

MORAL LEARNING AND MORAL REALISM: HOW EMPIRICAL PSYCHOLOGY ILLUMINATES ISSUES IN MORAL ONTOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: Although scientific naturalistic philosophers have been concerned with the role of scientific psychology in illuminating problems in moral psychology, they have paid less attention to the contributions that it might make to issues of moral ontology. In this paper, I illustrate how findings in moral developmental psychology illuminate and advance the discussion of a long-standing issue in moral ontology, that of moral realism. To do this, I examine Gilbert Harman and Nicholas Sturgeon's discussion of that issue. I contend that their explorations leave the issue unresolved. To break the stalemate, I appeal to empirical psychological findings about moral internalization—the process by which children acquire the capacity to act in terms of moral norms. I contend that these findings illuminate the issue, suggest a way to advance it, and tend to support a moral realist position.

Although scientifically and naturalistically inclined philosophers have been concerned with the role of scientific psychology in illuminating problems in moral psychology, such as the capacities for moral agency (for instance, Flanagan, 1996 and Goldman, 1992), they have paid less attention to its potential contributions to issues of moral epistemology and ontology. In this paper, I attempt to illustrate how findings in moral developmental psychology might illuminate and advance the discussion of the long-standing issue in moral ontology of moral realism and moral antirealism.

Moral realism and moral antirealism are distinct from moral nihilism and moral noncognitivism (Rottschaefer, 1998 and Sayre-McCord, 1988). Moral realists and antirealists both assert that there are some moral facts. They differ about the nature of these facts. Moral nihilists and moral noncognitivists contend

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that there are no moral facts.¹ Classically, Platonic realists hold that moral values are abstract entities. Theistic moral realists, on the other hand, hold that moral values are instantiated in an all good and loving divine being. Realists who are followers of G. E. Moore hold moral values to be constituted by nonnatural facts.² Naturalistic moral realists reject these explications of moral realism and make moral facts a part of the natural world. Naturalistic moral realists differ in their understanding of how facts are a part of the natural world. Some maintain that natural moral properties can be reduced to natural nonmoral properties. Others maintain that they supervene on these natural nonmoral properties, while still others maintain that they are emergent properties. Scientific naturalistic moral realists argue that moral facts can be described and explained in an initial fashion by means of ordinary cognitive capacities and, then, more adequately, by the natural and social sciences.

Moral antirealists confine the referents of moral facts to subject-side factors of individuals or groups of individuals, for instance, preferences or pro-attitudes toward helping others in need. On the other hand, moral realists include in moral facts object-side features, such as the properties of certain events, objects, or situations, for instance, the cessation of bleeding in an accident victim. Some moral realists are moral epiphenomenalists who, while admitting that there are natural moral realities, argue that they exercise no causal influence. The scientific naturalistic moral realism for which I shall argue maintains that moral facts exercise causal influence. In addition, although I do not argue for it here, I maintain that moral facts refer to material *relational* factors, concerned both with agents, their actions and characteristics, and with the properties of things and

¹ Moral skeptics, on the other hand, maintain either that we do not know whether there are any moral facts or that we cannot know whether there are any. Given that there are some moral facts, moral realists and antirealists claim that there can be some approximately true moral beliefs. While moral skeptics assert that we either cannot or do not know any approximately true moral beliefs. Moral nihilists, of course, would maintain that there can be no approximately true moral beliefs because there are no moral facts. 'True' can be understood in a number of different ways, for instance, (a) the correspondence sense of fitting with moral reality, (b) the coherence sense of fitting with other moral and nonmoral beliefs or (c) the constructivist sense of being constituted by the evidence of justification for the moral belief. Moral realists will often understand 'true' in a correspondence sense, though they need not do so. Moral realists and antirealists maintain that there are some justified true moral beliefs, while the so-called error theorists argue that there are no justified true moral beliefs. Moral realists hold that moral facts are in some important senses of the term independent of moral subjects.

² Moral realism might be thought to be coextensive with the position that moral principles are universal. But this is not so. Moral principles might be relative to given cultures or societies and, nevertheless, refer to moral values that have object-side factors that are relative to given cultures or societies. I have argued that this is the way to understand what B. F. Skinner called societal values (Rottschaefer, 1980). On the other hand, Kant held that moral principles were universal, but was not a moral realist.

events with which the agent interacts.³ This position contrasts with the view of antirealists who hold that moral facts refer exclusively to either subjective or intersubjective factors concerning the moral agent, and not also to the properties of objects and events. Thus moral realists contend that moral realities are objective to the extent that they are not constituted exclusively either by the subjective states of moral agents or by intersubjective factors. Naturalistic moral realism makes these objective moral realities part of the material world.

