

Introduction: The Ages of Metaethics

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I

To speak of ethical theory *sans phrase* is to neglect to distinguish between *normative theory* and *metatheory*. By *normative theory*, we mean the endeavor to bring some unity or system to our multifarious moral evaluations, normative commitments, practices, moral rules and principles by developing (some might even say by discovering) a coherently interrelated cluster of normative principles or procedures to represent and organize them and, as well, in the processes, to justify them. By *metatheory*, or metaethics, we mean the attempt to elucidate moral reasoning and moral discourse (essentialist philosophers would say *the nature* of moral discourse). It seeks to characterize the use of moral terms, to determine the logical and cognitive status of moral utterances, to characterize moral reasoning, to explicate the nature of disagreement in ethics, and to clarify what counts as justification in ethics. The thing is to come to a clear understanding of the nature of morality, of what it is to take the moral point of view, and of the relation between the reasons for a moral commitment and the commitment itself.

The emphasis here is on *understanding* and not on *advocacy* or *determining* (ascertaining) what is right and wrong; the task is not to get people to be good, to provide moral knowledge or, alternatively, to try to establish that nothing is right or wrong, good or bad and that there are no values or that values are only attitudes or emotions. Some not very astute philosophers thought the emotivists were trying to do the latter. (For a rather gross form of such a misunderstanding see Joad 1950.) But such moral affirmations or such iconoclastic denials are not

any part of metaethical theory. Rather the task is to come to understand what it is for something to be right or wrong, good or bad, justified or unjustified, reasonable or unreasonable. Perhaps, most deeply, it is the attempt to gain some understanding of the very idea of *normativity* and most particularly of moral or ethical normativity.

The term 'metaethics' came into usage with the rise of analytical philosophy, but both the concept and the practice have been with us (though often poorly understood) for almost as long as philosophy has. However, prior to the rise of analytic philosophy, it existed either as part of a larger systematic substantive moral theory, containing elements of both what we would now call normative ethics and metaethics, and much else as well. Paradigm cases of such moral theory are found in Aristotle, Kant and Sidgwick. What we now call metaethics was done there, though only as a part of a larger project. It also existed – and this was the more typical situation – either as part of an even larger comprehensive speculative scheme, as in Plato, Spinoza, Hobbes or Hegel, or as part of a speculative philosophical-theological scheme as in Augustine, Scotus, Ockham and Aquinas. But, while all these philosophers, or philosopher-theologians, occasionally made what we would now call metaethical arguments, analyses and claims, they did not do metaethics as a distinct discipline or activity with its own rationale, or simply identify it, as some analytical philosophers have, with ethical theory: taking it to be the whole of ethical theory (Frankena 1951, 44). Even Henry Sidgwick, who thought of ethical theory as a distinct sub-branch of philosophy, only thought of what we now call metaethics as a proper part of a larger substantive, systematic, and critical normative enterprise. It is this enterprise, and not metaethics, that, for him, constituted ethical theory or moral philosophy. What is peculiar to our century is that there came into existence a distinctive activity that came to be called 'metaethics' and came to be taken as a distinct discipline. Some philosophers came consciously to think of themselves as doing metaethics and indeed some of them, namely most logical positivists (Moritz Schlick and Otto Neurath being notable exceptions) and some other linguistic philosophers, thought that the *only* part of ethical theory that was legitimately philosophical was metaethics. A.J. Ayer, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, Hans Reichenbach, Arthur Pap, and Charles Stevenson, who all thought this way, believed, of course, that, as citizens and critical intellectuals, they could and should take and defend moral

stances and make critical moral claims, but as *philosophers*, in attending to the domain of morality, they believed – and they were rather passionate about this – that they must restrict themselves to metaethics.

G.E. Moore did not so conceive of his philosophical work, but his most influential *practice*, vis-à-vis moral philosophy, namely the first three chapters of *Principia Ethica* (1903), though in idiom Platonic, provided an exemplar of metaethics at work and set the direction for much of Anglo-American and Scandinavian moral philosophy of our century.

We will, somewhat artificially, for there were transition periods, divide up Anglo-American and Scandinavian ethical theory into three periods: (1) The First Period was the period from the beginning of the century until around the 1930s. This was the period before metaethics became a self-conscious discipline. It was the period in which *Principia Ethica* set the tone and yielded most of the problems. (2) The Second Period, the period from the 1930s to the 1960s, was the heyday or Golden Age of metaethics or what is sometimes called, *some* would think pleonastically, analytical metaethics. We will call it, as others have as well, the *old* metaethics. (3) The Third Period is the period from the 1970s to the present – what we will call, as have others, the *new* metaethics – a metaethics arising in response to what has been dubbed The Great Expansion (Darwall et al. 1992, 121-4 and Copp 1992, 790-7).

II

During the First Period the dominant ethical theories were: (1) metaphysical ethics, (2) ethical naturalism and (3) non-naturalism (intuitionism). Metaphysical ethics had it that ethical terms are both definable in terms of, and stand for, certain distinctive metaphysical properties or entities such as God, being, or noumena. Ethical naturalism (as understood and criticized by Moore and – during that period – by many other moral philosophers as well) also had it that ethical terms are definable, but ethical naturalists, by contrast with defenders of metaphysical ethics, believed that ethical terms stand for certain empirical or natural properties (including, of course, relational properties). Non-naturalists, by contrast with both, denied that fundamental ethical terms were definable at all (Moore), or claimed that they were only interdefinable in terms of other normative terms (A.C. Ewing), and

they all claimed as well, that ethical terms stood for certain non-empirical and unique nondescriptive properties – non-natural properties, as Moore called them. These non-natural realities of an allegedly *sui generis* autonomous moral realm were realities which moral agents, if they were to know them at all, had somehow to be directly aware of in some nonempirical way.

Intuitionism, as a positive doctrine, had little influence inside philosophy. The powerful and vastly influential metaethical arguments contained in *Principia Ethica* were negative arguments devoted to destroying metaphysical ethics and ethical naturalism. Moore thought both committed what he called ‘the naturalistic fallacy’ and thus were vulnerable to the *open-question argument* and the *non-contradiction argument*. Moore put both arguments in a misleading Platonic idiom, but later, self-consciously linguistic philosophers who adopted them, such as A.J. Ayer, Charles Stevenson, Paul Edwards, P.H. Nowell-Smith, and R.M. Hare, reformulated them in an appropriately linguistic idiom which brought out their force more clearly than Moore did himself. Moore’s atheism and metaphysical realism made him in a cosmological sense a naturalist, as distinct from a supernaturalist or an idealist (Moore, 1901, 88). However, general philosophical or cosmological naturalism is one thing – as we shall see in some detail later – and ethical naturalism another. As we shall also see, W.K. Frankena was perfectly justified when, surveying the scene in ethical theory at mid-century, he remarked that “naturalism [ethical naturalism] is still strong, and intuitionism remains on the field, although not in great force. But metaphysical ethics has virtually retreated from the philosophical scene ...” (Frankena 1951, 45).

