From the Location Problem of Normativity to Metaethical Quietism

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This Dissertation is submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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September, 2021

Declaration

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UEA or any other educational institution. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work.

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September, 2021

Abstract

This thesis is a metaethical study of normativity, specifically, the existential question of normativity whether there are normative entities (the 'location problem' of normativity), and it seeks a satisfying realist response to this question. However, it is shown that mainstream realist approaches to this location problem suffer from various difficulties, and I argue we should take quietist realism, a rather marginal position seriously.

The first chapter focuses on reductive naturalism, including the property identity version where normative entities are identified with some other natural ones, and the analytic version where normative concepts are considered as natural. I argue that Parfit's 'triviality objection', reconstructed properly, will undermine the former and the latter is problematic due to its employment of the notion of 'mature folk morality'. I move to the so-called Cornell realism in the second chapter, a naturalist yet non-reductive position that draws on the analogy between natural science and ethics; then I claim that Harman's 'explanatory challenge' constitutes a real threat to this metaethical view. In the rather short transition chapter, I briefly explain why non-naturalism should not be regarded as the last word on the location problem as substantial arguments that support the non-naturalness of normativity are absent.

The third chapter addresses Scanlon's quietist realism, a radical metaethical position that rejects the mainstream metaphysical approaches to normative realism, and I further defend quietism against its most fully-developed objection, namely, the asymmetry argument. However, the debate between quietism and metaphysical realism meets a stalemate; this leads us to the final chapter. Relying on Cavell's thoughts on skepticism, I first explain why the two sides are stuck in a dialectical difficulty; then, after showing that certain metaphysical approaches to realism are inadequate, I am able to explain what the existential question of normative entities really amounts to.

Contents

Acknowledgement

I am primarily grateful to my two supervisors, Oskari and James. Oskari read every part of the thesis over and over again during these years (a heavy burden for sure!), witnessing my struggle to make my ideas clear and offering immensely helpful remarks that teach me how to argue for a philosophical position; James, who seemed to be less sympathetic to my philosophical position, provided me with several suggestions that were insightful and largely unexpected. I also thank Tom who granted me the chance of holding seminars for first-year students, which was one of the best experiences I had. I want to thank Catherine as well, who supervised me in my first year and told me to be confident in my thoughts. A special thanks goes to Xing Huang, Yuxin Liu, Marco and Anton: you are my colleagues and dear friends, and I wish you all the best.

As to those outside of the academia: I thank my mother and grandmother who support me unconditionally. I am grateful to Fei Lin with her various helps during the pandemic, both spiritual and material. “Even though I [walked] through the valley of the shadow of death, I [feared] no evil; for you [were] with me.” (Psalms 23: 4) I am indebted to Yumin Han, a relentless and eloquent storyteller, who encouraged me to carry on the project years ago. Miss Centella helps me many times through her benevolence and humor. I am also grateful to Ruoxin Wang: cheers to the good old days we spent together. I thank Wei Liu for bearing my personality for a long time, from whom I learn many things without telling him. Finally, I must thank Huaya Liao, he is a believer of technology and a good friend.

Introduction

We inhabit a world of 'should': for example, one *should* take care of her well-being, it is *right* to keep one's promise, one has a *reason* to buy low and sell high when investing, etc.. Roughly speaking, the term 'normativity' is used to denote such phenomena that are ubiquitous in human society.

However, we also live in a natural world. We are embodied organisms and we tend to appeal to natural science to explain whatever phenomenon we encounter: the explanatory success of scientific theories is almost too obvious to be mentioned. Not surprisingly, metaethics is no exception in accepting the authority of science, and, if possible, imitating its way of working: "In light of the explanatory power and massive achievements of scientific theorizing, many philosophers take providing a naturalistic metaethical account to be an important goal…" (McPherson and Plunkett, 2018: 8). This naturally leads to the thought that we should (!) fit normative phenomena into the scientific world-picture. Nevertheless, it is here we meet a so-called 'location problem' or 'placement problem': prima facie, normative entities (e.g. reasons, goodness, the property of rightness) do not have a room in the scientific image of the world, as natural sciences concern how things are, while normativity, as we have seen, concerns how things should be.

The thesis starts from the tension between the normativity (of acts)[1] and the scientific world-image and seeks a satisfying realist response to the location problem (therefore I do not consider any form of anti-realism in the thesis). Obviously, the most apparent solution is to regard normativity as a part of the natural order: either, normative terms actually refer to *other* natural entities that are more familiar to us (reductive naturalism), or normative entities constitute a natural kind of their own, together with other natural entities (non-reductive naturalism). As Sturgeon (2006: 92) writes: "…such [normative] properties…as the rightness or wrongness of actions, are natural properties of the same general sort as properties investigated by the

[1] The ubiquitous normativity extends to beliefs, say, one should believe that earth is round rather than flat. The normativity of belief is, nevertheless, not the focus of the metaethical study of normativity and thus will not be discussed here.

sciences…" In this or another way, normativity, unlike witches or phlogiston, will not be eliminated from the natural world-picture. Yet, as my investigation proceeds, it is shown that both forms of naturalism have their difficulties: chapter 1 and 2 are dedicated to these two naturalist positions with their various objections.

To be sure, naturalism is by no means the only approach to the location problem. According to its opponents, there seems to be an implicit assumption behind naturalism: since natural science is so successful, it must, in principle, provide a complete and exhaustive account of the world; thus we have to naturalize normativity in order to preserve its existence. But that inference is not mandatory: it is one thing to claim that science is successful, it is another to claim the exhaustiveness of the scientific world-view; the latter is a metaphysical view that does not gain any support from science itself. Enoch captures this difference in the following way: "It is not clear how damaging this is, especially seeing that rejecting such naturalism need not involve rejecting science—merely the exhaustiveness of science, which may be an aspiration of many scientists but is not itself a scientific claim" (2018: 34). Non-naturalists thus argue that we can have a more tolerant world-picture where natural entities and non-natural, normative ones both have their places, without sacrificing the authority of natural science at all. However, in the transition chapter between chapter 2 and 3, I will briefly explain why non-naturalism should not be seen as the last word on the location problem.

More importantly, the exposure of one assumption is followed by another: the ontological (or metaphysical) approach, the inquiry that aims to give an ultimate description of reality is assumed to deal with whether normative entities (e.g. reasons) exist by *both* naturalists and non-naturalists. To repeat, the proponents of the location problem question the existence of normativity in a broadly naturalist *world-picture*; in fact, this assumption is so fundamental that philosophers often call questions like 'Does X exist?' simply ontological or metaphysical ones. However, is it possible that this assumption is itself problematic? Is it possible that the existential issue of an entity (a convenient and theoretically neutral way of saying the question 'Does X exist?') is *not* one about its ontological place in reality? As Scanlon (2014) claims, in the domain of science, it is science (rather than metaphysics/ontology) that tackles the existential issue of natural entities like

bosons, and in the domain of mathematics, it is mathematics (rather than metaphysics/ontology) that determines whether there is a prime number between 17 and 23 (yes, there is, it is 19). He then asks: why not treating the existential issue of reasons in a similar way, that is, appealing to normative ethics without bothering with metaphysics or ontology? For Scanlon, it is obvious that metaphysics does not play any role in determining whether there is a reason to, say, keep one's promise: this is itself a normative issue. Thus, there is no (metaphysical) 'location problem' at the very beginning: normative entities of course exist, say, there *is* a reason to obey traffic rules, and its existence is settled by normative ethics (say, it maximizes pleasure). This anti-metaphysical yet realist position towards the existential issue of normativity is nowadays labeled 'quietism' and 'quietist realism'.

Quietism or quietist realism has long been dismissed, if ever mentioned, by mainstream metaethicists and thus remains in a marginal position. This is hardly surprising: what quietism challenges is precisely the core assumption among mainstream normative realists, namely, the metaphysical approach to existential issues (that whether something exists is a question about its ontological status in reality). Quietists reveal that this approach is in a symbiotic relationship with the so-called location problem; therefore, once we realize that the metaphysical approach is not mandatory or even problematic, the location problem will be dissolved at the same time. Given the whole enterprise of metaphysics is set aside, it is not surprising that quietism incurs criticism in terms of being irresponsible, cheap and lazy. However, if philosophers are allowed to wield certain metaphysics to question the existence or reality of any entity (in this case, normative entities like reasons; in other cases, God, mind, world, ordinary objects, number, or whatever you like!), why are quietists not allowed to do the very same thing to certain questions by wielding something else, for example, Scanlon's observation that different domains have different standards of existence for different kinds of objects? Scanlon's version of quietism that heavily relies on the idea of plural domains, together with his dissolution of the location problem, therefore constitute the first half of chapter 3.

In the second half, I turn to the most fully-developed objection against quietism, namely, the asymmetry argument: this argument says that quietism is inferior to the metaphysical approach to normative realism because the former cannot secure the authority of our current normative system (a totality of norms that tell us what are the right things to do), a desideratum for *all* forms of realism, while the metaphysical approach to realism can. Examining this argument in detail, my conclusion is that this strategy of undermining quietism fails, as this very strategy can be used to show that metaphysical realism fails the desideratum in the same way.

Unfortunately, even if my refutation of the asymmetry argument works, the quietist dissolution of the location problem is not made any more attractive than the metaphysical attempt of answering it: both sides, the quietist one and the metaphysical one, seem to beg the question against each other. Quietists dismiss metaphysics since there are multiple standards of existence to settle the existential issues of different objects from different domains, while metaphysicians embrace metaphysics and believe that notions like 'domain' are amenable to metaphysical investigations themselves. That is to say, the debate between quietist realism and metaphysical realism has met a stalemate.

At this moment, it seems that one has to dive into the meta-ontological inquiry in order to determine which one will beat the other, (normative) quietism or metaphysical (normative) realism. However, in the final chapter, I aim to show that we may have another, metaphysics-light way out: with the help of Stanley Cavell's (a figure that seldom appears in the literature of metaethics) thoughts on *skepticism,* we have a chance to re-examine the debate and have a deeper understanding of what those two positions really amount to.

Skepticism, though an important philosophical topic in its own right, does not play a significant role in metaethics. However, the location problem can be seen as a form of skepticism towards the *existence of normative entities,* and the metaphysical approaches to normative realism can be seen as anti-skeptical

responses, in the sense that they aim to give a positive answer to that question. This is not just repeating the location problem in different terms: by understanding the location problem in the light of skepticism, Cavell's thoughts on external world skepticism and other minds skepticism will contribute to our understanding of the metaethical debate between quietism and metaphysical realism in the following three respects.

First, relying on Cavell's discussion of external world skepticism, I am able to explain *why* quietists and metaphysical realists are stuck in a dialectical difficulty: they are actually talking past each other. For quietists like Scanlon, they are always speaking of normative entities in a concrete, specific way to the extent that we know *what* they are, such as the reason *to keep one's promise*, the reason *to buy low and sell high in markets*, the reason *to obey traffic rules*, etc.. Yet metaphysical realists are only concerned with normative entities on a generic, abstract level (viz., the reasons *themselves*), where we cannot specify the content of those entities (that is, we do not know what these reasons are except that they are normative entities). No wonder Scanlon claims we only need to consult normative ethics (in its most broad sense) in order to determine whether there is a (specific) reason: it is normative ethics that tackles such specific normative issues. Since quietists and metaphysical realists are dealing with normative entities in these two radically different ways, the debate between them stagnates.

The Cavellian line of thinking does not stop here. If we follow the distinction between the specific way of speaking of normative entities and the generic, abstract way, a potential disadvantage of the metaphysical approach to normative realism will gradually become clear. To see this, I start with examining Enoch's argument for a form of metaphysical realism (that is, an anti-skeptical response to the location problem). It is shown that this argument suffers from a similar problem that Cavell diagnoses in the anti-skeptical argument against the external world skepticism. Moreover, the case of Enoch's argument can be extended to a wide range of metaphysical approaches to normative realism: it is not that those metaphysical approaches are problematic per se; instead, they can be inadequate for those who propose a metaphysical approach

themselves, due to the neglect of the distinction between the two ways of speaking of normative entities I mentioned before. Thus, those metaphysical realists need to either substantially revise their metaphysical approaches, or turn to quietism.

Finally, with the help of Cavell's thoughts on other minds skepticism, I move 'behind' the kind of metaphysical realism (whose disadvantage was just revealed) and provide a diagnostic account of how it emerges in the first place. After that, I am able to explain what it really means to embrace quietism, that is, to treat the existential issue of normative entities as itself a normative one: it is to be realistic towards our real life that there is no once and for all answer to the question of whether normative entities exist or not. At this moment, the deadlock between quietism and metaphysical realism is broken, not in the sense that we finally know which position 'knocks down' the other; instead, the debate is settled in the sense that it is clarified: we now know what it means to have an existential question about normativity, and what quietism and metaphysical realism can and cannot do.

Chapter 1. The unsatisfactory reduction

In this chapter, I first introduce the notion of normativity with the location problem, and then focus on the first candidate solution for the location problem within the realist camp, namely, reductive naturalism (including its two versions, the 'property identity' one and the analytic one). My conclusion is that the first version of reductive naturalism is at least unsatisfactory in one very crucial respect, and the second version suffers from a similar difficulty. Thus, we had better suspend reductive naturalism as a proposal rather than an available metaethical response to the location problem.

1.1 Normativity and the location problem

Metaethical inquiries under the title of 'normativity' have become quite an industry. I will start with some general remarks on the meaning of 'normativity', and the location problem of normativity will be later outlined.

From an etymological point of view, the term "normativity" means to do with norms, rules, or correctness. When the traffic light at a pedestrian crossing turns red, we think that pedestrians *should not* go straight across the road, students *ought to* attend the class, one *should* wear certain uniforms on certain occasions, etc.. Normativity in this sense is *norm-relativity*, which is, according to many philosophers, "quite unremarkable": "Even a shopping list is normative in this sense, because it provides a standard against which the contents of a shopping cart can be compared" (Finlay, 2010: 332). For *metaethicists*, the notion of normativity that becomes philosophically interesting is the one that could be seen from those judgements: one ought to be kind to his little brother, one should not lie, it is right to sell high and buy low in markets, etc.. For example, Thomson writes that this kind of judgements is different from the non-normative judgements as that one kicks his little bother, one tells a lie; she then calls "our judgments that A ought to…,

directives". Furthermore, Thomson believes that *evaluative* judgements, like 'it is good to help the neighbour', are normative as well, and she calls them "evaluatives" (Thomson 2008: 1-2).

What is normativity in this sense? Many metaethicists today characterize it in terms of 'reason'. "When I call some claim *normative* in the *reason-implying sense*, I mean roughly that this claim asserts or implies that we or others do or might have some reason or apparent reason" [to act in certain ways] (2011 Vol 2: 268), says Parfit, whose argument is going to be examined later. In this way, normativity becomes a capacious term to contain both the "directives" and the "evaluatives" mentioned above: as Parfit indicates, terms like "good" or "right", "ought" or "should" all have a "reason-implying sense". Thus, the normative statement 'it is good to help the neighbours' is understood as the one that 'I have a (moral) reason to help my neighbours', and 'you should get a haircut' means 'you have a (perhaps aesthetic) reason to get a haircut', etc.. To use Raz's words: "The normativity of rules, or of authority, or of morality, for example, consists in the fact that rules are reasons of a special kind, the fact that directives issued by legitimate authorities are reasons, and in the fact that moral considerations are valid reasons" (1999: 67). In this light, even the philosophically uninteresting 'norm-relativity' sense of normativity could be explained in terms of reason: to say that students should attend the class, is to say that they have a reason to do so.

One may further wonder how to understand the notion of reason. It seems that philosophers who consider the notion of reason as fundamental in defining normativity prefer to understand it as a *relation of favour*. Parfit believes that "Facts give us reasons, we might say, when they count in favour of our having some attitude, or our acting in some way…But 'count in favour' means roughly 'gives a reason for'" (2011: Vol. I, 31). In a similar vein, Scanlon makes the following claim: "the idea of a reason—the idea of counting a consideration in favor of an action", and "the relation that holds between an agent and a consideration X in such a situation just *is* the relation of *p*'s *being a reason for that agent to do a*" (2014: 7, 10).[2] Thus, to say that I have a reason to help the neighbour, is to say that there is a relation of favouring between the agent (me) and the act

[2] Cf. Olson 2014: 105: "a normative reason for an action is a fact that counts in favour of that action."

of helping the neighbour. To be sure, the reason characterization is not embraced by everyone, and some philosophers would claim that we should regard good, rather than reason as fundamental in understanding normativity.[3] However, I believe all my arguments below will remain intact regardless of this intra-normative controversy, given the nature of the problem I face. Hence, in the following discussion, I will grant the reason characterization of normativity defined as a relation of favouring when I use any normative term.[4]

Now, philosophers all agree that there are normative *concepts* or normative *statements*: after all, we frequently make such statements in our daily life. However, for metaethicists, the crucial question is: how to understand those normative statements?

Traditionally, the view called 'normative realism' says that normative statements are normative in virtue of being answerable to normative *entities*. It is generally believed that there are at least two theses realists are committed to:

1) A normative statement is truth-apt.

2) Some normative statements are true.[5]

[3] See Thomson, 2008, for such a 'Neo-Aristotelian' account of normativity.

[4] Cf. Street, 2008, 209: "…I employ the term reason (always in the sense of a normative reason) as a catch-all normative term, using expressions such as normative judgments and judgments about reasons interchangeably. Nothing substantive hinges on this choice of language; my points could also be couched in the language of value, should, ought, goodness…and so on."

[5] See Clarke-Doane for a refined definition (2020: 16-18). Cf. Enoch, 2018.

Combined together,[6] normative realism rules out a variety of metaethical positions. Given 1, non-cognitivism, the view that normative sentences express non-cognitive attitudes and thus lack truth-conditions is rejected since all normative statements like 'it is wrong to lie' can be true or false for realists. Given 2, error theory, the view that normative sentences systematically fail to get the normative entities right as there are no such things at all, is excluded. For brevity, I will call all metaethical positions that these two theses exclude 'anti-realism'. On the other hand, to repeat, normative realists believe that normative statements are normative in virtue of being answerable to normative entities, just like realists about natural entities believe that natural statements are about those natural entities. For example, the statement 'the ball is round' describes the object of a ball with its property of being round, and normative realists will say that the normative statement 'one should not lie' describes the act of lying with its property of being wrong, and it could be further interpreted as the existence of a favoring relation between an agent and the act of not lying.

Should we give a realist construal on normative statements? It is said that normative realism best catches our commonsense, pre-theoretical intuitions about normative discourses (e.g. apparently, normative judgments are not different from judgements about natural objects).[7] Nevertheless, normative realism is problematized by a strong *metaphysical* line of thinking in contemporary metaethics. Jackson, who invented the label "location problem", formulated this line of thinking in the following way. "Metaphysics is about what there is and what it is like", and he continued that metaphysicians seek a "comprehensive account of some subject-matter—the mind, the semantic, or, most ambitiously, everything—in terms of *a limited number of more or less basic notions*" (my italics). Precisely "Because the ingredients are limited", "some putative features of

[6] My characterization of normative realism is obviously a minimal one. The most notable neglect here is perhaps the notion of objectivity: given many philosophers have found such a notion too unclear, I set it aside.

[7] See Enoch, 2018: 31: "The first thing to note is that moral (and more broadly, normative) language behaves very much like other representational language. Linguistically speaking, it is very hard to tell apart "Gender discrimination is common" and "Gender discrimination is wrong.""

the world are not going to appear explicitly in some more basic account" (1998: 4-5). Thus, for any dubious entities, metaphysicians must either find them a 'location' in our reality, or just eliminate them altogether.

Another philosopher who shares this idea is Price, raising the "placement problem" in a similar vein: "The problem is that of 'placing' various kinds of truths in a natural world…If all reality is ultimately natural reality, how are we to 'place' moral facts, mathematical facts, meaning facts, and so on? How are we to locate topics of these kinds within a naturalistic framework, thus conceived? In cases of this kind, we seem to be faced with a choice between forcing the topic concerned into a category which for one reason or another seems ill shaped to contain it, or regarding it as at best second-rate – not a genuine area of fact or knowledge." (2011: 6)

Before we examine how the location problem threatens normative realism, it should be noted that Price refers to a *monist* naturalist ontology that whatever exists is natural, and Jackson is also committed to the idea that our basic notions about the kind of things are "limited", where the existence of natural entities is taken for granted. In contrast, Jackson mentions that there are *pluralists* who propose a more charitable ontology, and he picks Searle as an example: "Dualists asked, 'How many kinds of things…are there?' and counted up to two. Monists, confronting the same question, only got as far as one. *But* [we pluralists believe that] *the real mistake was to start counting at all*."(1992, 26) Then, one may wonder why we cannot endorse the pluralist view, that is, why we should take the location problem seriously. According to Jackson, this pluralist move amounts to "[abandoning] serious metaphysics in favour of drawing up big lists", while "we know that we can do better than draw up big lists." (1998: 4-5) However, a hard-core pluralist may still claim that "Then why not abandoning this so-called serious metaphysics? Why do you assume that drawing a big list is worse? Could you offer a non-circular argument without appealing to the monist metaphysics?" To notice, pluralism (or better, quietism) is the position of some philosophers which I will discuss in chapter 3; the point is, ontological parsimony is generally regarded as a theoretical virtue: "Kinds of entities should not be unnecessarily multiplied, redundancy should be avoided" (Enoch, 2007: 26). Thus, I will follow the

principle of parsimony and set pluralism aside for a while, which means the location problem makes sense and deserves serious treatment.

To recap, for serious metaphysicians, "there are inevitably a host of putative features of our world which we must either eliminate or locate" (Jackson, 1998: 5). Here an example might be helpful. Long ago, people believed that witches with their magic existed as parts of our world. Yet science has successfully proved that such entities are just incompatible with physics, hence witches are eliminated from our best metaphysical world-picture.[8] Another example is the metaphysical status of mind: eliminativists will simply deny the existence of mind, while dualists and physicalists (among others) try to secure the location of the mind, though they disagree on where the location is: for the former, mind is not a part of the physical world, for the latter, mind is physical as well.

In this light, the difficulty the location problem poses to *normative realism* gradually becomes visible: to give a realist construal on normative statements, we need to secure whether there really are normative entities. In this way, the location problem is shown an "prime example" of "the new wave of 'old-fashioned' metaphysics" (Macarthur, 2008: 194). To be sure, we do have normative concepts like 'reason', 'should', 'good' and normative statements; but our employment of them does not ensure the existence of these entities. Consider the example of witch again: we still have concepts of 'witch' and 'magic', and we could even have some statements where these terms are used (for rhetoric purposes, say); but that does not mean there *really* are witches *out there.* In a word, the location problem urges normative realists to prove that normativity has a location in this world and specify it.

But why it is normativity that suddenly become suspicious? Of course, philosophers are entitled to doubt the existence of whatever they like (mind, ordinary objects, numbers, God, to name a few); yet the question

[8] One may ask, since it is science that eliminates the existence of witch, what is the job of metaphysics? This is precisely a pluralist or quietist point, see chapter 3 for an elaboration on this line of thinking.

remains: what makes normativity *particularly* suspicious? In metaethics, this Jacksonian line of thinking is appealing due to the pressure of a *naturalist* world-picture. Before Jackson, Mackie, in his influential *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong,* had already put the point in this way: "…if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe [which are natural]" (1977: 38) (to remind, evaluative judgments are normative as well, given the reason conception of normativity). The distinction Mackie is trying to draw could be understood better with the help of some examples. Suppose that there is a cup of coffee on the table. It is perfectly fine that there are multiple natural, scientific properties of the coffee; but to say that there is a property or fact of "having a reason to drink it" (say, one, though feeling tired, has urgent work to do) is utterly different: the former do not concern whether I *should* take some specific acts about the coffee, which is the job of the latter. To use Dancy's words, those natural, scientific properties of coffee are *not* "practically relevant"; rather, the practically relevant fact/property (if there is any) is some "meta-fact" about those scientific properties of coffee, namely, the fact/property of 'having a reason to drink the coffee' (Dancy, 2006). Only this kind of meta-fact is normative. Then, *prima facie,* the normative entity is radically different from all natural entities. In this way, Jackson's location problem of normativity seems to get a grip on us: either we show that normative entities could have a location in this natural world, or we eliminate them just like we eliminate the existence of witches and embrace an anti-realist position about normativity.

We have seen pluralists who call for a more capacious ontology, and a pluralist in metaethics could just say that both normative entities and natural ones exist. She may further accuse the proponents of the location problem of smuggling the naturalist and monist assumption: it is one thing there are natural and normative entities, it is another that only the former shall survive in the last word.[9] However, under the pressure of a naturalist world-picture and the requirement of ontological parsimony, the most intelligible move for normative realists at this stage is to shoulder the mission of finding the location for normativity. In fact, this is precisely what they do. To name a few, McPherson and Enoch set their metaethical agenda by saying that

[9] This point will be the focus in chapter 3 and 4.

we must understand "how our practices of normative judgment and discourse *fit within* our *best general account* of the world'', which is called the "meta-normative project" (McPherson: 2011; Enoch: 2007; my italics), and McPherson elsewhere credits natural science as the paradigm of the "best general account of the world": "In light of the explanatory power and massive achievements of scientific theorizing, many philosophers take providing a naturalistic metaethical account to be an important goal" (2018: 8). Besides McPherson and Enoch, Railton, who is also a leading realist, makes explicit the influence of natural science on considering the philosophical issue of normativity. Railton writes: "philosophical naturalists tend to share a sense that the empirical, theoretical, and mathematical sciences afford our best-developed and most successful examples of inquiry aimed at obtaining a fundamental understanding of the world and ourselves…the sciences have developed powerfully predictive explanations of many of the phenomena…Naturalists urge that we learn from this history that philosophical inquiry should be pursued in tandem with empirical science…philosophers should seek to develop theories that can be contributory parts of the larger explanatory enterprise of science" (2018: 46-47). In a word, once the naturalist and monist assumptions of ontology become gripping, the metaphysical status of normativity immediately becomes problematic, calling for answers.

Since we have seen the challenge normative realism faces, it is time to check what candidate solutions we have at hand. Realism is generally divided into naturalism and non-naturalism, and they accordingly constitute two main responses to the location problem. Roughly speaking, the naturalist strategy is to make normativity less strange by interpreting it as something natural: if normative entities are, after all, natural ones, they will reside perfectly well in our world just like other natural entities. On the other hand, non-naturalists make a more radical move: they deny the naturalist default position and claim that the non-naturalness of normativity is the only way to do justice to the normative phenomena. One may wonder what counts as natural, before we move on. Unfortunately, the term 'natural' is perhaps even more controversial than that of 'normative': as a result, some metaethical position is regarded as naturalism according to some

standards but non-naturalism according to others[10], which means that philosophers may risk talking past each other. Given this situation, a better way to proceed with the discussion is to focus on more concrete proposals, and I am going to examine the first version of naturalism, that is, reductive-naturalism.[11]

1.2 Reductive naturalism and the triviality objection

A main reductionist, Copp, gives a succinct and useful explanation of the reductionist proposal: what reductive naturalists need to do is to offer a "nontrivial and explanatorily and philosophically interesting statement of the form 'To be normative is to be N,' where 'N' is replaced by a term standing for a natural property" (2012: 29-30). In other words, reductive naturalists believe that normative statements in fact represent natural entities. In this way, the normative fact of, say, 'having a reason to drink the coffee' is, according to reductive naturalism, not completely different from the various natural properties of that coffee after all. The merit of reductive naturalism is immediately recognizable: if it holds, the metaphysical status of normativity will be secured without violating the default position of a broadly naturalist world-picture, given the seemingly strange normative entities are proved part of the natural order.[12]

A simple example of reductive naturalism is reductive (hedonist) *utilitarianism*. Roughly speaking, granted that pleasure is something natural, reductive utilitarianism is a form of reductive naturalism since it identifies the normative property of 'having a reason to do' or 'being right' with the natural property of 'maximizing pleasure'. 'I have a reason to drink that coffee' would be interpreted as 'to drink the coffee will maximize pleasure'; and 'torture is wrong' would be interpreted as 'torture does not maximize pleasure'. Copp also gives his more refined version of reductive naturalism in terms of successful social cooperation and personal

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[10] I have in mind McDowell's position here.

[11] Given the location problem is triggered by a broadly naturalist world-picture, we may say that the naturalist response to the location problem is a default position.

[12] I leave the analytical reductive naturalism, the view that normative concepts are natural as well to section 1.4.

success (see below). Nevertheless, some realists find the reductionist component of this position unacceptable, and raise a variety of objections. Here I will focus on the "triviality objection" offered by Parfit.[13]

Suppose we identify the property of being right with the property of, say, maximizing pleasure: again, this is the proposal of reductive utilitarianists. Parfit (2011: Vol.2, 336-339) claims, given this identity thesis, the natural claim 'this act maximizes pleasure' and the normative claim 'this act is right' would share the same information, as both state the same property, viz., the property of maximizing pleasure. Then, if we combine these two claims, the resultant statement we get, namely, 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' will be a trivial one, since no new information is offered. However, the point is that that statement is not trivial, but substantive: 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' states a hedonist utilitarian view. Thus, reductive utilitarianism is incoherent: the identity claim 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' is supposed to be trivial due to the property identity thesis, but it is non-trivial in fact. Notice that utilitarianism is just an example, and Parfit thinks we can generalize his objection against reductive utilitarianism to all reductive proposals that try to identify the normative property with a certain natural one.

Many metaethicists have detected that Parfit's objection bears a strong resemblance to Moore's classic open question argument, which requires another place to do full justice to. However, it seems that the triviality objection could be problematized in a similar way that Moore's argument arguably is. Consider the property of being water and that of being H_2O: the claims 'this is water' and 'this is H_2O' are about the very same property. However, the identity claim 'the thing that has the property of being water is H_2O' still gives us significant information about the chemical structure of the water. Similarly, a reductive utilitarianist would claim that the identity claim 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' supplies "information about the nature

[13] As Copp points out, there is "a family of arguments" under this title, and the one I am going to discuss has something to do with my own reformulation of it, presented in the next section.

of the normative properties…[it] tells us that the property of being what we ought to do has, as constituents, the property of [maximized pleasure] and the relation of being a maximization of something and that it relates these constituents in a specified way" (Copp 2012: 52). Thus, the identity claim 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' is not trivial from beginning to end, which means that it is not incoherent as Parfit supposes it to be.

I agree with Copp that the triviality objection, *constructed in this way*, does not work; however, there is a rather implicit strand in Parfit's text, which is neglected by critics like Copp and perhaps downplayed by Parfit himself. In the next section, I will develop it into a somewhat different objection that reveals the inadequacy of reductive naturalism.

1.3 The triviality objection revisited

To recap, in the original triviality objection, given reductive utilitarianism, the reductive claim 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' is supposed to be trivial, as the natural claim 'it maximizes pleasure' and the normative one 'it is right' are said to share the same information, and they share the same information, according to Parfit, because they are about the same property. Also, we have seen that this objection does not work, as the reductive claim is shown informative through and through.

However, there is another way of reading Parfit's argument. To see this point, let us return to the reductive naturalist formula: it is supposed to offer a "nontrivial and explanatorily and philosophically interesting statement of the form 'To be normative is to be N,' where 'N' is replaced by a term standing for a natural property" (Ibid, 29-30). Again, reductive (hedonist) utilitarianists believe that the N is the natural property of maximizing pleasure. However, reductive utilitarianism, being a identity thesis of properties, is *not* normatively *neutral*: once we identify the property of being right with that of maximizing pleasure, we at the same time know what it is for an act to have the property of being right or being what we ought to do,

namely, when it has the property of maximizing pleasure. This is why Parfit says that this identity thesis of properties gives us "positive substantive normative information" as it tells us what kind of act we ought to do, namely, the act that maximizes pleasure; similarly, Dancy writes that the statement 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' is itself a fully-blown evaluative one (2006: 131). Thus, it may be said that utilitarianism (the normative theory) is the *implication* of reductive utilitarianism (the metaethical property identity thesis).

Next, if we *grant* reductive utilitarianism, that is, identify the property of being right with that of maximizing pleasure, we will at the same time regard its implication, namely, utilitarianism as true: according to reductive utilitarianism, the nature of the property of being right *is* just the property of maximizing pleasure, just like the nature of water is H_2O. That is to say, given the property identity thesis, there is only one way for an act to be right, that is, to maximizes pleasure, which means that all *other* normative theories that conceive 'right' in terms other than 'pleasure' are ruled out. In other words, by granting the property identity thesis, utilitarianism becomes the last word in normative ethics.