Some recent arguments against moral realism claim that if moral realities are objective, then the methodologies of ethics and the sciences must be significantly similar. Three major arguments have been made that ethical methodology is importantly different than that of the sciences (Brink, 1989, Ch. 7). These arguments are: (1) the argument from testability, that scientific claims are testable and ethical claims are not; (2) the argument from disagreement, that scientists eventually come to some sort of consensus about what ought to be believed, ethicists do not; and (3) the argument from queerness, that moral realists postulate queer sorts of properties, ones that impose a sort of requiredness upon moral agents. Such properties are completely foreign to the sciences.⁴ If one or more of these arguments are successful, then it seems that the case for a naturalistic moral realism is problematic.

Although most philosophers believe that the testability argument against moral realism fails, Gilbert Harman (1977/1988, 1985, 1986) has formulated a new argument against moral realism, one related to the testability argument, an argument which he claims shows the implausibility of moral realism, whatever the fate of the arguments from disagreement and queerness. I shall call this argument against moral realism the argument from explanatory inertness. In this paper, I examine the recent discussions between Harman, an antirealist, and the moral realist Nicholas Sturgeon concerning the argument from explanatory inertness, and I contend that their discussions have ended in a stalemate. I then introduce some empirical findings from the study of moral development concerning moral internalization to break this deadlock. These empirical results, I maintain, render

³ On the other hand, moral realists, who are nonrelational objectivists, hold that moral facts are constituted by realities entirely independent of the moral agent.

⁴ Some might want to add to this list, indeed, give pride of place to the is/ought gap. However, the is/ought gap is not incompatible with every sort of moral realism since it is perfectly compatible with a nonnaturalistic moral realism. Nevertheless, it might be argued that it is clearly incompatible with a naturalistic moral realism, especially a scientifically based one. The sciences, it is claimed, deal with facts and what is the case, while ethics deals with values and what ought to be the case. I have addressed this issue elsewhere (Rottschaefer, 1998).

the explanatory inertness argument problematic; in addition, they lend some support to the thesis of moral realism and provide some potentially fruitful paths for continuing investigation of the issue of moral realism. If my claims are correct, they illustrate how scientific psychological findings illuminate a significant issue in moral ontology.

The Argument from Explanatory Inertness Against Moral Realism

Harman has argued that although moral claims can be tested, their testability and subsequent confirmation is not sufficient to establish moral realism. The fact that an ethical principle has observable consequences does not, he contends, establish that there are moral facts. Suppose that our ethical claim is:

(M): It is right to help a person who is injured and in need of help.

This claim is testable if we add some auxiliary hypotheses and suppose a certain “testing situation.” For example, imagine the following “test situation:”

(TS): Ivan has fallen, injured himself and is in need of help.

Given the following auxiliary hypotheses:

(A1): Katie usually does the right thing.

(A2): For Katie to help Ivan is for her to clean and bandage his wounds.

We can then conclude that we will more probably than not observe

(O): Katie is cleaning and bandaging Ivan’s wound.

To establish that testability and confirmation do not imply moral realism, Harman asks us to distinguish two sorts of apparently testable claims, psychological and sociological claims, on the one hand, and moral claims, on the other. For example, consider the following sociological and psychological claims:

(S): Many Americans believe that it is right to help a person who is injured and in need of help, and

(P): Katie believes that it is right to help a person who is injured and in need of help.

(S) is a testable explanatory hypotheses insofar as it can explain the fact, if it is a fact, that many Americans help a person who is injured and in need of help. And (S), along with the claim that Katie is an American, can lead to (P) and, thence, to an explanation of the fact, if it is a fact, that Katie is cleaning and bandaging Ivan’s wound. Or, of course, we could use (P) without bringing in (S) to explain Katie’s action. As explanatory, both of these claims refer to facts that play a causal role in bringing about Katie’s actions. But Harman argues that (M) does not have a similar explanatory role. That is, the fact of the rightness of the action, if it is a fact, plays no causal role either, for instance, in Katie’s belief that helping is the right thing to do or in her subsequent action.