We should say something more about the senses of ‘naturalism.’ As Frankena, among others made clear, during the Golden Age, the sense of ‘ethical naturalism,’ taken over in analytical metaethics from Moore, was rather restrictive and in ways misleadingly persuasively defined. We will note three ways. First, ‘naturalism’ outside metaethical theory is used in a wider cosmological or worldview sense, where it denotes a general philosophical point of view standing in contrast to theism (and the various other forms of supernaturalism such as deism) and idealism (again in its various quite different forms). In this *general* sense, as we have already noted, Moore was a naturalist. His ‘critique of naturalism’ then applied only to ethical naturalism; that is, for him, the

view that moral properties are definable in terms of empirical properties. Second, moral cognitivists who hold such a view commit, according to Moore, the naturalistic fallacy. But so do, according to Moore, moral cognitivists who hold that moral properties are definable in terms of metaphysical properties or entities. It is useful to remember here Frankena's claim that the 'naturalistic fallacy' would have been better labelled 'the definist fallacy,' for it was the definition of fundamental moral properties that Moore was really opposed to (Frankena 1939, 464-77). Thirdly, it is worth noticing that in Moore's view, the 'naturalistic fallacy' does not invalidate moral cognitivism. Moore himself was a moral cognitivist for he believed that moral properties are directly apprehensible, though not by empirical observation.

Moore's criticism of naturalism leaves untouched then (1) naturalism in the cosmological sense, (2) moral cognitivism, provided it does not allow for a non-normative definition of moral properties (naturalistic fallacy), and (3) a noncognitivism which standardly adumbrates and defends a general naturalistic philosophical point of view while articulating and defending an emotive or prescriptivist theory of ethics. W.R. Dennes, roughly a Stevensonian emotivist, defends such a view in his "Categories of Naturalism" (1944) and in his *Some Dilemmas of Naturalism* (1960). Axel Hägerström, A.J. Ayer, Richard Robinson, Charles Stevenson, and Bertrand Russell, while being naturalists in the cosmological sense, are noncognitivists in metaethics and so are, today, Allan Gibbard and Simon Blackburn.

The principal targets of Moore's criticism, as we have noted, were metaphysical ethics and ethical naturalism. Moore took Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill to be paradigm-case ethical naturalists, plainly committing the naturalistic fallacy. It could, and indeed should, be argued, however, that, while they were in the general worldview sense naturalists, they were not ethical naturalists in Moore's sense, did not commit the naturalistic fallacy (if indeed it is a fallacy or some other kind of mistake) and they did not try to derive an ought from an is (Hall 1964, 101-32; and Nielsen 1977, 110-23). It was clear, in J.S. Mill's case, that, like Moore, he thought such a derivation to be quite impossible. (See the last chapter of his *System of Logic*.) What we have just noted about Bentham and Mill should also be said about the American naturalists (in the broad philosophical sense) George Santayana, John Dewey and Sidney Hook. Perhaps the only philosophers to fit Moore's specification

for being an ethical naturalist are Ralph Barton Perry, C.I. Lewis, J.B. Pratt, and John R. Reid, and it is not even clear that is so for Lewis in the case of 'right' or 'obligation' as distinct from 'good' or 'valuable.'

Finally, it should also be noted that the relation conceived by Moore between cosmological naturalism and ethical non-naturalism goes the other way too. Theists (antinaturalists in the general philosophical sense) could without any inconsistency be ethical naturalists in Moore's sense, as it is perhaps correct to say of Jacques Maritain and H. Richard Niebuhr (Frankena 1964, 446) and is more plainly so of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Peter Geach.

III

In 1950 – the middle of the Golden Age of analytical metaethics – metaphysical ethics was gradually supplanted by noncognitivism (sometimes variously called nondescriptivism or nonfactualism) either in the form of an emotive theory or of a prescriptivism. The emotive theory came first, arising in the English-speaking world in the 1930s, although as early as 1911, in Sweden, Axel Hägerström in his "On the Truth of Moral Propositions" powerfully articulated an emotive metaethics which was later developed in books by Hägerström himself and by a number of other Scandinavian philosophers influenced by him (Hägerström 1964, 77-96).

We will now further and more clearly characterize what at mid-century were taken to be the three major metaethical systems: non-naturalism (intuitionism), naturalism and noncognitivism. Frankena has provided us with a concise way of comparing them and characterizing their differences, and he has also importantly reminded us that proponents of these different metaethical theories "might quite possibly maintain the same opinions as to what is right or good in normative ethics" (Frankena 1951, 45). Frankena remarks that the following three sentences can be usefully employed to classify and compare the three metaethical theories.

- (1) Ethical sentences are cognitive and true or false.
- (2) Ethical terms do not name any unique or simple non-natural characteristics.

- (3) Ethical sentences are nondescriptive. (ibid., 45)

As Frankena was perfectly well aware, for later developments of Ayer's and Stevenson's views, as well as for Hägerström's initial statement, (1) and (3) would, though in nonessential ways, have to be altered to (1*) and (3*):

- (1*) Ethical sentences are cognitive and true or false in some substantial more than minimalist manner.
- (3*) Ethical sentences are *primarily* nondescriptive and only *secondarily* descriptive.

But (1) and (3) are more useful to fix thought than the more pedantic though more accurate (1*) and (3*). After all, if we adopt, as perhaps we should, a minimalist or deflationary conception of truth, the problem originally expressed by the noncognitivist denial that fundamental moral utterances could be either true or false still re-emerges as follows. Though moral utterances in declarative form plainly bear the syntactic features of assertoric discourse, still, if noncognitivism is true, moral utterances lack *truth makers*. That is, there is nothing in the world or for that matter 'out of the world' that would make moral utterances true. In that way, it is claimed, 'Hitler was vile' and 'Hitler had a black moustache' are very different. The latter has a plain truth maker. The former, however true, does not. More widely than that, even if talk of 'truth makers' smacks too much of metaphysical realism and the correspondence theory of truth, still, as Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard and Peter Railton put it,

important contrasts between ethics and, say, empirical science or mathematics might remain. For there will be differences in the kinds of features of the world that figure in the (minimal) *truth conditions* of sentences in the various domains, and differences, too, in the *methods* available for establishing (minimal) truth and in the amount of *rational consensus* such methods can bring about. (Darwall et al. 1992, 129)