The problem is, utilitarianism seems implausible, if not downright untenable: it is by no means the last word in normative ethics. Then, given that the metaethical property identity thesis (the identification between the property of maximizing pleasure and that of being right) is tied up with the utilitarian theory, we have a very good reason to reject reductive utilitarianism:

1) Reductive utilitarianism (the property identity thesis that the property of being right is that of maximizing pleasure), being a metaethical position about properties, is not normatively neutral, but leading to a normative theory, namely, utilitarianism (premise 1);
2) Utilitarianism is normatively problematic (premise 2).
3) Reductive utilitarianism should be dismissed due to its problematic implication.

In Parfit's text, he gives us an imagined scenario about a doctor who is also a reductive utilitarianist (2011: vol 2, 342)[14], where this line of thinking becomes obvious. Following utilitarianism, the doctor wonders whether he could kill one of his patient: "this person's transplanted organs would be used to save the lives of five other young people, who would then live long and happy lives". He then continues: "When I claimed that I ought to kill this patient, I was only stating the fact that this act would maximize pleasure. On my view, that is the property to which the concept *ought* refers…The property of maximizing pleasure is the *same* as the property of being what we ought to do". Clearly, he is stating the (metaethical) reductive utilitarian thesis, that is, the identity between the property of being right and that of maximizing pleasure. The point is, the two premises I constructed above could be seen clearly from Parfit's imagined scenario: 1) The identification between the property of being right and that of maximizing pleasure expresses a normative theory, namely, utilitarianism, which endorses organ transplant at the cost of murder: given doctor's commitment to the property identity thesis, utilitarianism tells he the right thing to do is to maximize pleasure; 2) Once utilitarianism becomes the last word in normative ethics, the act of murdering someone for organ transplant will become the *only* right option since it maximizes pleasure ("when I claimed that I ought to kill this patient, I was only stating the fact that this act would maximize pleasure…"). However, I suppose most people would not regard such an act as right, which means that utilitarianism is problematic. Given the property identity thesis (reductive utilitarianism) leads to utilitarianism the normative theory, we should reject reductive utilitarianism for its problematic normative implication.

Although this reformulation of the triviality objection does not refer to the notion of 'triviality', its relation to the original triviality objection is clear. In the original version, the reason reductive utilitarianism is rejected is that the truth of it will render the utilitarian statement 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' trivial, in the sense that it does not offer any new information (while it does tell us the discovery of the nature of the property of right); this new formulation, nevertheless, addresses the point that the truth of reductive utilitarianism (the property identity thesis) will lead to the truth of utilitarianism, while the latter is arguably

[14] For the consistency of terms, I replace 'happiness' with 'pleasure'.

not true. By sidestepping the notion of triviality, the reformulation will not be undermined by Copp's objection: the utilitarian statement 'the act that maximizes pleasure is right' is indeed informative through and through, in the sense that 'water is H_2O' is; instead, the point in this case is that utilitarianism is *wrong,*

which problematizes the identification between the property of being right and that of maximizing pleasure, namely, reductive utilitarianism, given that property identity thesis is tied up with utilitarianism.[15]

Now notice that utilitarianism is just an example: there could be other forms of reductive naturalism that identify the property of being right with some natural property other than that of maximizing pleasure. Therefore, the next step of completing my argument is to apply this line of thinking to other cases. Premise 1 could be easily generalized: as long as the reductive proposal is to reduce the property of being right to certain natural property N, it will give us a substantive normative theory in the form that 'the act that instantiates N will have the property of being the act we should do'. To be sure, for any metaethical proposal, to have some normative implication is not problematic per se. The point is, we are not sure whether that normative implication is normatively problematic or not, in the way that utilitarianism is. The only way for that normative implication to be normatively plausible, is to prove that that normative information in terms of certain natural property N is indeed the last word or the ultimate theory in normative ethics; at that moment, the normative claim 'the act that has N is right or is the act we should do' would not incur any normative objection. In other words, the identity thesis about the property of being right and that of N will no longer have any problematic normative implication. Schroeder expresses this point well:

"One of the most pressing tasks facing the reductive naturalist is to defend actual reductive, naturalistic analyses of moral properties like [right/]*wrong*. Such an analysis will tell us *what it is* to be [right/]wrong.

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[15] Perhaps we may say that the point of the new formulation is that the property identity thesis (of reductive utilitarianism) will make the normative claim 'it is right to maximize pleasure' normatively trivial, while it is not. This is also how I understand Dancy's presentation of the triviality objection, where he lets the notion of triviality play a role: see Dancy, 2006.

But once we know what it is to be [right/]wrong, we will know a condition that is necessary and sufficient for something to be [right/]wrong—indeed, we will know the most fundamental and explanatory such condition, in virtue of which all other generalizations about what is [right/]wrong are true. So we will have not just *some* commitment or other within normative theory, we will have attained the holy grail of the most ambitious and general kind of explanatory normative ethical theory" (2018: 682-683).

That is to say, since a reductive naturalist theory (that is, a property identity thesis) cannot be normatively neutral as it is unavoidably tied up with a normative theory, the plausibility of the former will require the completion of normative ethics where the sufficient and necessary condition of being right is specified (the 'holy grail' Schroeder speaks of), otherwise the reductive naturalist theory would be undermined, due to the normative theory it expresses could be normatively problematic in various ways.

Unfortunately, it seems that philosophers have *not* completed normative ethics, that is, have not discovered the last word in normative ethics yet. Thus, the premise 2 above can be generalized as well: any reductive naturalist position should be *suspended*, until it is shown that the normative theory in terms of some natural property N will not incur any normative objection. In a word, reductive naturalism, following the formula 'rightness = N' where N is a certain natural property, is at the mercy of the completion of normative ethics. My objection against reductive naturalism could thus be constructed as follows:

1) Reductive naturalism that identifies certain natural property N with the normative property of being right expresses or implies a substantive normative theory in terms of N (premise 1);
2) We have not discovered any normative theory in terms of certain natural property N that is free of normative problems or successfully specifying the sufficient and necessary condition of what it is to be right (premise 2);
3) We should suspend any reductive naturalist proposal, until the last word in normative ethics in terms of N is presented.

Call it 'normative ethics objection' if you like. It shall be emphasized that this objection against reductive naturalism is better understood as a *challenge*, rather than a refutation that 'knocks down' reductive naturalism once and for all. The reason is simple: we need to examine reductive proposals in a piecemeal way in order to make sure whether the normative theory it implies is really normatively acceptable, as different reductive proposals have different natural properties that are intended to be identified with the normative property of being right/wrong. That is to say, it is possible, in principle, that one day we will discover such a normative theory in terms of certain natural property N which is the last word in normative ethics: it successfully specifies the sufficient and necessary condition of being right in terms of N. At that moment, this challenge will be overcome by that specific reductive proposal, as the normative theory it implies is no longer normatively problematic. Due to this possibility, what the normative ethics objection could achieve at best is the suspension of reductive naturalist proposals: we are not entitled to endorse any reductive naturalist proposal at this stage, as we have not discovered an appropriate natural property that could replace the normative property of being right/wrong without leading to any normative trouble. It is one thing to say that reductive naturalism is at the mercy of the completion of normative ethics, it is another to say normative ethics will never be completed.

Still, to emphasize, the point of this challenge is that we have not seen a normative theory which is immune to all normative objections, that is, normative ethics has not been completed yet. Without the completion of normative ethics, there is no way any reductive proposal, following the formula 'rightness = N' where N is a certain natural property, could get rid of normative objection. Thus, we should suspend reductive proposals *now*, before the completion of normative ethics, regardless of whether it is achieved by reductionists.

Now, to strengthen my challenge, I shall move to another reductive proposal. We have seen that anti-reductionists like Parfit and Dancy both choose reductive *utilitarianism* as the example in their discussion of reductive *naturalism,* and they both generalize the failure of the former to the latter (I followed them in this

respect). However, one may wonder whether they do full justice to reductive naturalism, which is pointed out rightly by Schroeder: "[anti-reductionists] may choose to illustrate [reductive naturalism] with the example of views that everyone can agree are not true" (2018, 681). Again, (hedonist) utilitarianism is easily proved untenable (recall Parfit's doctor scenario), but not all reductive proposals are as coarse as reductive (hedonist) utilitarianism.[16] Furthermore, I have made it explicit that the normative ethics objection I delineate above is a challenge, which is used to test every *particular* reductive proposal (in other words, it is not an once and for all refutation of all reductive theories). Therefore, if I could show that a different reductive proposal is still undermined by the normative ethics objection, I could render this objection more attractive by doing more justice to reductive naturalism. Indeed, we find a very different reductive proposal, which is offered by Copp himself, and I think his theory does not overcome the normative ethics challenge, either, though in a different way.

Copp believes that normative facts could be divided into "moral facts" and "facts about practical reasons". As to the former, "morality is the solution to a problem in social engineering, the problem of equipping people to live comfortably and successfully together in societies…" (2012: 38). Elsewhere, he writes that "A society needs to reduce the harmfulness of conflict among its members and to give its members the security they need in order to cooperate successfully". In this light, it seems that the moral fact of 'it is good to help the neighbour' could be translated into the fact that 'to help the neighbour would "facilitate beneficial cooperation and coordination" (2007: 13) between me and my neighbour'. This is what he calls the "society-centered theory". As to "facts about practical reasons": "my proposal is that the truth as to what we have most practical reason to do is a function of what is required by the autonomy norm", where the autonomy norm is the one that "can ameliorate" the problem of us being "distracted by temptations". In other words, those norms are "enhancing and reinforcing our motivation to live in accord with our values" (2012: 38-39). In a word, normative facts of being right/good could be identified with the following two distinct kinds of

[16] To avoid misunderstanding, I do not deny that there could be fine-grained version of utilitarianism which stands a better chance against normative objections.

facts: 1) facts of successful social cooperation and 2) facts of personal success in holding on to her values. Since Copp seems to pay much more attention to the first kind of normative facts, viz., "moral facts", I will follow him in this respect and say little about 'facts of practical reasons' (and the relation between these two kinds of normative facts).

At first glance, Copp's reductive theory seems, unlike reductive utilitarianism, not obviously problematic. I think the reason may be that his theory, in terms of social cooperation, is highly abstract: perhaps all normative theorists like deontologists, utilitarianists and virtue ethicists (among others), in the end, are just debating on the best way the society cooperates. Thus, it seems we could interpret the property of being right as that of facilitating beneficial cooperation without giving rise to any normative objection. For examples, to say that one ought to keep her word, is to say that to keep one's word would make people successfully live together in communities; to say that she is a good person, is to say that she is a person that facilitates beneficial cooperation among her and the others, etc.. In other words, it seems that the sufficient and necessary condition of instantiating the property of being right is making successful cooperation or facilitating beneficial cooperation. If that is the case, then Copp's proposal would overcome the normative ethics challenge, as he seems to find out the last word in normative ethics.

How would an anti-reductionist respond to this refined reductive proposal? The immediate thought is that Copp's "society-centered theory" is still normatively problematic somehow, thus anti-reductionists could aim to find certain counter-examples where an act that makes social cooperation successful is nevertheless a wrong one. If they succeed, Copp's reductive proposal will be dismissed for its problematic normative implication, in the way that reductive utilitarianism is rejected.[17] However, here I will set this strategy aside, as I think there is a greater difficulty for Copp's reductive proposal: Is his theory a *naturalist* one? It seems

[17] It seems there are many values cannot be explained in Copp's theory, e.g. friendship and love; to explain them in terms of social cooperation is rather cynical, if not untenable. In other words, Copp's view of morality seems to be an 'instrumentalist' one that is arguably problematic. I thank Oskari for this point.

that his is not naturalist at all, as terms like "successful", "beneficial" are all evaluative (that is, normative) notions themselves, and Copp does not tell us what counts as a successful/beneficial social cooperation in natural terms. Hence, even if we could identify the normative property of being right with the property of facilitating beneficial or successful social cooperation, Copp has not shown that the latter is a natural property, given the property he uses to replace the property of being right is itself cast in normative terms. In other words, it seems what Copp offers is just a *normative* theory in terms of properties, rather than a metaethical reductive thesis about the normative and the natural: the *normative* property of being right is merely interpreted as the *normative* property of facilitating beneficial or successful social cooperation. Therefore, granted that Copp's is the final word on normative ethics, we are not led to the triumph of reductive *naturalism*: it remains unclear whether the normative property of facilitating successful social cooperation is a non-natural one.[18]

This brings us back to premise 2 of the normative ethics objection, which says that 'we have not discovered such a normative theory *in terms of certain natural property* that is free of normative problems'. After the discussion of Copp's proposal, it should become clear now that the normative ethics objection in fact poses *two* challenges or requirements for reductive naturalists: they need to not only find a normative theory that is normatively non-objectionable, but also make sure that that normative theory is a naturalist one. In other words, they need to not only complete normative ethics, but also complete it in a naturalist way. If they fail the first task (in the case of reductive utilitarianism), that reductive proposal will be deemed as problematic

[18] It shall be noted that Copp has a different story on what counts as natural: he prefers an "epistemological characterization" of naturalism that "ethical knowledge is empirical" (2012: 28-29). This is a highly controversial claim. Moreover, granted this new characterization of the natural, it is still not clear whether a piece of ethical knowledge, say, 'it is good to keep your word' (interpreted as 'to keep your word will facilitate beneficial social cooperation') is an purely empirical, that is, a natural one. Metaphysical or epistemological characterization aside, my point of discussing Copp is that reductive naturalist proposals can be problematic in a different way: once one employs normative terms in his property N that is supposed to replace the property of being right, his property identity thesis can be given a non-naturalist reading, which means that his metaethical position fails to be a reductive naturalist one.

as the normative theory it expresses is problematic; if they fail the second task, that is, if they discover a property N that could be identified with the property of being right without leading to any normative objection, but they do not prove that N is natural property, reductive naturalism will not follow since N could possibly be a non-natural property (in the case of Copp's society-centered theory where N is the property of facilitating successful social cooperation).[19] In both cases, reductive naturalism will not hold.

1.4 Jacksonian analytic naturalism

In the previous section, I focused on the form of reductive naturalism whose goal is to specify the content of N in the equation "To be normative is to be N", "where 'N' is replaced by a term standing for a natural *property*" (Copp, 2012: 29-30, my italics). However, this is not the only form of reductionism. A different approach is *analytical* naturalism: it is our normative *concepts* that can be given naturalist definitions. Thus, it seems we could arrive at the reductionist conclusion of normative entities through conceptual analysis alone. In this section, I will discuss perhaps the most influential version of analytical naturalism, which is proposed by Jackson himself (with Pettit), who is also the proponent of the location problem.[20] After presenting his innovating line of thinking, I will first explain how Jackson's theory is immune to the normative ethics objection, but claim later that it is still problematic and we should suspend it as well.

Jackson's theory starts with the fact that we have a "network of moral opinions, intuitions, principles and concepts whose mastery is part of parcel or having a sense of what is right and wrong", which is called "folk morality" (Jackson, 1998: 130). That is to say, for any normative term, our folk morality contains various "commonplaces". Suppose an oversimplified version of folk morality system, which includes the following statements 'the right act is not the wrong one', 'rightness is a property of acts and institutions', 'it is right to

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[19] Of course, being a non-naturalist position is not a flaw per se for Copp; yet it will fail to be a naturalist solution to the location problem.

[20] See Jackson and Pettit, 1995, 1996 and Jackson, 1998.

keep one's word', and 'virtuous people are disposed to perform right actions'. Those claims are quite platitudinous or commonplace, in the sense that they are "candidates for a priori truths: they are putatively such that anyone who knows how to use the term [say, 'right'] is in a position to see that they hold" (Jackson and Pettit: 1995). Next, we give each normative ("ethical/evaluative") term a unique variable that serves as the property-name, say, W for wrongness, R for rightness and V for virtue. Then we conjoin all those claims and we get a long disjunctive sentence: R is a property of acts and people, acts that have R would not be ones that have W, the act of keeping one's word has R, people with V are disposed to perform acts that have R.

Now comes the crucial move. If we are interested in 'right', equipped with the disjunctive sentence, the meaning of right would be defined by that disjunctive sentence: granted my oversimplified version of folk morality, right is such a property,[21] where R is a property of acts and people, acts that have R would not be ones that have W, the act of keeping one's word has R, people with V are disposed to perform acts that have R. That is to say, the property of being right is whatever property that fulfills this network. In this way, the property of being right would be a vast disjunctive property, rather than a certain natural property (say, the property of maximizing pleasure). The point is, the long disjunctive sentence (that is, the network) we use to define 'right' "contains no value expressions" and consists of "purely descriptive terms": all normative terms in the disjunctive sentence have been already replaced with variables. Given Jackson's claim that "By the descriptive picture, I mean the picture tellable in the terms that belong to the 'is' side of the famous 'is-ought' debate" (Jackson 1998: 131), a reductive definition of 'right' is offered.[22]

Notice that our actual folk morality contains much more platitudinous claims about 'right' than the ones in my oversimplified example. Given all those true claims in folk morality involving 'right', the property of

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[21] To be sure, Jackson and Pettit's proposal aims to offer an attractive version of normative realism ("cognitivism"), thus their move of handling normative words in terms of property will be taken for granted.

[22] Cf. Smith, 1993: "For what we have here is a definition of the property of being right in terms of the whole network of relations it stands in to the other moral properties, and to all of the platitudes about moral properties...the analysis mentions no moral terms at all...for these were all stripped out replaced by variables at an earlier point in the analysis." (46)

being right could be identified with such a vast disjunctive property that realizes the disjunction of all those right-claims where all normative terms are replaced with property-names, and we could surely give network analyses of other normative terms like 'fair','good', 'evil', etc., in the same way. Since this proposal is heavily inspired by functionalism in philosophy of mind, it is also labeled "moral functionalism".

At this stage, one may wonder whether the network analysis of normative terms could ever finish: to complete the reduction of any normative term, we need to first write down *all* true claims, that is, commonplaces, about that term in our folk morality; however, the folk theory of morality is full of controversies and incoherencies besides platitudinous claims. Furthermore, as to those, say, right-claims that are considered as platitudinous, folks could disagree "about the fundamental underpinnings of these generally agreed principles…" (1998: 132). The point is, if the list of platitudinous claims about, say, the term 'right' is indeterminate due to those incoherencies and controversies, we will not know the full story of the disjunctive descriptive property which is intended to realize the disjunctive sentence that consists of commonplaces of 'right'. In other words, it seems that we have to, again, wait for the completion of normative ethics, where there are no incoherencies and controversies of, say, right-claims, in order to complete the reduction of right. In a word, we meet the normative ethics objection again.

Jackson is fully aware of this difficulty; yet, his ingenious move is to propose the idea of a "mature folk morality": Jackson believes that our folk morality is evolving, and one day it will "end up after it has been exposed to debate and critical reflection", and reach the stage of maturity: "The idea is that mature folk morality is the best we will do by way of making good sense of the raft of sometimes conflicting intuitions about particular cases and general principles that make up current folk morality" (Ibid, 133-135). In fact, according to Jackson, "[utilitarianists], contractarians, Kantians, ideal observer theorists, universal prescriptivists, virtue theorists, and so on, can all be seen as having special stories to tell that start from one or another part of what we find intuitively plausible from, that is, one or an other part of current folk morality. They then seek to recover enough of folk morality, or enough of a clearly recognizable descendant of folk

morality that stands up to critical reflection, to form mature folk morality" (Ibid, 133-135). Thus, if the convergence in normative ethics Jackson speaks of would happen, we will know (nearly) all claims of, say, 'right' that are considered as commonplace, which means that the reduction of 'right' will complete (as would other normative terms).

Now it becomes clear that the normative ethics objection gets no purchase on Jackson at all,[23] as Jackson's reductive proposal does not come with any *specific* normative theory. The property of, say, being right is not identified with any certain natural property; instead, it is a vast disjunctive property spelled out by a vast disjunctive sentence, consisting of claims whose truth is considered as platitudinous. To borrow Copp's words, according to moral functionalism, rightness consists in "the disjunction all of the 'ways' in which an action could be" right (Copp, 2012: 51). As Jackson and Pettit say, what is said or believed in characterizing an act as right "ties up with the fact that accepting the characterization means becoming disposed to draw the lessons articulated in the commonplaces", and again, those commonplaces about 'right' are various, to the extent that no specific normative theory follows. Given its reduction of 'right' will not have any particular normative implication, moral functionalism will never encounter the difficulty, say, reductive utilitarianism faces: to repeat, the latter identifies rightness with the certain natural property of maximizing pleasure, which implies a substantive normative theory that is arguably wrong.

Still, moral functionalism incurs other objections. Before I move to one of them, there is a special issue that needs to be highlighted. Commentators usually consider Jackson's moral functionalism as a form of (normative) naturalism,[24] while at least one metaethicist, namely, van Roojen claims that moral functionalism and (normative) naturalism are two things, which is, perhaps surprisingly, admitted by Jackson and Pettit themselves. As Jackson and Pettit rehearse van Roojen's point, granted that normative terms could be defined by pure descriptions, "it is quite another question whether the properties whose places in the

[23] Dancy fully realizes this point, see 2006: 132.

[24] For examples, Fisher, 2011, Miller, 2013.

network can be given in purely descriptive terms are *themselves* descriptive properties" (Jackson and Pettit, 1996: 84). That is to say, given that the property of being right is a vast disjunctive property (that is, it realizes a disjunction of descriptions), we do not know whether that property itself is a natural one, which means that it "can be non-natural all the while" (van Roojen, 1996: 79-80). Thus, moral functionalism does not lead to normative naturalism. Here an oversimplified example may be helpful. We might have reductive descriptions of the property of being God that do not contain any obviously theological term (suppose that they are commonplace), like 'He knows everything' 'He is indivisible', etc.. Then, we may say that the property of being God is such a disjunctive property that realizes the disjunction of all those claims where theological terms have been culled. Nevertheless, granted this network analysis, that disjunctive property is itself supposed to be a supernatural one, namely, the property of being God.

One reason moral functionalism does not lead to naturalism is, I suggest, that claims about the nature of normative *properties* (concerned with whether they are natural) are not part of (mature) folk morality. Suppose by 'normative naturalism', one means normativity is not autonomous from natural sciences in the sense that natural science is relevant to our understanding of normative properties. The point is, it seems whether normative property is autonomous from natural science is, say, not a folk topic, regardless of whether folk morality is mature; therefore, it seems moral functionalism has nothing to say on whether normative *properties* are natural. To repeat, it is one thing to say that normative *terms* are reducible to natural/descriptive ones, it is another to say normative *properties* are natural. Jackson and Pettit thus admit "we never thought, and do not say, that reductive naturalism follows from moral functionalism". Instead, they appeal to another thesis to reach the naturalist conclusion: the "identity of ethical properties with descriptive ones [that is, reductive naturalism] is strongly supported (given cognitivism) by the *distinctive* nature of the supervenience of the ethical and evaluative on the descriptive" (Jackson and Pettit, 1996: 85, my italics). That is to say, unless the supervenience thesis they speak of holds, reductive naturalism will *not* follow moral functionalism, while supervenience is an independent and controversial issue that I cannot discuss here. To remind, in this context, what matters is the location problem, and what is at stake here is

whether normative *entities* (properties/facts/relations) are natural. Therefore, moral functionalism, being an innovative view of normative discourse though, would not constitute a *naturalist* solution to the location problem, namely, normative entities reside well in the natural world as they are natural.[25]

Nevertheless, moral functionalism still counts as a *reductive* position for it defines normative terms in descriptive ones. Thus, there is at least one objection that is interesting in this context, to which I now move. To repeat, to complete moral functionalism, all normative or evaluative terms must be rewritten into descriptive or natural ones. Nevertheless, there is one term that seems irreducibly normative/evaluative for moral functionalists, namely, the term 'mature' itself. Yablo (1999) first makes this point, but he does not spell it out in detail: here I pick up this line of thinking and attempt to explain why 'mature' is hard to reduce, and then I will return to the relation between this objection and the normative ethics objection I discussed above.

Suppose that a moral functionalist starts to analyze the term 'mature', like she analyzes other normative terms like 'right'. She first needs to write down commonplace statements about this term in folk morality, such as 'a mature person is better than an immature one', 'a mature act is respectful of others', 'maturity is a property of acts and people'. To repeat, according to Jackson and Pettit, those claims serve as the candidates for *a priori* truths. Also, if someone doubts whether she could write down all platitudinous statements about 'mature', or whether what she writes are commonplace enough (for example, one may doubt that 'mature' acts should always be respectful of others: for certain people, it is to be disrespectful to them that is mature), the moral functionalist could respond that those controversies will disappear in the mature folk morality. If that is the case, there is hardly anything problematic about the analysis of 'mature'. However, the term 'mature' Yablo speaks of is *not* the one that appears in those mundane mature-claims: instead, the arguably

[25] To be sure, it is by no means a flaw as such that moral functionalism does not lead to naturalism; my point is simply that moral functionalism, contra many commentators, does not make any contribution to normative naturalism and even the location problem: to repeat, the location problem is a metaphysical one that concerns properties.

irreducible term is the 'mature' in "mature folk morality" alone. For convenience, let us call it mature$_2$ that differs from the term 'mature' we use in folk claims like 'a mature person is better than an immature one'. In other words, mature$_2$ has nothing do with mature people and mature acts; instead, it appears *solely* in the phrase 'mature folk morality', where all incoherencies and controversies in normative ethics are supposed to vanish.

Now consider what claims we have about this term mature$_2$: 'there will be a mature folk morality', 'in mature folk morality all incoherencies and controversies in normative ethics will disappear', etc.. Suppose a moral functionalist wants to analyze 'mature$_2$': the very first step is to write down all commonplaces or platitudes about this term. The problem is that she seems to have none: all she has are controversial, one may say, Jacksonian claims, like 'there will be a mature folk morality', or 'in mature folk morality all incoherencies and controversies in normative ethics will disappear'. At least, one cannot, on *a priori* ground, say that those mature$_2$-statements are platitudinously true. As to the first statement 'there will be a mature folk morality', the idea of "mature folk morality" is an *idea* that the maturity of folk morality will come one day in the future, which means that it is an *empirical* issue whether there will really be such a mature folk morality; thus, this claim cannot be an a priori truth, that is, this claim cannot be a commonplace in Jackson's sense. The second statement 'in mature folk morality (nearly) all incoherencies and controversies in normative ethics will disappear' is not a commonplace for the same reason. It reads 'our folk morality will evolve to a mature stage where all incoherencies and controversies disappear'; again, we do not know that a priori.[26]

In addition, the point that there are no commonplaces about 'mature$_2$' could be put in a slightly different way. As Lutz and Lenman (2018: 3.3) say, "…maturity in current folk morality is plausibly pretty contested. There are many ways morality could develop to a more settled state, and we are liable to differ about which of them we count as maturation and which we would describe less favorably." What they mean is that we do

[26] This point could be generalized to any characterization of "mature folk morality".

not know a priori *which* moral system will count as mature (or count as a coherent and non-controversial one), or what the mature folk morality will look like, since it has not come yet. That is to say, we cannot a priori specify the commonplaces or platitudes of what it is for our current folk morality to be mature (or what it is to be free of all normative incoherencies and controversies).

Then, the moral functionalist will encounter a dilemma. On one hand, if she continues to reduce 'mature$_2$' in the way she reduces terms like 'right', she will beg the question: the issue at hand is precisely that those mature$_2$-statements are not commonplace, while the first step of specifying the descriptive content of 'mature$_2$' is to regard those mature$_2$-statements as commonplaces that are a priori true. In comparison, when she reduces terms like 'right', she will never meet such a problem as there are many right-statements that could be considered as commonplaces ('right actions should be encouraged', 'it is right to keep one's word', etc.); however, again, she has none in the case of 'mature$_2$'. That is to say, the reduction of 'mature$_2$' is thwarted.

On the other hand, if the moral functionalist realizes that she has no platitudinous statements about 'mature$_2$' that are supposed to be true a priori, she will have to admit that her analysis of this term cannot get off the ground. What she can say about the term 'mature$_2$' are only claims like 'there will be a mature folk morality', 'in the mature folk morality, all normative incoherencies and controversies will vanish' and 'it is whatever role it plays in mature folk morality'. Obviously, the normative/evaluative term 'mature' is contained in all those statements, that is, those statements are not pure descriptions. In other words, she fails to reduce this term.

Could moral functionalists escape this dilemma? According to Jackson, some remarks seem to hint that the idea of mature folk morality is somehow already rooted in the folk morality that moral conflicts can and will be resolved: "I have spoken as if there will be, at the end of the day, some sort of convergence in moral opinion…Indeed, I take it that it is part of current folk morality that convergence will or would occur. We

have some kind of commitment to the idea moral disagreements can be resolved by sufficient critical reflection—which is why we bother to engage in moral debate" (1998: 137). If these claims are plausible, then it seems safe to say that the mature$_2$-statement, say, there will be a mature folk morality where the convergence occurs is, after all, not that far from being a commonplace, which means that the reduction of mature$_2$ might take off. However, there are three reasons to reject this move. First, as Jackson himself immediately concedes, "But this may turn out to be, as a matter of fact, false. Indeed, some hold that we know enough as of now about moral disagreement to know that convergence will (would) not occur" (Ibid, 137). Thus Jackson says it is an issue of "complication", which is "set aside" by himself. Second, even if we grant Jackson's previous remarks, it seems what Jackson really says there is that we *hope* to find such a basis for agreement through moral debates: what folks are really committed to is that "moral disagreements *can be* resolved by sufficient critical reflection" (Ibid, 137, my emphasis). The problem is, it is one thing that we hope for such a convergence through moral reflection, it is another that it will really occur[27]: again, the latter is not an a priori issue. Thus, the mature$_2$-statement 'there will be a mature folk morality in normative ethics' does not count as a commonplace: at best, it expresses our hope for the convergence in normative ethics. Third, according to our folk moral debates, we may even grant that the commitment to agreement on *particular* moral issues through reflections and debates is part of the folk morality; however, the maturity Jackson and Pettit speak of is of the morality *as a whole,* which is not obviously a folk topic. In a word, the reduction of 'mature$_2$' still makes no progress as there is still no commonplace of this term.

Finally, it shall be noted that this objection in terms of 'mature', like the normative ethics objection discussed in the previous section, should be seen a challenge rather than a decisive refutation. To emphasize, it is certain that when the maturity of folk morality comes in the future, the reduction of 'mature$_2$' will be no longer a difficulty, as we will know the commonplaces of 'mature$_2$' then, just like we will know (nearly) all the commonplaces of other normative terms. Thus, the reduction of 'mature$_2$' is not a priori impossible.

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[27] Cf. Yablo, 2000: "But commitment to moral debate is one thing, commitment to convergence is another." (8)

Nevertheless, the point of this objection is precisely that we do not a priori know whether 'mature$_2$' can be reduced, as, again, whether the mature folk morality will come is an empirical issue. Or, following Lutz and Lenman, we can say that there will be many ways morality could develop to a more settled state, and we do not a priori know which one will be the truly mature morality, which means that we do not a priori know which set of platitudes is about the evaluative term 'mature' in mature folk morality. In other words, the reduction of 'mature$_2$' is at the mercy of the presence of the mature folk morality. Thus, until the mature folk morality actually comes, 'mature$_2$' remains irreducible and moral functionalism remains incomplete.

Now, the relation between the objection against moral functionalism in terms of 'mature' and the normative ethics objection in the previous section should become clear. Like the form of reductive naturalism I discussed before, moral functionalism is by no means untenable; instead, both two forms of reductionism are, again, *incomplete*: for reductionists who attempt to identify the property of being right with certain natural property, they need to shoulder the burden of discovering the final theory of normative ethics in natural terms alone, while they seem to either play down this daunting task, or fail to show that the supposedly final theory is a naturalist one (in Copp's case); for analytic reductive naturalists like Jackson and Pettit, the reduction of 'mature' in "mature folk morality" will be a non-starter until the mature folk morality is achieved in the future. Hence, a more deliberate approach is to suspend these two unsatisfactory reductive proposals, and turn to other available positions. After all, my concern is the location problem, and there are certainly other options that are arguably more attractive, which leads us to the next chapter.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the first realist candidate solution to the location problem, namely, reductive naturalism: according to this view, 'normative entities' is just a new name for some other natural entities, which means that normativity is just a part of our natural world-picture.

I first discussed Parfit's triviality objection against reductive naturalism, which says that it is incoherent: using reductive utilitarianism as an example, Parfit claims that the identity between the property of being right and that of maximizing pleasure will lead to the triviality of the claim 'what is right is to maximize pleasure', while that claim is non-trivial as it is a substantive normative one. I then explained why this objection does not work by appealing to Copp's response: the claim 'what is right is to maximize pleasure' can be seen as a non-trivial one from beginning to end, as it tells us what is the nature of being right.