Thus Harman is contending that explanatory scientific hypotheses identify causal factors in the occurrence of the *explanandum*. Successful testing of such hypotheses is a basis for realism about these factors. So if the moral realist is to make her case, she must not only demonstrate that moral claims can be successfully tested, but also show that some moral claims are explanatory hypotheses which, if confirmed, provide evidence that moral facts play a causal role in the bringing about of moral and nonmoral phenomena. For instance, (1) the moral rightness or wrongness of an action might explain why one comes to believe that the act is right or wrong; (2) the moral virtue or vice of a person might help explain judgments about the moral character of that person; (3) the moral rightness or wrongness of practices or institutions might explain the moral beliefs and the reactions people have to these practices and institutions. The testing of an explanatory hypothesis can be conceived of in terms of an attempt to determine whether the effects postulated by an explanatory hypothesis to be the results of the causal factors discussed in the explanatory hypothesis do in fact occur and occur in the way postulated by the hypothesis. If these effects are observable, then we have an observational test of an explanatory hypothesis about moral facts. If there are several competing explanatory hypotheses, then the explanatory hypothesis that better accounts for the effects is the preferable one. We can take this account of the testing of an explanatory hypothesis to be a description of either ordinary everyday practice or scientific practice or both. Thus Harman is claiming that the hypothesis that object-side moral facts, for instance, the rightness of aiding a bleeding person, have a role in the explanation of either other moral facts or nonmoral facts is less plausible than alternative hypotheses appealing to subject-side phenomena, for instance, the agent's psychological set.

Consequently, Harman is claiming that (M): *helping someone who is injured and in need of help is morally right* does not identify any causal factors, and, consequently, has no explanatory power. However, as they stand, (S), (P), and (M) are not incompatible hypotheses. So, to make Harman's point, we can strengthen (P), or other similar hypotheses about moral sensibilities, so that (P) excludes (M). We can do so by maintaining that such hypothesized psychological or sociological factors are relatively sufficient, insofar as they do not require the objective rightness of actions in order to bring about their effects, in this case, Katie's action. I say "relatively" sufficient because, of course, there are many other factors necessary for Katie to help Ivan, for instance, neurophysiological processing in her brain. But the necessity of such factors is not in question. However, Harman does allow that (M) is a testable *explanatory* hypothesis, if it is accompanied by a moral theory that contains a naturalistic *reductionistic hypothesis*, for example, moral rightness and wrongness are constituted by certain beliefs along with pro- and

con-attitudes. Harman believes that one or other of two types of naturalistic theories (impartial observer theories or practical reasoning theories), along with “a touch of noncognitivism” may be of the right sort to provide the reductions necessary to give moral claims explanatory power (Harman, 1986). Thus (M) cannot explain Katie’s perception, belief or action unless the rightness of the action is reduced by means of some moral theory to a naturalistic set of subjective or intersubjective factors, as, for instance, pro- or con-attitudes. It is these latter factors that then do the explanatory work, rather than any object-side factors, for instance, those connected with Ivan’s injury and the benefits to Ivan of Katie tending to it. Consequently, Harman argues that an emotivist can contend that the hypothesis that moral sensibility will bring about Katie’s action—without appealing to the objective rightness or wrongness of an action—would be confirmed in the case of Katie.⁵ On this basis Harman concludes that hypotheses about objective moral facts are not necessary in explanations of either other moral facts or nonmoral facts. In fact, Harman claims that such hypotheses about objective moral facts are explanatorily irrelevant (Harman, 1977/1988, p.122).

In further support of his argument, Harman compares the testing of an alleged explanatory moral claim with a scientific explanation. Physicists appeal to the presence of protons to explain the observation of vapor trails in a cloud chamber.⁶ The vapor trails act on our visual system to produce an observation of them, and, with background knowledge, an observation that protons have passed through the cloud chamber, producing the vapor trail. But in the moral case there is nothing present in the objective facts to act on perceptual systems to produce the observations about moral rightness. Subject-side factors alone suffice to account for whatever moral observations or beliefs are generated in the situation.

Harman concludes that he has shown that moral realists face a special problem if they attempt to build their case for moral realism on the similarity of ethical and scientific methodology in the testing of explanatory hypotheses. He

⁵ Harman also argues against claims that reflective equilibrium, a method that includes testing moral theories against moral intuitions and adjusting the latter in terms of the former, parallels the scientific method of adjusting theories to observations. Physicists test an explanatory hypotheses about the causal forces of matter by postulating that certain effects in the real world will be manifested given certain assumptions about the nature of these forces and a specified testing situation. But according to Harman reflective equilibrium is a method for testing moral beliefs against *imaginary* cases, not the real world.