For fundamental moral principles, at least, noncognitivists are claiming, we have no way of establishing or ascertaining whether these principles are true or false, so that it would be reasonable to say of any of them that they are true or, for that matter, false (Altham 1986, 275-6). 'Abortion is evil' is in a syntactical form in which it would not be at all

a deviation from a linguistic regularity to assert it or for that matter to deny it. If people have certain attitudes, perhaps arising from living in a certain community, they may very well say that it is true, but, if they have different attitudes, perhaps causally rooted in different beliefs of a different community, they will say, perhaps, that it is false or in some circumstances true and in other circumstances false. Perhaps there are no truth makers anywhere – belief in them being a realist myth – but certainly attitudes are real enough. Truth makers or not, there will be no rational consensus on judgments, the argument goes, concerning abortion, nor can there be, noncognitivists could claim, for there is nothing there in the world, including in our human nature, which will show ‘Abortion is evil’ to be true or, more radically still, even could show it to be either true or false. And similar things obtain for our other fundamental moral judgments and principles. This being so, it is less misleading to say, as emotivists do, that moral utterances are neither true nor false. Or at least so noncognitivists could plausibly claim. It involves, in our *metatheory*, a revision of how we should talk when we are engaged in theory articulation and, more generally, a revision of what we should think about truth in morals. But the revision arguably has a point.

We are not saying, or giving to understand, that we think the noncognitivists are right here. Perhaps wide reflective equilibrium or some other method will yield a method for establishing truth in moral domains or at least warrantedness (Nielsen 1994, 89-138). Moreover, if we accept that and combine it with a minimalist or deflationary account of truth, where we do without truth makers and correspondence, then we may very well be able to establish that certain moral utterances are true or that we can at least give grounds for believing them to be warranted. And this could come to include certain very fundamental moral principles. But it is also not evident that the noncognitivists are mistaken. Accepting a minimalist account of truth, which reasserts what is built into our ordinary usage, may not be sufficient to meet the challenges that noncognitivists direct at cognitivist accounts of moral discourse. *Perhaps* we cannot justifiably take such a short way with dissenters.

IV

Toward the end of the Second Period of twentieth-century metaethical theory, it was fair to say, as we look at Stevenson's work and at the work of such ethical naturalists as Philip Rice and Henry Aiken, that "noncognitivism has become more cognitivist, and cognitivists have been making concessions to noncognitivism" (Frankena 1964, 447). It is, it came to be recognized, not clear that there is such a thing as *independent* emotive meaning; that beliefs and attitudes can be as sharply distinguished as emotivists thought they could (that we can have an attitude that is not also a belief), that we can separate out the evaluative components and the descriptive components of moral terms; that there are, or even clearly can be, any disagreements in attitude that are not rooted in disagreements in belief; that talk of what is 'rational' or 'reasonable' is not just as expressive and evocative as talk of what is 'good' or 'valuable' or 'right' or, though we need a distinction between *exciting* reasons and *justifying* reasons (between goading and guiding), that what that distinction comes to when pressed, is not clear. Similar things should be said for the distinction between cognitive and noncognitive utterances or aspects of such utterances. (But see here Frankena 1958b, 146-72.) Still, the emotivists in stressing such distinctions seemed to be onto something, but, at the very least, our initial facile ways in which we drew and deployed the above distinctions fared badly under close inspection.

There are also grounds for skepticism about talk of incommensurability or *essentially* contested moral concepts, stances which in turn are not unrelated to the above puzzles. The thought is that in morality there are, when matters are pushed far enough, *ultimate* disagreements *in* attitude concerning which no reasonable grounds exist, or at least not anything even like a nearly decisive argument is possible, which would settle the matter at hand (Nielsen 1989, 196-206). It is finally, some noncognitivists thought, just a matter of being for or against something or having one attitude rather than another. Fundamental moral matters become matters of decision, subscription, or commitment and not a matter of knowing or even soundly believing that something is right or is the thing to be done. However, that this is so is not evident. That very conception, so central for many emotivists, rests, for whatever plausibility it has, not only on being able to make the

bifurcating distinctions mentioned above, but also in relying implicitly on end-of-inquiry metaphors (Rorty 1984, 6-7). There is, in reality, no identifiable point where we could coherently say that we finally have arrived at an *ultimate* disagreement or, for that matter, agreement: where we agree about *all* the facts but still disagree in attitude. We have no understanding of what it would be like to have all the facts. Talk about what 'in the end' or 'in the final analysis' or 'ultimately' we would agree on is without coherent sense.

Stevenson made it evident that he was taking such disagreement to be just a logical or conceptual *possibility*. But it is unclear whether this putative possibility is even coherently conceivable. Language and thought, or so at least it appears, are idle here. We do not, that is, understand in such circumstances what we are talking about. If noncognitive analyses drive us in that direction, then noncognitive analyses are at least in some crucial respects mistaken. But, given the importance of John Dewey's work for Stevenson's own theorizing, it is not evident – some appearances to the contrary perhaps notwithstanding – that his form of noncognitivism will have that upshot (Stevenson 1963, 94-137). But if the above distinctions – cognitive/noncognitive, descriptive/evaluative, belief/attitude – rest on mistakes, at least when taken as dualisms or sharp distinctions, then disputes between non-naturalism, naturalism and noncognitivism may come to nothing. (For a fleshing out of this see our Afterword.)

Be that as it may, in the Third Period of the history of metaethics, the competition between noncognitivism and ethical naturalism is still going strong. Allan Gibbard and Simon Blackburn have given noncognitivism fresh and sophisticated reformulations as have Peter Railton, Nicholas Sturgeon, Richard Boyd and Richard Miller for ethical naturalism.

V

With the Third Period – the new metaethics – the metaethical scene becomes less restrictive, less arid. 'Analytical metaethics' is no longer a redundancy. The varieties of ethical naturalism get extensively enlarged and include varieties (*synthetic* ethical naturalism) which *may* well be immune even to sophisticated revisions of Moorean criticism.