I then presented a different reading of the triviality objection: what this objection really says can be that the identity thesis between the normative property of being right and a natural property N is tied up with a normative theory that to be right is to be N. Thus, a reductive naturalist position can be normatively objectionable, unless the normative theory it implies is the last word in normative ethics. For this reason, we should suspend any reductive proposal until it is shown normatively plausible. Also, to do more justice to reductive naturalism, I examined Copp's reductive proposal that is, nevertheless, problematic in a different way: it can be interpreted as a non-naturalist position.

Finally, I moved to a different approach in reductionism, that is, Jackson's moral functionalism that reduces normative concepts rather than entities. I then introduced two difficulties of this line of thinking: 1) Like Copp's proposal, Jackson's does not lead to normative naturalism; 2) moral functionalists cannot reduce at least one normative term, namely, 'mature'. Given all those objections, I suggested that we should move to other realist options in order to better answer the location problem.

Chapter 2. Scientific Naturalism and the Explanatory Challenge

The topic of this chapter is the second candidate solution to the location problem: scientific naturalism, which is largely contributed by the 'Cornell school'. After presenting this 'Cornell realism', I introduce Harman's explanatory challenge against it, which is arguably the most famous and persistent one. In the next section, several objections that aim to overturn the Harmanian line of thinking are examined; my conclusion is that they do not work in this or any other way, which means that the location problem calls for a yet different approach to a satisfactory solution.

2.1 The scientific and the non-reductive

In the previous chapter, I introduced the reductive version of naturalism; opponents of this view often emphasized that normative entities cannot be reduced to natural ones without bringing about difficulties. However, not all naturalists are reductionists. The 'Cornell realists', as metaethicists often call them, believe that moral entities can be *both* natural and irreducible.[28] In this section, I will first discuss these two aspects, and how Cornell realists support their thesis later.

2.1.1 Cornell realism, an overview

In *How to Be a Moral Realist,* Boyd, a mainstream Cornell realist writes: "scientific theories should be understood as putative descriptions of real phenomena, that ordinary scientific methods constitute a reliable procedure for obtaining and improving (approximate) knowledge of the real phenomena which scientific theories describe…". (Boyd, 1988, 181) We have seen that science, with its huge success in explaining natural phenomena, has made a naturalist world-picture irresistible to metaethicists, which urges them to find

[28] Cornell realists speak of 'morality' rather than 'normativity', and I will follow them in this respect when their view is discussed.

the 'location' of the seemingly non-natural normativity in this broadly natural world. Yet, Boyd goes further in this direction as he claims that ethics should be treated in the very *same* manner as natural science:

"By 'moral realism' I intend the analogous doctrine about moral judgments, moral statements, and moral theories", in the sense that "scientific beliefs and methods actually possess many of the features which form the core of our current picture of moral beliefs and methods of moral reasoning", and "moral beliefs and methods are much more like our current conception of scientific beliefs and methods than we now think." (184)

What should be noted here is that once this analogy holds, moral properties will be "natural properties of the same general sort as properties investigated by the sciences, and…that they are to be investigated in the same general way that we investigate those properties." (Sturgeon 2006: 92) Since this version of realism defines 'natural' in terms of natural science, I will call this position 'scientific naturalism' or 'Cornell realism'.

The second aspect of scientific naturalism is its 'irreducibility' view on moral entities. As Sturgeon, another mainstream Cornell realist says, reductionism is simply not compulsory for a sympathizer of naturalism: the property of goodness/rightness could be *both* natural and one of its own kind (2006: 98). Darwall, et al. explain this point in the light of natural science: "various chemical or biological 'natural kinds'—acid, catalyst, gene, organism—are not obviously type-reducible to the natural kinds of physics, and yet play a role in good scientific explanations" (Darwall, et al, 1997: 169-170). Since 1) Cornell realists understand ethics through the model of science, and 2) it is shown that science itself consists of multiple "levels" that seem to be non-reductive to the physical one (and non-reductive to each other); then it is more natural for Cornell realists to prefer the non-reductive approach towards moral entities.

Combined these two aspects together, scientific naturalism constitutes an attractive solution to the location problem: like the reductive form of naturalism, scientific naturalism seems to offer a perfect response to the

location problem. Given moral entities are just natural ones, their existence will not violate the scientific world-picture. More importantly, *unlike* the reductive form of naturalism, scientific naturalism will not be swayed by the 'normative ethics challenge' I presented in the previous chapter. To recap: *reductive* naturalists, by reducing the moral properties to natural ones, need to complete normative ethics in order to make their position immune to objections from a normative angle. Meanwhile, Cornell realists, as Miller says, "…can imagine an indefinite number of ways in which actions can be morally right" (2013: 139). Therefore, they are not required to fill the blank in the property-identity thesis "Goodness/Rightness = ____", which means that they do not need to shoulder the daunting task of finding out the last word in normative ethics in order to hold their position. In fact, scientific naturalists are happy to admit that the process of finding out what moral properties are is an ongoing one; the full story about the content of our moral beliefs is yet to be discovered.[29] Therefore, scientific naturalism seems to be a more plausible option than reductive naturalism, and we seem to have a better solution to the location problem.

2.1.2 The 'inference to the best explanation' principle

The crucial question is: how do Cornell realists support their metaethical view? Why should we understand morality in the way we understand natural phenomena from the very beginning? At first glance, moral entities are not like typical natural entities, say, the properties of colours and shapes, as the latter are observable to our naked eyes while the former are not.[30] If moral entities are unobservable *and* irreducible to other natural ones, in what sense are they real? This worry can be cast in a different way: even if the realist, irreducible construal of moral entities is granted, it seems that they are fundamentally different from natural ones due to the fact that the former are unobservable. Thus, the analogy between moral entities and natural ones seems implausible, which means that we should not embark on the Cornell proposal in the first instance.

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[29] Also, scientific naturalism will not be undermined in the way that Jackson's moral functionalism is: the former does not promise a mature folk morality in the future.

[30] Cf. Chrisman 2017:76 "It's not like we can collect a bunch of goodness in a test tube and analyze its molecular structure."

To respond to these worries, Cornell realists develop a line of thinking that distinguishes themselves from their realist companions. Consider an example. There are certain physical entities, say, protons that are not available to our sense experience, which means that we do not know whether they exist or not by our naked eyes. However, we can be justified in believing the existence of protons, when their existence constitutes the *best explanation* of some other phenomena that are accessible to our sense experience, say, there is a vapour trail in the cloud chamber. If the existence of protons best explains the vapour trail, we will be justified in believing the former, even if we do not see protons by our naked eyes.

Another example, offered by Lutz and Lenman, is the property of being healthy (Lutz and Lenman, 2018). "Consider, for instance, the property of *being healthy*. Being healthy isn't like being red; there's no way that healthy people look. Of course, there may be some characteristic visual signs of healthiness—rosy cheeks, a spring in one's step—but these visual signs are neither necessary nor sufficient for healthiness. These directly observable properties are only *indications* of healthiness." However, being unobservable, the property of being healthy can explain phenomena like one's "energy" and "long life", which means that we know there is the property of being healthy based on the presence of those phenomena, just like we determine the existence of protons based on the presence of vapor trail in the chamber. This is the so-called 'inference to the best explanation' principle.[31]

The point is, it seems that a parallel claim in the moral realm can be made: Cornell realists hold that moral properties are "exactly like *healthiness* in all of these ways" (Ibid). True, moral entities like the property of rightness may not be directly observed; nevertheless, granted the 'inference to the best explanation' principle, if those moral entities can do some explanatory work for us, we will be justified in believing their existence, in the way we are justified in believing the existence of protons and the property of healthiness, without

[31] For a more detailed discussion of this principle in the context of metaethics, see Schechter, 2018. I assume this principle in the following discussion, and I will return to this topic in the next chapter.

actually seeing them. Darwall, et al. nicely summarize this strategy of Cornell realists: "…application of a principle of inference to the best explanation requires recourse to our going theory as well as experience in assessing the plausibility of competing explanatory claims…we arrive at belief in the reality of moral properties as part of an inference to the best explanation of human conduct and its history." (Darwall, et al., 1997: 169) In this way, the 'inference to the best explanation' principle helps Cornell realists establish moral *realism*: though moral entities are unobservable, they can be believed due to their explanatory function. As Railton sketches: "…an external world is posited to explain the coherence, stability, and intersubjectivity of sense-experience. A moral realist who would avail himself of this stratagem must show that the postulation of moral facts similarly can have an explanatory function" (2003: 9).[32] Again, Cornell realists seem to achieve their goal.

What's more, Cornell realists show that, in a fair sense, moral entities are just analogous to a certain kind of natural entities such as protons or the property of healthiness: they are both unobservable, yet they have their indispensable explanatory function.[33] In this way, the Cornell proposal, which treats morality like natural phenomena, becomes much more persuasive, as moral entities, like the property of healthiness or protons, are unobservable but explanatory.

In a word, by appealing to the 'inference to the best explanation' principle, Cornell realists have a way to argue for the belief in a moral reality *and* the analogy between ethics and science at the same time. Sturgeon makes the double functions of this strategy most explicit: the "acceptability" of the explanatory power of moral properties "would seem to provide an argument against skeptical views that deny the existence of such properties, and also an argument that the properties in question are natural ones." (2006: 244) Ironically,

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[32] Cf. Brink: "I assume that, whatever its exact specification, inference to the best explanation is a legitimate nondeductive inference pattern. A belief is justified to some degree, according to this inference pattern, if its truth is the best explanation, given certain background assumptions, of other claims that are taken to be true." (1989: 169)

[33] See Sturgeon, 1988 for a detailed explanation of this parallel.

Cornell realists, heavily relying on the explanatory role of moral entities, also provide the resource for the infamous objection against scientific naturalism itself, namely, the "explanatory challenge" proposed by Harman: the latter claims that moral entities do not have any explanatory power, which leads us to the next section.

2.2 Harman's explanatory challenge

Let us return to the proton example, which is in fact Harman's own. To repeat, suppose one observes there is a vapor trail in a cloud chamber, and she thereby forms the belief 'there goes a proton' without actually seeing the proton. This "observation" (one's "thinking that thought [there goes the proton]") occurs, as we have seen before, because the proton's being there constitutes the best theory that explains the vapor trail in the cloud chamber (Harman, 1977: 3-8). Given the 'inference to the best explanation' principle, we are justified in believing the existence of protons, though we do not have direct empirical evidence for it.

Now Harman invites us to carefully consider an ethical case (Ibid, 6-9). Suppose some hoodlums ignite and torture a cat and someone observes this scene: she immediately forms the moral belief ("moral observation") that the action of those children is wrong. Harman's claim is that the scientific and ethical cases constitute a *disanalogy*. In the previous scientific case, one needs to "make assumptions about certain physical facts [the existence of proton] to explain the occurrence of" one's observation ('there goes a proton'); yet in this moral case one does not 'seem to need to make assumptions about any moral facts to explain the occurrence of the so-called moral observation", that is, the forming of moral belief 'those children are wrong'. Harman continues that in the moral case, "all we need assume is that you have certain more or less well articulated moral principles that are reflected in the judgments you make". For example, one is committed to the moral principle that 'one should not harm animals deliberately' (which can be given an anti-realist construal without referring to any moral property); in this way, when she sees hoodlums torturing a cat for fun, her judgement 'they are wrong' can thus be explained well by appealing to the moral principle she upholds (with

the natural fact that those hoodlums are indeed torturing the cat she has direct access to of course). In contrast, in the scientific case, it seems impossible for someone to form the belief 'there goes the proton' "without the need for any assumption about a proton": the scientific fact that proton exists is "relevant to a reasonable explanation of why that [belief about proton] was made". Therefore, the moral fact, say, the wrongness of the act of torturing the cat becomes explanatorily redundant or "irrelevant" to one's moral judgement.

This disanalogy between science and ethics Harman speaks of can be put in a slightly different way. In the scientific case, "Facts about protons…can cause a vapor trail that reflects light to your eye in a way that, given your scientific training and psychological set, leads you to judge that what you see is a proton." (Ibid, 7-8) That is to say, there is, or at least, can be a whole story about how the existence of proton leads to one's belief 'there goes the proton'. In contrast, "…there does not seem to be any way in which the actual rightness or wrongness of a given situation can have any effect" on one's moral observation (Ibid, 8). A story about how moral facts lead to one's moral belief is absent.

Harman's challenge can be thus formulated in the following way:

1) We are not justified in believing the existence of something, unless the existence of that thing plays an explanatory role in some phenomena, say, one's belief. (premise 1, the explanatory demand)
2) Moral properties/facts do not have such explanatory power in our forming of the moral belief, unlike scientific ones. (premise 2)
3) We are not justified in believing moral entities. (from 1 and 2)

Three remarks. First, this challenge is an anti-realist one that depends, basically, on a converse of the inference to the best explanation principle. The original principle says, again, we are entitled to believe the existence of something, on condition that it constitutes the *best* explanation of some phenomena. Since

Harman, contra Cornell realists, believes that moral facts do *not* play any explanatory role on moral beliefs (unlike the existence of proton that explains our scientific belief) and arguably any other phenomena, we are thus *not* entitled to believe their existence. In other words, this Harmanian line of thinking transforms Cornell realists' argument for realism into an anti-realist challenge: the 'inference' principle actually undermines the realist claim.

Second, Harman's reason for premise 2 is in fact very thin: his sole basis for the claim that moral facts are explanatorily irrelevant to moral beliefs is the supposedly disanalogous scenarios of science and ethics alone, characterized above. Perhaps this is why this line of thinking is often called a 'challenge', rather than a full-blown argument. However, read sympathetically, Harman's point can be that he is urging his opponents to show that moral entities are explanatory, because it seems that those entities cannot explain anything, let alone figure in the *best* theory of any phenomena.

Third, I mentioned above that one advantage of scientific naturalism is that by taking moral properties as *irreducible*, it will not be affected by the 'normative ethics challenge' that undermines the reductive version of naturalism. Unfortunately, in this case, reductive naturalism, due to the *reduction* of moral properties, will *not* be affected by Harman's challenge: if we grant that the property of wrongness *is* the property of not maximizing pleasure, this property will certainly be a part of the explanation of our belief 'they are wrong', as we just observe the property itself. That is to say, it is the *irreducibility* of moral entities held by Cornell realists that makes their position amenable to Harman's challenge.

At this moment, one might say that this challenge is not decisive to scientific naturalism: even if we concede that Harman has a point here, what Cornell realists lose is no more than a realist argument that appeals to the 'inference to the best explanation' principle; they can just stop talking about the explanatory function of moral entities and turn to other arguments in order to dismiss anti-realism. However, the threat of the explanatory challenge to scientific naturalism is greater than one may expect: unlike many metaethicists, I do

not believe Harman's challenge is merely an anti-realist one; rather, it is the whole Cornell proposal is at risk.[34] To remind, the analogy between ethics and science is at the core of scientific naturalism, and we have seen that moral entities are unlike typical natural properties such as shapes and colours, as the latter are observable while the former are not. Thus, moral entities *have to* be explanatory in order to make the analogy between ethics and science work: being unobservable, moral entities can still be analogous to *certain* natural ones that are also unobservable but explanatory, such as protons and healthiness (the former can explain the vapor trail in the chamber, and the latter can explain one's rosy cheeks and long life). Therefore, once moral entities are shown explanatorily *impotent*, the analogy between ethics and science will be seriously damaged: there will be no natural entities that moral entities are supposed to be analogous to. Moral entities are neither like the ordinary natural properties of shapes and colours (as the former are unobservable), nor like the scientific entities as protons (as moral entities are not explanatory). Then, one may wonder why we should naturalize morality given moral entities and natural ones are so different, which means the Cornell proposal is crippled from the very beginning.[35]

Hence, Cornell realists have to shoulder the burden of proving that moral entities are explanatory, not only to defend their realist argument against Harman's challenge (viz. the argument appeals to the 'inference to the best explanation' principle), but also to save their own proposal where moral entities are understood in a scientific manner.

Unsurprisingly, Cornell realists fully realize the threat posed by Harman to their metaethical position: Sayre-McCord admits that the story about how moral facts lead to one's moral belief is absent and the task of offering it is "surprisingly hard" (Sayre-McCord, 1988: 256-7), while Sturgeon and Brink offer a variety of responses. This leads us to the next section.

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[34] Mainstream metaethicists seem to understand Harman's challenge as one against non-reductive realism in general, see, for examples, Shafer-Landau, 2003 and 2006, Enoch, 2011 and Schechter, 2018. I by no means deny this point: my point is rather that this challenge is also an, say, anti-Cornell realist one. See below.

[35] This point is consistently emphasized by non-naturalists, see the next chapter.

2.3 Two objections against the explanatory challenge

This section is dedicated to examining two major responses to Harman's explanatory challenge raised by Cornell realists. The first one claims that moral entities, contra Harman, are explanatorily relevant to moral beliefs; the second one, which is to some extent beyond Harman's original challenge, aims to show that moral entities can explain other phenomena, such as historical events.

2.3.1 A counterfactual test

Perhaps it is Sturgeon (1988, 2006) who takes Harman's challenge most seriously, and thus attracts the most attention. In order to solve the challenge, he argues that moral entities can explain not only moral beliefs but also other phenomena, such as historical events. Here I will focus on Sturgeon's first claim that moral entities can explain moral beliefs, where he appeals to some counterfactual test.

The structure of his argument is clear, which has two steps. First, Sturgeon proposes a counterfactual test that is used to test the explanatory relevance. Second, granted the test, it is applied to moral entities, and moral entities will be shown explanatory by passing that test.

Let us start with the counterfactual test. Here I adopt Miller's characterization: "…One way to test claims of explanatory relevance is by applying the counterfactual test: to say that a's being F is explanatorily relevant to b's being G is to say that if a had not been F then b would not have been G" (Miller 2013: 151). Consider a homely example: my classmate claims that he comes to my house to do his homework with me, and I suspect that his real thought is that he could play the newly released video game I have just bought. Now, after a few days, if the copy is locked by my parents, the way to show that my suspicion is correct is to see whether he still comes when playing that game at my house is no longer available. If he never comes, then

my suspicion is vindicated, and it can be said that 'playing video games' is a good explanation of his act of coming to my house. In this case, a's being F is the game's being available at my house, and b's being G is my classmate's coming to my house: when a's no longer F (the copy is not available), b's no longer G (my classmate does not come anymore), which means that a's being F is explanatorily relevant to b's being G. The test seems to work.

The next step is to apply this test to the moral case where hoodlums ignite the cat, though the moral case is more complex than the example of playing video games: in this case, a's being F is the *wrongness* of hoodlum's act, and b's being G is one's forming the *moral belief* 'they are wrong'. To remind, the goal of Cornell realists is precisely that moral properties are explanatorily relevant to moral beliefs. Sturgeon now asks whether our moral belief of those hoodlums will become different (whether b's no longer G in this case), once their act lacks the moral property of being wrong (that is, once a's no longer F): if their act, being devoid of the property of being wrong, leads to the change of one's moral belief, it will be shown that the moral property of wrongness is explanatorily relevant to one's moral belief according to the test.

Sturgeon claims that the covariance indeed occurs. How so? It seems that once the act of torturing the cat is devoid of the property of wrongness, based on the idea of *supervenience*, hoodlum's act must lack certain non-moral natural properties upon which the moral property of wrongness supervenes, say, that of being "gratuitously cruel".[36] Briefly speaking, the idea of supervenience says that the moral nature of a state of affair will not differ without there being some natural difference to it; thus, if the moral nature of a state of affair *has* differed, there must already be some natural difference to that state of affair. This is what happens when we remove the moral property of wrongness of hoodlums' act: given the moral property of wrongness of hoodlums' act is now removed (it is removed for the sake of argument: this is how the counterfactual test works), according to supervenience, the natural property of hoodlum's act on which wrongness used to

[36] Whether the property of being gratuitously cruel is a non-moral, natural property is controversial; yet, for the sake of argument, I will accept Sturgeon's move that cruelty is a non-moral natural property.

supervene must differ accordingly, to the extent that the property of wrongness will *not* be instantiated. For Sturgeon, it is the natural property of being gratuitously cruel that disappears after the removal of wrongness, which guarantees that the moral property of wrongness will not be instantiated in hoodlum's non-cruel act. To quote Sturgeon in length:

"…Since what makes their action wrong…is presumably something like its being an act of gratuitous cruelty…to imagine them not doing something wrong we are going to have to imagine their action different in this respect. More cautiously and more generally, if what they are actually doing is wrong, and if moral properties are, as many writers have held, supervenient on natural ones, then in order to imagine them not doing something wrong we are going to have to suppose their action different from the actual one in some of its natural features as well." (Sturgeon, 1988: 247)

The point is, once hoodlums' act lacks the non-moral, natural property of being "gratuitously cruel", it seems "simply false to say that…we would still have believed the action to be wrong" (Miller, 2013: 152): that is to say, our moral belief will turn into 'they are *not* wrong' (b's no longer G) once their act does not have the natural property of being cruel (the natural property of being cruel disappears due to the removal of the moral property of wrongness, see above). To use Sturgeon's own words again: "So our question becomes: Even if the children had been doing something else, something just different enough not to be wrong, would you have taken them even so to be doing something wrong?" (Sturgeon, 1998: 247); and the answer is obviously no. Since the removal of the moral property of wrongness eventually leads to the change of one's moral belief (through the disappearance of the natural property of being cruel), according to the counterfactual test, the moral property is shown explanatorily relevant to our moral belief. Harman is thus wrong to claim that moral properties cannot explain moral beliefs.

We can formulate the argument in the following form:

1) The way to show that a's being F is explanatorily relevant to b's being G is to pass a counterfactual test: if a's no longer F leads to b's no longer G, then F is explanatorily relevant to G (the counterfactual test).

2) Once hoodlums' act is no longer instantiating the moral property of wrongness, according to supervenience, there must be a natural difference to their act: it could be that their act no longer has the natural property of cruelty.

3) If their act does not have the natural property of cruelty, to the extent that it does not instantiate wrongness, we will not believe they are wrong.

4) The loss of the moral property of wrongness leads to the change of our moral belief. (from 2 and 3)

5) Moral property is explanatorily relevant to one's moral belief (from 1 and 4).

How to assess this argument? I think Sturgeon is faced with at least two difficulties: the first one, which is minor, is concerned with steps 2-4, and the second one, which is major, is about step 1, namely, the counterfactual test itself. I shall explain these two problems in turn.

To recap, steps 2-4 explain how the loss of the moral property leads to our change of moral belief, given the counterfactual test (I will grant this test here for the sake of argument, and return to it later). It should be noted that the idea of supervenience plays a significant role, as Sturgeon relies on it to show that the removal of the moral property of wrongness (of hoodlums' act) must lead to the removal of the natural property of cruelty[37], which further explains why we can no longer believe the act is wrong. Here I will grant the idea of supervenience; instead, what I find seemingly problematic is Sturgeon's way of employing the supervenience idea: the interpretation of supervenience he appeals to is a relation between two kinds of *properties*; that is to say, Sturgeon appeals to a *realist* conception of supervenience that moral *properties* supervene on natural properties. It means that he has already committed to a realist metaethical position in his argument.

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[37] Here it seems that Sturgeon assumes that the property of cruelty is a natural one, and I will not take issue with it though his assumption is controversial.

Then the situation becomes a bit complex. If Sturgeon is arguing against *another moral realist* who denies moral entities can explain moral beliefs, to presuppose moral realism will be perfectly fine: after all, the two metaethicists are both committed to the existence of moral properties/facts, and the disagreement between them is merely whether those moral entities are explanatory. In *that* case, a realist understanding of supervenience can be used to support Sturgeon's view that moral entities are explanatory, since the change of moral properties indeed covaries with the change of moral beliefs. Given that Sturgeon's goal, as shown by my construction of his argument above, is that moral properties are explanatorily relevant to moral beliefs, it seems that the argument works. However, if Sturgeon's opponent is a Harmanian anti-realist who uses the explanatory impotence to show that we are not entitled to *believe in a moral reality* (the conclusion of Harman's challenge above), Sturgeon's argument seems to beg the question. To truly overcome Harman's challenge, one *cannot* assume moral realism first (in whatever form, including the realist conception of supervenience[38]) and then show that moral entities are explanatory. It is to assume what one sets out to prove. For *both* Harman and Sturgeon, it is the explanatory function of moral entities that will support the belief in moral reality (or the explanatory impotence of moral entities that will deny the belief in moral reality), not the other way around. Since we should be neutral to moral realism in the Harman vs. Sturgeon debate, this 'counterfactual test argument' fails to dismiss Harman's challenge.[39]

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[38] The realist conception of supervenience is not compulsory as an anti-realist interpretation of supervenience is available: say, the idea of supervenience is a constraint on our moral discourse that there cannot be two different moral judgements on two things, if our natural judgements on those two things do not differ. Hence, to appeal to a realist conception of supervenience is a substantial move.

[39] Very interestingly, Sturgeon, much later, expresses his deep doubt on the application of supervenience in metaethics: scholars' understandings of it are so "parochial", to the extent that it cannot be used for any metaethical purpose without begging the question. "It is difficult…to find a version of the doctrine of the supervenience of the evaluative that is available as a serious argumentative weapon in the dialectic of metaethics". See Sturgeon, 2009: 57.

Nevertheless, one may say that the first difficulty I characterized above is not fair to Sturgeon. As Yasenchuk points out: "…Sturgeon is arguably entitled (and even required) to suppose that certain moral facts exist in responding to Harman's…thesis, it appears that he is also entitled to employ a realistic conception of supervenience in responding to Harman" (Yasenchuk, 1994: 489). Furthermore, even if we set aside Yasenchuk's point, Sturgeon's argument still saves the analogy between ethics and science in some way. True, if Sturgeon wants to use this argument to dismiss Harman's challenge, he might beg the question as he assumes moral realism (not to mention that accusing him of begging the question is arguably unfair); yet if he merely wants to prove the *explanatory function* of moral entities, he seems to succeed: again, what he achieves is that *given* the realist understanding of morality, moral properties are shown explanatorily relevant to moral beliefs. In other words, Sturgeon shows that moral entities *can be* analogous to certain natural entities that are unobservable but explanatory, as long as there are indeed such things. Hence, this argument seems to achieve a *limited success*: the Cornell proposal that moral entities are like certain natural ones (e.g. protons/healthiness) *can* work, once moral realism is allowed.[40]

However, is that so? For the sake of argument, I set aside step 1 in discussing the first difficulty of Sturgeon's argument; yet the limited success of this argument is real, on condition that step 1 of this argument, namely, the counterfactual test is safe (remember that the overall line of thinking of this argument is that the counterfactual test is a test for explanatory power and moral entities pass that test). Unfortunately, when we pay attention to the counterfactual test, I do not think it works, which leads us to the second, and major difficulty this 'counterfactual test argument' has.

To repeat, the counterfactual test says that if a's no longer F covaries with b's no longer G, a's being F will be explanatorily relevant to b's being G. Now consider a different example. Suppose someone claims that the soporific quality of opium, or its power to make people sleep (a's being F) is explanatorily relevant to the fact that we are induced to sleep by the opium (b's being G). To support her claim, she appeals to this

[40] Of course, Cornell realists can find out other arguments for realism.

counterfactual test: "when a's no longer F, that is, when the opium loses the soporific quality, b will no longer be G, that is, we will of course not be induced to sleep by the opium". It seems that the opium's soporific quality passes the counterfactual test: this means the property of being soporific or the power to make one sleep is shown explanatorily relevant to the fact that we are induced to sleep by the opium. Nevertheless, to treat F as G's explanation in this case constitutes a typical pseudo-explanation: the soporific quality of opium's power to make one sleep does not really explain why we are induced to sleep by opium (perhaps what is really explanatorily relevant is in relation to chemical, biological terms). That is to say, mere covariation between a's no longer F and b's no longer G does not guarantee the explanatory role of F in G: further qualifications are needed to make this test work. Since this test cannot be trusted at this moment, its application in the moral realm becomes fruitless: it cannot be used to show the explanatory relevance of moral entities to moral beliefs.

I anticipate there may be the following objection: one can claim that my example of opium's soporific quality is not fair to Cornell realists, because it has already been proved that the explanation (of the fact that we are induced to sleep by opium) in terms of opium's soporific quality is a pseudo-one. Thus, I cannot appeal to the already-failed case of opium's soporific quality to question the counterfactual test. However, this objection misunderstands my view, as my point is precisely that the *counterfactual test itself* fails to rule out the pseudo-explanations such as the one in terms of soporific quality: we now do *not* believe that the soporific quality of opium, or its power to make one sleep is explanatorily relevant to the fact that we are induced to sleep by opium, due to the contribution of science (or something else perhaps, which is not the point here), rather than this counterfactual test itself. If this test cannot rule out this pseudo-explanation of opium, the mere fact that moral entities pass this test will *not* prove anything: it could be that the moral explanation in terms of moral entities is a pseudo one as well, just like the 'explanation' in terms of opium's soporific quality is. In fact, I am not the only one who finds the explanation of one's moral belief in terms of moral facts/properties highly suspicious. Leiter once wrote that if one seeks an explanation for one's moral belief that 'they are wrong', and is offered the explanation 'they are wrong' (interpreted as 'they possess the

property of being wrong'), "I would take such an answer to be a bit of a joke: a repetition of the datum rather than an explanation." (Leiter, 2001: 53)[41] Here he seems to express the very same point that such an explanation cannot be a genuine one.[42]

Hence, given this test cannot rule out pseudo-explanations, it cannot be granted, which means that the step 1 of Sturgeon's argument is problematic.

These two difficulties combined, it seems that the 'counterfactual test argument' neither helps Cornell realists defend their realist argument against Harman nor saves the analogy between ethics and science. It fails to dismiss Harman's explanatory challenge, as its implicit assumption of moral realism seems problematic (the first, minor difficulty). One may say that the assumption of moral realism is not problematic, and it at least proves the explanatory relevance between moral entities and moral beliefs (thus saves the analogy between ethics and science), granted moral realism; nevertheless, this argument, at second glance, fails to prove the explanatory function of moral entities, either, as it relies on a counterfactual test that does not work (the second, major difficulty). Hence, this argument should be rejected.

2.3.2 Explaining historical events

I shall move to the second line of thinking from Cornell realists: it says that moral entities could explain something other than beliefs, such as certain historical *events.* Notice that we are now deviating from Harman's original explanatory challenge to some extent: Harman focuses exclusively on the explanatory

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[41] Similarly, if one says that we are induced to sleep by opium because the opium has the power to make us sleep, we will take it more or less as a joke.

[42] Another critic of Cornell realists, Zangwill, goes even further. He claims that to explain one's moral belief in terms of moral properties/facts commits to a normative mistake: it is totally irresponsible. Consider the following example: one explains that he has the belief 'Billy is a bad person' because 'Billy has the property of being bad', without mentioning any other natural property of Billy; this explanation sounds very untenable. See Zangwill, 2006.

issue of *beliefs*. That is to say, Harman does not say anything to thwart the following strategy: *even if* moral entities cannot explain moral beliefs, they will still "earn the right to exist" if they can explain other things, such as events.[43] Thus, this strategy is promising prima facie.[44]

The question is, how to prove that moral properties offer explanations on events? To start, Sturgeon writes:

"Here is an example in which [moral entities] appear to [be explanatory on events]. An interesting historical question is why vigorous and reasonably widespread moral opposition to slavery arose for the first time in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even though slavery was a very old institution; and why this opposition arose primarily in Britain, France, and in French- and English-speaking North America, even though slavery existed throughout the New World. There is a standard answer to this question. It is that chattel slavery in British and French America, and then in the United States, was much *worse* than previous forms of slavery…" (1988: 245)

He admits that this is a historically controversial explanation, but the point is that "The appeal in these standard explanations is straightforwardly to moral facts." (Ibid, 245) Sturgeon does not say too much about how he will justify this claim, but his idea is clear: moral facts, say, the fact of worse-ness of slavery in certain countries (in comparison to slavery's previous forms) could explain the increasing opposition to slavery in those countries. Another Cornell realist, Brink writes in a similar vein: "For example, racial oppression in South Africa consists in various particular social, economic, and legal restrictions present in

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[43] This phrase is borrowed from Miller, 2013.

[44] In fact, some metaethicists precisely question Harman that the supposed explanatory impotence of moral entities on moral beliefs does not amount to the explanatory impotence of moral entities in general. Enoch expresses this point in perhaps the strongest voice: "…Which possible explananda, for instance, count in shouldering the burden of the Explanatory Requirement? Only observations, as Harman himself seems to suggest? Why this restriction? Maybe explaining non-observational beliefs, or desires, or actions, or non-action sociological events, or more purely causal events suffices for satisfying the Explanatory Requirement or the intuitive condition it is meant to capture?" See Enoch, 2011: 52.

