also Velleman 1992: 5). In this section I try to show why this is unlikely. Two preliminaries are needed.

First, with non-cognitivism the focus of meta-normative discussion shifts from the 'good'—or better, from the *goodness* of what is conceived as good—to the 'conceiving as good'—to the nature of this state or attitude. This is because, *qua* cognitivist views of evaluative thought, neither reductive naturalism nor error theory had any reason to take issue with the cognitive or truth-apt status of conceiving as good. The question for them was whether they make sense of the *content* of this state in a way that is amenable to GG. The question for non-cognitivism is instead whether it can satisfactorily make sense of 'conceiving as good'.

Second, I assume that non-cognitivism is not only a theory about normative or evaluative judgments or sentences, but an approach to evaluative thought more generally. And I regard 'conceiving as good' as an exercise of evaluative thought, even in the case where it consists of a perception-like appearance of the good, which may or may not presuppose the subject's mastery of evaluative concepts. As such, non-cognitivists should be interested in giving an account of 'conceiving as good'.⁸

By non-cognitivism in this broad sense then I mean the view that exercises of evaluative (or normative) thought should be understood not as attempts to represent any evaluative matter of fact but as expressions⁹ of conative attitudes, which can very summarily be identified as

⁷ If they do, then it follows that *all* practical normativity involves error. Some error theorist might of course be happy with this result.

⁸ I take it that this assumption is very much in the spirit of Simon Blackburn's and Allan Gibbard's views, although probably less so in the spirit of early emotivists or R. M. Hare's prescriptivism.

⁹ I use 'expression' as in 'Leonardo's paintings are expressions of Renaissance art'. Evaluative thought in this sense manifests or belongs to the conative side of our nature. A more specific use of 'expression' is needed for *expressivism* as a narrower theory about normative sentences or utterances and their relation to attitudes (see Schroeder 2008a).

‘being for’ or ‘being against’ something. Judging that keeping promises is morally good, for instance, involves a certain way of ‘being for’ keeping promises.¹⁰ One thing follows immediately: since on this picture conceiving as good is not an attempt to represent any evaluative reality, the fact (accepted by non-cognitivists) that there is no evaluative reality to be represented does not mean that conceiving as good, and in turn desire, are systematically mistaken, as was the case with error theory.

But how can ‘conceiving X as good’ be analysed in non-cognitive terms? Here we need to distinguish intellectualist and perceptualist versions of GG. The intellectualist version identifies it as a judgment that X is good. We can then plug in a non-cognitivist account of value judgments. Judging that X is good will involve, be identical to, or anyway be intelligible only against the background of, a state of being for X. And this latter state is a kind of conative state, i.e. a kind of desire. On a ‘simple’ non-cognitive account judging that X is good will, for instance, involve a desire to pursue X. But this is clearly a non-starter from the point of view of GG: a desire for X involves conceiving X as good, conceiving X as good involves judging that X is good, and judging that X is good involves desiring to pursue X, with which we are back to square one. The combination of intellectualist GG and ‘simple’ non-cognitivism does not advance our understanding of desire.

We could instead plug in a more refined non-cognitive account of value judgment, where ‘being for X’ is a desire to desire X, or some kind of reflective endorsement of X, or some kind of planning state (as in Gibbard 2003). Let’s call this more refined state ‘D+.’ But this won’t work either: a desire for X involves conceiving X as good, conceiving X as good involves judging that X is good, and judging that X is good involves D+. Since I take ‘involve’ here to be transitive, it follows that a desire for X will involve D+. And this is implausible: it would imply that *whenever* I desire something, say, to quench my thirst, I am always also in some other conative state such as desiring to desire to quench my thirst, or reflectively endorsing quenching my thirst etc. While conative states may often link to one another, the combination of intellectualist GG and ‘refined’ non-cognitivism has the improbable result that any desire *must* be accompanied by some other refined state.

The perceptualist version of GG identifies ‘conceiving X as good’ with a perception-like state of X appearing or seeming good, which falls short of a full-blown judgment, and may well be resilient to contrary judgments to the effect that X is not good. How exactly this state should be characterized may vary according to authors. I will take the lead from Tenenbaum’s definition. An appearance is in this context “something that inclines us or tempts us to judge in a certain manner, something that is a *prima facie* (though not necessarily *pro tanto*) reason to judge, but that we sometimes can recognize as being illusory” (Tenenbaum 2010: 219).¹¹ So a desire to run a marathon is or involves an appearance of running the marathon as good, which in turn involves an inclination to judge that running the marathon is good. An inclination to judge that running the marathon is good could then be understood in non-

¹⁰ Non-cognitivism in this sense differs from other non-representational approaches to normative thought, such as fictionalism (where the relevant type of attitude is not conative but some kind of make-believe) or Horgan and Timmons’s ‘cognitive expressivism’ (2006) (where the key attitude is a non-representational type of belief).