Noncognitivism remains, but is no longer in the dominant position it came to have in the previous period, and intuitionism (non-naturalism) all but disappears from the scene. As metaphysical ethics had disappeared by the beginning of the Golden Age, so intuitionism has now gone the way of all flesh; perhaps, after all, with a certain implicit *persuasive* definition of 'progress,' there is (at least in the short run) some progress in ethical theory. But, progress or not, there is some change. It is also true that with the new metaethics the forms of ethical naturalism and noncognitivism not only proliferate, they become more complex and take to heart the at least putatively valid criticisms of each other. During the Third Period it is also true that new varieties of metaethical theories arrive on the scene (though this has its commencement during the Golden Age). We come to have (a) moral-point-of-view theories (Stephen Toulmin, Kurt Baier, Kai Nielsen, and W.K. Frankena), (b) error theories (Richard Robinson and J.L. Mackie), (c) quasi-realist-projectionist theories (Simon Blackburn), (d) practical-reasoning theories (Hobbesian in inspiration with Kurt Baier and David Gauthier or Kantian in inspiration with Thomas Nagel, Stephen Darwall, Christine Korsgaard, Alan Donagan, and Alan Gewirth), (e) constructivist theories (Thomas Scanlon, John Rawls, and Brian Barry), (f) sensibility theories (John McDowell and David Wiggins), and (g) contextualist-pragmatist theories (Hilary Putnam and Isaac Levi). Vis-à-vis the classic triumvirate of the Golden Age (non-naturalism, naturalism, and noncognitivism) (a) through (f) are hard to place, though quasi-realist-projectionist theories are best classified as a form of noncognitivism and sensibility theories as forms of ethical naturalism. But some error theorists (Richard Robinson) also regarded their theories as emotive theories, though J.L. Mackie thought – and went out of his way to insist on this – that he was doing the ontology of values and not doing metaethics at all (Mackie 1977, Part 1). However, under the wider dispensation of the *new* metaethics, Mackie was clearly doing metaethics, and it is possible to argue that, to the extent that his account is coherently articulated, it is, his own understanding to the contrary notwithstanding, a form of noncognitivism. What, as Mackie should have had it, and in effect had it, is so pervasively in error is not morality or morals themselves, but the rationalist meta-moral belief in a peculiar conception of moral objectivity (moral objectivism) common to intuitionism (non-naturalism), Kantian practical-reasoning theories

and the less articulated objectivist and objectivizing conceptions rooted in much common-sense understanding of morals, that is to say, in their implicit meta-beliefs *about* morals, particularly when they have religious roots. What is in error is the pervasive meta-moral belief that there are Objective Prescriptivities or norms mysteriously either in *re-rum natura* or in some mysterious *noumenal* realm. That is what 'believing in morals' comes to, but many people can be persons of moral principle and have an understanding of why they have the principles they have, including their rationale for these principles, without *so* 'believing in morals.' When we turn to moral-point-of-view theories, (a) we should recognize that they are not clearly metaethical and certainly not evidently *just* metaethical. Stephen Toulmin and Kurt Baier never used such conceptualizations at all, though W.K. Frankena and Kai Nielsen did. And constructivist theories (e) and contextualist-pragmatist theories (g), though they both have metaethical components, are clearly not just metaethical theories.

It is also clear that, among these new members on the new metaethics roster, some moral philosophers fit in more than one cubby-hole. Kurt Baier is both a moral-point-of-view theorist and a practical-reasoning theorist, W.K. Frankena a moral-point-of-view theorist and a sometimes reluctant noncognitivist, Kai Nielsen both a moral-point-of-view theorist and a contextualist-pragmatist, Hilary Putnam both a contextualist-pragmatist and a constructivist, Isaac Levi both a contextualist-pragmatist and a naturalist, and David Gauthier both a practical-reasoning theorist (Hobbesian clan) and a noncognitivist. Moreover, with these additions, most particularly in the cases of (a), (d), (e) and (g), the line is no longer sharply drawn between a metaethical theory and a normative ethical theory. Indeed, this is a hallmark of the Third Period of metaethics. In expanding, as it does, the conception of metaethics, the distinction gets fuzzed. Perhaps we should extend Quine's remarks about the fence being down concerning the analytic/synthetic and the necessary/contingent to metaethics/normative ethics or metaethics/substantive ethics? Moreover, it is worth reflecting on the Wittgensteinian point that perhaps all these distinctions and classifications are a waste of time and energy leading to tempests in teapots and generating more confusion than clarity. With respect to such considerations about the metaethics/normative ethics distinction, this may be in effect a reason, indeed perhaps a very good reason, to

return to an older tradition of moral philosophy, where metaethics is an ancillary matter and is certainly not seen as a distinctive or self-contained activity. (See here our Afterword: Whither Ethical Theory?)

VI

We will now say something more about what makes the new metaethics *new* and what motivates it in an intellectual climate in which moral philosophers have, since the late 1960s, increasingly turned their attention to normative ethics. They have, as Holly Smith put it, “turned to developing and criticising normative systems and especially to resolving concrete moral problems – issues concerning racism, sexism, war, economic justice, medical and business practice, scientific experimentation, and so forth” (Smith 1986, 471). For good or for ill, this was the intellectual climate in and around moral philosophy as the Third Period of metaethics came into being. Holly Smith goes on to point out that much normative ethical philosophizing was “consciously conducted in the absence of any metaethical thesis about what moral judgments meant or how they could be justified” (ibid.).

With not a few philosophers there was, and still is, an ambivalence here. On the one hand, there was the felt need to get on with these normative matters without constantly, or even very intermittently, raising ‘foundational’ questions or meta-questions about what they are doing, questions that, as Wittgenstein stressed repeatedly, call themselves into question and generate interminably still further questions until we get in such a state that we do not know where we are or what really is at issue anymore. On the other hand, even where there was on the part of these philosophers an intense interest in and concern about pressing normative issues, there was also often (given that they were philosophers) a pressing desire to get their philosophical bearings: the old philosophical itch to get back to basics, the perhaps irrational, or maybe even incoherent, wish to finally get to ‘the bottom of things.’

There was, however, in the general philosophical climate, also more theoretical matters that made the very doing of metaethics more problematical and led, where it continued to be done, to doing it somewhat differently. Moving away from the atomism and molecularism of earlier analytic philosophy, the most powerful currents of philosophy from the

later 1960s up to the present (1996) have gone, more or less, holistic. As Darwall et al. put it, a conception of philosophy became dominant “in which theory, metatheory, evidence, and inferential norm, or, alternatively, content and framework were not sharply distinguished” (Darwall et al. 1992, 121-2). That, along with, and relatedly, a Quine-Putnam-Davidson rejection of any significant distinction between the analytic/synthetic, made metaethics, at least as it previously had been understood and practised, problematic (ibid.). Moreover, and additionally and distinctly, under the influence of Rawls, there was an increasing interest in large and systematic normative – plainly substantively normative – and indeed normatively political inquiry, in which the method of wide and general reflective equilibrium came to be centrally in place, as the underlying method of ethics (Rawls 1995, 141-2). This was the underlying method on which Rawlsian and related contractarians and constructivists were crucially dependent. Their contractarianism and constructivism was never free standing.