South African society. Now it seems better to cite racial oppression as a cause of political instability and social protest in South Africa than the particular social, economic, and political restrictions…" (1989: 195) What he means is, again, that the moral fact of, say, injustice, plays an explanatory role in the event of social protest, which means that we should believe the existence of moral entities. If moral facts/properties do have such an explanatory function, then we are entitled to believe them, and the analogy between ethics and science is saved.

Given the complexity of this line of thinking, this section will be arranged in the following way. First, I will introduce Blackburn's rejoinder to Sturgeon. Second, a more technical reformulation of Sturgeon and Brink's argument will be discussed, which aims to show that moral explanations are *indispensable* for the explanation of events. Finally, I will pose an objection against that reformulated argument.

In response to Sturgeon, Blackburn writes "I cannot readily think of mechanisms whereby injustice brings about revolutions except through the population's awareness of it". In this way, Sturgeon's explanation of opposition in terms of moral fact could be seen as an "elliptical" one (Blackburn 1993: 205): when one cites 'moral fact' like worse-ness or injustice as the cause of protest, what she really means is that the population have some moral judgements ("awareness") that they are victims of certain natural (social/economic) conditions. Yet those judgements could be interpreted in an anti-realist manner, say, they express their disapproval when they claim that slavery in their time is worse or unjust. In this way, the real explanatory relation is the one between people's (anti-realist) moral judgements (based on certain social/economic facts) and event, instead of the moral property and event. Therefore, we do not need to cite moral entities to explain events.

How to assess Blackburn's response? At first glance, Blackburn does not directly deny that moral entities can explain events; instead, he just offers a different, anti-realist story on the explanation of events. Hence, it seems that Sturgeon and Brink's claim that moral facts can explain events is safe: it is just that there can be

another (anti-realist) way of explaining events. However, I believe Blackburn's rejoinder can be reconstructed into a stronger one that requires further responses from Cornell realists.

Strictly speaking, the 'inference to the *best* explanation' principle Cornell realists appeal to says that something must fit in the *best* explanation of some phenomena in order to earn the right of existence. That is to say, if the realist explanation of events is *no better than* the anti-realist explanation, Cornell realists will *not* be entitled to believe the moral reality: there is simply no *best* explanation of events yet. Moreover, it seems that the realist explanation of events is *worse* than its opponent, due to the idea of ontological parsimony: anti-realists can explain events without positing moral entities.[45] In other words, it seems that moral entities do not figure in the *best* explanation of historical events, which means that we should believe neither moral entities nor the analogy between ethics and science: to remind, scientific entities such as protons do figure in the *best* explanation of the vapor trail.

Hence, for Cornell realists, they must show that the realist explanation of events somehow *triumphs* over the anti-realist one, to the extent that the former is a better explanation *despite* its ontological extravagance. In fact, Brink (1989) develops such an approach: briefly speaking, Brink believes that there is something *more* to the moral explanation than the one in terms of social/economic (that is, natural) facts alone when it comes to certain events. That is to say, Brink claims that moral entities have their *unique, indispensable* explanatory contribution. If Brink successfully shows that the realist explanation indeed possesses something that the anti-realist explanation lacks, he will prove the former is a better, or the best explanation of events: to adopt an anti-realist explanation of events will bear an explanatory *loss*. Then, the idea of ontological parsimony can no longer be used by anti-realists to defeat the realist explanation: we must posit moral entities to *fully* explain events, otherwise our explanation of them will be *inadequate*. At that moment, we will be justified in

[45] Given it seems that there are only two options, the anti-realist explanation of events will be the best one if it is better than its realist opponent.

believing the existence of moral entities, since they figure in the best explanation (the full, complete explanation) of events, and the analogy between moral entities and natural ones will be saved.

To be sure the characterization of Brink's strategy above is formal: the crucial two questions are: 1) What is the indispensable explanatory contribution supposedly made by moral entities? 2) Is it something that is possessed by the realist explanation alone? To answer the first question, it seems that Cornell realists and their sympathizers appeal to the idea of 'program explanation',[46] which is introduced in *Program Explanation: A General Perspective* by Jackson and Pettit (1990). I will first discuss this idea, and later explain how it is applied in metaethics. Then, I will move to the second question.

To start, consider an example raised by Jackson and Pettit. The water's property of being 100°C is a "higher-order" property, which can be realized by various "lower-order" momentum properties. When a new event occurs, say, a fragile glass container breaks, it is caused by the lower-order momentum-property of water when its temperature reaches 100°C. Jackson and Pettit call such an explanation, appealing to the *lower-order* property (in this case, the momentum property) a "process" one: "a process explanation is one which cites a property that is directly causally efficacious in bringing about an effect, that is, a property in virtue of whose instantiation, at least in part, the effect occurs" (Sinclair, 2001: 5). However, we can also explain the crack of glass in terms of the temperature (of water): the crack of glass is *ensured,* or *programed* by water's *higher-order* property of being 100°C, despite this higher-order property could be realized in multiple ways (there are various arrangements of the molecules that satisfy the required momentum). Hence, this explanation is called a "program explanation": "a program explanation is one which cites a property which,

[46] Cf. Blackburn, 1993, Sinclair, 2001, Miller, 2016. Brink does not mention the very term 'program explanation', but it will become clear later that he shares the same line of thinking with others who explicitly appeal to this idea, see below.

while not directly causally efficacious in bringing about the effect, programs for (or ensures) the instantiation of some property which is directly causally efficacious in bringing about the effect".[47]

The point is, "a program explanation of an event may provide information which the corresponding process explanation does not supply" (Jackson and Pettit, 1990: 116). In this case, though it is the (lower-order) momentum property of molecules that is causally efficacious in the production of the event that glass cracks,[48] the process explanation in terms of momentum alone will *not* convey the following *modal* information, that is, 'the glass will crack as long as the temperature of water reaches 100 °C despite there could be different states of the molecules'. To quote Jackson and Pettit in length: "a program explanation provides a different sort of information…which someone in possession of the process account may lack. The process story tells us about how *the history actually went*: say that the momentum of such and such molecules was responsible for the cracking of the glass. A program explanation tells us about how *that history might have been.* It gives modal information about the history, telling us for example in any relevantly similar situation, as in the original situation itself, the fact that the water was at boiling temperature means that where will be a property realized—that involving the momentum of particular molecules—which is sufficient…to produce the cracking of the glass. In the actual world it was this, that and the other molecule whose momentum led to the cracking of the glass but in the possible worlds where their place is taken by other molecules, the cracking still occurs" (Ibid, 117, my italics). In this way, "[program explanation] may be an explanation which the process explanation does not supersede" (Ibid, 116).

If the idea of program explanation is allowed, the next step of Cornell realists is, of course, to consider moral explanations as program ones: Brink's claim that moral entities offer indispensable explanatory contribution

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[47] Jackson and Pettit write that program is a useful metaphor: "The analogy is with a computer program which ensures that certain things will happen - things satisfying certain descriptions - though all the work of producing those things goes on at a lower, mechanical level" (1990: 114).

[48] According to Jackson and Pettit, the (higher-order) property of temperature is, strictly speaking, not causally efficacious. Here we can set this claim aside.

will immediately make sense. Return to his example, the program explanation is the moral one that the racial injustice (the 'higher-order' property in this case) leads to the protest, while the process explanation is the one referring to social, political and economic properties (that is, lower-order properties) alone. Brink thus writes: "it seems better to cite racial oppression as a cause of political instability and social protest in South Africa than the particular social, economic, and political restrictions, precisely because there would still have been racial oppression and instability and protest under somewhat different social, economic, and legal restrictions, and the only thing this large set of alternate possible social, economic, and legal bases of oppression have in common is that they realize racial oppression (it is very unlikely that there is a natural—nonmoral—social category that corresponds to this set)" (Brink 1989: 195). That is to say, just like only the program explanation in terms of temperature can offer the modal information that the glass would break when the water is 100°C (despite the molecules that have such and such momentum can be different from those of the actual world), only the *moral* explanation could give us the *modal* information that the protest would occur when the society becomes so unjust (despite the social, economic conditions that instantiate the moral property of injustice possibly being different from those of the actual world). Hence, "moral explanations will occupy a distinct and privileged explanatory role" (Ibid, 195). In fact, moral explanations constitute a part of the *best* explanation of certain events: those non-moral explanations (in social, economical terms alone) of protest, due to the lack of that modal information characterized above, would be thus inadequate. The analogy between moral entities and natural ones is thus saved, as the former figure in the best explanation of certain phenomena as well as the latter, and we are justified in believing the existence of moral entities, granted the inference to the best explanation principle.

Both the idea of program explanation and the application of it in the moral realm are no doubt innovative, and I believe Cornell realists plausibly explain how the realist explanation of events possesses the modal information. That is to say, the first question I listed above was well answered. However, for the realist explanation of events really *supersede* the anti-realist one and constitute the best one, Cornell realists need to answer the second question: Is the modal information characterized above *uniquely* possessed by the realist

explanation? Only after they show that moral entities *alone* offer this modal information will they prove that the realist explanation counts as the best explanation of events: it is the only full explanation of events.

Unfortunately, it seems that they fail at the second step. It is one thing to think there are moral explanations that contain some modal information, it is another to give those moral explanations a *realist* construal. In still other words, what is shown by Brink is that moral explanations are indispensable for the best or full explanation of certain events (which is plausible), *not* that moral properties/facts are indispensable for moral explanations: there can be an anti-realist version of moral explanations.

How does an anti-realist version of moral explanation *that contains the modal information* look like? Suppose the single social condition that directly causes the protest is the difference of payment based on race (an oversimplified explanation of course), which I suppose is unjust. Thus, there can be two explanations of the protest: 1) the *moral* explanation that 'injustice (of payment) leads to the protest', and 2) the *non-moral* explanation that 'the differences of payment cause the protest'.

By regarding the moral explanation as a program one, the moral explanation would contain the following *modal* information that the non-moral explanation lacks: despite the payment gaps being able to differ from those of our actual world, the protest will occur so long as the payment gap of the society is unjust. Thus, the non-moral explanation of events is incomplete, and a full explanation of the protest should contain the moral explanation that offers such modal information. 'So far so good.' Now Cornell realists seem to assume that 'the payment gap in the society is unjust' means 'the payment gap instantiates the property of injustice'. The problem is that this assumption is groundless, as anti-realists can interpret the moral explanation, together with the modal information it contains in an anti-realist manner: so long as people *express their disapproval* of the social conditions (in this case the payment gap), the protest will occur, despite the fact that gaps in payment can take different forms from those of the actual world. There is no reference to any moral property

in this anti-realist moral explanation of events, and the modal information is there.[49] Interestingly, it seems Brink himself implicitly supports this view: to repeat, it is "moral *explanations*" rather than moral properties/facts that "occupy a distinct and privileged explanatory role" (my italics); and it is "*By relying on moral theory* about the nature and causes of social and, in particular, racial injustice" (emphasis in original, 192) we have a moral explanation of the protest, not by relying on *a realist construal of that moral theory*. In a word, it seems that Cornell realists mistakenly identify the moral explanation with the moral *realist* explanation of events, neglecting the possibility of *anti-realist* moral explanation.

Of course, it is not wrong per se to give a realist construal of moral explanations. However, in this case, what matters is precisely whether the realist explanation is better than the anti-realist one. It seems we return to the previous situation, where to embrace the anti-realist explanation of events will *not* have any explanatory loss. This means that moral entities are *not* indispensable for the best explanation of events as Brink supposes them to be.[50] Thus, Cornell realists can no longer take the realist explanation of events as the *best* one, due to its ontological extravagancy. According to the 'inference to the best explanation' principle, we therefore have no reason to believe the existence of moral entities (understood in a scientific manner), which means that the realist argument Cornell realists offer fails. More importantly, the analogy between ethics and science will be undermined: since moral entities do not figure in the *best* explanation of certain phenomena (in this case, historical events), one can no longer claim that moral entities are analogous to certain natural entities like protons, as the latter figure in the best explanation of certain phenomena while the former do not.

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[49] At this moment, scientific naturalists may contest the anti-realist moral explanation that it cannot count as a program explanation, because a program explanation, according to Jackson and Pettit, is by definition a realist one in terms of properties. However, this is merely a terminological issue: it does not matter, in this case, whether the anti-realist moral explanation is a 'program' one or not, in the sense characterized by Jackson and Pettit. Instead, what matters here is that anti-realist moral explanation can offer the modal information as well.

[50] Cf. Sinclair, 2001: 21-23. There he understands Cornell realists' argument from the program explanation as a self-contained one that aims to establish moral realism, and his approach is more from philosophy of language. Still, his point is similar: a good moral explanation does not require moral realism, as moral explanation can be spelled out in an anti-realist way.

Hence, the idea of 'program explanation', once again, neither helps Cornell realists overcome Harman's explanatory challenge nor defends their proposal against those who refuse to naturalize morality.[51]

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I examined scientific naturalism or Cornell realism and Harman's explanatory challenge. Cornell realists believe that moral entities can, like other kinds of natural entities, earn the right to exist by being explanatory, while Harman argues that moral entities do not play an explanatory role in our moral beliefs, which means that we are not entitled to believe their reality. I also point out that the explanatory function of moral entities is vital to the Cornell proposal, as this seems to be the only way to make the analogy between moral entities and natural ones promising.

I later examined two objections against Harman's challenge: Cornell realists aim to show that moral entities can explain not only moral beliefs but also events. Sturgeon appeals to a counterfactual test to show the former, while Brink and Sturgeon relies on the idea of 'program explanation' to prove the latter. However, I argued that neither worked: the counterfactual test itself was shown useless, and the idea of 'program explanation' did not make a realist construal of moral explanation more attractive than an anti-realist construal. The conclusion was that Harman's challenge remained safe and the whole Cornell proposal was problematic. Therefore, it seems we should not locate moral entities in some natural ones that are irreducible.

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[51] I shall briefly mention that there is another line of thinking against the application of 'program explanation' in the moral realm: we may safely say that when the temperature of water reaches 100°C, the glass will crack, no matter what the state of molecules is; yet it is not obvious that once the actual social, political conditions vary, the protest will still occur as long as the society is unjust. The short story is that history can be radically different due to a slight change: in other words, it is possible that the protest will not occur due to the change of certain social, political conditions, though the society is still unjust.

Now, since neither form of naturalism (reductive naturalism and non-reductive, scientific naturalism) is without problems, it seems that we have no choice but to accept anti-realism, due to the pressure of the location problem. Or, is there still a different way? In the following transition chapter, I will pay attention to the third camp of realism, namely, non-naturalism. According to non-naturalists, the whole debate around the location of normativity is misplaced, and we should reject the location problem itself.

Transition Chapter: Non-naturalism?

I have offered various arguments that both forms of naturalism are not without their difficulties. In this transition chapter, I briefly discuss non-naturalism, which will be structured in the following way. First, I explain why non-naturalism is immune to Harman's explanatory challenge; second, I discuss the strategy non-naturalists use to support their view, and why it is not satisfactory; finally, I explain why I cannot do full justice to this position (thus the 'transition chapter' rather than a full chapter), based on its relation to the location problem.

1. Non-naturalism and Harman's explanatory challenge

Perhaps the best way to characterize non-naturalism is to treat it as the antithesis of naturalism (reductive or not). We have seen that Cornell realists attempt to interpret moral entities as something that do not metaphysically differ from natural ones that are studied by natural science, and for reductive naturalists 'normative entities' is just another name for some other natural entities. However, non-naturalists believe nothing can be further from the truth: normativity is *sui generis*. Before I examine how non-naturalists develop their thoughts, I shall explain how the non-naturalness of normative/moral entities can already make non-naturalism immune to Harman's explanatory challenge.

To recap, understood as an anti-realist argument, Harman's challenge has two premises. The first one is the explanatory requirement that unless the thing in question figures in the best explanation of some phenomena, we have no reason to believe its existence. This is an application of the famous 'inference to the best explanation' principle. The second premise says that moral entities do not have any explanatory power on

our moral beliefs; in fact, it seems they never play an explanatory role in any phenomena. Thus, we are not entitled to believe them.[52]

We have seen that Cornell realists choose to overturn the *second* premise: they develop arguments to show that moral entities have explanatory functions, and even fit in the best explanation of certain phenomena, such as historical events. Regardless of whether they succeed (though I argued that they did not, see chapter 2), what matters here is that the first premise is kept intact by Cornell realists. The reason is obvious: they rely on the explanatory function of moral entities to establish both moral realism and naturalism. That is to say, if moral entities are shown explanatorily impotent, their argument for realism will fail, and the analogy between natural and moral entities will be undermined (see section 2.2).

However, things are different for *non-naturalists*: they can deny the first premise straightforwardly in order to dismiss this challenge. A non-naturalist could give the following response: "the whole 'inference the best explanation' principle is initially used to grant beliefs in *certain scientific* or *natural* entities: it says that as long as they fit in the best theory of certain natural phenomena, we are entitled to believe them, despite the fact that they are not directly observable (e.g. protons). Nevertheless, I do not believe normative entities are natural. Thus, though I still need to provide an argument for non-naturalism, this principle has nothing to do with my position: there is nothing problematic in something being non-explanatory and non-natural at the same time." In other words, by considering moral/normative entities to be non-natural, the non-naturalist will have a *shortcut* to avoid the explanatory challenge.[53]

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[52] Unlike scientific naturalists, non-naturalists do not rely on the 'inference to the best explanation' principle to establish realism; yet anti-realists can still use that principle to undermine realism, whether it is naturalist or not.

[53] This is why I disagree with Schechter's interpretation that the explanatory challenge could be best understood as one against non-naturalism. Schechter's claim is based on the idea that non-naturalists squarely deny that moral entities, being non-natural, could have any causal power, thus moral entities "presumably…cannot play a role in the causal explanation of natural phenomena. So they cannot earn their place in our picture of the world by providing causal explanations. Harman's Challenge is therefore at its

Now suppose someone who continues to challenge non-naturalism, appealing to the 'inference' principle again: "No. The 'inference' principle should be used as a test for *ontology: anything,* including your supposedly non-natural moral entities, should not be believed unless it is shown explanatory. We have already used this principle to reject the existence of many unreal things, such as golem and ghost; why not (non-natural) moral entities then? You cannot escape Harman's challenge that easily."[54] How will a non-naturalist reply?

I think non-naturalists have two ways to respond to this claim. First, the claim that the 'inference' principle should be regarded as an ontological test that applies to everything is not obviously true. Certainly, if I am allowed to assume the belief in the existence of my hands, that belief is hardly based on the explanatory function of my hands. Hence, the non-naturalist is entitled to say that her opponent owes her an argument for the claim that the 'inference' principle should be regarded as an *ontological* test that applies to anything, as it seems it does not.

Second, to use the 'inference' principle as an ontological test that applies to anything is arguably wrong. Perhaps Shafer-Landau best expresses this line of thinking. "Application of the [inference to the best explanation principle as an ontological test] has highly counter-intuitive implications…it follows that nothing exists but (roughly) atoms and the void. There certainly won't be any such things as atmospheres, rock strata, newts, and dandelions, if we grant that such things are not type-identical to anything referred to in a physics journal." (2006: 226) That is to say, those familiar objects will be eliminated as they do not

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strongest targeted against robust [non-natural] realism." (2018, p. 448) Again, non-naturalists do not need to take the inference to the best explanation principle seriously, though, of course, they bear the burden of offering the independent argument for the non-naturalness of moral entities.

[54] Shafer-Landau points out that the 'inference to the best explanation' principle, understood this way, is an application of Occam's razor. "We're quite finished with explanations that invoke Osiris or golems or centaurs…all that these entities were once invoked to explain can be more parsimoniously explained by relying on facts whose existence is vindicated through scientific confirmation." (2006: 225)

really possess the causal power that plays the explanatory role (the causal power is possessed by, say, atoms and void). Given we are not ready to deny the existence of those objects listed above, we had better *not* treat the 'inference' principle as an ontological test. Thus, the supposedly non-natural normative entities will be safe from the explanatory challenge.

2. Reasons to favour (and suspend) non-naturalism

However, even if non-naturalism can escape Harman's challenge, it does not automatically become a plausible position. In fact, many metaethicists believe that the location problem precisely constitutes the major challenge for non-naturalism: the non-naturalness of normativity is a sheer violation of the scientific, naturalist world-picture that is widely accepted by metaethicists. Therefore, non-naturalists must respond to the objection that they introduce something into our ontology that is metaphysically strange.

It seems there are at least two ways for non-naturalists to overcome the location problem. 1) They provide us with an argument for the non-naturalness of normativity, which is strong enough to the extent that we are entitled to introduce the seemingly strange non-natural normativity into our ontology. In other words, this strategy is to bite the bullet: "I may introduce something metaphysically queer, but my point is that I have to do so as normativity, as I shall argue, is really non-natural", say. The second approach is more radical: 2) to claim that the location problem is itself problematic.

Non-naturalists seem to prefer the first approach: they rely on an *intuition* that normative entities are "just too different" from the natural ones (Enoch 2011: 105, Dancy 2006).

Enoch, one leading non-naturalist, explains this intuition by appealing to Schroeder's (Schroeder, 2005; Enoch, 2011) diagnosis of the reduction of some 'God-facts' claimed by religion: if Schroeder successfully shows that 'God-facts' cannot be reduced to natural ones, then, according to Enoch, it will be shown that

normative entities are irreducible to natural ones in a similar way. Let us pay attention to Schroeder's claim first.

Schroeder starts with the "plausible thought" that "attempts to naturalistically reduce God-facts are non-starters", and he tries to offer a "diagnostic discussion" to explain why (Schroeder, 2005: 4-6). Consider the religious, God-fact that the world is *created.* Suppose we, nevertheless, define God in a *non-religious* way, for example, to take it as some entity that can be discovered by natural science, such as strong nuclear force. According to Schroeder, the result is that such a naturalist reduction will simply prevent us from saying "some of the things we pre-theoretically take to be true". That is, we can no longer believe God creates the world once we reduce this God-fact to the strong nuclear force, as God at that moment is no longer an agent but some kind of physical matter that is hardly *able* to *create* the whole world. To quote Schroeder's words in length: "God is supposed to have created the universe. But the [natural entities like] strong nuclear force did not create the universe. God is supposed to have spoken to us by His prophets. But the strong nuclear force doesn't speak to anyone…so many things that are supposed to be true of God simply are not true of the strong nuclear force that someone who believes that God is the strong nuclear force does not count as fully believing in God…If the whole point of realism about God is to capture the basic theological phenomena—that God is (at least on the traditional Christian view) the creator, omniscient and omnipotent and eternal and loving—then so long as we genuinely respect these phenomena, we won't be happy with the reduction". This is why God-facts seem clearly irreducible.[55] Perhaps one may say that we can offer some novel account of the concept 'create', which makes the claim 'God, being a natural entity that can be discovered by natural science, still somehow created the world' intelligible. Yet this account is unattractive, as it is a purely *ad hoc* one that hardly makes sense: the revisionary account of 'God creates the universe' fails to capture the "central claims about creation" where "creation is an *action*" (by an agent), as that revisionary account of 'creation' is not an action at all (Ibid, 4-5). Thus, we cannot successfully reduce theological facts to natural ones without eliminating them altogether.

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[55] However, just because a God-fact is irreducible does not mean it cannot be eliminated.

Armed with Schroeder's diagnosis of God-facts, Enoch finds a way to make a parallel claim for normative entities that they are irreducible in a very similar manner.[56] According to Enoch, once we understand normative facts naturalistically, we will, to paraphrase Schroder's words, prevent ourselves from saying something that is supposed to be the point of speaking of normativity. What point? Enoch imagines the following scenario to explain. Suppose that there is a blue button, where the manual alongside states a natural fact: "press it will maximize happiness". Consider now someone is thinking the normative question whether she *should* press it: the point is, the manual completely fails to address her concern. What she needs is some deliberation concerned with the "background commitment", that is, the utilitarian view itself. That is to say, any natural fact about the blue button does not help her solve the normative issue of whether she should maximize happiness by pushing that button. To use Enoch's words, any answer to the question 'should I press the button that maximizes happiness?' in terms of natural facts "simply changes the subject" (say, answering the previous question by 'press the button will maximize happiness'). Therefore, "Normative facts sure seem different from natural ones, different enough to justify an initial suspicion regarding reductionist attempts." (Enoch, 2011: 107)

Furthermore, in a rather recent passage, rehearsing his intuition that the normative and the natural are too different, Enoch makes the stronger claim that non-naturalism should be considered as the "default position" (which means all *other* metaethical views need to defeat non-naturalism in order to be available): the normative is so obviously non-natural that we should take it for granted. To quote him at length: "…think of paradigmatically moral or normative facts and properties…and notice how different they are from paradigmatic natural ones. In the first group we have such things as the wrongness of humiliation; the value

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[56] To be sure, Schroeder's aim of discussing the theological reduction is to emphasize the difference between God-facts and normative facts, which further supports his view that we can reduce the latter. However, according to Enoch, Schroder actually offers a strategy that is available to non-naturalists to show that normative facts are, just like theological ones, irreducible. Here I will set aside Schroeder's proposal and only focus on Enoch's application of it.

of dignity; the fact that it's wrong to take pride in one's social status; the fact that you have a reason to desire those things that are desirable; that you have a reason not to believe a contradiction; that it's virtuous to overcome fear in the face of danger (in the right circumstances, for the right reasons, to the right extent). In the second group, we have things like electrons and quarks, tables and chairs, the ubiquity of gender discrimination, the average weight of the male middle-aged analytic philosopher, the fact that the glaciers are melting, the current exchange rate between US dollars and the New Israeli Shekel, and so on. When we consider these two groups of facts, properties, and objects, it becomes clear that the two are very different." Hence, "…non-naturalist realism remains the default position…the view to beat." (Enoch 2018: 32) Let us call this the 'different subjects thesis'.

I shall make it explicit that Enoch is not the only one who appeals to the different subjects of the normative and the natural, in order to support non-naturalism. In a similar vein, Dancy claims that normative facts have their own subject matter, which is "what justifies our separating them from others, and placing them in a special category." But what subject matter? "The fact that one ought to do this rather than that, and the fact that one has reason to do this rather than that, bear their *practical relevance* on their face." (Dancy, 2006: 136) To explain this practical relevance, Dancy also uses the example of utilitarianism. Suppose that there is a natural fact that a certain act will maximizes welfare. Yet, with this natural fact alone, we do not know whether we *should* perform that action: such a natural fact is in this sense *not* practically relevant. The point is, there is a further, distinct fact *that* 'one should perform such an act', which is *about* the former natural fact that this action will maximize welfare; it is this further fact that is the normative one and practically relevant "over and above", thus Dancy sometimes calls it the "meta-fact".[57] In this way, Dancy reaches the same conclusion as Enoch's, that is, the normative cannot be reduced to the natural: "if we identify [normative] facts with natural facts…we change their subject matter…The fact that something is of practical relevance is something over and above the something that is of practical relevance. We can talk till we are

[57] The idea of 'meta-fact' has been introduced in section 1.1.

blue in the face about the way things are, but until we turn to the difference these things make to how to act, we have said nothing normative." (Ibid, 140-141)

How to assess this attempt made by non-naturalists? I think there are at least two difficulties. First, to be sure, Enoch himself admits that it is "not satisfying". The reason is obvious: in Enoch's case, the whole line of thinking is based on an *intuition* that the normative and the natural have different subjects and nothing more. That is to say, one either accepts or rejects the "just-too-different intuition", and "thus in a way [begs] the question against the other party to the reducibility debate." (Enoch, 2011: 108) Thus, it seems the 'different subjects thesis' is no more than an assertion, which will be rejected outright by naturalists.[58] Second, Dancy realizes that this thesis may not work against the *non-reductive* version of naturalism. For example, a Cornell realist can grant Dancy the distinction between the meta-fact that is practically relevant and the natural fact that is not; nevertheless, the Cornell realist will say that the distinction itself does not show that the former cannot be natural. Even if we grant that the normative and the natural have different subjects, we still do not establish the *non-naturalness* of the former: it is one thing normative entities cannot be reduced to *other* natural ones, it is another that they are non-natural themselves.[59] Although Dancy writes "it would be impossible to identify these normative facts with any fact that [non-reductive naturalists] can allow to be natural", he does not explain how (Dancy, 2006: 142). In fact, Dancy even gives the example of temporal facts to support his naturalist opponents: temporal facts cannot be reduced to other natural ones, that is, they have their own distinctive subject matter; nevertheless, they are still natural facts. Thus, Dancy cannot deny the possibility that though normative facts, like temporal facts, are irreducible to other natural facts and have

[58] "Caterpillars just seem too different from butterflies to be the same species and yet they're not. " See van Roojen, 2015: 257.

[59] When Enoch introduces the different subject thesis, he in fact speaks of the "irreducibility", rather than 'non-naturalness' of normativity, though he tries to use it to reject naturalism (the section he introduces the 'different subjects thesis' is called "naturalism, after all"). It seems that he conflates non-naturalness and irreducibility. See Enoch 2011: 5.1.

their distinctive subject matter, they still count as natural. In a word, the 'different subject thesis' is not so helpful in making non-naturalism more attractive.

Now, one may wonder whether non-naturalists have stronger arguments to offer. Perhaps surprisingly, it seems they have none: they seem to meet serious difficulties in developing *positive* arguments for the non-naturalness of normativity. Instead, non-naturalists' frequent strategy is to dismiss all the other competitive metaethical positions. For example, Enoch concedes in his major work that he does "not have such [a non-naturalist] argument up [his] sleeve" (2011: 105), and his approach there is to reveal flaws of a wide range of other metaethical views. In other words, he can only establish the non-naturalness of normative entities in a *piecemeal* way, which becomes explicit when he speaks of his naturalist opponents: "…everything depends on the details and resulting attractiveness of specific reductionist proposals." (Enoch, 2011: 109) Enoch is not the only non-naturalist who is troubled by this absence: Parfit also admits that he is, as Korsgaard characterizes, a "primarily polemical writer" who defends his non-naturalist position by attacking all other views, as he has little positive to say (Parfit, 2006: 332).[60] Although we can find various arguments in his work, they all aim to problematize the attempt to naturalize normativity (e.g. the 'triviality objection'; see section 1.2 and 1.3), rather than directly arguing for the non-naturalness of it.

Therefore, a non-naturalist approach to realism seems to be *negative* in nature: non-naturalists are committed to the 'different subject thesis'; yet, since they have no substantial argument for it, they have to argue against all other metaethical views (especially various forms of naturalism), which is the only way to make that thesis plausible for those who do not find it plausible at the beginning. In fact, as a sympathizer of non-naturalism, I was partly following this approach before: I used the 'normative ethics objection' to challenge reductive naturalism in the first chapter and defended Harman's explanatory challenge against scientific naturalism in the second. If my arguments work, then we are closer to the goal of non-naturalism as two major forms of naturalism have been, at least, undermined. Unfortunately, I cannot further pursue this line of

[60] See Korsgaard, 1996: 31.

thinking, that is, to do full justice to non-naturalism here. The major reason is not that this strategy is too ambitious and requires far more space;[61] rather, the reason is that it will *not* yield a satisfying response *to the location problem*: non-naturalism is not very informative on the non-naturalness of normativity. Even if non-naturalists achieve their goal and all other metaethical views are proved wrong, the metaphysically strange non-naturalness of normativity is still left unexplained, which means we have to accept the existence of this kind of entity as a brutal fact. That is to say, the conflict between the non-natural normativity and a broadly scientific world-picture is *bypassed*, rather than answered in the non-naturalist framework. Thus, the suspicion against the existence of normativity will not be easily dispelled by this negative strategy.

Perhaps to bite the bullet and just accept that normativity is non-natural brutally is the best we can do *if* non-naturalism really triumphs in the future. Nevertheless, at *this* moment, we still have other options. In fact, the 'different subject thesis' proposed by non-naturalists has paved the way for a more radical metaethical position, where a different solution to the location problem I mentioned above becomes available: instead of biting the bullet, one could argue that the location problem itself, with its threat to the non-naturalness of normativity are both *unreal*. This final realist position I am going to examine, which is continuous with non-naturalism to some extent but ultimately breaks its framework, is quietist realism (or simply quietism). In the next chapter, I will elaborate on this view, show how it solves the location problem, and defend it against some objections.

[61] Though it is in fact extremely ambitious! Besides all realist positions except for non-naturalism, non-naturalists need to dismiss all forms of anti-realism, constructivism, hybrid theories, etc..

Chapter 3. Scanlon's Quietism

In this chapter, I will focus on Scanlon's version of quietist realism. First, I explain how he establishes quietism, with an eye on its relation to non-naturalism; second, I discuss how his quietism is intended to solve the location problem; third, I elaborate on the major objection against quietism, namely, the 'asymmetry argument': how does it work, and why we should reject this argument. Finally, I raise two further difficulties for Scanlon's quietism, which seems to make his framework with its solution to the location problem inadequate.