¹¹ A *pro tanto* reason is a consideration that really is a good reason (for judging or doing something) but may be outweighed by other reasons. A *prima facie* reason is an apparent reason—a consideration that looks like a good reason but may not turn out to be a good reason at all. By the way, I choose this definition partly because, if evaluative appearances are or involve inclinations to judge (rather than being states *unconnected* with judgment), then evaluative appearances should be at least *indirectly* of interest to non-cognitivism as a theory of normative judgment. Anyway other authors offer analogous definitions (Oddie 2005: 41-2).

cognitive terms as an inclination to be in non-cognitive state N. So, by transitivity, a desire to run a marathon would involve an inclination to be in N.

If N is a simple desire to run the marathon, then the desire to run the marathon would be unhelpfully explained as an inclination to desire to run the marathon. If N is a refined state D+, then any desire for X would necessarily involve an inclination to be in D+ (desiring to desire X, reflectively endorsing X etc.). Now *this* need not be as implausible as the previous claim that a desire for X requires having D+. An inclination to be in D+ can be understood as a disposition to enmesh a given desire in a more complex evaluative outlook—e.g. a desire to run the marathon is likely to be reflectively endorsed by the subject as part of a plan to stay healthy or in an athlete’s case as part of her chosen career path. Perhaps any desire inclines us to hold further related attitudes, even if it doesn’t require *the actual presence* of those attitudes.

However, even refined non-cognitivism cannot capture Tenenbaum’s intended role for evaluative appearances. Evaluative appearances incline us to evaluative judgments by coming across as *reasons* for the judgment—in the same sort of way as perceptual appearances (the fact that this jumper looks red) incline us to hold corresponding beliefs (“this jumper is red”). But this cannot be the same sense in which a given desire inclines us to be in D+: my desire to run the marathon does not come across as a reason to, say, desire to desire running the marathon. If anything, it is the refined attitude D+ which presents itself as a reason or at least as endorsement for the desire to run the marathon. So non-cognitive states cannot quite reproduce the appearance-judgment interplay that is central to perceptualist GG.

With these arguments we confirm the suspicion one might antecedently have had, that GG and non-cognitivism are indeed rival approaches to the philosophy of evaluation.¹² On GG, we desire something *because* we (somehow) think it good. On non-cognitivism, we think that something is good *because* we (somehow) desire it.¹³ GG advocates will need to adopt a cognitivist theory of evaluative thought. Non-cognitivists will need to adopt an alternative to GG (for instance, Blackburn 1984 defends and partly builds his views on the so-called Humean theory of motivation).

3.5 Minimal and Robust Non-naturalism

Having eliminated reductive naturalism, error theory, and non-cognitivism, we can now ask whether GG is better supported by a minimal or by a robust version of non-naturalism. To recall:

Metaphysically minimal non-naturalism: there are non-natural normative truths, but there are no ontologically existing non-natural normative properties or facts. All ontologically existing properties and facts are natural.

Metaphysically robust non-naturalism: there are both non-natural normative truths and ontologically existing non-natural normative properties and facts.

¹² For example, Oddie (2005: 45-6) uses a GG view of desire in part to defend cognitivism.

¹³ Resorting to minimalism about truth and in turn minimalism about evaluative belief or appearances does not help here. The issue is not how to accommodate any pre-theoretically attractive feature of cognitivism, but how to combine two different theories. Just saying that ‘conceiving as good’ can be minimalistically truth-apt is not what is distinctive about non-cognitivism.

Robust non-naturalism presents two challenges for GG. Here is the first. If desire is desire for the good, and, as robust non-naturalism has it, the good consists of (ontologically existing) non-natural facts (such as the fact that innocent pleasure is good, etc.), then desire requires the existence of non-natural facts, on pain of falling into error theory. This implication will strike many as unfortunate. Even for GG advocates, desiring must after all be a natural state of affairs (desires can come into existence and cease to exist, they may have causal interactions with other mental states and with the body, etc.), and it is at the very least not clear how a natural state of affairs can require the existence of a non-natural one. At any rate, the truth of GG would be hostage to a very controversial metaphysical claim. For this reason, it seems more prudent to combine GG with minimal non-naturalism.