Generalizing from the above considerations, it should be noted that, as Darwall et al. put it,

[the] narrowly language-oriented agenda of analytic metaethics was fully displaced, not so much because of a refutation of, say, noncognitivism, but because of an uneasiness about the notions of “meaning” or “analytic truth” and because reflective equilibrium arguments, which tended to set aside metaethical questions, promised to shed much greater light on substantive – and in many cases socially pressing moral questions. (Darwall et al. 1992, 123)

So it was not only renewed interest in, and post-positivist confidence about, being able as philosophers to legitimately address practical moral and normatively political questions, but, as well, deep changes in the very method, presuppositions, and self-conception of analytic philosophers, that led to the move away from metaethics and to the end of its short-lived hegemony in moral philosophy. This is the period that Darwall et al. refer to as the period of the Great Expansion.

Many philosophers saw the Great Expansion as something providing “a sense of liberation,” as “moral philosophers shed the obsessions of analytic metaethics, and saw – or thought they saw – ways of exploring normative morality as a cognitive domain, without a bad philosophical conscience.” But, Darwall et al. also observe, some other philosophers saw the Great Expansion as something that “partly contributed to the

contemporary revival of metaethics" (ibid., 123). The method of reflective equilibrium, so central in normative inquiries, unwittingly contributed, some thought, to this revival. The method of reflective equilibrium appealed very centrally to considered judgments, many of which were "moral intuitions (not Moorean insight into the Forms but substantive moral responses that strike us as compelling)" (ibid.). Both in the adumbration of general normative ethical theories and in the examination of particular moral problems, these moral intuitions flowed abundantly. Their role in the procedure of reflective equilibrium, both in normative critique and in forging and justifying a systematic normative ethical theory or normative political theory, was analogous to that of data in the articulating and testing of scientific theory. In theory construction they were used dialectically: we shuttle back and forth between the theory-dependent principles which were articulated and an appeal to the considered judgments to be used in their rationalization and in turn to be assessed by these principles. Justification and rationalization is never a one-way street and is always a bootstrapping operation. Considered judgments functioned as *partial* checks on the adequacy of a normative theory or account. But it was this very thing that contributed to the revival of metaethics. "The method of reflective equilibrium accorded a cognitive and evidential status to moral intuitions or 'considered moral judgments,' particular and general" (ibid., 125). Some philosophers (e.g., Richard Brandt, Joseph Raz, J.L. Mackie, Simon Blackburn, Gilbert Harman) questioned whether this status was warranted and, in doing so, took us back to metaethics. They saw – or thought they saw – a host of logical, semantic, epistemic, and even metaphysical issues emerging from, and entangled in, the very use of wide reflective equilibrium. Crucial among them were questions about the "practical status of morality" (ibid., 124). So, not a few philosophers think that we must go back to basics if we are to seriously think about morality in a philosophical way.

How does the new metaethics look after so many conceptual fences are down, with holism and the near ubiquitousness of wide and general reflective equilibrium? Some of the new metaethical theorizing, rightly or wrongly, uses decision theory, game theory and rational-choice theory in thinking about questions of practical reasoning or practical justification. (In this volume, Isaac Levi's contribution is a good example of the use of decision theory as a critical tool in metaethics.)

The new metaethics is as well less analytically restrictive and takes, as something sometimes rightly entering into its domain, empirical, as say, biological, psychological, sociological and historical, considerations and theories. It also more self-consciously raises epistemological considerations and sometimes raises issues and makes claims in what is called by some philosophers the ontology of morals. Moreover, metaethics, under the new dispensation, has become more "reflective both about the limitations of the notion of meaning and about the point or prospects of philosophical inquiry itself" (ibid., 124). So the new metaethics, while remaining *second-order*, does not assume "that one can avoid normative commitments in doing metaethics" (ibid.) (though it would be useful to know just what these commitments *must* be, and skepticism concerning such claims is not unreasonable). The new metaethics does "not restrict metaethics to the analysis of moral language" but it includes in its domain, as Darwall et al., who make this claim, are quick to add, "studies of the justification and justifiability of ethical claims as well as theories of meaning and also the metaphysics and epistemology of morals and like matters" (ibid., 125-6; see also Copp 1992, 790-7). Still, the new metaethics is, after all, not so far from the old, for it remains true that the semantic interpretation of moral language continues to play a central and pivotal role in metaethical inquiry. Could it be the case that, for that very reason, the new metaethics is not immune from at least some of the old problems?

VII

We will now worry this last question a little and, in doing so, return to considerations which were central for the first two periods of metaethics. We shall ask whether in some form they are, or at least should be, still with us. To initiate the dialectic here we will characterize the central reasons why it came to be so widely thought, during those periods, that ethical naturalism must rest on a mistake. What was centrally involved here was the open-question argument. All the criticisms of it notwithstanding, not a few philosophers thought, and some still think, it makes problematical any form of ethical naturalism (Rosati 1995, 46-70). Let us see if we can sort out a bit what is involved here.

The open-question argument has frequently been taken to be the key test for the claim that there is, if not strictly a fallacy, at least a mistake, an error, that allegedly undermines *all* forms of ethical naturalism, even in its linguistically oriented revisions. But it is generally recognized now not to be the decisive argument that Moore, and many others, during the Golden Age, took it to be. The open-question argument does not *prove* that ethical naturalism must rest on a mistake. At best it shows that the naturalistic definitions of moral and other normative terms hitherto offered do not work and gives us reasons – albeit rebuttable reasons – to expect that the same fate will befall new candidates. Among other things, the open-question argument ignores that there is such a thing as the Paradox of Analysis (a paradox propounded by Moore himself). Moreover, that correct analyses may leave open questions is just the paradox of analysis, for, if they leave open questions, how can they be correct analyses? It looks as if to be correct analyses they must both leave them open and not leave them open, and thus, unless we can somehow go around that paradox, they undermine themselves. Similarly, if the establishment of the sameness of cognitive significance is the test for correctness of an analysis, it may very well be the case that we might not immediately, or even on careful reflection, recognize that the two terms have the same cognitive significance when in fact they do. Since correct analyses arguably may leave open questions, the open-question argument cannot decisively refute – prove wrong – even definitional naturalism. Moreover, the meaning or uses of words, and the concepts they express, are often not transparent, yet the open-question argument assumes they are and assumes as well that analytic truths are ready to hand and often obvious. But much of that is, to put it mildly, questionable. Moreover, definitions, both philosophical and scientific, typically do not rely on giving intentional equivalents. Indeed that very conceptual baggage can itself be put in question. But even if it is not, to assume that all good philosophical and scientific definitions must be in terms of intentional equivalences (if you will, essences) – something the open question argument assumes – is an arbitrary assumption about what good philosophical and scientific definitions, to say nothing of ordinary definitions that might find their way into a dictionary, must be. To point out – correctly – that Moore was not out to give the latter, that he was after ‘real definitions,’ does nothing to show that there must be, or even

typically is, something wrong with such dictionary definitions. It only shows that they do not answer to Platonist purposes. But they can be perfectly all right for all of that.