⁶ “Facts about protons can affect what you observe, since a proton passing through the cloud chamber 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. But there does not seem to be any way in which the actual rightness or wrongness of a situation can have any effect on your perceptual apparatus. In this respect, ethics differs from science.” (Harman, 1977/1988, pp. 7 & 8)

contends that the passing of such tests is in fact necessary for establishing sufficient similarity between ethics and the sciences. Thus the inability of moral claims to serve as explanatory hypotheses bodes ill for moral realism.

Sturgeon's Realist Response and the Stalemated Debate

Nicholas Sturgeon (1985, 1986a, b) and others (Railton, 1986; Brink, 1989), have challenged Harman's views concerning explanatory inertness. Focusing in particular on the interchange between Sturgeon and Harman, we can discern several sorts of arguments and counterarguments: appeals to ordinary moral discourse, the use of thought experiments, and speculations about the causal efficacy of supervenient properties. I contend that their interchange ends in a stalemate.

But to begin with, let us consider a little more carefully the exact nature of the differences between our representative realist and antirealist. As ethical naturalists, Harman and Sturgeon agree that if there are moral properties they are neither autonomous nor independent of nature, but are constituted by natural properties. Thus they also agree that naturalists have to develop a naturalistic theory of the moral good, one that displays the connections between moral natural properties and nonmoral ones. Given this basic agreement, Harman and Sturgeon disagree about the need for and the role of such a theory in the observational testing of moral theories. Although Harman does not require a reduction in the classical sense of deductive links made possible by bridge principles that define moral terms by means of nonmoral ones, he requires, it seems, more of a systematic theory than does Sturgeon, if the observational testing of moral claims is to occur.⁷ Sturgeon, however, maintains that to get to the commonly shared goal of a naturalistic theory, relatively nontheoretical explanations of the wrongness or rightness of actions, for instance, are a necessary step. Harman believes that such explanations are problematic, if not irrelevant, without some sort of naturalistic theory in hand to inform the observations used to test moral

⁷ Harman clarifies the sort of reduction he has in mind as follows: "It is certainly not true, as Sturgeon says, that an ethical naturalist need not worry about having a reduction now. I am not saying the ethical naturalist needs to have reductive *definitions*, in Sturgeon's sense, because I am not sure what he means by 'definition.' But in order to show that moral claims are empirically testable in the relevant sense, the naturalist must say enough about the natural facts with which the moral facts are to be identified to indicate how the moral facts can be manifested in the world in a way that allows the relevant testing. Otherwise, the naturalist has no answer to what seems to me to be the central issue in moral philosophy." (Harman, 1986, p.67)

claims.⁸ More importantly, the sort of naturalistic theory that Harman has in mind is a subjective or intersubjective one, while the one that Sturgeon embraces is an objective one. That is, Harman links moral rightness and wrongness to the agent's or a society's beliefs and attitudes, while Sturgeon connects them to aspects of the states of affairs instantiated by both the agent's actions and the features of things and situations that the agent's actions aim to change and achieve.

To support his realist views, Sturgeon first appeals to the realist character of common sense moral explanations. He claims that if these explanations are taken on face value, they attribute effects to the moral features of actions, persons, practices and institutions. He maintains that these explanations should be taken seriously, and should not be rejected without good reason. Moreover, Sturgeon contends that Harman has not provided us with any good reasons for rejecting these claims and, *a fortiori*, for considering them as explanatorily irrelevant. Nevertheless, although antirealists do admit that common sense moral explanations sometimes appeal to moral facts as explanatory, they can maintain that examples of antirealist explanatory patterns can also be found in common sense moral discourse. Moreover, antirealists can recast realist interpretations in terms of subjective and intersubjective facts without loss of explanatory power. Reliance on common sense explanatory practice does not seem to settle the issue.

Sturgeon admits that common sense explanatory practice does not provide definitive support for moral realism. Thus, he reinforces his argument with the claim that these explanations stand up in the face of thought experiments concerning counterfactual situations. These thought experiments use something like Mill's method of difference. For instance, suppose that Alfred hits his innocent baby brother with a stick, thereby harming him. Katie sees Alfred doing so and forms the belief that what Alfred did was wrong. How do we explain her belief? A necessary part of this explanation must be the fact that what Alfred did was wrong. Suppose, however, that what Alfred had done in hitting his innocent baby brother with a stick and harming him had not been wrong. What, then, would Katie have believed about what Alfred had done? Our intuitions tell us that she would not have believed that what Alfred had done was wrong. This is true, of