Secondly, it is sometimes argued that if non-naturalism is true, pretty much anything *could* turn out to be a normative fact: it may be *intrinsically wrong* to look at hedgehogs in the moonlight (Philippa Foot’s example) or the love of Sophocles may be, *in itself*, a reason to drink coffee (Raz 2002a: 9), or again, causing suffering may be good and causing happiness bad.¹⁴ Almost by definition, there would be no empirical or natural limits to what can be good or bad. And this poses a problem for GG, for it follows that pretty much anything could turn out to be *desired* under the guise of the good—drinking coffee for the love of Sophocles and the like. In this case GG would lose its attractiveness. It is clearly not sufficient for rationalizing an action that one come up with *any old answer* to the Anscombean question ‘why do you want to do that?’. Rationalization doesn’t come that cheap on GG. If your answer to ‘why do you want to drink coffee?’ is ‘for the love of Sophocles’ (without further elaboration), we are at an explanatory loss—regardless of your insisting that the love of Sophocles is what makes drinking coffee good or desirable for you, our reaction is that ‘*that cannot be a reason for drinking coffee*’. But under non-naturalism such a reaction would be unjustified—because, if pretty much anything is eligible to be a good reason for anything, we would need to stand ready to accept any such absurd explanation.¹⁵ In other words, the metaphysics of value or reasons does not guarantee that the good under whose guise something is desired must be at least an *intelligible* good. And this is a problem that affects, primarily, *robust* non-naturalism, since it posits non-natural facts, and we have no right to expect that non-natural facts will be precisely those that make normative sense to us.¹⁶

Minimal non-naturalism can do better, because it only posits non-natural truths, and these can be kept ‘under control’ better than non-natural facts. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) argue that some non-natural moral truths get to be true as conceptual truths, i.e. true in virtue of the essence of their constituent concepts, where concepts and their essences are understood as mind-independent entities. For instance, the proposition

It is pro tanto wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person

is a conceptual truth because “it belongs to the essence of the concept ‘being wrong’ that, necessarily, if anything satisfies the concept ‘recreational slaughter’ (of a fellow person) it also satisfies ‘being wrong’ (in a world sufficiently similar to ours)” (Cuneo and Shafer Landau 2014: 410). They name this and other propositions “moral fixed points”, i.e. propositions that “fix the boundaries of moral thought: one could not engage in competent

¹⁴ See Street 2008: 208.

¹⁵ *As an explanation* from the agent’s perspective. Robust non-naturalism of course doesn’t imply that we cannot criticize the agent’s reasons.

¹⁶ Supervenience does not help, because supervenience as normally understood does not fix any particular normative fact.

moral thinking while rejecting them” (ibid.: 401).

Extending this model across normative domains, we may invoke certain *negative* conceptual truths to fix the boundaries not only of morality, but of practical normativity more generally. For example, one could claim that it belongs to the essence of the concept ‘X being a reason for Y’ that, necessarily, if *a* satisfies the concept ‘love of Sophocles’ and *b* satisfies the concept ‘drinking coffee’, then *a* and *b* do not satisfy ‘X being a reason for Y’ (in a world sufficiently similar to ours). Anybody taking love of Sophocles to provide a reason for drinking coffee would not be engaging in competent *normative* thought, and thus we should at least hesitate before accepting that, when they seem to act for that sort of reason, they are genuinely acting under the guise of the good.¹⁷

Note that there need be nothing comprehensive about such fixed points—as merely negative statements, they do not suggest any substantive account of normative reasons. Plus, as non-obvious conceptual truths, there might well be debates about them. What matters is that their function is to rule out certain reasons as even potentially good reasons, and therefore as potentially acceptable guises of the good. Robust non-naturalists may also borrow the ‘fixed points’ account, *but* they would need to explain how it is that non-natural normative facts respect the fixed points set by non-natural normative concepts, and yet consist in more than just ontological duplicates of normative truths.¹⁸

I conclude that the problem of metaphysical controversy and the ‘any old reason’ argument make minimal non-naturalism a dialectically better candidate to accompany GG.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that metaphysically minimal non-naturalism is the meta-normative view (among those considered here) which makes best sense of GG—of its letter, its spirit, and its motivations. The overall conclusion is of course conditional: if GG is true, then this is an important point in favour of minimal non-naturalism over other views, including robust non-naturalism. I have not tried to defend GG against its rivals in any detail, nor indeed have I defended either version of non-naturalism from objections. These are tasks for a longer work.

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¹⁷ Just to clarify: *moral* fixed points need not (and are not intended to) be valid across normative domains. The conceptual truth of ‘it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person’ does not exclude intelligible non-moral reasons for someone to want to do that sort of thing. What I am invoking here are instead fixed points that cut across normative domains.

¹⁸ Thanks to a reviewer for pressing this point. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau do argue that the moral fixed points view may lead to “something very much in the spirit of Robust non-naturalism” (2014: 418), since these conceptual truths may be seen as the ‘makers’ of non-natural normative facts.

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