Still, for all its deficiencies, the open question argument has continued to attract. Right up to the present many philosophers believe that Moore and philosophers following after him in his critique of ethical naturalism, such as Stevenson and Hare, were onto something, even when it is difficult to say exactly what (ibid.; and Darwall et al. 1992, 177-80). Moore, recall, in effect taking a metaethical turn, stressed that it was vital in doing moral philosophy to distinguish between, on the one hand, the question 'What things are good?' and, on the other, the question 'What does the concept good mean?' Moral philosophy has repeatedly wrecked itself, Moore thought, by not keeping apart the question 'What is "goodness" – the concept?' and, the quite different question, 'What things are good?' To do a real *principia* we must begin with the question, 'What is goodness?' Otherwise, he had it, we will have failed to begin at the beginning. Previous moral philosophers, Moore contended, had not kept clearly in mind that these are distinct questions and, failing to draw that distinction, thought they had ascertained what we mean by 'good' – had discovered what goodness is – or the use of 'good,' when they had determined *what* are the fundamental goods. They thought that in ascertaining that pleasure is good, that happiness is good, that security is good, that friendship is good, that the meeting of needs is good and, even more generally, that the satisfying of interests and preferences is good, that they had discovered what goodness is: that they had come to understand what we mean by 'good.' They thought that in having ascertained these things (that pleasure is good, that happiness is good, that satisfying interests is good) they had defined 'good': had discovered the very essence of goodness. What goodness is, they mistakenly thought, Moore had it, is ascertained by finding out what things are good. This Moore, and following him Stevenson, Nowell-Smith, Hare et al., argued is a fundamental mistake; 'good' cannot be defined by reference to some natural property(s) or characteristic(s) such as answering to interests or some metaphysical property such as being willed by God or being the ground of being. And that this is so, as Stevenson and Hare put it, taking a more linguistic, less Platonic, turn than did Moore himself, could be established by attending to how we use 'good' and related terms.

It is here that the open question argument comes into play. Given any sentence of the form 'X is good' we will always recognize that it makes sense to withdraw thoughtfully and ask 'But is X good?' We – or at least most of us – believe that happiness is good, but we also realize that it makes sense to ask whether happiness is good. Moreover, someone who says that 'Happiness is good' is not saying, in saying that, that 'Happiness is happiness.' In saying 'Happiness is good,' she does not mean to be uttering a tautology. And someone who says, however mistakenly, that happiness is not good is not contradicting herself or saying something that is literally unintelligible. But it would be a contradiction and 'Happiness is good' would be a tautology, if 'happiness' and 'good' were equisignificant. But they are not, as attention to the use of 'good' reveals. That is not how the language-game is played.

Similar things apply to other clearly naturalistic definitions. For whatever X, where 'X' refers to (denotes) natural properties (characteristics) or relations, it always makes sense to ask whether X is good. The question is always open and never closed, even when we agree that X is good. It is, the argument went, only when evaluative or normative terms surreptitiously occur in the allegedly naturalistic definition that it becomes unclear whether the question is open. In, for example, 'Good is what *reflective, reasonable* people want under *ideal* conditions,' all the italicized words are evaluative and not just descriptive, so we cannot take the above as a properly naturalistic definition. Where we apply the open question test to such definitions we may be unsure, and indeed may not be able to determine, whether the question is open or closed, though note we would have to be confident it is closed to know that it was a good definition (a definition showing sameness of meaning; Nielsen 1974, 51-6). But where we have doubts about the openness of the question it is often due to the evaluative term(s) occurring in the *definiens*.

Some questions are *ersatz* self-answering questions that no one would try to ask if they understood the language in question, e.g., 'Is a father a male parent?' or 'Are emerald things green?' or 'Is goodness good?' But, for any proposed naturalistic definition, when an evaluative term is not smuggled into the definition, 'Is X good?', unlike 'Is goodness good?' is never a self-answering question but always an open question. Where X is 'what people generally approve of' we can still intelligibly ask 'Is what people generally approve of good?' or where X is

'an object of any interest' we can still intelligibly ask if what answers to any interest is good? The open-question argument, as we earlier remarked, does not *prove* that no naturalistic definition will ever be successful resulting in a closed question. But it provides a powerful method of challenge. None of the proposed definitions work – given an acceptance of Moore's traditionalist conception of definition – yielding, as they must to succeed, as does 'Are bachelors unmarried?', a closed question that someone could only ask if she did not know how to play the language-game. This is, to repeat, no proof that no new definition could succeed. But still the *prima facie* plausible candidates have been fairly well canvassed in the earlier phases of the metaethical arguments for and against ethical naturalism. And the naturalistic definitions so far proposed have never yielded clearly closed questions, where they are unambiguously naturalistic, and, even when they are not, they still are not securely closed. But their being securely closed is required – is a necessary condition – for us to be justifiably confident that any of these naturalistic definitions are correct, i.e., that such a definition really shows sameness of meaning (*ibid.*). 'It is a fitting object of a pro-attitude, but is it good?' or 'It is something people approve of when they have it clearly in mind and are being ethically consistent, but still is it good?' are examples of the latter. Whether these questions are open or closed is not crystal clear – they *may* rest on covert synonymies – but it is also not clear, given the occurrence of 'fitting,' 'clearly' and 'ethically consistent,' whether we have with them genuinely naturalistic definitions. Indeed, we think we have good reason to believe that they are not. But the naturalistic fallacy challenge is that, when the definition is clearly naturalistic, it never yields a self-answering closed question as it must to justify that 'good' means – is identical in meaning with – the naturalistic definition proposed.

VIII

What the naturalistic fallacy, with its utilization of the open-question argument, and the noncontradiction argument points to, is that there is some kind of gap between moral judgments and empirical characterizations of how things are. From empirical descriptions of the world,

no matter how complete, we cannot deduce what is morally permissible and what is morally proscribed. Noncognitivists, in trying to account for the naturalistic fallacy, point to the emotive, expressive, evocative, or prescriptive features of moral talk. It is because of these noncognitive elements (the shadows cast by emotive meaning or force), that we cannot get the equivalencies that ethical naturalists seek. But, as John Pollock has argued, there is "an alternative explanation for the naturalistic fallacy... What the naturalistic fallacy tells us is that there can be no truth condition analyses of moral concepts in terms of non-moral concepts" (Pollock 1986, 508). Truth condition analysis is an analysis that insists that a concept has not been properly analyzed unless we have provided a statement of logically necessary and sufficient conditions for the exemplification of the concept in question. The naturalistic fallacy shows that this cannot be done for 'good,' 'right,' 'reasonable,' 'rational,' or any other fundamental normative notion. But – and this began to be appreciated during the Third Period in the history of metaethics – this failure of truth condition analysis is not at all peculiar to, or distinctive of, ethics or of evaluative notions generally. Rather, the situation is quite general in philosophy. Naturalistic fallacy considerations in effect gesture at or suggest the fact that philosophers ought to give up truth conditional analyses of concepts. But that was the very ideal of analysis. But the fact is that, quite generally, in domain after domain, these analyses collapsed under the pressure of counter-examples. Persistent efforts were made for some time to provide truth conditional analyses, but slowly Wittgenstein's point sank in that the idea prevalent in philosophical logic that concepts are individuated by their truth conditions was just an unworkable dogma. For most philosophically interesting concepts, as Pollock put it, "truth condition analyses are just not there to be found" (*ibid.*, 508). That we cannot give truth conditional analyses of moral concepts shows nothing unusual about moral and other normative concepts. In this respect all concepts – or at least almost all concepts – are in the same boat.