⁸ Harman states: "I do not mean to try to resolve this basic issue in ethics. My purpose is only to argue that it is a real issue, one that is not resolved by an appeal to the commonplace examples cited by Sturgeon. In the absence of a way of reducing moral claims to psychological or sociological claims there is a real problem as to the testability of moral claim, because it is obscure how the rightness or wrongness of an action can manifest itself in the world in a way that can affect the sense organs of people. Apart from such a reduction, to develop a moral theory using the method of reflective equilibrium is to confuse moral psychology with the theory of right and wrong." (Harman, 1986, p.66)

course, only if there is no causal overdetermination, that is, there are no other sufficient causes of the *explanandum*. If there are other such causes, then even if the putative *explanans* in question had not occurred, the *explanandum* may have.⁹ So, there is some further reason to believe that moral facts play a causal role in Katie's belief. Antirealists might appeal to thought experiments of their own. Suppose that Katie did not have a con-attitude toward harming innocent people, would she then have judged that Alfred's action was wrong? Our intuitions tell us that she would not. Harman (1986, p.63) grants that at least in some cases of ordinary moral reasoning the counterfactual test seems to work. But he does not concede that this is enough to establish Sturgeon's case for moral realism.

The counterfactual argument would not be enough to convince a moral epiphenomenalist that moral properties are actually causally efficacious. Although they may exist, they do nothing. Moral epiphenomenalists could attribute all the causal efficacy to the nonmoral features of Alfred's action upon which the moral features supervene. However, realists, like Sturgeon, find Harman's appeal to moral epiphenomenalism unsatisfactory both because a full-fledged commitment to epiphenomenalism renders all scientific explanations, except perhaps those of particle physics, explanatorily inert and because Harman's own naturalistic position itself depends upon the failure of moral epiphenomenalism.

First, the thesis that supervenient properties are epiphenomenal, possessing no causal powers, is not restricted to moral properties. If supervenient properties are epiphenomenal, then the properties of actions, events and entities appealed to in all the social and natural sciences, except for the most fundamental properties of physical particles are causally inefficacious. If this is so, then explanatory testing is not a feature of any of the sciences except particle physics. Thus the realist argues that whether the epiphenomenalist thesis fails or succeeds, an antirealist appeal of the sort represented by Harman's is futile. If the epiphenomenalist thesis is correct, ethical theory is in no worse shape than all the other sciences concerned with properties of entities above the level of particle physics in which explanatory testing might be thought to occur, and according to which higher level supervenient properties are thought to be causally efficacious. Thus, an antirealist

⁹ Another version of the counterfactual test is to suppose that all the supervenient bases of the moral fact were held to be the same; but, in fact, the action was not morally wrong, and to ask whether Katie would still come to believe that the action is wrong. The proponent of the explanatory impotency of moral facts can be expected to respond affirmatively. Sturgeon and Brink, moral realists, suggest that from the perspective of a naturalistic moral realist the supposition that the moral facts can change while the supervenient bases of these facts are unchanged, is not tenable. However, they both admit that the moral epiphenomenalist could well argue that the presence of moral facts is irrelevant to the causal efficacy of the nonmoral facts. As a result, Katie comes to judge and believe Alfred's action to be morally wrong because of its supervenient bases whether or not it is in fact morally wrong.

cannot maintain the difference concerning explanatory power between ethics and the sciences generally, the difference upon which he builds his antirealist arguments rejecting ethical theories that refer to objective moral realities. If he wants to maintain such a contrast he has to provide some principled difference between ethics and the other sciences concerned with entities and properties above the level of physical particles. But Harman has failed to provide such a principled difference. On the other hand, if the general epiphenomenalist thesis fails, then, in order to maintain their position, Harman and his antirealist associates must provide some principled account of why its failure applies only to the sciences and not to ethical theory also.

But even this will not do since Harman's own position is also subject to attack by moral epiphenomenalists. For instance, suppose that Harman's view is that some sort of subject-side reality, for instance, a con-attitude to harming innocent people, is constitutive of the wrongness of Alfred's action. A moral epiphenomenalist can argue that it is the nonmoral properties upon which that moral property (the con-attitude) supervenes that do all the causal work. Thus a moral epiphenomenalist could maintain that the factors that Harman claims bring about Katie's judgment that Alfred's action is wrong, namely, her belief that Alfred hit and harmed his baby brother and her con-attitude toward his action, are, in fact, causally impotent. Rather, the nonmoral factors upon which the moral features supervene are causally efficacious in bringing about Katie's judgment. Consequently, naturalistic explanations that refer only to subject-side moral features are just as epiphenomenal as those of the moral realist that appeal to the wrongness of Alfred's action. So the realist concludes that Harman cannot appeal to moral epiphenomenalism without putting his own position in jeopardy. But, on the other hand, the realist has provided no refutation of moral epiphenomenalism. Why should the antirealist who is also a moral epiphenomenalist be persuaded that object-side moral features are causally efficacious? Realists like Sturgeon have only their appeals to the realist implications of some ordinary moral discourse and to realistically construed thought experiments to fall back on.