3.1 Understanding quietist realism

To be sure, the following elucidation of the metaethical position I call quietism is not a definite theory that is shared by a certain group of philosophers. In fact, it seems metaethicists who are considered as 'quietists' never refer to this label themselves.[62] Nevertheless, I will stick to this label, and the reason will become obvious later. Perhaps the philosopher who expresses the strongest voice for quietism in metaethics nowadays is Scanlon in his *Being Realistic about Reasons* (2014), thus I will focus on his version here.

Let us start with a critic of Scanlon's quietism, McPherson, who summarizes this position well. Calling it quietist realism, McPherson claims that Scanlon's view is a combination of just these two theses. First, it endorses *realism*: there are normative entities, and normative statements answer to them. Second, Scanlon embraces the *quietist* thesis that the realist construal of normative statements will not evoke any *metaphysical* trouble, say, the location problem that the existence of normativity is questionable given a broadly naturalist conception of reality; instead, to cope with the issue whether there are normative entities, all we need to address is *first-order* or *substantive normative theorizing* (McPherson, 2010). At first glance, the two theses seem contradictory: How could the existence of some entity have nothing to do with

[62] I have mainly Scanlon (2014, 2017), Dworkin (1996), and (arguably) Parfit (2011) in mind.

metaphysics, and how will the first-order, substantive normative reasoning handle the ontological issue of normativity? To answer those questions, Scanlon's key notion is 'domain':

"I believe that the way of thinking about [metaethical issues] that makes most sense is a view that does not privilege science but takes as basic a range of domains, including mathematics, science, and moral and practical reasoning. It holds that statements within all of these domains are capable of truth and falsity, and that the truth values of statements about one domain, insofar as they do not conflict with statements of some other domain, are properly settled by the standards of the domain that they are about. Mathematical questions, including questions about the existence of numbers and sets are settled by mathematical reasoning, scientific questions, including questions about the existence of bosons, by scientific reasoning, normative questions by normative reasoning, and so on" (Scanlon, 2014: 19).

One may first think of a domain as a group consisting of certain objects with their specific properties, say, the domain of science consists of natural objects like atoms. However, "if we take arithmetic or set theory as primary examples of domains", Scanlon suggests that it is less misleading to understand a domain in terms of "the kind of claims it involves" and "concepts that it deals with", than thinking of a domain as "consisting of a realm of objects of a certain kind and their properties." (Ibid, 19) The reason is that statements, containing concepts from the same domain could be about, say, different kinds of objects. Arithmetic statements could be "pure" ones about numbers, while there are also numerical statements that are about the physical objects.[63] Therefore, it is better to appeal to "subject matter" in characterizing a domain: it is just "a way of referring to the fact that statements can make claims about different *subject*: some make claims about the natural world, some make claims about numbers…", and it is "a common-sense idea" (Ibid, 23). Later, Scanlon makes it explicit that "by a domain I meant simply a subject matter: the subject that certain

[63] Scanlon's passages seem to hint that claims like 'there are two apples' are still arithmetic ones. However, it can be a natural one as well, whose subject matter is physical objects. Perhaps it is better to say that in some cases the subject matter of a certain statement depends on its context, which is a topic that Scanlon does not say too much of.

statements are about" (Scanlon, 2017: 880). Normativity thus constitutes a specific domain, like that of mathematics and natural science, as it is about the rightness and wrongness of acts (where rightness is further interpreted as the reason to do something, see section 1.1). Obviously, Scanlon's thought here is reminiscent of the 'different subjects thesis' developed by non-naturalists I discussed above; yet we will see later that he goes in a very different direction.[64]

Now, equipped with the idea of domain, Scanlon is able to establish his version of quietism, which is reconstructed in the following three steps.

First, obviously, mathematicians cope with mathematical issues while scientists cope with scientific ones. Moreover, in settling those specific issues, they are appealing to criteria that are internal to the domain where that issue belongs, including the *existential* issue of whether certain entities exist. To use Scanlon's later example, "Is there a prime number between 17 and 23?" is an existential question concerning some kind of numbers. Given number is the subject of arithmetic, we must rely on arithmetical standard to determine whether there is such a number, and the answer is "yes, it is 19." (Scanlon, 2017: 877-878) Similarly, to settle whether there is boson, we must rely on scientific, physical criteria: the domain of science is concerned with natural objects that are, say, spatio-temporal and causally effective.[65]

Then comes the second step. Granted our actual practices in specific domains guarantee existential statements like 'there are entities of *such-and-such a kind'*, we are entitled to make the inference that 'there

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[64] See the end of section 3.2 for the difference between the 'different subjects thesis' understood by non-naturalists and the quietist understanding of it.

[65] See Scanlon, 2014: 25: "We make claims expressed by the existential quantifier in many domains, but what is required to justify any existential claim, and what follows from such a claim, varies, depending on the kind of thing that is claimed to exist. The claim that mountains exist is licensed by and licenses certain other claims about the physical world. The claim that there exists a number or set of a certain kind is licensed by and licenses certain other mathematical claims. And in each case that is all there is to it. Nothing more is claimed or required."

are such entities'. Again, our mathematical practices have settled that 'there is a *prime number,* 19, between 17 and 23', which is an existential statement about a specific number that has certain properties. The point is, if there is such a prime number, we can accordingly infer that 'there are numbers', since a prime number is a number.[66] In other words, we can draw the general conclusions of certain entities from more specific existential statements.

The last step is to apply what we have achieved to normative entities, such as reasons. If one wonders whether there is a reason to, say, push the blue button that will maximize happiness in Enoch's scenario, whether she should eat meat, whether she ought to do this rather than that…she needs to rely on normative ethics, the standard internal to the domain of normativity, to settle it.[67] Moreover, there are many cases where reasons for specific acts exist. Suppose someone, who is innocent, is drowning in the river and calling for help, no one denies that *there is* a reason for people nearby who are capable of swimming to rescue that innocent person (or to call for help, for people who are not good enough at swimming), and we settle the existential issue of the reason to help that drowning person by appealing to *normative* criteria, say, life matters. The point is, if those existential statements of specific reasons are granted, the existence of reason would seem undeniable, as a reason to do something is, after all, a reason. Perhaps it can be said that Scanlon's strategy is, like Enoch's (2018), to characterize his position as a 'default' one: philosophers who think 'though there are reasons for such-and-such actions, we still cannot say that reasons exist' need to offer further arguments to support their seemingly implausible view.

Thus, Scanlon claims there are, obviously, reasons. To recap: the existential issue of certain entities can only be settled by *internal* standards within the same domain where that entity belongs, and we have the positive answer to the existential issue of reason judged by the internal standards of normative ethics. In this way, this

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[66] Cf. Wedgwood, 2016.

[67] See Scanlon, 2017, 879: "…it remains the case that whether there is or is not a fact of the matter about the truth of a given judgment about moral right and wrong is a purely moral question."

version of realism is rightly labeled a quietist one: it is normative ethics, instead of metaphysics that is called for in determining the existence of normative entities such as reasons.

3.2 A quietist solution to the location problem

Before we move to various objections against quietism later, in this section, I shall discuss how Scanlon solves the location problem: this problem is deemed as unanswerable and misplaced. In the following passages, I attempt to reconstruct this quietist response to the location problem from Scanlon's text.

To start, Scanlon contrasts his quietist understanding of existence with the "general ontological commitment" in Quine's sense.[68] The latter is the view that there is a "general idea of existence that applies to everything we are committed to quantifying over in a range of particular domains" (Scanlon, 2014: 23-24). According to this view, when we consider whether something exists, the domain that entity belongs to is insignificant; thus Scanlon writes that such a standard of existence is beyond and independent of all particular domains. To avoid confusions, from now on I will use the term 'ontological/ontology' in a stipulated way, which refers to the *metaphysical, non-quietist* approach to the existential issue of something that commits to this "general idea of existence"; and the term 'existential/existence' will be used in a theoretically neutral way.

The location problem no doubt embraces this general idea of existence: again, "Metaphysics is about what there is and what it is like", and metaphysicians seek a "comprehensive account of some subject-matter—the mind, the semantic, or, most ambitiously, *everything*—in terms of *a limited number of more or less basic notions*" (Jackson, 1998: 4-5, my italics). Responding to Searle's (1996) suggestion that we should be "pluralists" who do *not* use a general standard of existence to determine how many kinds of things in the

[68] It is impossible to fully examine Quine's ontological view here; yet Scanlon's explanation of it is enough for our purpose. See the next sentence and below.

world there are, Jackson replies that it is "to abandon serious metaphysics in favour of drawing up big lists" and "we can do better" than that (Ibid, 4). In other words, metaphysicians like Jackson aim to determine the existential issue of anything, by relying on some general standard of existence, which consists of certain basic, "more fundamental" notions across all domains.[69]

However, the apparent problem of this line of thinking, as Scanlon points out, is that there is simply no such thing as a general standard of existence across all domains yet: no one has ever specified what such a standard is like. "…Unless more is said to specify [what kind of entity is in question], the idea of a kind of existence that is common to all elements of our universe of discourse is empty." (Scanlon, 2017: 878) That is to say, until we finally achieve such a general standard of existence are we entitled to question the existence of normativity based on that standard, *and* until it is shown that normativity fails to satisfy that general standard can we claim that there is indeed a location problem for normativity. Otherwise, the location problem will not get off the ground: given there is no general condition of existence across all domains, it makes little sense to doubt the existence of normativity relying on such an empty idea in the first instance.

Perhaps the proponents of the location problem (of normativity) are happy to point out that their general condition of existence is by no means empty; instead, that general standard is a broadly naturalist one. They may claim: "since normative entity seems very different from natural objects, its existence is questionable". Mackie, as we have seen, claims that moral entities seem metaphysically queer as they are not like natural entities at all; similarly, as Scanlon reminds us, the Quinean ontological principle has "exclusive emphasis on the physical world", and "His concern is exclusively with theories of the world that impinges on our sensory surfaces". Here Scanlon has two responses to this naturalist idea. The primary one is that such a view flies in the face of reality: we, in our real life, do not use the naturalist standard of existence as a general one that applies to anything regardless of its domain. In fact, we have various internal standards for

[69] Cf. Khlentzos, 2021: "[Metaphysicians] think there is a unitary sense of 'object', 'property' etc., for which the question 'what objects and properties does the world contain?' makes sense".

different entities in different domains: say, the mathematical standard that applies to the existence of certain numbers, the geological standard that applies to the existence of stratum, the aesthetic standard that applies to the existence of certain aesthetic properties ("Is there a property of being beautiful in this erotic painting?", say), etc..

However, a robust naturalist may not be impressed, as she will not care what our everyday life is: in fact, her aim is precisely to discover the truth of normativity that is not available from the perspective of common sense. Thus, she will continue to wield naturalism, understood as the standard of existence for everything (that is, an ontological standard), to question the existence of normative entities, given the latter seem non-natural. Then comes Scanlon's second response.

Scanlon goes further in suggesting that the move turning an initially *particular* standard of existence that applies to specific objects into a *general*, ontological standard of existence that applies to everything seems implausible: this move does not change the fact that such a so-called 'general standard' is actually "parasitic on the particular domains that contribute to it" (Scanlon, 2014: 24). In other words, Scanlon does not dismiss the idea of a general standard of existence itself: what is problematic is that those who turn the initially particular standard of existence (a standard of existence contributed by a particular domain) into a general, domain-independent one seem to lack *domain-independent reasons* to support that move.

Naturalism is no exception. The standard of existence that applies to natural objects is initially a particular one (as it is contributed to by, say, the explanatorily successful natural science[70]), while *naturalism* is an *ontological* view that *whatever* exists must be natural. Again, the problem appears when one tries to take the previous particular (natural) standard of existence that applies to natural objects as an ontological (naturalist)

[70] Here I simplify the issue that different natural objects seem to have different existential standards as well: say, the standard of existence for stratum is a geological one, which is not relevant to standards of existence for, say, psychological entities like depression.

one that applies to everything *without* offering domain-independent reasons. This is precisely what happens to many metaethicists on whom the location problem has a grip: due to the success of natural science, they find a naturalist ontology irresistible; however, natural science is a particular domain, which means that their reason to endorse the naturalist ontology is an internal, domain-dependent one (say, how successful natural science is). The problem is, such an internal, domain-*dependent* reason is not strong enough to support the claim that 'we should take the natural standard of existence as a general, domain-*independent* standard of existence, namely, naturalism that applies to everything, including normativity'.

Hence, *before* we achieve a domain-independent reason to support a general standard of existence, any so-called 'general' standard of existence should be suspended, including naturalism.

With the general standard of existence suspended, we have good reasons to doubt whether the location problem, which is based on such an idea, is a genuine problem. To recap, if one claims that the existence of normativity is suspicious due to some general standard of existence, quietists will point out that we have no general standard yet, which means the suspicion is groundless; if, based on the success of natural science, someone continues to give a naturalist construal to the general idea of existence and uses it to question the existence of normative entities, quietists will first respond that such a naturalist ontology flies in the face of reality where standards of existence are plural, and then show that unless she offers some domain-independent reasons (that is, her reason cannot be merely that natural science is successful, as that is a domain-*dependent* one) to make her naturalist ontology plausible, hers should be suspended.[71]

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[71] It seems the only way to show that naturalism constitutes a genuine general standard of existence is to successfully naturalize everything that seems non-natural before (and/or successfully eliminate some of them). However, the quietist point is that since naturalists have not done so, to doubt the existence of normativity in the name of naturalism, conceived as a general standard of existence, in advance is problematic, given the latter is not an ontological standard yet. Of course, naturalists may doubt the existence of normativity based on the success of natural science, then, again, we return to Scanlon's response that natural science is no more than a particular domain.

In this way, the location problem itself is shown problematic: the philosophical suspicion against the existence of normativity in the name of metaphysics (viz. the general idea of existence) is not well-grounded: it is either based on an empty idea or a particular domain, namely, natural science, instead of a standard of existence that is truly general; again, we have no domain-independent reasons for naturalism.[72] Thus, at this stage, we should reject this problem rather than answering it.

Admittedly, this Scanlonian line of thinking I reconstructed above has its weakness, and I will return to it in the last section. Here, I shall end this section with the relation between quietism and non-naturalism. Roughly speaking, the former can be seen as a radical version of the latter: for both quietists and non-naturalists, it is wrong to characterize normative entities as natural ones. However, what distinguishes quietists from non-naturalists is that the former reject metaphysics with the location problem altogether, while the latter embrace them both: quietists claim that normative entities look queer or brutal only because we have presupposed a general idea of existence (usually a naturalist one) which is ill-grounded, while non-naturalists claim that the strangeness of normativity bestows a metaphysical task on themselves to fit the existence of non-natural normativity with "our broader metaphysical commitments" (McPherson, 2010: 224). Again, in the eyes of quietists, such a metaphysical task is unreal, as naturalism has not become a genuine general standard of existence yet.

The crucial difference between these two metaethical positions can also be seen from their different applications of the intuition that the normative is just so different from the natural: though both quietists and non-naturalists believe that the normative and the natural have different subject matters, the former take this

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[72] To be sure, it means there can be metaethicists whose suspicion against the existence of normative entities is not based on a naturalist ontology: they simply think normativity should be natural without endorsing a naturalist ontology. Scanlon's arguments will not work against them, as their proposal does not rely on a general standard of existence. Yet, being sympathetic to Scanlon, I think at least they owe us an explanation for their seemingly strange line of thinking: if their proposal of naturalizing normativity is not triggered by a naturalist ontology, then it will become unclear how the non-naturalness of normative entities becomes a problem.

intuition as an indication that there is no external, metaphysical question about the existence of normative entities (as the existential issue of normative entities is settled internally by normative ethics), while the latter use this intuition to support the *metaphysical* claim that the non-natural normativity is a part of our reality, alongside various natural entities. Hence, we may say that quietism is a *non-metaphysical* form of non-naturalist realism: we have normative reasons to do this or that, which means there are reasons (non-metaphysical realism), and those reasons are non-natural, in the sense that we solve the existential issues of reasons by appealing to normative ethics, rather than standards that are used for natural objects (non-metaphysical non-naturalism); that is all.[73] As to the metaphysical question whether the non-natural normativity is really a part of our *reality* or *world*, quietists will take this question itself as misleading: given there are plural standards of existence, our world is a "merely disjunctive" one, while that metaphysical question seems to presume a general standard of existence for us to determine whether *anything* in our world exists. Since there is no such general standard, quietists suggest that "it is better" to avoid any question of what "the world contains" (Scanlon, 2014: 24).[74]

Thus, to avoid confusion, I will keep the label 'non-naturalism' for the metaphysical approach to non-naturalist realism,[75] and 'quietism' for the 'internal' approach to realism that relies on normative ethics. We will immediately see that quietism is fiercely attacked due to its rejection of metaphysics.

3.3 Defending quietism against the asymmetry argument

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[73] For those who find such a view 'cheap', see 3.4 and the next chapter.

[74] Cf. Scanlon, 2017: 878-879. "…In order for there to be a reason to deny that certain entities, numbers or anything else exist, the idea of existence in question has to have some content…I do not see that there is any other contentful idea of existence that being part of the universe of discourse would involve."

[75] Recently, this position is often called 'robust realism' where 'robust' shows the commitment to the general idea of existence.

Granted that quietism 'solves' the location problem that haunts many metaethicists, realists have a good reason to adopt this position: also, quietism avoids all difficulties we have encountered in all other metaphysical approaches to realism. Yet the cost of abandoning metaphysics might be too high. In this section, I will examine the chief objection against quietism, namely, the asymmetry argument. It is mainly presented by McPherson and Enoch, who seem sympathetic to the metaphysical ("meta-normative") approach towards the existential issue of normativity. The basic structure of this argument is clear: they claim that there is a desideratum for all forms of realism, including quietist realism, yet quietism, due to its rejection of metaphysics, fails to meet this desideratum, which means that it is an incoherent position and realists should embrace a metaphysical approach. This challenge is particularly devastating to quietism, as it is intended to be an *internal* critique: quietism fails not because it cannot satisfy some external criteria that are established by anti-quietists; instead, it fails to stand on its own.

Here I shall focus on McPherson's most comprehensive presentation of it, with an eye on the relevant discussions from Enoch and Eklund,[76] and my aim in this section is to defend quietism against this argument. The section will be divided into three parts: 1) I explain how the asymmetry argument is intended to work; 2) I discuss Scanlon's complaint against this argument and explain why it is not enough; 3) I present my objection that the metaphysical solution, recommended by the proponents of this argument, is no better than the quietist one in the light of this argument itself.

3.3.1 Understanding the asymmetry argument

To start, let us call the totality of *correct* reason norms on our actions the 'reasons standard'. Under such a standard or standard system, to use McPherson's example, it is wrong to poke Artemis in circumstances

[76] For Enoch's version of this argument, see Enoch 2011, chapter 5. For Eklund's discussion, see Eklund 2017, chapter 8.

where there are decisive reasons not to do so.[77] Now, consider an *opposite* system of norms called the 'schmeasons standard'. Under the *schmeason* standard, however, it is *right* to poke someone unless there are decisive schmeasons not to do so (and it is also right to break the traffic rules, it is right to break one's promise, it is wrong to help one's neighbours, etc.). Hence, the schmeasons standard is a totality of 'counter-reasons', to use Enoch's term. Furthermore, in contrast with our rules of chess, McPherson supposes that there would be some "schmess" which has opposite rules to chess as well.

McPherson claims that all four normative systems are *formally* normative. "Chess is formally normative simply in virtue of its being possible to play an incorrect chess move", so is schmess. The reasons standard is also formally normative, as "it is possible to act contrary to [one's] reasons…one would violate the reasons standard by poking Artemis…" (McPherson 2010: 232), and such an act is in accordance with the schmeasons standard. Nevertheless, McPherson claims that our reasons standard is in some sense *distinctive*, while all the normativity of schmeasons standard, chess and schmess are not: "Almost all of us take reasons to be normative in a way that contrasts with other formally normative systems such as the rules of chess or the schmeasons standard": the distinctiveness of the reasons standard constitutes an asymmetry between reasons standard and other formally normative systems. The task at hand is thus to "explain this distinctive authority that we presume the reasons standard to have [in our deliberation]" (Ibid, 224). In other words, "realists need to explain why reasons are *robustly* normative, while schmeasons are merely formally normative" (Ibid, 233). For convenience, from now on I will use the terms 'robustness' and 'authority' interchangeably.

McPherson does not further explain what the distinctive authority of the reasons standard amounts to; instead, he continues to charge quietism of meeting a dilemma: it can neither dismiss it, nor explain it.[78]

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[77] For brevity, I will just say "it is wrong to poke others" from now on when this example is mentioned.

[78] To remind, quietism is a form of realism as it conceives normative judgements as beliefs and commits to the existence of normative entities.

Why cannot quietism downplay the authority of the reasons standard? According to McPherson, quietists need this notion to reject the *reductive* proposal of naturalizing normative entities like reasons into desires. For example, McPherson points out that Scanlon himself claims reasons cannot be reduced to "second-order desires", as a desire is "too arbitrary a feature to form the explanatory ground for the normative authority of a consideration". Quietism "thus appears committed to the possibility of explaining the difference between robust and merely formal normativity" (Ibid, 233-234). In this way, to secure the robustness of reasons standard becomes an inescapable task for quietism.

However, McPherson believes that quietism cannot explain the authority or robustness of the reasons standard without itself collapsing. He helpfully characterizes the quietist strategy as one that appeals to "a normative-level explanation of robust normativity": "It begins by noting that one makes a *mistake* relative to the reasons standard in [poking] Artemis". However, this is not enough to "explain the asymmetry in robust normativity between reasons and schmeasons", because "the same pattern applies to chess and schmess". Suppose that a chess player meets a schmess player. Our chess player can explain the difference between two games easily by appealing to the rules of chess, that is, by relying on an *internal* explanation: "in chess, you cannot move a Knight diagonally", say. However, a schmess player could say that she could move a Knight diagonally according to the rule of schmess. Thus, if a quietist explains the difference between reasons and schmeasons *in a similar way*, that is, by "noting that one makes a mistake relative to the reasons standard", she will meet the similar trouble. A schmeason follower would claim that poking Artemis is only wrong by the reasons standard, while he has a schmeason or counter-reason to poke Artemis. Thus, the quietist strategy, appealing to the "substantive normative deliberation" alone, just cancels the asymmetry between the *robust* reasons standard and the *formal* schmeasons standard: the difference between them now becomes the same kind as the one between chess and schmess, as a schmeason follower now could reject the reasons standard, in the very same way that a schmess player rejects the chess rule.

Furthermore, given "[quietists] cannot explain the robust normativity of reasons", "the attempt to appeal to correctness relative [internal] to the reasons standard at best presupposes that this standard is robustly normative, rather than shedding any light on its normativity" (Ibid, 235-236). The lesson McPherson draws from his argument is that realists need an *external*, metaphysical approach to explain why a normative system is distinctively, robustly normative. Nevertheless, once a realist makes this move, she will at the same time abandon *quietist* realism: the promise of quietism is precisely that a realist explanation of normativity would not involve metaphysics.

To recap, we have seen that quietists need to secure the authority/robustness of the reasons standard in order to block any attempt of reducing normative entities into natural ones (e.g. desires); given quietism fails to do justice to the robustness of the reasons standard as it cancels the asymmetry between the reasons standard and schmeasons standard, quietism is an incoherent position, and a metaphysical approach is called for (though, one may say, whether the metaphysical approach is the *only* viable option to re-establish the asymmetry is still unclear[79]). This is how the asymmetry argument works.

There is more toing-and-froing between McPherson and quietism, and I will fully elaborate on it later, where I raise my objection against this argument. However, before that, I want to make it explicit at this stage that there is something dubious about McPherson's whole line of thinking.

Readers may complain that the notion of 'robustness' or 'distinctive authority' which is said to be possessed by our reasons standard alone is quite unclear: What is that thing that makes our normative system, rather than the schmeasons standard authoritative in our deliberation at first place, according to McPherson? Unfortunately, nowhere is this notion further explained in his text, except for the mere statement that

[79] I am non-committal on whether the metaphysical, external approach is the only way out after the supposed failure of quietism, but I will later argue that this approach itself is no better than its quietist opponent, see below.

"Almost all of us take reasons to be normative in a way that contrasts with other formally normative systems such as the rules of chess or the schmeasons standard". This statement does not cast any light on our understanding of the notion of 'authority'.

The unclarity of 'authority' is, nevertheless, not insignificant for the proponents of the asymmetry argument. As I have said, the strategy of this argument is to show that quietism is *incoherent*: quietism fails to "deliver on [the] promise" of explaining the authority of the reasons standard without evoking metaphysics. Thus, for this strategy to work, McPherson needs to show that the robustness/authority of our reasons standard is *actually* the desideratum of quietism, otherwise, quietists will not know in what sense their position is inadequate in relation to their *own* promise. The question is: is the authority of the reasons standard really the desideratum of quietism?

To be sure, quietists like Scanlon do refer to the term 'authority' in dismissing the naturalist proposal of reducing reasons to desires: it seems that the authority of reason is indeed a desideratum of quietists. However, the "authority of reason" Scanlon speaks of seems *not* to be the same thing as the robustness/authority of our reasons standard that McPherson speaks of. To fully discuss Scanlon's anti-reductionist argument in the name of authority will lead us far afield. Yet it is clear that the authority of our reasons standard, in *McPherson's case*, is used to establish the *asymmetry,* and that asymmetry is understood through the imagined schmeasons talk; while in the *passages from Scanlon that McPherson quotes*, the keyword of Scanlon's anti-reductionist argument is "arbitrary" ("Scanlon finds a desire's being second-order too arbitrary a feature to form the explanatory ground for the normative authority of a consideration", see Ibid, 234). In other words, it seems that the asymmetry McPherson raises has nothing to do with the case of Scanlon's rejection of the reductive proposal: for Scanlon, the authority is used to reject the reduction of reasons to (arbitrary) desires, rather than to establish the asymmetry between the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard. They seem to discuss two different notions under the term 'authority'.

Therefore, *prima facie*, we do not know whether McPherson successfully shows that the authority of reasons standard, *understood through the story of the imagined schmeasons standard*, is really the desideratum of quietists. Hence, he needs to *first* explain what is the standard of robustness/authority, and why it is only satisfied by our reasons, while schmeasons, chess and schmess all fail, given he is the one who uses the schmeason talk to undermine the quietist explanation of the robustness/authority of our reasons standard. If not, quietists will have a good reason to suspect that the so-called 'distinctive authority' of the reasons standard is *already* a notion that can only be explained by something external to the normative (or, 'metaphysical'), created *ad hoc* to reject quietism. In that case, quietism certainly fails to explain that metaphysical notion as quietism is anti-metaphysical. Nevertheless, the asymmetry argument, considered as an internal critique, will fail at the same time, because it turns out to be an *external* critique, and quietists can straightforwardly dismiss this objection by claiming that the metaphysical notion of robustness is by no means the desideratum of quietism from the beginning. If that notion of robustness is not the desideratum of quietism, then quietism will not be incoherent in the way McPherson believes it to be.

Since no further story is told about what the authority of reason is yet, I will follow McPherson's intuition and assume that the claim "the reasons standard, rather than the schmeasons standard is normatively authoritative" makes *some* sense, and I also assume that quietists must explain this authority. Now it is time to turn to the quietist responses to the asymmetry argument.

3.3.2 Scanlon's rejoinder

I shall start with rehearsing the quietist explanation of the authority of the reasons standard in greater detail, to pave the way for McPherson's further claims and Scanlon's rejoinder against the asymmetry argument.

As we have seen, a quietist explanation will rely on normative resources alone, just like the chess player will explain the rightness of moving the knight diagonally by appealing to the chess rules. Suppose that a

schmeason follower thinks that he has a schmeason to poke Artemis, while a reason follower thinks there is a reason not to do so. The reason follower could argue against her opponent by claiming that poking someone will *harm* others. If she is asked for explaining why not to harm the others is authoritative in her deliberation, she could, for example, appeal to some utilitarian theory: roughly speaking, our reasons standard is authoritative in this case, because harming others will never maximize happiness. In contrast, since the schmeasons standard takes the act of harming others as right, it thus fails to maximize happiness. In other words, our reasons standard weighs on our deliberation ("…the distinctive authority that we presume normative claims to have in our deliberation", see above) because utilitarianism tells us that we should maximize happiness, where not poking others counts as an instance. To be sure, utilitarianism is only one example, and there could certainly be other options available (e.g. deontology, virtue ethics, etc.)[80]; the point is, such an explanation of authority is an internal one within the domain of normativity, as utilitarianism is a first-order, normative theory.

McPherson dismisses the quietist explanation. He rightly points out that "the quietist strategy could be made to work in virtue of the fact that…practical norms are much richer in content…" and the 'richer content' can be the utilitarian theory of not harming the others in my example (or other normative resources). However, McPherson claims this strategy does not work "because any structural feature of the reasons standard could seemingly be detached and thus could be shared by structurally analogous but non-robust norms" (Ibid, 235). How so? We have seen that from the quietist perspective, the rightness of not poking the others *cannot* be detached from the reasons standard and *cannot* be shared by the schmeasons standard: on the contrary, it is poking the others that is right according to the schmeasons standard. That is to say, the schmeasons standard does not share anything with the reasons standard at all. Yet McPherson anticipates this line of thinking: he coins "disutilitarianism" to raise the objection again. If quietists think that the authority of the reasons

[80] Or there might even not be a theory behind one's reason (if that person commits to particularism, say). My point is, a particularist also has her normative resources (focusing on her current particular case) to support her reason to do something (not to poke others in this case).

standard could be established by its rightness, which is further supported by say, a utilitarian theory, then a schmeason follower could devise a 'disutilitarian theory' as the response: "one has schmeason to A just to the extent that A-ing will increase the net suffering in the world" (Ibid, 233). Then, the asymmetry between our reasons standard and the schmeasons standard disappears again: for schmeason followers, it is to poke others that counts as a right action as it maximizes the suffering. In other words, *structurally speaking,* the reasons standard (supported, say, by utilitarianism) is *parallel* to the schmeasons standard (supported by disutilitarianism): the structural feature of the former (rightness of an act) is in this sense shared by the latter, which is non-robust.

Another proponent of the asymmetry argument, Enoch, expresses a similar point: one is entitled to believe that there are such things as schmeasons or counter-reasons, just like "we are entitled to believe that there are such things as reasons". "They think that it is rather obvious that an action will cause the agent pain is counter-reason *for* performing it" (according to disutilitarianism, say). How will this imagined situation spoil quietism? Enoch continues to claim: "Of course, [counter-reasons] are not as *normatively* respectable as reasons are. And so those acting on them are to be criticized for not acting on the reasons that apply to them. But then again, reasons are not as *counter*-normatively respectable as counter-reasons are, and we may be counter-criticizable for failing to act on the counter-reasons that apply to us" (Enoch, 2011: 124-126). To repeat, suppose a quietist says to a schmeason follower: "You are wrong to think you have a reason to poke someone". The schmeason follower can argue back that what he has is not a reason, but a counter-reason/schmeason to perform this action. He may even claim that the quietist is entitled to say that he is wrong, but he is wrong only by the standard of reason, rather than that of schmeason or counter-reason, and he is perfectly right according to the latter. Then, the proponents of the asymmetry argument accordingly accuse quietism of leading to this awful situation, as our reasons standard is thought to be authoritative, and an asymmetry between the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard is thought to be there, which is nevertheless canceled by quietism.

In other words, it seems here we encounter a *special relativist* thesis in terms of 'schmeason': it is a *relativist* thesis, as the property of rightness is attributed to the act of poking the others under the schmeasons standard, while the same property is instantiated in an opposite act (not poking the others) under the reasons standard; this relativist thesis is *special*, as the so-called 'schmeasons standard', or better, 'disutilitarianism' will not be seen as an attractive normative theory at all (more on this below). Anyway, this kind of relativism seems to be a very troublesome position, and if quietism cannot thwart it, it amounts to canceling the authority of the reasons standard, which means we should prefer a metaphysical, rather than quietist approach to normative realism.[81]

Is that so? Let us focus on Scanlon's response to this argument: "these imagined conclusions about 'counter-reasons' conflict with our conclusions about reasons only insofar as they are interpreted as conclusions about reasons", therefore "the problem seems to me illusory" (2014: 29). At first, it seems what Scanlon says is merely that quietists will understand the two normative standards as two first-order normative systems, and the difference between them is regarded a first-order one within the domain of normativity. At that moment, the schmeasons or counter-reasons will be rejected by certain normative theories such as utilitarianism: 'schmeasons' are only fancy names to denote very wrong normative views.