Truth conditions always were supposed somehow to yield informative definitions of concepts (e.g., knowledge is justified true belief), but the search for such definitions – real definitions if you will – in ethics and elsewhere was a search for a will-o'-the-wisp (Robinson 1954). Concepts are not individuated by a statement of their truth conditions. Indeed, to go a little further down the Wittgensteinian road

(further than Pollock will go), we should abandon talk of what concepts *essentially* are, including talk of what their *essential* roles or job descriptions are. Essentialism is a reification resting on a mistake. (With a firm recognition of this, we come to see the end of analytic philosophy, at least as traditionally conceived.)

Given these considerations, how does ethical naturalism stand? What the above considerations seem at least to do is to undermine any form of semantic or definitional ethical naturalism that would seek to define moral terms in terms of non-moral terms. Such a reductive or definitional naturalism – seeking to give intentional equivalences – seems at least to rest on a mistake. The open-question argument was important in bringing this realization.

However, matters do not end here. During the Golden Age that was just what most analytic philosophers took ethical naturalism to be. Ethical naturalism just was reductive semantical (definitional) naturalism. But the present strong contenders are not such reductive semantical naturalisms but are synthetic naturalisms which deny any *ontological* autonomy to ethics. They grant that moral terms neither mean the same as non-moral terms (including any string of them) nor can they be adequately paraphrased in non-moral terms. So much they grant to the noncognitivists or any non-naturalists that might still be around. What these ethical naturalists reject, to repeat and in doing so to amplify, is the *ontological* autonomy of non-naturalism: that moral judgments, where true, accord with a realm of *sui generis* moral facts, properties or characteristics – some occult realities, to use Jean Hampton's phrase – that are somehow independent of the world (Moore 1901, 95). There are no such facts or properties. Instead moral judgments to be true, if indeed they are true, must match with some natural facts: facts which are, directly or indirectly, empirically detectable. Moral judgments (*pace* both intuitionists and their nemesis, error theorists) are, ethical naturalists claim, in reality empirical judgments true or false in the same, or at least similar, ways that other empirical judgments are. Two terms, e.g., famously 'the morning star' and 'the evening star,' could have the same denotation even though they do not have the same meaning or the same use (the same job description). Similarly 'good' and 'answers to interests' could have the same denotation without having the same meaning or use. 'It answers to interests but is it good?' is an open, not a closed, question, but still 'good' and 'answers to interests' might have

the same denotation. Semantic or definitional naturalism could be false while synthetic naturalism could be true. That the two terms ('good' and 'answers to interests') denote the same property (characteristic) could be established empirically, and, if that were so established, we would have established the truth of synthetic naturalism. That moral properties are *de facto* identical with natural properties might, the claim goes, be established by empirical research rather than by conceptual analysis. So once more we have ethical naturalism as a contender even in the face of the naturalistic fallacy (Pigden 1991, 421-31).

However, it is *perhaps* not amiss to be skeptical whether any such *de facto* identities have been established or, even more deeply, skeptical whether we have any even reasonably clear idea of how empirical research is supposed to establish them. Skepticism here does not appear to be philosophical nit-picking. Just what would it be like empirically, rather than postulationaly, to establish – and of course postulations do not *establish* anything – such a *de facto* identity? What kind of research strategy do ethical naturalists have in mind? And without some idea here, isn't a postulated identity just arbitrary? None of these questions seem to us idle. But this does not gainsay the point made above that synthetic naturalism is not done in – or at least not evidently so – by naturalistic fallacy difficulties. Synthetic naturalism makes no claims about identity of meanings. (But see, for something more on the strength of naturalism, including its taking a rather different tack with a stress on asymmetric supervenience, the article by Peter Railton in this volume, as well as our discussion of it in the Afterword.)

IX

With the withering away of metaphysical ethics and intuitionism, most of the competing metaethical theories are naturalistic in *the general philosophical (cosmological) sense*, with the sometime exception of some forms of Kantian practical-reasoning theory and some forms of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism (Foot, Anscombe and Geach). Indeed some forms of noncognitivism (Gibbard and Blackburn), error theories, and *some* forms of ethical naturalism want to go still further and argue for, or at least assume, a sparse Galilean cosmological naturalism – a bald naturalism or physicalism – with a brute descriptive language, with a no non-

excisable appeal to thick concepts. Allan Gibbard's view of the world (his cosmological naturalism) is a good example of such a pared-down physicalist picture. And, in this worldview, he wants to treat, as he puts it, "normative judgments and moral sentiments as natural phenomena" (Gibbard 1993, 34). One of his "chief aims throughout" *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* was to do just that (ibid.). Here, in world-outlook, he is, broadly speaking, one with the other noncognitivists running from Hågerström to Ayer to Stevenson. But their treating of moral judgments as natural phenomena is very different from that of ethical naturalists. The latter want to construct a broadly scientific normative ethic where, as we have seen, moral judgments are viewed as a subspecies of empirical factual judgments: judgments that are true or false, and *establishable* as true or false, in basically the same way as any other empirical judgments are. This substantive ethical theory was to be backed up by a naturalistic metaethical theory, which, in one way or another, identified norms and values with natural facts.