The direct evidence for this reading is this passage: "If we currently believe that certain conclusions about reasons are correct, then we will believe that claims about "counter- reasons" that conflict with these are mistaken" (Ibid, 29). Unfortunately, if we understand Scanlon's view in this way, it seems he fails to dismiss the proponents of the asymmetry argument: for those anti-quietists, the point is that *a schmeason follower* can appeal to disutilitarianism to support schmeasons or counter-reasons and claims that it is right to poke

[81] To be exact, the asymmetry argument requires this kind of relativism to be a problematic position in order to undermine quietism, and I am non-committal on whether this special kind of relativism and relativism in general are problematic.

the others. This means normative ethics quietists rely on solely is incapable of establishing the authority of the reasons standard: there is no asymmetry between reasons and counter-reasons.

Moreover, this reading of Scanlon's view can be rejected in a different way if anti-quietists are allowed to slightly revise their line of thinking. Eklund best expresses this strategy: he first concedes that if schmeasons differ from reasons "only by failing to be in normative *competition* with them" (my italic), normative ethics may successfully secure the authority of the reasons standard (though, *contra* Eklund, I do not think so. See my reading of Scanlon's response above). However, his next step is that anti-quietists could propose a *stronger* form of that special relativism: different systems are *incommensurable* to each other, in the sense that the truth/justification of a normative claim, which is relative to a specific system, is *immune* to objections outside of that system. Call this stronger form relativism$_2$. Granted relativism$_2$, quietists can no longer appeal to normative ethics to reject disutilitarianism, as the schmeasons standard constitutes a different, self-contained domain that does not compete with normative ethics. At that moment, there is nothing quietists, relying on normative ethics alone, can do to preserve the authority of the reasons standard. (Eklund 2017:151).

Again, I believe that Scanlon's response, read in the way I constructed above, fails to dismiss the asymmetry argument (both its original form and Eklund's revised form). Nevertheless, there is a second way of understanding Scanlon's rejoinder: in that what he questions is whether that special kind of relativism constitutes a *real* threat to normative ethics (that quietists rely on to explain the authority), rather than an "illusory" one. It seems that when a genuine normative debate gets a grip on philosophers, the two normative views in play are always two *substantive* normative views in the sense that both are taken seriously by (often different groups of) philosophers: only when both views are somehow attractive can there be any genuine competition. For example, it may be said that the debate between carnivorism and vegetarianism is a substantive one, and it may be said we are currently in a relativist situation in this case, given neither side is

getting an upper hand.[82] The point is, both sides are regarded as serious normative positions that are supported by serious arguments developed by philosophers. However, the meat-eaters vs. vegetarians opposition is *not* like the opposition between reasons followers and schmeasons followers at all: no one will seriously argue for views like disutilitarianism, including the proponents of the asymmetry argument themselves. In fact, the schmeasons standard is something made up and imagined by the proponents of the asymmetry argument or anti-quietists: the disutilitarian view that it is right to maximize suffering is by no means philosophically interesting. That is to say, disutilitarianism does not, *strictly speaking*, count as a real or substantive normative view: it is created *ad hoc* whose only use is to spoil quietism, and no one will take it as a competitive alternative in discussing any normative issue. Therefore, the threat to quietism (to be precise, the quietist explanation of the authority of the reasons standard) brought by the special kind of relativism is "illusory" according to Scanlon, because that is not a real relativist thesis: counter-reasons can not even be wrong reasons. They are simply ridiculous and unreal, or even psychopathic.

Here Williams' example may help us better understand the situation. He once speaks of an 'amoralist':

"Is there anybody whose sufferings or distress would affect him [the amoralist]? If we say 'no' to this, it looks as though we have produced a psychopath. If he is a psychopath, the idea of arguing him into morality is surely idiotic". The schmeason-follower who believes disutilitarianism is, in this light, a psychopath. More importantly, "…the fact that it is idiotic has…no tendency to undermine the basis of morality…the amoralist seemed important because he seemed to provide an alternative; [his view], after all, seemed to have its attractions." (1972: 9-10)

[82] Maybe the relativist situation will disappear once one side is proved wrong in the future. Yet this is not the point of this example, see below.

Obviously, since the disutilitarian view is not attractive at all, it is unclear how he with his psychopathic view undermine normative ethics, which means that the schmeasons standard fails to challenge the quietist explanation of the authority of the reasons standard.

How do we see this line of thinking?[83] In fact, I think it is ultimately not strong enough to overcome the asymmetry argument. True, the schmeasons standard is indeed created ad hoc by anti-quietists, and any schmeason-view is totally unattractive as a normative position to the extent that it is even questionable for it to be called a 'normative' position. Yet that does not mean this imagined schmeasons standard is accordingly insignificant: anti-quietists can emphasize that our current normative ethics is *really* useless in dismissing the, say, disutilitarian view, regardless of whether this view is made up or not. In other words, if we are sympathetic to the anti-quietists, it seems we meet a dialectical stalemate between quietists and the proponents of the asymmetry argument: on one hand, quietists can state that the special kind of relativism involving the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard will not undermine the quietist explanation of the authority of the reasons standard, given the schmeasons standard is made up and unreal; on the other hand, anti-quietists can state that the special kind of relativism will undermine the quietist explanation, given the incapacity of normative ethics in dismissing the schmeasons standard is real, no matter how ridiculous the latter can be.

The good news for quietism is that Scanlon, according to my second reading, at least shows that the asymmetry argument does not really defeat quietism; instead, what we have here is a stalemate that we are not going anywhere until further steps are taken. However, I think further steps from the quietist side can be taken, and I am precisely going to do that: it will be shown that the whole line of thinking in the asymmetry argument is fundamentally wrong.

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[83] Perhaps this line of thinking is more of my revision of Scanlon's view than a different reading of it. Also, it can apply to Eklund's revision of the asymmetry argument, which I do not need to repeat.

3.3.3 The objection against the asymmetry argument

To start, my objection takes the following strategy: instead of directly refuting that quietism will be undermined by the schmeason talk, mine is a *counter-argument* that questions the solution offered by the proponents of the asymmetry argument. It seems McPherson and Enoch believe that the metaphysical approach, appealing to an external perspective (to the normative realm), will re-establish the authority of the reasons standard after the supposed failure of quietism which relies on the internal, normative resources alone. Nevertheless, I argue that this metaphysical move is no better than the quietist explanation in the light of the asymmetry argument itself: it backfires.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose there is finally a second-order, external standard that ascribes authority to our reasons system but *not* to the schmeasons system. This metaphysical standard, supported by some metaphysical argument behind it, endorses that reasons "exist in the world" while schmeasons do not (Enoch, 2011: 126), and this standard is a metaphysical one, in the sense that it is the one and only one standard of existence across all domains. That is to say, in this case, the asymmetry between the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard is explained in terms of "existence", and the existential issue of *anything* is now regarded as a metaphysical issue.[84]

Does this metaphysical solution work, that is, secure the authority of our reasons standard? Could there be a *parallel* argument against this metaphysical solution developed by people who are committed to the schmeasons? Siding with the schmeasons standard for the sake of argument, I attempt here to sketch such a challenge.

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[84] I have explained in section 3.1 and 3.2 that quietists squarely oppose the view that the existential issue of anything could be handled by second-order metaphysics. But I will grant this metaphysical move here as my goal is to challenge the metaphysical solution to the asymmetry problem.

To repeat, 'metaphysicians' or anti-quietists claim that the reasons standard now is asymmetrical with the schmeasons standard, as the former exists while the latter does not. Suppose that a schmeason follower now studies some metaphysics, and he criticizes the metaphysicians in an Enoch-like way: "Yes, I agree with you that reasons exist. However, reasons only exist according to your metaphysical standard of existence. You fail to realize that there could be a schm-metaphysical standard, according to which schmeasons exist, while reasons do not".

Metaphysicians may consider this response as ridiculous, since the metaphysical standard is intended to be general and applies to *any* entity (across all domains), thus the asymmetry will not be cancelled by the parallel argument provided by the schmeason follower. They can state that there is one and only one reality, and there is only one standard to determine whether *anything* exists or not. Granted the metaphysical argument for the existence of reasons, schmeasons are not part of this reality. Unfortunately, the claim of the schmeasons follower could be even more radicalized: he could happily accept the one and only one reality. But he continues that according to some schm-metaphysics, there is also a schm-reality or counter-reality, where schmeasons exist but reasons do not. "Of course, schmeasons are not as metaphysically respectable as reasons are. And to believe the existence of them in reality is to be criticized for defying the one and only one reality. But for me, reasons are not as schm-metaphysically respectable as schmeasons are, and to believe the existence of reasons in schm-reality is to be criticized for failing to respect the schm-reality", said the schmeason follower, in an Enoch-like tone again.

This radical response could be formulated in different terms: instead of the notion of schm-reality, the schmeason follower may put forward that of 'schm-existence'. He could concede to the idea that there is one and only one reality, and reasons exist as part of it. Yet, his point this time is that reasons do not schm-exist; it is schmeasons that schm-exist in this reality. Once again, he admits that schmeasons are not as metaphysically respectable as reasons are, and to believe the existence of them is to be criticized for violating the metaphysical standard of existence. But he claims that reasons are not as schm-existentially

respectable as schmeasons are, and metaphysicians are schm-criticizable for failing to see the possibility of schm-existing. Thus, there is just no asymmetry between the reasons standard and schmeasons standard: 1) In the first formulation, reasons exist in reality according to the metaphysical standard while schmeasons exist in schm-reality according to the standard of schm-metaphysics; 2) In the second formulation, reasons exist in reality but fail to schm-exist, while schmeasons schm-exist in reality though they do not exist.

Could metaphysicians escape the predicament? Their last route I consider is to claim that by the 'one and only one reality', they mean that the so-called schm-reality, whatever it means, is supposed to be a part of this reality, and we could develop some metaphysical arguments to deny the existence of such a schm-reality. Or, metaphysicians claim that for any existential issue, there are only two options: to exist or not, while the so-called 'schm-existence' is just a fancy name for 'non-existence'.

I suspect that this strategy will be problematic for two reasons. First, any metaphysical argument could be rejected by the schmeason follower in the name of 'schm-': whatever standard of existence the metaphysician proposes, the schmeason follower always has a chance to reply that schmeasons exist relative to the schm-standard rather than *that* metaphysical standard of existence, and reasons do not exist in the schm-reality. Or, the schmeason follower could accept that schmeasons do not exist, but his point is that the reasons do not schm-exist, either. In either way, metaphysicians fail to establish the asymmetry between the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard in terms of existence. For example, if the standard of existence that a metaphysician proposes is that "whatever exists must be natural", then the schm-reality could be a supernatural or spiritual realm. The metaphysician certainly could claim that any supernatural entity is untenable (given naturalism), yet the schmeason follower will happily respond that it is only untenable according to *that* metaphysician's naturalist standard of existence, while the supernatural schmeason is perfectly fine according to the schm-standard of existence, which is supernaturalist.[85]

[85] This kind of response could be easily applied to the second formulation I mentioned above, which I do not need to repeat. Also, by 'supernaturalism' I mean the existential view that there are otherworldly entities.

Now the metaphysician may say that the relativist thesis I constructed above in the metaphysical realm (e.g. naturalism vs. supernaturalism) is ridiculous or unreal: they may say that no one, including myself, will seriously argue for a schm-standard (or supernaturalism), thus the whole schm-standard is made up, created ad hoc, whose only use is to spoil the metaphysical attempt of establishing the asymmetry between the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard. Then comes my second reason that metaphysicians cannot escape the predicament: it is related to the quietist response to the asymmetry argument I presented above.

For the sake of argument, let us grant the metaphysical, non-relativist move that there is only one reality, and the conception of the so-called 'schm-reality' is just a fancy name for a wrong view of reality (say, supernaturalism), which could be proved wrong by metaphysicians (or 'schm-existence' is just a fancy name for non-existence, which could be dismissed by metaphysicians). Or, the whole 'schm-reality' talk is too ridiculous to be even a wrong metaphysical view: it is made up and thus unreal or imaginary. In other words, let us grant metaphysics is capable of rejecting a schm-metaphysical view (e.g. supernaturalism), because either the schm-metaphysical view can be proved wrong by metaphysical arguments, or a schm-metaphysical view is not a real, seriously-argued philosophical position. If this move is allowed, a quietist can immediately ask: "Then why bother with metaphysics at the beginning at all? I have already claimed that we can rely on normative ethics to establish the authority of the reasons standard, because either normative ethics is capable of proving, say, disutilitarianism wrong, or the schmeasons standard is not a real normative position, but a made up, unreal one.[86] In other words, either the so-called schmeasons standard is just a fancy name for a system of normative views that are normatively wrong, or it does not even consist of a group of real normative views that should be taken seriously. In both cases, the asymmetry between the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard is preserved. Now if you are entitled to appeal to metaphysics in

[86] Obviously, these two options correspond to the first and second readings of Scanlon's response I elaborated on above.

dismissing schm-metaphysics, or to state that schm-metaphysics is unreal, why can I not appeal to normative ethics in dismissing the schmeasons standard, or state that it is unreal?"

In other words, what the metaphysicians have done are: 1) establish the authority/robustness of the reasons standard by a *correct* metaphysical view (supported by some metaphysical argument) that denies the opposing metaphysical view, viz., schmeasons exist (in my example, the two competing metaphysical views are naturalism and supernaturalism); 2) state that the schm-metaphysical view is made up or unreal. The point is, this strategy is *structurally similar* to the quietist one of explaining the authority of the reasons standard: quietists also establish that authority in these two ways: 1) they propose a *correct* normative view (supported by utilitarianism in my example) that denies the opposing normative view (the so-called 'disutilitarianism' that we should maximize the suffering); 2) they state that the so-called 'disutilitarianism' is made up and thus it does not deserve to be treated seriously (which means it does not constitute a real threat to normative ethics). Hence, if the move of the metaphysicians is available, so is the quietists' one; if quietists are not allowed to use normative ethics in dismissing the schmeasons standard or point out that the latter is unreal, neither can metaphysicians.[87]

One interesting question is why metaphysicians seem to assume that metaphysics is capable of establishing the authority of the reasons standard while normative ethics is not. A possible reason, I consider, is that the notion of robustness/authority is implicitly conceived to be something that can only be explained by

[87] In fact, I can even, following Eklund (2017), propose a stronger relativism$_2$ on the metaphysical level, where supernaturalism is immune to any objection from naturalist metaphysicians. Hence, I do not need to care about their views at all and assert that metaphysics is useless in securing the asymmetry between the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard. I suppose anti-quietists (not necessarily McPherson and Enoch as the idea of relativism$_2$ is proposed by Eklund) will think my move is deeply problematic, yet my point is precisely that they are doing the very same thing on the normative level.

metaphysics.[88] Thus, only a correct metaphysical view could establish such robustness while a correct normative view cannot. If so, then quietism indeed cannot secure this metaphysical property. However, such metaphysical robustness is by no means the desideratum of quietism, which means the asymmetry argument fails accordingly: to repeat, one crucial element of this argument is that quietism should satisfy its *own* desideratum; thus, once the desideratum is shown irrelevant to quietism, quietism will not be incoherent in the way the proponents of this argument suppose it to be.

In a word, anti-quietists here are faced with a dilemma. On one hand, if anti-quietists think the authority of the reasons standard could *not* be established on the normative level (due to some form of relativism on the normative level), then the same thing can be said about the metaphysical explanation of the authority of the reasons standard on the metaphysical level: there can be some form of relativism on the metaphysical level which makes metaphysics fail to establish the authority between the reasons standard and the schmeasons standard. What appears on the first-order level will reappear on the second-order level in second-order terms. On the other hand, if anti-quietists think they have some way to dismiss the schmeason follower on the metaphysical level (say, by developing a correct metaphysical view or claiming that the schm-metaphysical view of schmeasons follower is unreal), then quietists will have a structurally similar way to dismiss the schmeason follower on the normative level as well (say, developing a correct normative view that dismisses disutilitarianism or claiming that disutilitarianism is unreal). Again, what appears on the second-order level will reappear on the first-order level in first-order terms.

Therefore, the plan of the metaphysical realists that supports a metaphysical approach in normative realism by undermining quietism backfires on itself, in the light of their own argument: it turns out that the

[88] To be sure, the proponents of the asymmetry argument do not explicitly say so. However, this is precisely an issue I raised at the beginning: the whole idea of authority or robustness is nowhere explained by anti-quietists. See the end of section 3.3.1.

metaphysical approach, held by anti-quietists is no better than the quietist one,[89] which means we should reject this argument.

3.4 Two further difficulties of quietism

I have explained why the asymmetry argument, the most serious objection against quietism does not hold. However, in this section, we will see that there are at least two more difficulties quietists face, which seem to make Scanlon's framework inadequate.

First, let us return to Scanlon's view on normativity. To repeat, Scanlon understands normativity in terms of reason, and reason is conceived as a relation of counting in favour. We take the relational statement "poke is a reason for anyone to refrain from poking Artemis" as true, while the statement "poke is a reason for anyone to poke Artemis" is understood as false (McPherson, 2011: 228-229); according to quietism, to determine which statement is true is a first-order issue that is internal to the normative domain: we can use substantive normative theory to settle it, which is shown above.[90] Nevertheless, after presenting Scanlon's view, McPherson immediately writes that "our metaphysics must seemingly contain relational structure that make [the first statement] true, and lack those that would make [the second statement] true". What Scanlon does is "only to clarify the locus of metaphysical questions about normativity, not to provide an easy answer to them". Thus, quietism "fails to address the central ontological question about reasons…The metaphysical issue about reasons…concern a class of relation facts…" (Ibid, 228-229) In a similar vein, Scanlon's view that the standard of correctness for normative claims is itself settled by normative ethics (say, we judge the act of poking others as wrong based on the standard of utilitarianism, which is itself open to further normative debates) is questioned: "might the same metaphysical concerns arise about standards of

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[89] Strictly speaking, if the quietist explanation of normative authority works, the metaphysical explanation would be redundant in preserving the authority of the reasons standard.

[90] For the sake of argument, the response that schmeasons standard is made up and unreal is set aside here.

correctness?" (Ibid, 230) Obviously, McPherson's question (say, 'is there a utilitarian standard of correctness in our *reality*?') calls for an external, metaphysical approach, which cannot be solved in Scanlon's quietist framework. Not surprisingly, as to the quietist strategy of explaining the robustness of normativity, McPherson repeats this style of objection: "whatever normative-level explanation one offers, further meta-normative interpretations of that explanation are still possible. This is an *intrinsic* problem for quietist realism" (Ibid, 235, my italic). In this way, it seems that quietism is doomed to fail *all* desiderata like "truth" "fact", "structure" or even "domain"[91], because even if quietists think they have given internal, first-order interpretations on these notions, metaphysicians can *always* show that there are *further* external investigations that can only be conducted in a metaphysical manner. This is how this problem of quietism is supposed to be an "intrinsic" one.

How will quietists respond to those complaints? Surely, a quietist, following Scanlon, will claim that metaphysical questions like 'is domain or the standard of correctness a part of our reality' are themselves assuming the general idea of existence, which means that they can be dismissed for the reasons I discussed above (see section 3.2). In a later reply, Scanlon just makes this point: "It seemed to me that the domains I have just listed—the natural world, arithmetic, and the normative—were better understood in terms of the subjects they are concerned with…The general principles and methods of argument that guide our thinking about these subjects are *substantive theses* about them…The existence claims made in each of these disjuncts is given *content* by the subject matter involved" (2017: 878-881, my italics). In other words, metaphysical questions about the notion of domain or the standard of correctness are misleading, as those questions, based on the general idea of existence, are "empty" (e.g. are there numbers?): only existential questions that have a specific subject are "contentful", which are answered internally (e.g. is there a prime number between 17 and 23? yes). However, if we are more sympathetic to metaphysics, then it seems that Scanlon's reply is not

[91] Cf. McPherson and Enoch, 2017, 823-824: "What sort of thing is a domain, then?…A collection of concepts? A collection of sentences? Of true sentences? A collection of truth-makers?…Scanlon nowhere explains".

satisfying: his story of the 'plurality of discourses',[92] which is used to reject the general idea of existence, is itself amenable to the metaphysical interrogation that is based on the general idea of existence. This is why metaphysicians believe they are entitled to raise metaphysical questions against Scanlon's key notions like 'domain' or 'standard of correctness'.[93] To put this point in different terms: the plurality of domains is the starting point of Scanlon's version of quietism, while this starting point is by no means innocent from the metaphysical perspective.[94]

Hence, it seems we, again, meet a *dialectical stalemate*: both sides have to beg the question in order to reject the opposing view. Scanlonian quietists, assuming the plural discourses in our life, claim that the general idea of existence is empty, while metaphysicians, who can straightforwardly deny the significance of our real life situation, assume the general idea of existence and accordingly raise external questions about the quietist approach.[95] Given this situation, the quietist solution to the location problem, relying on the plurality of discourses, is at best not perfect.

Now I shall turn to the second difficulty of quietism, which is anticipated by Scanlon himself: "One objection to the view I am recommending might be that it is too permissive…Can we take seriously an idea of existence that comes so cheaply?" (2014: 27) To remind, Jackson, who proposes the location problem, uses the metaphor of "shopping list" to dismiss the quietist/pluralist line of thinking, and believes that we can

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[92] I borrow this phrase from Eklund, 2017.

[93] In the later passages, Enoch and McPherson even interpret Scanlon's position as a 'hermeneutic fictionalism', which replaces 'truth' with the "pretense of truth" in understanding discourses and is thus "unattractive".

[94] This can be seen most clearly from the exchange of views between Scanlon and Enoch and McPherson. Trying to bypass the metaphysical/ontological investigations of domain, Scanlon writes that "the question about domains is not whether they exist but whether they provide a helpful way of discussing certain matters." (2014: 23) Later, Enoch and McPherson just respond: "But this reply is initially disorienting…we are told this [ontological question of domain] isn't the question. What could that mean?" (2017: 828)

[95] Interestingly, when Enoch raises his "too different" intuition against naturalists, he also admits that he meets a stalemate there. See the transition chapter before.

do better than just "drawing up big lists". Obviously, given the plurality of domains, there is little work for metaphysics to do for the existential issues; or, as Scanlon puts it, "questions of ontology, and metaphysics more generally, are always domain-specific." (2017: 884) Since the seemingly deep truths about the *existence* of normativity in the *reality* and the *nature* of it are established in such a cheap way, quietism seems problematic. Call this the "cheapness" objection.

Although this cheapness objection may not be as elaborate as the asymmetry argument, it arguably constitutes the most prevalent reason philosophers disdain quietism. Besides Jackson, Enoch writes: "[quietist views] are first and foremost expressions of impatience…If I am right, then, there are no metaphysically light ways of getting the…realist what he wants" (2011: 133). Similarly, Virvidakis and Kindi say that quietism is "quite controversial" as it "is often thought to imply intellectual idleness or laziness…" (2018).[96] Thus, we seem to return to Scanlon's worry about his own position: Could the realist view of normativity be gained this easily? If what quietists have done is merely to point out the "locus of metaphysical questions about normativity" (McPherson, 2011: 229) without even attempting to answer them, their position undoubtedly seems cheap and lazy in the eyes of metaphysicians.

I think those two difficulties of quietism raised by metaphysicians are real, but I also believe there can be a better response to them from the side of quietism. However, it requires a different approach towards quietism this time. In the next chapter, I am going to discuss Cavell's understanding of *skepticism* towards the external world and other minds. This sounds like a deviation from the existential issue of normativity; but it will become clear later that this Cavellian line of thinking will strengthen quietism by providing it with a new source of argumentative leverage. After re-interpreting the existential issue of normativity in the light of Cavell, quietists will be able to handle the two difficulties I mentioned above: quietism is by no means a

[96] Cf. Leiter, 2004: 19 for an outright disdain for quietism: "The quietistic influence of Wittgenstein and Heidegger has been pervasive only among those with little knowledge of philosophy; among philosophers, as noted, quietism has been a decidedly minority posture. The non-quietistic philosophers-the naturalists and otherwise-take up precisely the kinds of questions that have occupied the major historical figures…"

cheap position, and there is no intrinsic problem with it; more importantly, we will better understand what it really means to question the existence of normative entities.

Chapter 4. A Cavellian approach to quietism

I have examined four realist responses to the location problem, namely, reductive naturalism, non-reductive naturalism, non-naturalism and finally quietism. In the previous chapter, I discussed Scanlon's version of quietism and how he used it to dissolve the location problem. Although I argued that the most serious objection against quietism, namely, the asymmetry argument did not work, there were two more difficulties posed by those who favoured a metaphysical approach to normative realism: the 'intrinsic problem' objection and the 'cheapness' objection. They seemed to make Scanlon's framework, together with its 'solution' to the location problem, inadequate, and we were stuck in a dialectical difficulty between quietists and metaphysicians.[97]

In this chapter, I appeal to Cavell's thoughts on skepticism in order to break the deadlock between those two kinds of realists. This chapter will proceed as follows: the first section focuses on some key Cavellian ideas he develops in his discussion of *external world* skepticism and *other minds* skepticism. Next, I will show how those ideas can give an account of why the debate between quietism and metaphysical realism stagnates. Then, I offer a case study of Enoch's argument for metaphysical realism: I first argue that it cannot achieve its goal and then generalize this difficulty into an objection against a wide range of metaphysical approaches to normative realism. Finally, I will clarify the existential issue of normativity, and it will be shown that the two difficulties posed by metaphysicians to quietism I mentioned above are not threatening after all.

4.1 Cavell on skepticism

[97] For convenience, by 'metaphysicians' or 'metaphysical realists' when I discuss the metaethical issue of the existence of normativity, I mean those who adopt a metaphysical approach to normative realism, in contrast with quietists who believe a realist construal of normative entities will not evoke any metaphysical trouble.

Before I go on, it would be helpful to summarize the situation we are in currently. In the previous chapter, I examined Scanlon's quietist response to the location problem: this problem presupposes the Quinean ontological principle, and there are two ways to understand it. In the first one, the idea is that there can be a *general* standard of existence: it applies to anything regardless of the domain it belongs to. In other words, for those who adopt the Quinean ontological principle, the sense of terms like 'object', 'property' is unitary, where the question 'what objects and properties does the world contain?' makes sense. The second understanding takes the *further* step that the general standard of existence should be understood in naturalist terms, where the existence of physical objects in space and time is considered as the paradigm.[98] Granted the Quinean principle (in either form), the location problem of normativity arises. We need to conduct a metaphysical investigation to determine whether normative entities exist: to see whether they fit the general standard of existence (the first form), or to check whether they violate a naturalist ontology (the second form). Nevertheless, Scanlon claims there are multiple problems with this line of thinking. For the first form of the Quinean principle, the idea that there is a general standard of existence is empty: 1) no one has ever specified what such a standard looks like; 2) in actual life, we deal with existential issues by appealing to various standards of existence rather than the metaphysical standard of existence, depending on what domain the thing in question belongs to. For the second form, the domain-independent reason for a naturalist general standard of existence is absent, which means the naturalist suspicion against the existence of normative entities is ill-grounded. Since the location problem is based on this Quinean principle, it should be taken as misleading and dismissed rather than answered.

However, in the last section, I introduce two difficulties quietism faces: 1) Whatever a quietist explanation of normativity is, one can always raise further metaphysical investigation of it (e.g. when a quietist claims that 'the reason to do such and such exists because such an act maximizes happiness', a metaphysician can further ask that 'does our universe contain the entity called 'reason'?). This is the 'intrinsic problem' of quietism. If this objection holds, the quietist response to the location problem will be flawed, as its starting

[98] "…[Quine's] exclusive emphasis on the physical world". See Scanlon, 2014: 18.

point, the plurality of discourses or domains, like the notion of reason, is amenable to metaphysical interrogation as well. Moreover, since we have seen that quietists accuse the idea of the general standard of existence of being empty, we meet a deadlock: both metaphysicians and quietists beg the question against each other. 2) Quietism is cheap and intellectually irresponsible as it grants a realist construal of normativity without bothering with metaphysics.

To make any progress in this debate and, standing with quietism, to overcome these two difficulties, I will appeal to Cavell's thoughts on skepticism, which is the focus of this section. Cavell deals with two different skeptical theses, namely, the skepticism of the external world and the skepticism of other minds, and both will be shown relevant to the quietism vs. metaphysics debate (or so I argue); I will therefore discuss them in turn in this section. Two remarks: 1) At first glance, it may look like I am deviating from the metaethical concern with the 'location' of normativity, yet the way Cavell's thoughts enter metaethics will become immediately clear in the later sections. It means that this section, focusing on Cavell's thoughts alone, is more or less a self-contained one. 2) Cavell's line of thinking is both innovative and very complicated, and certainly constitutes a subject in its own right. Therefore the following discussion is highly simplified and selective.

4.1.1 External world skepticism

Descartes is widely believed to be the philosopher who brings external world skepticism to the center stage of philosophy: for similar-minded skeptics, they believe that they are not entitled to believe the existence of *any* material object (thus the external world), while their opponents, namely, the epistemologists or the metaphysicians, attempt to refute that negative view and secure our knowledge of the existence of material objects.[99] Before I examine how the debate between skeptics and epistemologists proceeds, the more

[99] Since the belief in the existence of something, if true, has the metaphysical implication that that thing exists, I will not distinguish epistemologists and metaphysicians in this case.

important question now is how such a grand doubt of the whole material world takes off in the first place.[100] Consider a doubt against *a* material object. Suppose someone says that there is a goldfinch in the garden at 11:00 a.m.. If he is asked how he knows *that*, he may respond he sees it through his naked eyes, perhaps also saying that the light condition of the environment is normal and he does not have any health problem with his eyes. In this mundane scenario, it seems that even if we can have some doubts about the existence of that *particular* object, namely, the goldfinch in one's garden at 11:00 a.m., the grand doubt against *all* material objects, that is, the external world, will not immediately rise (see below for a brief discussion on how skeptics raise that hyperbolic doubt). Thus, there is no work for epistemologists to do in this case, either, if their aim is to secure the knowledge of the external world as a whole. Of course, it might be the case that the 'goldfinch' is actually a very vivid machine that can probably explode, thus his statement 'there is a goldfinch in the garden at 11:00 a.m.' can be wrong; but what this possibility shows is merely that one's knowledge of something is not infallible, rather than that all our knowledge of all material objects suddenly becomes doubtful.[101]

In fact, appealing to those mundane scenarios is the way certain philosophers dismiss external world skepticism and the epistemological attempt of denying such skepticism *altogether* (most notably, Austin, 1961): since whether one believes something exists (or something is real) depends on the considerations of specific conditions in a particular case (e.g. the light condition of one's garden at 11:00 a.m., his health condition, etc.), the skepticism about the *whole world* will not immediately take off, which means that the

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[100] To notice, we may say that skeptics, in some sense, are metaphysicians or epistemologists themselves as well: they are engaged in the same enterprise (the existence of material objects). However, for convenience, I will still use the label of 'skeptics', which is distinguished from the 'epistemologists/metaphysicians'.

[101] See Austin, 1961: 56 "Being sure it's real is no more proof against miracles or outrages of nature than anything else is or, sub specie humanitatis, can be. If we have made sure it's a goldfinch, and a real goldfinch, and then in the future it does something outrageous (explodes, quotes Mrs. Woolf, or what not), we don't say we were wrong to say it was a goldfinch, we don't know what to say...When I have made sure it's a goldfinch (not stuffed, corroborated by the disinterested, etc.) ... in a very good sense I can't be proved wrong whatever happens."

epistemological task of securing the knowledge of the external world will not immediately appear, either. What we have is only a mundane doubt if you like.

However, according to Cavell, this, say, Austinian line of thinking cannot do its job of dismissing skepticism/epistemology, as it fails to address the concerns of both the skeptics and the epistemologists. Though the two groups are opposed to each other, they *agree* with each other in the crucial respect that their doubts do not concern any *specific* object in a concrete scenario *at the very beginning:* their doubt is not a mundane, but a hyperbolic one. As Cavell writes in *The Claim of Reason:*

"When those [specific] objects present themselves to the epistemologist, he is not taking one as opposed to another, interested in its features as peculiar to it and nothing else. He would rather, so to speak, have an unrecognizable *something* there if he could, an anything, a thatness. What comes to him is an island, a body surrounded by air, a tiny earth. What is at stake for him in the object is materiality as such, externality altogether." (Cavell, 1979: 53)

Since epistemologists and skeptics do not focus on any specific material object, the Austinian attempt to refute skepticism (and to make epistemology redundant) by appealing to plain, ordinary cases fails as it fails to *engage with* skeptics/epistemologists. To quote Cavell's words again: "they [the Austinian anti-skeptic and the Cartesian skeptic] are talking past one another." (Ibid, 146)

In characterizing the enterprise of skeptics/epistemologists, Cavell suggests that "for heuristic purposes", we can call the objects of traditional epistemologists/skeptics "generic objects", in contrast to the "specific objects", such as the goldfinch I mentioned above. To be sure, Cavell does *not* mean that "there are two kinds of objects in the world"; instead, the use of this distinction is to "summarize the spirit in which an object is under discussion, the kind of problem that has arisen about it, the problem in which it presents itself

as the focus of investigation" (Ibid, 52-53). Perhaps we may say that there are two ways of taking about objects, the generic and the specific.

This distinction is crucial to the issue of external world skepticism. According to Cavell, generic objects can be tables, tomatoes, wax, or anything (material) else: in fact, what matters here is that when skeptics speak of them, they are not *really* treated as tables, tomatoes, wax, etc. in their own right; instead, the 'tables', 'tomatoes', 'wax' in the skeptical text are deprived of any *distinguishing* feature that can be used to *identify* themselves correctly (thus the "generic"). The only important thing about a generic object in the narrative of skeptics is whether it exists (is real) or not, while its use, location, material, the time it is perceived, etc. do not play a role in the skeptical investigation. Cavell presents this point in the following way:

"…There is something common among all…objects [that traditional epistemologists are obsessed with]: they are ones specifically about which there just is no problem of recognition or identification or description; ones about which the only "problem", should it arise, would be not to say what they are but to say whether we can know that they exist, are real, are actually there."[102] (1979: 52)

Why the only significant issue about a generic object is its existence? The apparent reason is that once we consider that object in its own right, that is, once we consider it with its all distinguishing features (say, we are actually speaking of the wooden table one sees at her room in London at 11:00 a.m. 1/1/2021), then, to settle whether our knowledge-claim of *that table* stands, what is required is an investigation that involves the specific conditions and circumstances where we encounter that specific object, just like the example of goldfinch. Therefore, the knowledge-claims of skeptics/epistemologists must be about objects that are understood in generic, rather than specific terms (say, *a* table whose location, material, the time it is perceived, etc. do not matter, rather than *the* goldfinch which has the following specific features: it is in the

[102] Cf. Cavell, 1979: 201: "That the generic object taken as exemplary by the traditional epistemologist has no special markings is essential to his investigation."

garden of a particular person, it is seen at 11:00 a.m. today, etc.). Otherwise, to repeat, the doubt (skeptic's project) or the elimination of that doubt (epistemologist's project) will be about that specific object, which is not a part of the enterprise of skeptics/epistemologists at all.[103]

Given the concern of skeptics or epistemologists is the external world as a whole, or the materiality as such, no wonder why "such a thing as a goldfinch does not make an appearance in traditional epistemology" (Ibid, 53). Hence, the Austinian anti-skeptical appeal to specific objects with their circumstances will not constitute an objection against external world skepticism or epistemology.

Nevertheless, though Cavell complains about Austin's response to skepticism/epistemology, he does not discard it altogether; instead, he develops it into a stronger objection. To see this, I shall examine how skeptics develop their argument (according to Cavell), which includes three components.

1) You claim you know that is a, say, table.
2) But how do you know? (the response may be 'I see it')
3) The skeptic continues: no, you are not entitled to know that, as it could be something else (since you are not entitled to know *this* for some reason, you are not entitled to know anything, hence the external world skepticism).

Hammer helpfully terms these three components "the entry of a claim to knowledge about a generic object", "a request for basis" and "a ground for doubt" (Hammer, 2001: 49). According to Hammer, epistemologists, aiming to refute the skeptic, prefer focusing on the third component: they argue that there is, after all, no such a ground for doubt (say, if the skeptic claims I cannot know this because I may be consistently

[103] Of course, in a strict sense, any object, no matter how you think of it, is in some way specific. Even if skeptics are speaking of a 'generic' table, it is a table that has certain characteristics after all. This is why Cavell emphasizes that the 'specific' and 'generic' refer to two "spirits" "in which an object is in discussion": for a 'generic' object, the point is that it lacks all distinguishing features that we can use to identify it.

hallucinating, the epistemological response can be that I cannot be hallucinating all the time). However, for Cavell, the *first* component is the most important one: the 'table' in the first component must be a generic one that lacks any distinguishing features in the skeptical argument (that is, the only philosophically important question of that object is whether it is real), and we have seen the reason above: if it is about a specific object that has distinguishing features, one's doubt will immediately turn into a mundane one where questions about its distinguishing features become crucial in settling one's knowledge-claim of that object.

Yet Cavell's question is: are skeptics really sticking to their plan, that is, starting with generic objects?

Consider the first step of Descartes' skeptical argument in his second *Meditation*.[104] He starts with "things which people commonly think they understand most distinctly of all; that is, the bodies which we touch and see". However, he immediately writes that "I do *not* mean bodies in general — for general perceptions are apt to be somewhat more confused — but one *particular* body." Thus, "let us take, for example, this piece of wax". He then continues his discussion of that particular piece of wax that "has been taken from the honeycomb" (Descartes, 1984: 20, my italics). That is to say, perhaps surprisingly, Descartes does *not* start his enterprise with a generic object, but a specific one. Yet if that is the case, then there must be a "slip in the Cartesian skeptical argument", as Norris puts: "The ball of wax must at once be and not be a ball of wax, a specific object in a specific situation. It is only as such that the skeptic can speak of it; but it is only as something quite different from a ball of wax that the skeptic can say what he wants to say." Thus said, the skeptic is left in a dilemma: "he must speak of a particular thing (if not a ball of wax, then a hand, or a tree). But in order to make an absolutely general point about his knowledge of reality as such, the particular thing must be considered as being generic." (Norris, 2017: 73-74) On one hand, if the skeptic starts with a specific object and is consistent with his argument, his conclusion of the discussion of a specific object "would not have the generality it seems to have" (Cavell, 1979: 218): one can doubt whether what he perceives is really

[104] To be sure, Descartes uses skeptical considerations only as a method of doubt in order to reach epistemological and metaphysical conclusions later. Though I appeal to Descartes' skeptical considerations here and both Norris and me speak of a 'skeptic' who holds the view that we reject, I do not regard Descartes himself as a skeptic.

a piece of wax that just comes out of the honeycomb, yet his statement would be about that particular piece of wax alone in his particular case, rather than the materiality as such. On the other hand, if he treats the object he discusses through and through as a generic one, how his skeptical conclusion has any effect on knowledge-claims about *specific* objects that have distinguishing features becomes unclear, as the determination of those claims depends on the *identification* of that specific object (thus we need to examine the specific conditions or the particular circumstance of that object), while the generic object skeptics speak of must not involve the process of identification (otherwise it will be treated as a specific object). In the latter case, the result is that the skeptic's doubt becomes "idle": it is unclear how such a grand doubt of the materiality as such, which is based on the doubt of some generic object that lacks any distinguishing features, is related to one's knowledge-claims of *any* specific, identifiable material object.[105] Regardless of what the skeptic says, one still needs to examine the conditions of the particular circumstance he is in, in order to settle whether he is entitled to know that object: after all, the skeptical doubt is, strictly speaking, *not* about that very specific object from beginning to the end.[106]

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[105] Cf. Norris, 2017: 74 "The plain and the philosophical are at once conflated and distinguished—an awkward result, given the fact that the point of the whole enterprise is to achieve the transcendence of the philosophical so as to comment on the objective reality of the plain."

[106] What if a skeptic claims that his grand, hyperbolic doubt, based on, say, the demon's trick, is related to the reality of a specific object, such as the table in my room? If that is the case, then, granted his demon story, those questions immediately become philosophically important: Why does the demon trick me, instead of another person, such as you (the skeptic)? Why does the demon trick me at, say, 9:00 a.m. on July the 4th, 2020, not some other time? Why does the demon trick me into falsely believing the table, rather than something else? How long will that demon's magic last? What is the range of his magic (that is, if I go out of my room, will his magic cease)? How does that magic work in this case? Does he change my eyeball structure to the extent that I cannot distinguish a real table from a fake one? Does he merely change the surface of that 'table', or its material structure as well?…The point is, either those questions will not be addressed in a skeptical/epistemological investigation of the whole material world, or the doubt in this case is a specific one. In the latter case, the questions I list above are crucial in determining my knowledge-claim of that table.

To be sure, Cavell does not stop here: he further argues that neither the skeptics, nor the epistemologists are making any sense when they speak of generic objects; he writes that a meaningful claim about generic objects cannot be even entered.[107] I will nevertheless stop my discussion of Cavell's thoughts on external world skepticism here, as I already have all I need from those thoughts for my later development of quietism. Now I shall move to his discussion of *other minds* skepticism.

4.1.2 Other minds skepticism

Cavell starts his investigation of other minds skepticism with the "skeptical recital", where a skeptic encounters a problem (Cavell, 1979: 443): "Among the things we claim to know the existence of, some are human beings. I know, for example, that each of you is a human being and each of you knows — I devoutly hope — that I am a human being. But how do you know this?…" Suppose the skeptic faces another person; yet what she sees from her naked eyes is just "a humanish something of a certain height and age and gender and color and physiognomy, emitting vocables in a certain style…" In other words, given that all she knows is the *outer image* of that 'person', she claims that she is not entitled to say that she truly knows anything about the other's *mental life*; she does not even know whether there is such a thing as 'other mind'. Why might it not be the case that the other she encounters is an automaton, or a zombie, which behaves exactly like a human being but without a mind? "…for all I know some material object may be other than it seems to

[107] It seems such a claim indeed cannot be entered. As we have seen, even Descartes himself cannot avoid referring to a bit of wax in his skeptical argument; he makes it explicit that he would not start with materiality as such. Perhaps he cannot, as he cannot start with something that is purely, absolutely generic: otherwise we will not even know what it is. In other words, though one can treat a bit of wax or a table on the generic level, they still have certain distinguishing features (a bit of wax comes from bees, and a table is in a particular place, is made of some material, etc.). Therefore, skeptics have to start with an object on some specific level, which means that the skeptical reasoning, concerning materiality as such, is a non-starter: once skeptics start with specific objects, their doubt will be a mundane one. However, I will not develop this stronger point as it is less helpful for my later application of Cavell's thoughts to quietism.

be…" (Ibid, 422) It seems that no one really possesses the knowledge that she is surrounded by human beings!

A similar but less dramatic skeptical story narrows its target from other minds as a whole to specific mental episodes of others: the typical example is pain. The other the skeptic meets could display a variety of pain-behaviours (shouting, wincing, putting hands on some part of the body, etc.) without the actual presence of pain: he just feigns pain. This gap between one's inner and outer can be the other way around: one could be in suffering without any behavioural expression and pretend everything is well. In those cases, the skeptic perceives one's behaviours perfectly well, without apparently having any access to other's real mental life. "The *sharp* distinction is between his outer behaviour and his inner experience, and no mere description of his behaviour as being 'in or from or with pain' will alter that" (Ibid, 88).[108]

Although Cavell will eventually develop a different approach to other minds skepticism, his very first move is to admit that this skeptic has a point. Elsewhere, Cavell characterizes the skeptical recital in the following way: "[The skeptic] begins with a full appreciation of the decisively significant facts that I may be suffering when no one else is, and that no one (else) may know (or care?); and that others may be suffering and I not know, which is equally appalling." (Cavell, 1969: 247) This is what Cavell calls the "human separateness" or "our separateness", a "standing threat" that is captured well by skeptics. Similarly, in his much later reflection on other minds skepticism, Cavell even claims that the truth in skepticism is so obvious: "[she] might, say, be feigning what you say she feels, or feeling something quite different…[this] is too *trivial almost to mention…*what is inside the other is not transparent to me. *This is no news.*" (Cavell, 2005: 149-150, my italics)

[108] Cf. Cavell, 1979: 46: "So we don't know [other minds] (on the basis of the senses (or behaviour) alone); then (how) do we know [other minds]?"

However, the next step the skeptic takes is deeply misleading in the eyes of Cavell. In order to avoid the problem of the knowledge of other minds, the skeptic attempts to "transcend" the condition of human separateness: since she thinks "knowing that the other is in pain amounts to more than seeing her in obvious discomfort", she must possess the evidence that other minds exist (Norris, 2017: 90). It is at this moment that the skeptic becomes a metaphysician: by conceiving the human condition of separateness as an "intellectual lack", she searches for metaphysical or epistemological proofs to settle the issue, to prove that she knows other minds.[109] Traditionally speaking, philosophical literature under the title of 'other minds skepticism' just takes this approach: once there are arguments that successfully bridge one's outer image and inner life, the problem of other minds skepticism will evaporate, in the sense that the existence of other minds is finally proved, and the threat of the human condition that our minds are separate is eliminated.[110] In comparison, if those arguments are shown problematic in the end, then the metaphysician has to accept the desperate, skeptical conclusion that she does not really know whether there are other minds.[111]

Perhaps the most famous argument is the argument from analogy, and Cavell spends some time explaining why it does not work. However, what makes Cavell's approach interesting is not his rejection of such anti-skeptical arguments; rather, his crucial claim is that to treat the issue of other minds as a

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[109] Again, since this knowledge has the metaphysical implication (that other mind exists), I will not distinguish the metaphysician from the epistemologist.

[110] Perhaps one may already sense some problem in this line of thinking: if those arguments really succeed, does it mean that human minds are not separate, after all? How could it be? This is one of Cavell's points when he discusses those anti-skeptical arguments. See Cavell, 1979: 331.

[111] As many interpreters of Cavell point out, the metaphysicians and the skeptics for Cavell are intellectual twins: the former just give the affirmative answer to the skeptical question that we know others' minds (or they exist) while the latter answer that question negatively. Perhaps this explains why Cavell does not "confine the term [skepticism] into those who wind up denying that we can ever know"; instead, he applies "it to any view which takes the existence of [other minds] to be a problem of knowledge". See Cavell, 1979: 46. Cf. Conant, 2004: 98 "...According to this unconventional idiom, the term skepticism...refers not just to one particular sort of philosophical position (i.e., that held by one or another sort of skeptic) but rather to the wider dialectical space within which philosophers occupying a range of apparently opposed philosophical positions…engage one another, while seeking a stable way to answer the skeptic's question…" (my italics)

metaphysical/epistemological one is already misleading: "In making the knowledge of others a metaphysical difficulty, philosophers deny how real the practical difficulty is of coming to know another person, and how little we can reveal of ourselves to another's gaze, or bear of it." (1979: 90)

What does he mean? For convenience, we may say that other minds skepticism, from Cavell's perspective, constitutes a *practical,* rather than an intellectual issue. To understand this difference, let us return to the initial scenario, where we meet someone who cries 'ouch!', putting his hand on the belly and wincing right before us. Are considerations like 'I must figure out whether he is really a human or a robot' or 'I must make sure I truly possess the knowledge of his pain' really what we have when we witness such an event? Unlikely. This point may be clearer if we think the other way around. In "Knowing and Acknowledging", Cavell highlights a distinction that is largely underplayed by skeptics: when someone displays pain-behaviours, and even says explicitly: "I am in pain!", he is *not* expressing his *epistemological certainty* of the existence of some mental episodes; rather, he is expressing *that mental episode itself,* namely, pain. That is to say, when he cries, winces, and shouts, he is not showing me that I am entitled to have the knowledge of his own pain in the way he is, or entitled to approve of a metaphysical claim about a certain entity called 'his pain'; rather, he is calling for my *response*, my *recognizing* him as being in a rather abnormal state. His suffering "makes a claim" on me. Cavell thus writes "It is not enough that I know (am certain) that you suffer—I must do or reveal something (whatever can be done)…I must acknowledge it" (Cavell, 1969: 263).[112]

To be sure, Cavell's view is not that we must always have sympathy towards the other, or even "we always ought to have it" (in some cases, we may restrain our sympathy towards someone for some educational purposes, such as to avoid coddling). Instead, Cavell's concept of "acknowledgement", to use his words, "is

[112] Cf. Cavell, 1979: 70: "…it is desperate to continue, "I'm justified in saying; I'm almost certain." My feeling is: There is nothing any longer to be almost certain about. I've gone the route of certainty. Certainty hasn't taken me far enough."

evidenced equally by its failure as by its success. It is not a description of a given response but a category in terms of which a given response is evaluated". That is to say, regardless of whether we are sympathetic or not, the point is the *structure* of acknowledgement, consisting of a variety of *responses* (acknowledgement, care, sympathy, ignorance, cursing, etc.). Those responses, rather than intellectual considerations, are what the other calls for when he expresses his mental episodes through outer behaviours, and the real difficulty (the "practical" one) of other minds skepticism consists of giving the right responses, rather than sound metaphysical arguments. In this way, the acknowledgement "goes beyond" knowledge of the other, "not in the order, or as a feat, of cognition, but in the *call upon me* to express the knowledge at its core, to *recognize* what I know, *to do something in the light of it…*" (Cavell, 1979: 428, my italics). Elsewhere, Cavell simply claims that acknowledge *is* the knowledge in regards to other minds (or the former is an interpretation of the latter in the case of other minds): when we do something in the light of someone's discomfort, it shows we *know* that he is in pain, not in the sense that we successfully transcend the human separateness and read his mind or possess the evidence that his pain exists, but in the sense that we acknowledge his pain.[113]

Thus, if the skeptic is in the grip of the metaphysical problem whether she is entitled to know another's pain, in front of someone displaying discomfort, or moreover, if she concedes the negative conclusion that she does not really know another's pain as there is no valid proof for the existence of other minds, it will "[preclude] responding to her pain…there is no place for a response that is sympathetic, or tactful, or clumsy, or miserably helpless." (Norris, 2017: 90)[114] In other words, she is deflecting the true difficulty, namely, the practical one of acknowledging the others, by conceiving what she encounters as a metaphysical difficulty. Perhaps the skeptic will not be moved by Cavell's thought, and claims that she can respond to the person in pain, does something in the light of his condition, while she still doubts whether he has a mind or not.

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[113] Cavell, 1979: 239: "acknowledgment is the mode in which knowledge of mind appears." Quoted from Norris, 2017: 91.

[114] Cf. Hammer, 2002: 65: "The skeptic, in other words, mistakes a failure of acknowledgement for a failure of knowledge".

Nevertheless, we may say that the skeptic, after all, ceases to be a skeptic and knows his pain, in the sense that she *acknowledges* its existence by doing something in the light of his condition.[115]

Now I shall move to Cavell's discussion of the nature of this practical difficulty.

In real life, it is unfortunate to see that people all too often fail to acknowledge other's mental life, and such a failure is "the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness" (Cavell, 1969: 264). After all, one could be suffering without too much (if there is any) behavioural expressions, because, as Cavell points out, such expressions could, in some circumstances, be risky and unacceptable, and we are thus easily ignorant, cold, indifferent to other's inner life.[116] The foremost moral Cavell takes from his approach to skepticism is therefore that we undertake the *ethical* burden of acknowledging other's mental life, of bettering the interactions between oneself and others, of recognizing other's suffering as suffering. We can see this ethical point clearer from the negative perspective. When someone expresses her mind (not necessarily suffering) to us, while we shut our eyes to her, regardless of whether that is out of some metaphysical/epistemological concerns (e.g. 'I do not know whether she is really in pain, why should I care?') or just some other practical concerns (e.g. "I am not in the mood to care about her"), then we are already failing her, we are already inhuman and immoral. Cavell's own radical example is the way a slaveowner sees his slaves. The latter are simply treated as livestock: no matter how they express their mental states, the slaveowner just acts as if he does not see anything. Thus Cavell writes in his later

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[115] An interesting response is that the skeptic may say she still does not know whether he has a mind though she acknowledges it; or, acknowledging the existence of his mind, she insists that a metaphysical argument is needed to make sure whether he really has a mind (an even more radical response from the skeptic can be that 'I am doing this to him not because I acknowledge the existence of his mind; I do so due to the possibility that he might be a human being'). It seems Cavell does not say too much to such a hard-core skeptic, and I shall set it aside, though a similar issue will occur when I later appeal to Cavell's thoughts in developing quietism. See below, section 4.2.3.

[116] Also, we can fail to express ourselves to the others, which is the other side of the practical difficulty constituted by skepticism. Here I simply Cavell's story by only focusing on our failure of recognizing others.

reflection on skepticism that the real scandal of skepticism is not a metaphysical one that it is hard to develop philosophical proofs to bridge the inner and the outer: rather, it is "I", who fail to recognize other's mental life, "am the scandal" (Cavell, 2005: 151).

Moreover, the ethical burden on us is *everlasting*, simply due to the trivial fact that everyone has a unique mind, and one's mental life is constantly changing. We may acknowledge this person's mental life, but fail another person; also, we may acknowledge this person's mental episode this time, which does not guarantee that we can automatically recognize her inner life again next time. Therefore, though the separateness of human minds is trivial in an intellectual sense, it is by no means trivial in an ethical sense: we have to shoulder the burden of acknowledging others endlessly, given the appalling danger that others could be in suffering while we fail to acknowledge them is always there. As Hammer says, such acknowledgement "depends on you and me, on our relationship, on whether or not we are capable of maintaining or, if necessary, re-establishing our mutuality." (Hammer, 2002: 65) The danger of failing this ethical task cannot be eliminated once and for all.

This is how I reconstruct Cavell's innovative approach to both two kinds of skepticism. One last remark: the common thing between these two lines of thinking is that he neither aims to refute skepticism, nor aims to approve of it; instead, he tries to show that both skeptics and epistemologists can lead us astray. In the case of external world skepticism, the skeptic/epistemologist is shown to be in a dilemma, while in the case of other minds skepticism, the skeptic/epistemologist misunderstands the nature of the difficulty she faces.[117]

4.2 Undercutting the metaphysical approach

[117] One may wonder whether Cavell's point is a strong one that there is simply no metaphysical question of the other minds, or the weak one that there is an ethical aspect of the problem of the other minds. Again, I will set aside this issue as it is not helpful to my later application of Cavell's thoughts to quietism.

With the discussion of Cavell at hand, I can return to the quietism vs. metaphysics debate in metaethics. This section will be structured in this way: First, I will explain that the whole debate between quietism and the metaphysical approach to realism, pertaining to the location problem, is structurally similar to the debate between Cavell and skeptics/epistemologists in the case of *external world* skepticism. Therefore, we can see that why Scanlon's approach to quietism is ultimately inadequate to dismiss the metaphysical approach to normative realism. Second, I will undercut the metaphysical approach to realism by appealing to Cavell's diagnosis of external world skepticism and argue that metaphysical realism cannot do justice to the initial concerns of the metaphysicians themselves.[118]

4.2.1 Preliminary

To start, I have to introduce the location problem once again. We have seen that the location problem is explicitly cast in the language of metaphysics: according to Jackson, a serious metaphysician on the existential issue of something will not be satisfied with "[drawing] up big lists" about what there is; instead, he "seeks comprehension in terms of a more or less limited number of ingredients, or anyway a smaller list than we started with". The location problem thus takes off: "Because the ingredients are limited, some putative features of the world are not going to appear explicitly in some more basic account" (1998: 4-5). Normativity thus presents one typical location problem: properties of rightness or wrongness, or reasons, or the relations of counting in favours, seem to conflict with a scientific worldview that is largely taken for granted nowadays. In this way, serious metaphysicians undertake the task of finding the location of normativity or just eliminating it from our ontology.

I have explained in section 3.2 that the formulation of the location problem itself has already smuggled in a variety of problematic assumptions, most notably the Quinean general standard of existence that applies to

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[118] As to how Cavell's discussion of other minds skepticism relates to metaethics, I will leave this issue to the next section.

anything. Yet, in the light of Cavell, now we can examine the location problem from a different perspective, namely, *skepticism*. Although the very term 'skepticism' does not appear in Jackson's text, it does not prevent us from conceiving the location problem as a kind of skepticism *towards the existence of normativity*. After all, let us glance at the texts of like-minded metaethicists where the location problem is posed: "Where normativity could be found [?]" (Parfit, 2006: 331), "What feature of the world would make [a normative statement] true?"(Smith, 2004: 190), and "…Why on earth would anyone in this post-Enlightenment, scientific day and age think that…there are moral properties [?]" (Fisher, 2011: 74). In a word, the existence of normative properties/facts/relations becomes suspicious, and philosophers have to respond to such a doubt.

Nevertheless, the location problem is considered as a skeptical problem in a much more important sense: when metaethicists question the existence of normative entities, the latter are usually considered on a *generic*, abstract level: those normative entities are deprived of any distinguishing features to the extent that we do not know *what* they are except that they are normative entities. What are in question are normative properties of rightness, normative facts and the relations of favors, but not the rightness of a specific act, not the normative facts of a specific act, not the relations of favouring a specific act. Even if metaethicists mention certain acts (e.g. it is right to obey traffic rules) in their discussion of normativity (usually at the beginning of their text and before they dive into the their investigation), those certain acts by no means play any role in their enterprise: the existential issue they concern is *not* about those specific normative entities (say, the reason to obey traffic rules), but about, if you like, the reason as such, the *normativity*.

Correspondingly, in response to this location problem, understood as a form of skepticism about the existence of generic normative entities, philosophers who are sympathetic to some form of normative realism, that is, who are *anti-skeptical* on normativity adopt various strategies to secure its existence. As Finlay says: "For realists, normativity is in the first place something metaphysical, and only derivatively a feature of

normative thought and discourse" (2010: 334).[119] Consider the realist positions I discussed before: except for quietist realists, all reductive naturalists, non-reductive naturalists and non-naturalists aim to include normativity as such into ontology: either, they argue that normative entities are natural, thus their existence is not suspicious, or our ontology should extend to certain non-natural entities, thus the non-natural normativity is acceptable. As to *what* those normative entities are, it seems those metaphysical realists do not say a word: there is no process of identifying these entities in their anti-skeptical enterprise, either (I by no means hint that they are not allowed to treat reasons on a generic level; my point is different, see below).

In the previous chapter, I examined Scanlon's quietism, which is considered as a special form of normative realism that distances itself from all reductive naturalism, non-reductive naturalism and non-naturalism. Based on the idea that we have plural discourses in our actual life, Scanlon shows that the existential issue of normative entities should be dealt with within the domain of normative ethics (in its broadest sense), in the way that the existential issue of natural entities like bosons is settled within physics. Following this line of thinking, Scanlon further argues that the whole location problem is relying on a Quinean general idea of existence, which is empty at best: thus, at least there is no *metaphysical* inquiry about the existential issue of normative entities.

Given my discussion of Cavell before, Scanlon's quietist response to the location problem now can be understood in this way: perhaps surprisingly, it is analogous to Austin's objection against external world skepticism/epistemology. We have seen that in Austin's case (in Cavell's reading), he is speaking of certain specific objects rather than generic ones, such as a goldfinch in the garden at 11:00 a.m.. His reasoning is like this: if one wants to settle whether there is a goldfinch (say, it is his first time to see such a bird whose appearance looks like that of a goldfinch he sees in an illustrated book), what matters is to examine certain specific conditions of that circumstance: whether the light condition is fine, whether his eyes are healthy, etc..

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[119] Cf. Enoch, 2011: 121-133. He emphasizes the metaphysical commitment in normative realism, in contrast with "metaphysically light" quietism.

The point is, the knowledge-claim about the goldfinch is settled by considering the specific conditions, thus Austin concludes that "There *could* be no *general* answer to the questions what is evidence for what, what is certain, what is doubtful, what needs or does not need evidence, can or can't be verified. If the Theory of Knowledge consists in finding grounds for such an answer, there is no such thing." (Austin, 1962: 124) Similarly, Scanlon speaks of specific entities: recall his physical example of the *boson* (rather than materiality as such), which is used to show that the existential issue of physical entities should be settled in the specific domain of physics (in this case, we need to examine the physical properties of boson). As to normativity, he writes in a similar manner: "Whether a certain fact is a reason, and what it is a reason for, depends on an agent's *circumstances*. The fact that this piece of metal is sharp is a reason for me not to press my hand against it…"[120] (Scanlon, 2014: 30, my italic) Therefore, no wonder Scanlon later reaches a conclusion analogous to Austin's, namely, if the goal of metaphysics is to settle the existential issue of normative entities, *regardless* of the domain and the circumstance that specific normative entity is in, then such an inquiry will be empty.

If this analogy holds, then, unfortunately, it becomes obvious why Scanlon's version of quietism does not satisfy his metaphysical opponents. In fact, the response from the metaphysical side (e.g. Enoch and McPherson, 2017) is also analogous to the one from the external world skeptics/epistemologists in Cavell's text. Although metaphysical (normative) realists do not explicitly mention that the object in Scanlon's framework is not what metaphysicians are concerned with; nevertheless, they make it explicit that *their* concern is *not* addressed in that quietist framework. As McPherson says, quietists like Scanlon may claim that the difference between 'there is a reason to poke someone' and 'there is no reason to poke someone' would be a first-order, normative one (see section 3.3. Notice that McPherson is speaking of a specific

[120] Consider Scanlon's full characterization of reasons, which is a "four-place relation": "R (p, x, c, a), holding between a fact p, an agent x, a set of conditions c, and an action or attitude a. This is the relation that holds just in case p is a reason for a person x in situation c to do or hold a." (Scanlon, 2014: 31) Thus, it may be said that, to use Cavell's word, the "spirit in which" Scanlon's normative entities are under discussion is on a specific, rather than generic level.

reason here). However, McPherson's point is that Scanlon misses the real issue: even if Scanlon's quietist, first-order explanation is granted (e.g. 'poking someone would cause her to suffer, thus there is a reason not to do so'), it does not settle the *ontological* question whether there are normative facts *as such* (not normative facts of poking the other). In other words, the quietist explanation "serves only to clarify the locus of metaphysical question about normativity…"; hence comes the 'intrinsic problem' objection: "*Whatever* normative-level explanation one offers, further [metaphysical] interpretations of that explanation are still possible. This is an *intrinsic* problem for quietist realism" (McPherson, 2010: 229, 235, my italics) In fact, we can perfectly imagine an epistemologist who responds to the Austinian philosopher in a similar manner: "yes, maybe you can say that you have some way to make sure whether there is a goldfinch in your garden at 11:00 a.m.. However, could it be the case that there is no such thing as a material object? Or, could it be the case that the whole world is an illusion? Whatever you say about that goldfinch, your style of investigating the specific conditions and circumstance of that specific object is helpless to dismiss such a hyperbolic skeptical worry about the whole material world. What is needed is epistemology."[121]

Therefore, it leads to the stalemate I mentioned in section 3.4: in this case, both the quietists and the metaphysicians think the other side simply begs the question. The former claim that the latter presuppose a general idea of existence that is groundless, while the latter argue back that it is the so-called domain-talk or discourse pluralism that is groundless and must be subject to a metaphysical inquiry. At this stage, we may agree with Cavell that they *talk past* each other, in the similar way that the Austinian philosopher and skeptic/epistemologist do: quietists speak of reasons in specific terms while metaphysicians are concerned with reasons on a generic level. This is why I think Scanlon's quietist framework is ultimately inadequate as a response to metaphysicians.

[121] Although, to repeat, it should be noted that the way skeptic reaches that grand doubt is arguably problematic.

Before I appeal to Cavell's thoughts on skepticism to assist quietism, I shall make it clear that at this moment we already have an answer to the so-called 'intrinsic problem' objection. The reason metaphysicians can always ask further question about the quietist explanation of normativity is *not* that quietism is too shallow to touch the deep, 'real' metaphysical issue of normative entities; instead, the reason is, to repeat, that metaphysicians and quietists talk past each other. Quietists only focus on the existential issue of specific reasons. Therefore, this 'objection' does not constitute a real threat to quietism and make the metaphysical approach a better option; instead, it only shows that the two sides are in a dialectical predicament.

4.2.2 The slip in Enoch's argument for metaphysical realism

Now it is time to break the deadlock between quietism and metaphysical realism with the help of Cavell. My argument consists of two parts. Here I will first provide a case study of Enoch's argument for (metaphysical) realism of normativity, not for the sake of examining whether it works or not; instead, I aim to show that there is a slip in his argument, just like the slip in Descartes's discussion of the wax. Later, I will explain how this slip in Enoch's argument can be generalized into one that undermines a wide range of metaphysical approaches to normative realism.

In *Taking Morality Seriously,* Enoch writes that he aims to defend "robust realism", a metaphysical or "meta-normative" position that "there are irreducibly normative truths and facts…that are perfectly objective, universal, absolute" (2011: 1). Also, those reasons are generic, rather than specific reasons to do such-and-such: it is not a part of his enterprise to determine whether there are reasons to, say, obey traffic rules; not to mention that Enoch explicitly rejects such a quietist approach that focuses on specific reasons.[122]

To be sure, the argument Enoch develops for this metaphysical realism is complex and even convoluted, yet I will only focus on its crucial step, which is plain: the existence of reasons constitutes the precondition for

[122] See the asymmetry argument in section 3.3 and the 'intrinsic problem' objection in 3.4.

our *deliberation*. To explain how it works, let us start with the scenario Enoch supposes. A person (for convenience, let us name her Jill) meets a crisis about her career.