Later versions claimed, as we have seen, *de facto* identities without claiming any identities in meaning (sense or use). There are indeed moral properties but they are also factual properties or, more plausibly, always properties asymmetrically supervenient on factual properties. Their very *normativity* is somehow constituted or produced by their *facticity*. Ethical naturalists are, as Peter Railton well put it, *factualists* while noncognitivists, along with that endangered species, intuitionists, are *nonfactualists* (Railton 1993, 36-51). By contrast to factualists, noncognitivists regard moral judgments as expressions and evocations of attitudes or feelings or the making of prescriptions (telling someone to make something the case). They regard moral conceptions as natural phenomena in a way analogous to (but not identical with) the way a cry, groan, or a laugh or reacting for or against something is a natural phenomenon. As they see it, moral judgments are not primarily, or perhaps sometimes even at all, conveyors of information or knowledge claims. They are rather expressive of stances for or against something. Moral sentences in the declarative mode appear on the surface to be attributing properties, but they are best understood as doing something else, namely expressing attitudes of norm acceptance. An expression of an attitude is, not, of course, a statement of fact, though the statement that an expression of attitude has been made – itself a factual statement – is a showing of how firmly, without taking an ethi-

cal naturalist outlook, moral judgments and moral sentiments can be taken to be natural phenomena. They express and tend to evoke feelings or attitudes, but that they occur is a natural phenomenon as a groan or a laugh is a natural phenomenon. They are the linguistic analogue of groans, laughs, and the like.

So the difference between noncognitivists (nonfactualists, nondescriptivists) and ethical naturalists (factualists, descriptivists) is not over whether to have a broadly scientific worldview, but, arguably, over the putative fact/value and fact/norm dualism within such a scientific worldview. Ethical naturalists traditionally have believed that it is indeed just *putative* and that there is a continuity between science and ethics, with norms and values, even fundamental ones, being a subspecies of empirical fact. (All norms are facts, but not all facts are norms.) And moral judgments are in reality empirical judgments confirmable or infirmable empirically. Moral utterances, where true, tell it like it is, and tell it like it is about the empirical (natural) world, the only kind of world there is.

Ethical naturalists of the current generation draw attention to how our language is suffused with normativity. We have thick moral concepts (e.g., courageous, erasable, diligent, bestial, crude, kind) which are both descriptive and evaluative, and there is, they claim, no analyzing them out, or paraphrasing them into, a purely descriptive (factual) component and a purely normative or evaluative component. Here they are one with Philippa Foot and Bernard Williams. Similar things obtain, they claim, for the thin, or thinner, concepts good, right, ought, fitting, rational, or reasonable. Reflecting on our language and thought, we do not find in it, ethical naturalists claim, a deep linguistic or conceptual divide or gap between the factual and the normative. We have, as the metaphor goes, empirical facts, though often with a normative tone, all the way down.

Noncognitivists (nonfactualists), though they can agree with naturalists, as Gibbard does, that our language is suffused with normativity, believe that, if we analyze it and the thought that goes with it carefully, we will be able to analyze out (isolate and identify) purely factual components and a pure normative component, thereby vindicating a fundamental fact/norm division. Gibbard, like Hare and like Blackburn, wants to keep a dualism of fact and value (fact and norm) and to treat it as fundamental to a proper understanding of morality and evalua-

tive discourse in general. But he also remarks that he wants "to allow for lots of language that is mixed: that isn't purely normative and isn't purely factual" (Gibbard 1993, 53). It could even be the case that a language, perhaps English, "might have only mixed normative terms" (ibid.). But, if that is so (and isn't it?), shouldn't this lead Gibbard to ethical naturalism? Gibbard thinks not, for while his metalanguage (as he puts it) as a whole is English, still, he believes, we can develop a sufficient fragment of an ideal metalanguage in which "we can render meanings in a pared down, dualistic language: a language of pure facts, along with a single, pure normative element" (ibid.). The language of pure facts should be Galilean – the brute facts of a bald naturalism – and the single pure normative element is given in the term 'is rational.' Even that may not, as Gibbard speculates, under the pressure of Railton's questioning, be the *mot juste* (Railton 1993, 36-51; and Gibbard 1993, 52-8). 'Rational' may have too many connections to be expressive of a pure norm or a pure normative atom or a pure normative element. Perhaps 'is rational' is too tied to facts to so function. Perhaps it should be replaced by 'makes sense' or 'the thing to do?' But these terms in turn seem to have similar difficulties. They too seem to be tied to certain descriptions. But this does not terribly bother Gibbard, for he, in fine formalist fiddle, remarks that if English does not have such a term – an all-purpose normative term expressive of "a pure normative element" – then, he, Gibbard, will have to invent one and explain it, so as to make language live up to a fact/value distinction. But hitherto all proposed candidates have failed. And it is, moreover, problematic – to put it minimally – that we could somehow float free from our natural languages (remember Quine on how finally we have to just acquiesce in our mother tongue) and somehow or other just conceptualize 'a pure norm' or 'a pure normative element' so as to have some idea what we are talking about here. It begins to look like even *if* our last remark is somehow too strong, the search for the pure normative nugget is at best like the search for the holy grail and at worst like a search for the color of heat. Ethical naturalists will find such a strong claim of analysis as Gibbard's (as Gibbard surmises himself they will) implausible. Others will think it incoherent, and still others, who are not confident that it is incoherent, or perhaps even implausible, will think it is unmotivated, because pointless or at least unnecessary. What good is it? they will ask. We get along all right with our natural languages and with perspicuous rep-

representations of specific troubling normative notions in our language – our natural language – with only mixed, and at least seemingly inextricably mixed, normative terms (terms that are neither purely normative nor purely factual). Such terms are just all over the place. Our language is suffused with a blend of normativity and facticity. (Perhaps Dewey's talk of fact-values is not as silly as many of us took it to be?) To take our moral terms and other normative terms to be such mixed terms yields a conception that enables us to see how moral utterances are attitude-expressing, action-guiding and truth attributing all at once and quite consistently so. Moral utterances have both the dynamism and the practical-guidance quality that morality requires, and we can have some idea, as well, of when moral claims are true and, going up a level, of what it would be like for them to be true or false. We do not need, ethical naturalists will say, that old dualism which, like so many other philosophical dualisms, has baffled us more than it has enlightened us. Still, a quiet little voice may whisper to us, carrying us right back to the commencement of such discussions, 'But isn't there a distinction, which any analysis needs to capture, between describing what is the case and saying what ought to be the case, between saying what is done and saying what is *to be* done or what *must* be done?' Everything is what it is and not another thing. But if that is so – and isn't it? – isn't there a distinction – and a fundamental one – between fact/value and fact/norm and why not say it is a dualism deeply embedded in our thought and language?

Such a belief, though repeatedly challenged, has been, at least since the time of Hume and Kant and again throughout the three periods of metaethical theory, a persistent and very deeply embedded belief of many philosophers, perhaps most philosophers. And indeed the very sophisticated form of ethical naturalism defended by Peter Railton in this volume accepts a form of the is/ought gap. Whether the fact/value divide is genuine and fundamental or whether it is another confused philosophical dualism seems not to have been sorted out – *perhaps* it is not the sort of thing we can expect to sort out – or at least there is no consensus about it among informed and reflective moral philosophers. This issue (directly or indirectly) is an issue for many of the essays contained in this volume. We should see, in this respect, if things, in one way or another, get pushed along a little.

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