"Law school turned out not to be all you thought it would be, and you no longer find the prospects of a career in law as exciting as you once did. For some reason you don't seem to be able to shake off that old romantic dream of studying philosophy. It seems now is the time to make a decision…You ask yourself such questions as: Will I be happy practicing law? Will I be happier doing philosophy? What are my chances of becoming a good lawyer? A good philosopher? How much money does a reasonably successful lawyer make, and how much less does a reasonably successful philosopher make? Am I, so to speak, more of a philosopher or more of a lawyer? As a lawyer, will I be able to make a significant political difference?…and so on. Even with answers to most—even all—of these questions, there remains the ultimate question. "All things considered", you ask yourself, "what makes best sense for me to do? When all is said and done, what should I do? What *shall* I do?"" (Enoch, 2011: 72)

Apparently, in order to have the right answer, Jill needs to seriously consider and deliberate on this issue. However, for Enoch, the most important lesson from his scenario is that to be able to engage in this or any deliberation, one must assume that normative entities, that is, reasons or normative facts exist: "When engaging in this deliberation, when asking yourself these questions, you assume, so it seems to me, that they have answers. These answers may be very vague, allow for some indeterminacy, and so on. But at the very least you assume that some possible answers to these questions are better than others. You try to find out what the (better) answers to these questions are, and how they interact so as to answer the arch-question, the one about what it makes most sense for you to do." (Ibid, 72) Moreover, when Jill is in "trying to make up [her] mind, it doesn't feel like just trying to make an arbitrary choice. This is just not what it is like to deliberate. Rather, it feels like trying to make the *right* choice. It feels like trying to find the best solution, or at least a good solution, or at the very least one of the better solutions, to a problem [she is] presented with." (Ibid, 72) In other words, deliberation is by definition non-arbitrary. If so, then Enoch naturally moves to his

key claim that in deliberating, one is "trying to discover, not create." "Thus, in deliberating, you commit yourself to there being (normative) reasons to your deliberation." (Ibid, 74)

To be sure, the line of thinking I presented above is only one part of his full argument, and even this bit of presentation is a simplified version of the original. This part of his argument has invited various objections, yet my aim is not to refute this line of thinking altogether; instead, what is interesting here is whether Enoch achieves his goal, that is, to use his Jill scenario to support the *metaphysical* thesis that normative entities, which are understood as "perfectly objective, universal, absolute" exist. Even if we grant his crucial move from the availability of deliberation to the existence of reason, it seems his argument misses its target. Given his core idea that Jill must assume the existence of reason in order to deliberate on her future career choice, the crucial question, nevertheless, is: what is the thing that *must be assumed by Jill* in order to make her deliberate exactly? It seems Jill only needs to commit the existence of *specific* reasons that can be identified, such as the 'reason that one occupation is better than the other'. Because Jill assumes or commits that there must be a better option between being a philosopher or a lawyer (or, she believes the existence of the (specific) normative fact that one option is better than the other), her consideration of her future career becomes a (non-arbitrary) deliberation: instead of choosing randomly, she starts to examine the advantages and disadvantages of each option, in order to settle whether there is a reason to be a philosopher (or a lawyer), which is characterized vividly by Enoch. The point is, her deliberation does not need to involve any consideration of the existence of *reasons as such* or generic reasons that are too abstract to be identified; in still other words, Jill's deliberation does not need to involve anything metaphysical.

Hence, it seems that Enoch's argument, instead of supporting his metaphysical thesis, shows that he is in a dilemma. If he relies on any specific scenario (e.g. the Jill one) to explain his point that reasons are required to make deliberation possible (notice that I do not challenge this idea), the reasons must be at the same time generic and specific: they have to be generic, because Enoch's aim is to prove that *reasons as such* exist (which constitutes an anti-skeptical response to the location problem), rather than the mundane claim that

some specific reasons exist; however, they do not need to be generic (in fact, they *cannot*, see below): Jill only needs to assume the existence of *specific* reasons to deliberate. To put the point in a different way: if the reasons Jill needs to commit are only specific ones, then Enoch cannot draw a metaphysical thesis of 'reasons as such' that are out of any specific context, from the specific context of Jill's scenario; that is, at best, Enoch proves that there is a specific reason, namely, there is a better choice between becoming a philosopher and a lawyer for Jill, given her deliberation requires the existence of such a specific reason.[123] If the reasons Enoch speaks of are generic ones, that is, reasons as such that we cannot identify what they are, then it is unclear how the assumption of reasons as such can make Jill's consideration of the *specific* reason of, say, becoming a philosopher non-arbitrary: even if Jill assumes reasons as such exist, or reason is a part of ontology, her consideration of her future career can still be arbitrary, because she, though being a metaphysical realist now for the sake of argument, does not believe the existence of the *specific* reason that there is a better option between being a philosopher or a lawyer. Perhaps she just thinks the job market or even one's life is so volatile that it makes little sense to consider there is a better option, thus she decides to choose randomly. In this case, the metaphysical thesis Enoch tries to support by that specific scenario becomes irrelevant to the scenario he uses to support his metaphysical thesis.

In a word, as along as Enoch refers to any specific scenario to explain his idea that 'deliberation requires the existence of reason', the conclusion can only be that deliberation requires the existence of a *specific* reason, while the existential issue of any specific reason is not a part of any metaphysical enterprise. This slip in Enoch's argument and the dilemma he encounters, obviously, are analogous to the slip in the Cartesian

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[123] In fact, it seems that Enoch somehow realizes this point, see the paragraphs I quoted before: "When engaging in this deliberation, when asking yourself these questions, you assume, so it seems to me, that they have answers. These answers may be very vague, allow for some indeterminacy, and so on. But at the very least you assume that some possible answers to these questions are better than others. You try to find out what the (better) answers to these questions are, and how they interact so as to answer the arch-question, the one about what it makes most sense for you to do." (my italics) Obviously, Enoch is speaking of specific cases here.

skeptical argument and the dilemma skeptics/epistemologists meet in their enterprise I discussed in the previous section.

How will Enoch avoid this dilemma? Again, since I do not challenge his core idea that deliberation requires the existence of reason, perhaps he can revise this argument by *not* referring to any specific scenarios. Though I doubt such an attempt is hopeless (it seems that in order to explain what his core idea means, he has to appeal to a particular case), I will set it aside; instead, what I am going to do is to rehearse my objection against Enoch under a broader, and more significant context, where it is generalized into a line of thinking that will help us find a way out of the dialectical deadlock between metaphysicians and quietists.

4.2.3 What metaphysics cannot do

To repeat, we have seen that Enoch makes it explicit that his philosophical enterprise is about a metaphysical thesis of reasons as such that we do not know what those reasons are. However, things are not so straightforward at second glance. The examples of "irreducibly normative truths and facts" Enoch speaks of are actually "facts such that we should care about our future well-being, that we should not humiliate other people, that we should not reason and form beliefs in ways we know to be unreliable" (Ibid, 1). From these passages, it is clear that he is talking about specific, identifiable reasons that we know what they are: the denial of the existence of that specific reason, that is, 'we have *no* reason to care about our future well-being' is equally a specific claim. Later, in the section titled "The motivation", Enoch professes that "My underlying motivations for holding the metaethical view I in fact hold are – to the extent that they are transparent to me – much less abstract, and perhaps even much less philosophical. Like many other realists (I suspect), I pre-theoretically feel that nothing short of a fairly strong metaethical realism will vindicate our taking morality seriously."[124] (Ibid, 9) Once again, the normative entity he speaks of is not a generic, but a

[124] To be sure, he immediately admits that such a feeling is philosophically suspicious; I will explain that it is, indeed, problematic.

specific one, namely, the reason to 'take morality seriously'. Siding with Enoch, I fully understand his concern: I also believe that there are so many immoral phenomena nowadays that constitute urgent issues, which are nevertheless underplayed by various people.

As Enoch supposes, he is by no means the only normative realist who is *both* sympathetic to some sort of metaphysical approach to realism *and* triggered by some specific real-life concerns. The second example comes from Shafer-Landau. Although he seems silent on quietism, he first makes it explicit that his realism is metaphysical (and non-naturalist) in nature: "A good deal of opposition to moral realism stems from a basic *metaphysical* puzzle…it appears that moral values are something very different in kind from anything else that we are familiar with…I think that moral facts are different in kind from any other…What is needed, then, is a defence of non-naturalism." (2003: 55, my italic) Here, Shafer-Landau is speaking of normative/moral entities that are conceived generically: we simply cannot identify what those moral values or facts are. Moreover, his defence of moral realism aims to undermine the following problematic view: "…our moral opinions are either never true, or are correct, when they are, only in virtue of our endorsements…Moral principles enjoy no objective or transcendent status; they are not universal, but parochial". Again, we do not know what those moral principles are.

Nevertheless, he starts his essay with a lament about the current "armchair sociology": "many people express their moral views with a great deal more hesitation than was usual in the past". He continues to question such "moral modesty": admittedly, it could be a virtue when it is another name of our fallibility in knowing what is the right thing to do, but modesty is "not always a good thing", as "an unwavering conviction about certain matters is sometimes right and proper." For example, "…were we faced with" people like "antebellum slaveholders" as political opponents, humility and hesitation would be no virtue", which means we should be unwavering to such moral issues that we should *not* be humble to antebellum slaveholders and similar people. (Ibid, 1-2) That is to say, like Enoch, Shafer-Landau has normative concerns in mind when he proposes his

metaphysical realism, which can be expressed on a specific level, in the sense that we know what those moral entities are (say, the goodness of not being modest or humble at all to slaveholders).

Sayre-McCord's text provides us with the last example. Though he first writes that the difference between moral realists and anti-realists has "disappointingly little to do with the particular moral claims", later he seems to make an opposite claim that the debate between these two camps "makes a significant difference to our understanding of what (if anything) is valuable…to the importance we place on moral reflection. It may even make a difference to our *happiness*, if we desire things because of the value we take them to have and not vice versa" (Sayre-McCord, 1988: 2, my italics). Regardless of whether he is self-contradictory here, it is obvious that he speaks of specific values, such as happiness.

There are two things shared by these three examples: 1) Realists discuss and aim to defend a metaphysical thesis, where the reason they aim to prove the existence of is generic and cannot be identified. 2) Realists later claim (more explicitly in the first two cases) that *by* establishing that metaphysical realist thesis, our normative situation will be somehow benefited. In other words, there are two desiderata in their metaphysical projects: a metaphysical realist thesis and a contribution to the normative.[125]

Unfortunately, it seems that their metaphysical project cannot satisfy the second desideratum, as those metaphysical realists have two radically different ways of talking about reasons: the metaphysical, generic one where we do not know the content of those entities, and the specific one where we can identify what those entities are. That is to say, we will encounter the difficulty that is similar to the one we have already met in the Jill scenario. Suppose Shafer-Landau's defence of moral realism succeeds, and now the metaphysical statement 'there are moral facts that are objective' (whatever it means) is proven true. However, it is unclear how such a generic statement can make us have unwavering convictions about *any* particular

[125] The phrase 'the normative' is used in a capacious way which contains all normative issues, and I am neutral to all approaches to any normative issue here.

matters, such as not being humble to slaveholders, which is Shafer-Landau's own example. In order to determine whether it is good to be humble to slaveholders, we have to appeal to normative ethics where we deal with specific, contentful reasons: say, liberty belongs to everyone (which can be supported by further normative theories or other normative resources), thus we have no reason to be humble to slaveholders. The point is, without knowing *what* the normative entities in Shafer-Landau's *metaphysical thesis* are (actually, they cannot be known, otherwise his thesis will cease to be a metaphysical one), it is unclear how that metaphysical thesis can contribute to the normative claim that we have no reason to be humble to slaveholders. Unless one assumes that once the metaphysical thesis that moral facts exist is proven, the normative statement that 'one should not be humble to slaveholders' will be proven at the same time, one cannot move from the former smoothly to the latter. Obviously, such an assumption is implausible.[126]

The slaveholder is merely an example: moreover, we will not know how *any* "moral principle" is made "universal" or "objective" rather than "parochial" by committing to Shafer-Landau's metaphysical moral realism. If one wonders whether the principle 'never tell a lie' is parochial or not, merely stating that 'there are moral facts/principles that are objective' will not be helpful, as we do not know whether 'never tell a lie' counts as such a moral principle that Shafter-Landau speaks of in his metaphysical thesis. To be sure, one can claim that 'since moral principles are all universal according to Shafter-Landau's metaphysical realism, the moral principle 'never tell a lie' is universal as well'; however, she cannot dismiss an opponent (he perhaps comes from another region) who claims that 'never tell a lie' is by no means a moral principle from the very beginning. Apparently, they argue against each other, yet the point is that Shafter-Landau's metaphysical thesis is incapable in settling this issue. In other words, no moral principle will benefit from his metaphysical thesis (granted that being universal/objective is a good thing for a moral principle): we simply cannot know *what* the moral principle is in his metaphysical argument for realism. What can be benefited from his argument, if you like, is the metaphysical status of an entity called 'moral principle' that we do not

[126] We can even imagine someone, embracing Shafter-Landau's metaphysical thesis, claims that 'yes, thus the reason to be humble to slaveholders exists and is objective.'

know what that principle is, rather than any contentful moral principle itself ('keep one's promise', 'treating others as one wants to be treated', 'never tell a lie', etc.).

A similar thing can be said to Enoch. True, when he speaks of 'taking morality seriously' ("vindicating our taking morality seriously"), he is speaking of morality as a whole, rather than some specific moral entities: this expression is certainly more abstract than 'choosing philosophy as your future career' or 'not being humble to slaveholders'. However, no matter how abstract it is, the reason to take morality seriously is still *not* a generic reason, as we know what the reason is, viz., the reason *to take morality seriously*. Therefore, he will encounter the difficulty Shafer-Landau has before. This point can be seen clearly from a different angle: there are philosophers who seriously argue that we should *not* take morality seriously, namely, moral abolitionists. Briefly speaking, the abolitionists in this case believe that "morality in its entirety is…problematic…moral thought and discourse have all sorts of nasty consequences, such as elitism, authoritarianism, conflict, and war." (Olson, 2014: 179) Here, it does not matter whether such a view is untenable; what matters is that we do not know how Enoch's metaphysical thesis can, as he supposes, thwart such a view and be helpful in "vindicating" that we should take morality seriously: again, what is established, if Enoch's argument works, is a metaphysical thesis that our reality contains reasons as such, or reasons are part of our ontology. No one will think they should take morality seriously because of that: why should one draw the conclusion that one accordingly has a (specific) reason to take morality seriously because (the generic) reason is a part of ontology, instead of having a (specific) reason to abolish morality because (the generic) reason is a part of ontology?[127] Like Shafer-Landau, Enoch, without begging the question, cannot satisfy the normative desideratum by establishing his metaphysical thesis.

[127] To remind, Jill can be a metaphysical realist of normativity and still thinks there is no reason to find a better option between philosopher and lawyer, as she could believe the job market or one's future life is so volatile that a random selection is fine.

How will metaphysical realists respond?[128] There is at least one way out: to abandon the second desideratum of their project, namely, the normative goal which is about specific reasons. However, it means that if one hard-core metaphysician claims he is interested in metaphysics alone and he, *unlike* Enoch and Shafer-Landau (and Sayre-McCord), does not have any normative desideratum in developing his realist argument, then, regardless of whether he succeeds in the end, his enterprise is by no means amenable to my objection. For example, he can make it explicit that his argument will not make us take morality more seriously, neither will any moral principle be made universal/objective through his metaphysical position: the only result of his argument, if it works, is a metaphysical conclusion that generic normative entities (reasons, property of rightness, goodness, etc.) are a part of ontology. To be clear, I can say nothing more to such a metaphysician, and I have to return to my previous observation that metaphysicians and quietists talk past to each other when they discuss the existential issue of normative entities.[129] Nevertheless, my point is, for those who *refuse* to take this way out, which is not a small number (I, like Enoch, suppose that all metaphysical realists believe, explicitly or implicitly, their metaphysical position will somehow benefit the normative, at least the former is relevant to the former), that is, for those who think the normative can be benefited *through* their metaphysical approach to realism, the metaphysical approach is shown inadequate: it fails to make any contribution to the normative.[130]

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[128] An interesting response from metaphysical realists can be this. They may revise their claim and say that if normativity is eliminated from the ontology, then the normative will be severely damaged. Thus their aim is merely to reject the negative metaphysical view in order to avoid the damage it makes to the normative. Yet my point remains the same: it is unclear how the normative is damaged due to a negative metaphysical view. Suppose one believes the negative metaphysical statement that 'ontology does not contain reason'. Yet to determine whether there is no reason to, say, embrace Brexit is still a completely different issue. To think that 'since reason is not a part of ontology, there is no reason to embrace Brexit' just makes no sense.

[129] To be sure, it does not mean that such a pure metaphysical enterprise is hopeful. As we have seen, both Enoch and McPherson cannot get rid of speaking of specific reasons in their texts (choosing a career for the former and poking the others for the latter). Now, the hard-core metaphysician cannot mention any specific reason in his argument, otherwise he will arguably meet the difficulty that is similar to Enoch's in the Jill scenario.

[130] Readers may complain that terms like 'benefit normative ethics' or 'make contribution to the normative' are quite unclear: in what sense does metaphysical realism benefit the normative? However, this is precisely

At this moment, the debate between metaphysical realists and quietist realists can be finally clarified. Following the difference between speaking of reasons on a specific level and a generic level, there are actually two existential issues: 1) Is normativity as such a part of ontology? 2) Is there a normative entity (that we know what it is)? It may be said that metaethicists, perhaps except for quietists, only recognize the former as the real existential question of normativity, while Scanlonian quietists only recognize the latter. This leads to the dialectical difficulty between these two camps. However, due to the confusion of these two ways of speaking of normativity, a wide range of realists assume that once we offer a positive answer to the first question, it will immediately have some good implications for the second question.[131] Now it should become clear that those two questions require different kinds of inquiries, and it is shown that an answer to the first question is not relevant to the second. Thus, there is, under scrutiny, no deadlock between metaphysicians and quietists: they are doing different works, which merely share the same title, namely, 'the existence of normative entities'. Consequently, there are two ways the debate between metaphysical realists and quietists can end: either they admit that there will not be a fruitful discussion in the current state, given they do not really engage with each other, or the metaphysical realists who believe their position should be beneficial to the normative need to revise their proposal, given a metaphysical approach is shown useless in that respect.[132]

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my question for those metaphysical realists: I cannot see how metaphysical realism can be helpful for the normative for the reason I explained above.

[131] Or, at least, they assume that their metaphysical investigation has something to do with the normative, in Sayre-McCord's case.

[132] It should be noted that Scanlon's position may be a stronger one that a metaphysical approach is completely fruitless in the existential issue of normativity. He once wrote "…In order for there to be a reason to deny that certain entities, numbers or anything else exist, the idea of existence in question has to have some content…I do not see that there is any other contentful idea of existence that being part of the universe of discourse would involve." (2017: 878-879) Hence, it seems he is making the stronger claim that the metaphysical question of the existence of reason as such is empty, given we do not even know what that reason is (it is not "contentful"). However, I suppose metaphysicians can argue back that the content of their idea of existence is given by metaphysics itself. Thus I will not pursue this stronger point of Scanlon.

Also, in Scanlon's framework, given there are certain normative entities in certain cases (say, the reason to help an innocent, drowning person exists), we can trivially move to the existential conclusion that normative entities exist (see section 3.1), which makes quietism a form of realism. Nevertheless, for a 'Cavellian' quietist, the 'realism' in the label 'quietist realism' means something more, which leads us to the next section: I will explain what embracing quietist realism really amounts to in a Cavellian framework, and the 'cheapness' objection will be rejected there.

4.3 Being realistic about reasons

It is at this moment that Cavell's discussion of *other minds* skepticism enters the stage. To remind, the skeptic in Cavell's narrative is triggered by the terrifying fact that human minds are separate, which is the truth in skepticism; nevertheless, she turns it into a metaphysical/epistemological issue, calling for metaphysical proofs that are used to bridge the inner and outer of the other. Cavell's lesson in my previous discussion is that the skeptic can misunderstand the difficulty she encounters: witnessing someone who expresses his pain, what is required is acknowledgement, rather than epistemological or metaphysical considerations. In other words, the task bestowed by the human condition of separateness can be an ethical one, in the sense that we shoulder the burden of endlessly acknowledging the mental episodes of others and bettering our relations to them.

Now, we may say that the metaphysicians of normative realism can be analogous to the skeptic/epistemologist in the case of other minds skepticism in the following three senses[133]. First, they are troubled by *specific* normative issues, where the situation is dire and terrifying (taking morality not seriously,

[133] I use 'can be' rather than 'is', because, again, my whole Cavellian approach to quietism, in this section and before, only speaks to metaphysicians who believe that normative realism should be beneficial to the normative.

not be unwavering to certain normative statements, etc.), in the way the separate human minds to the skeptic is: the skeptic encounters specific other 'minds' that are separate from her own. Besides those examples I mentioned in the previous section, I suggest that the asymmetry argument I discussed in section 3.3 can shed some light on this point: as its proponents point out, whatever one argues for a normative claim, even a very basic one that 'one should not poke others', it is amenable to some 'normative' criticism that one should do so as it is right to maximize the suffering (the imagined 'disutilitarian view'). Thus, there is some truth in those worries of metaphysical realists, just like there is some truth in skepticism, namely, our normative situation is dire: the example of the schmeasons standard, perhaps implicitly, reveals the terrifying message that any normative statement, no matter how plausible and basic it seems, is always amenable to opposing views; in other words, our cherished normative system seems not authoritative/robust.

The second similarity between metaphysical realists and the skeptic is that the former, like the latter, turn the difficulty they encounter into a metaphysical one that calls for metaphysical arguments: finding reason (as such) a place in ontology. To be sure, they do not explain in detail how the difficulty of our dire normative situation is turned into one that can be solved or reduced by metaphysics; yet this is because, as we have seen, they assume that once the metaphysical thesis is established, certain normative issues will be benefited, if not totally settled. In fact, the asymmetry argument is again helpful in understanding this line of thinking of metaphysicians. It seems the proponents of this argument believe that unless we can make our normative standards *metaphysically* robust or authoritative, our normative standards will always be threatened by the schmeasons-followers who believe the opposite of everything we believe on all normative issues.[134] Similarly, witnessing someone who expresses his pain, the other mind skeptic could take "I am in pain!" or

[134] To remind, for the proponents of this argument, the seeming non-robustness of the reasons standard cannot be conceived as a metaphysical issue in the first instance, otherwise this argument will not constitute an internal critique of quietism. As we have seen, the idea of 'authority/robustness' is explained in neither McPherson's nor Enoch's texts. That is to say, it is the proponents of this argument who turn the issue of normative authority into a metaphysical one. See section 3.3.

simply “ouch!” as his epistemological certainty of his claim (or the metaphysical assertion of the existence of his mind), rather than the expression of pain itself.

Though I have shown that such a metaphysical attempt to establish the authority of our normative system fails, the point here is that the move of turning the issue into a metaphysical one itself is misplaced, in the way that the skeptic’s response (e.g. ‘I must make sure whether I am entitled to know you are in pain’) to the one who displays discomforts is. The challenge the imagined schmeasons-followers pose to philosophers is not a metaphysical, but a normative one (the normative claim ‘it is not right to poke others’ will be undermined by another normative, disutilitarian view); unfortunately, metaphysicians wrongly believe that only metaphysics can overcome this challenge, which is shown a failure. Correspondingly, once the other mind skeptic thinks her task is to bridge other’s inner and outer through arguments, in order to be entitled to know his mental episode, her move will be misplaced and she will fail that person. This is the third similarity between metaphysical realists and the other minds skeptic.

However, in the light of Cavell’s characterization of the practical difficulty bestowed by human separateness, quietist realism, the view that the existential issues of reason are themselves normative issues will gain a different meaning.

Agreeing with Scanlon that the existential issues of reason can only be settled by normative ethics, the Cavellian quietist draws the *further* conclusion that we are therefore bestowed with an endless burden: there is no once and for all solution to the existential issue of reason, because that problem in fact consists of endless existential issues of specific reasons, which require endless specific normative deliberations to settle; moreover, even if a specific existential issue of reason is settled at some stage, nothing can guarantee that the answer is unchangeable and one is thus getting rid of the relevant normative burden. For example, perhaps Jill decides that she should become a philosopher, and therefore rejects the offer of law school; yet after several years, certain living conditions change for Jill, say, she is disappointed about the mainstream way of

doing philosophy. At that moment, she has to deliberate on her future career again. Hence, it can be said that the burden given by the existential issue of reason is endless in the two following senses, which are analogous to the two senses the burden of acknowledging other minds is endless: there are so many specific reasons (just like there are so many other people we meet, whose minds are separate from ours), and there is no once and for all answer for even one specific existential issue of reason, as the circumstance of that reason is not unchangeable (just like acknowledging one's mind this time does not guarantee the success of the next acknowledgement, as the same person's mental life is in flux).

Thus, in the eyes of the Cavellian quietist, when normative realists are constructing *metaphysical* arguments for the ontological status of reason as such, *and* believing that our real-life normative situations can be thereby bettered, they are using "mistaken attempts to meet a real need", which is called 'deflection' by Cavell. The real need here is to respond to various "profound human life experiences", in this case, a normatively troublesome phenomenon like morality is not taken seriously, the armchair sociology that people hesitate to make certain moral commitments, the terrifying situation that every normative statement can be philosophically challenged, etc.. Nevertheless, those experiences are converted into "over-intellectual theoretical conundrums" that call for metaphysical proofs: we have seen the proponents of the metaphysical approach to normative realism believe that through the metaphysical attempt of finding the "location" of normativity in ontology, those normative troubles can be somehow theoretically overcome.[135] (Gleeson and Taylor, 2019: 1) Given my argument above that this metaphysical approach fails to help the normative, we may say the merit of quietism is that it *restores* the real philosophical need in this case from the hijack of metaphysics. A Cavellian quietist fully realizes the normative concerns of metaphysical realists and grants that there is some truth in their discovery, namely, our normative situation is dire in this or another way. Nevertheless, the Cavellian quietist does not have the illusion that our dire normative situation can be alleviated through something that is external to the normative (e.g. the metaphysical/ontological); instead,

[135] I add 'theoretically' as there are many ways to better the normative situation, and I suppose that making theoretical contributions to a normative issue is the task of philosophers.

she believes *hic Rhodus, hic salta*[136]: in order to truly improve theoretically our normative situation we can only cope with normative issues relentlessly, in the manner that we have to tackle other minds skepticism by acknowledging the mental episodes of others over and over again.[137] Therefore, it should be said that the 'realism' in 'quietist realism', as Diamond suggests, means more of a "realistic" position towards endless existential issues of reasons, than a philosophical doctrine, which confirms that such-and-such exist.[138]

Finally, I shall end this chapter with the 'cheapness' objection. To rehearse, it says that we cannot attain a realist construal of normativity without bothering with metaphysics, as that would be lazy and cheap. Of course, quietism is *metaphysically* cheap by definition: it simply sidesteps the metaphysical approach to the existential issues of reasons as such, and shows that such an approach is inadequate for a wide range of metaphysical realists (given the assumption that many normative realists believe their metaethical position will be beneficial to normative issues). However, it is one thing that a metaethical position is metaphysically cheap, it is another that such a cheapness constitutes a problem: those who find the metaphysical 'cheapness' of quietism a problem just conflate these two. To repeat, metaphysicians just speak of reasons in a generic way, while quietists focus on the reasons conceived on a specific level (this is why their position is

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[136] According to Aesop's fables, one athlete claims boastfully that he once won a competition of long jump on the island of Rhodes in a stupendous way. After hearing what he says, a bystander responds that 'stop reporting your achievement there; here is Rhodes, jump here!'
Cf. Wittgenstein, 1983: 333: "The difficult thing here is not, to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognize the ground that lies before us as the ground. For the ground keeps on giving us the illusory image of a greater depth, and when we seek to reach this, we keep on finding ourselves on the old level." The "old level" can refer to the normative in this case.

[137] Thus, one may say that Cavellian quietism has a 'therapeutic' function: it has this function because, unlike Scanlon's approach to quietism that talks past to metaphysicians, Cavellian quietism engages with (certain) metaphysicians, analyses their desideratum and reveals the inadequacy of their approach.

[138] For Diamond's application of Cavell's ideas in rejecting an intellectualist approach to philosophical, especially normative issues, see Diamond, 1995, 2008. Coincidentally, the title of Scanlon's book that defends quietism against the metaphysical approach to normative realism is also Being Realistic about Reasons.

metaphysically cheap). Thus, there is no vantage point for metaphysicians to claim that being metaphysically cheap is problematic without begging the question.

However, quietists have more to say. After I explain what the Cavellian quietism amounts to, it should become clear that quietism is not cheap in the following sense: it reveals that the existential issue of reason in our life is actually consisting of endless existential issues of specific reasons, and any of them will never have an once and for all answer. That is to say, by "[relying] on positive theorizing about the nature of normative thought and talk", such a quietist approach "is quite substantial…in its own right" (Kremm and Schafer, 2018: 655). In fact, given the burden bestowed on us by the existential issue of normative entities is endless, such an issue is even heavier for quietists: unlike the single metaphysical issue whether reason as such is a part of ontology, again, the existential issue of normative entities is endless in the two senses I characterized above. Hence, metaphysicians need to find a non-question-begging way to prove that quietism is cheap in *another* sense (given metaphysical cheapness is not shown problematic without begging the question) and the cheapness in that sense constitutes a problem for quietism.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I developed a new approach towards the debate between quietism and metaphysical (normative) realism, which was inspired by Cavell's thoughts on external world skepticism and other minds skepticism. I first examined how Cavell, relying on the distinction between generic objects and specific objects, showed that the enterprise of traditional skeptics of external world met difficulties; then I explained how Cavell treated other minds skepticism as an ethical, instead of a metaphysical/epistemological issue.

I then developed an analogy between Cavell's discussion of external world skepticism/epistemology and the location problem of normativity/its metaphysical response. Then, in the light of Cavell, I first examined Enoch's argument for metaphysical realism, showing that it was problematic in the way the skeptical

reasoning about the external world was. Later, I generalized my objection to Enoch into one that attempted to undermine certain metaphysical projects that had a desideratum of benefiting the normative: either those metaphysicians failed to do justice to their normative concerns they had in mind, or they must abandon those concerns. In this way, quietism became the only available realist option for those realists.

Finally, inspired by Cavell's discussion of other minds skepticism, I gave a diagnostic account of certain metaphysical approaches to normative realism, and I explained that in what sense a Cavellian version of quietism went further than Scanlon's: by conceiving the existential issue of reason as itself a normative one, we were bestowed with the heavy normative burden that was endless in the two senses: there are endless existential issues of reasons, and the there was no once and for all answer to any of them. Being disillusioned with the help of metaphysics, (Cavellian) quietist realism became a realistic metaethical position towards the existential issue of normativity.

Conclusion

I have started this thesis with the location problem of normativity, concerning whether there are normative entities like reasons in the world. I then examine three approaches to this existential problem, namely, reductive naturalism, Cornell realism and non-naturalism, and I have shown that they suffer from various difficulties. Then I move to quietism and Scanlon's presentation of it: the quietist position challenges the metaphysical assumption behind the location problem, that is, the general idea of of existence, so that quietist dissolves the location problem rather than answering it.

At this moment, the focus is shifted from the location problem to the defence of quietism: I argue that the most elaborated argument against quietism, viz., the asymmetry argument, does not work, yet the debate between quietists and proponents of a metaphysical approach to realism reaches a stalemate, as both sides seem to beg the question against each other. Finally, I appeal to Cavell's thoughts on skpeticism. Relying on the crucial difference between the generic objects and specific ones, I develop a line of thinking that will help us break the deadlock between quietism and metaphysical realism: I show that metaphysical realists and quietists actually talk past each other. It means that there are indeed two kinds of questions concerning the existence of normative entities: the location (metaphysical) problem whether normativity is a part of the reality, and the specific existential question whether a specific normative entity exists (e.g. Is there any reason to support Brexit?).

This has significant implication for metaphysical realists: they more or less assume that a metaphysical realist conception of the normative discourse will somehow benefit certain normative issues, but it turns out this is impossible due to the difference between generic normative entities and specific ones I mentioned above. Hence, my defence of quietism completes to the effect that either metaphysical realists abandon their normative desideratum and admit that their metaphysical position cannot have any normative effect, or they have to embrace quietist realism in order to make their realist position normatively relevant. For those who

embrace quietist realism, normative realism is no longer a metaphysical, generic statement that confirms normative entities exist; instead, it is a realistic commitment that we are endowed with an extremely heavy burden that there are endless normative issues and there is no once and for all answer to any of them.

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