Where does this interchange between Sturgeon and Harman leave us? Let us return to our example. Katie has formed the belief that Alfred's injuring his innocent baby brother is morally wrong. How are we to explain Katie's belief? The realist claims that the wrongness of the action is itself part of the explanation of her belief. Granted that Katie has a minimal sort of background ethical belief—however acquired—that there is some connection between innocent suffering and moral wrongness; nevertheless, the objective wrongness of the action—however that is to be spelled out—functions in her perception of that wrongness; and her

perceiving that wrongness leads her to form the belief that it is wrong. On the other hand, the antirealist explains Katie's belief by appealing to subjective features of her psychological makeup. Katie believes that the action is wrong because she has a moral sensibility such that, given the cues deriving from the nonmoral features of the action, she is led to believe that the action is wrong.

Which explanatory hypothesis is preferable? I conclude that we have reached a dead-end; neither the moral realist or the antirealist has presented a clearly persuasive case. Although each side can call upon examples from ordinary moral discourse to support its position, the other side can reinterpret these examples to show how they fit its own position. Moreover, the use of thought experiments leads into unresolved speculative issues about the causality of supervenient properties postulated by social and natural scientific theories. Thus the discussion seems to have come to an indecisive standstill. Is there anyway to move beyond the apparent stalemate? I contend that there is.

Moving Beyond the Stalemate: Empirical Findings About Moral Internalization

Brink (1989, p.186) suggests that in order to explain moral judgments and beliefs, we may have to appeal to the moral learning of the individual involved. Moreover, he claims, "unless we regard this education as mistaken or in some way biased, its explanation is likely to refer eventually and in part, to moral facts, their recognition and transmission." This is a fruitful intuition, and one whose accuracy can be pursued by an investigation of the relevant empirical literature. Thus, in order to break the stalemate, I suggest that we look at the results of scientific psychological studies concerning moral development, in particular, moral internalization, to see whether they throw light on the mechanisms of moral belief formation and thereby on the role, if any, of moral facts.¹⁰

¹⁰ We need to distinguish several issues. Recent findings (e. g., Carruthers and Smith, 1996) concerning how infants and children acquire cognitive competencies in various areas have shown that representation forming mechanisms might be developmentally relative, that is, it is probably the case that various capacities for belief-formation are only available given a certain degree of maturity and/or learning. Thus, it may be inappropriate to attribute moral beliefs in the full-fledged sense of the term 'belief' to very young children. In addition, it is no doubt the case that moral stances are taken in relatively unreflective ways and that the sorts of representations, if any, involved in these stances may only more or less approximate what we might call the folk psychological conception of a belief. Thus the question about what is the role of moral facts, if any, in moral *belief* formation is not a completely unambiguous one nor one that may be answered in the same way for everyone. Moreover, the ordinary modes of moral belief formation used by humans, whatever they are, are probably not optimal and may be improvable. Although advances in answering these questions may affect any conclusions we might draw about the role of moral facts in moral belief-formation, these issues certainly cannot be settled here. Plunging into the empirical literature is not likely to lead to quick or easy resolutions of such complex issues; but this should not be surprising or disheartening to naturalists, especially scientific naturalists.

For roughly the first two-thirds of this century Freudian, behaviorist, and cognitive developmental theories held center stage in the study of moral learning. For various reasons, including especially their fit with common sense intuitions about the nature of morality and its sources, cognitive developmental theories, like Kohlberg's, were thought to provide the most adequate scientifically-based accounts. But since the mid-sixties several key aspects of these theories have been shown to be highly problematic. In particular, researchers have provided strong reasons to reject the notion of developmental stages and have found that developmental theories do not adequately account for moral action (Bandura, 1986; Flanagan, 1984, Kurtines and Grief, 1974). More important for our purposes is the upsurge in the study of the moral development of infants and very young children, as young as one to two years of age (Dunn, 1987). These more empirically oriented studies have led to new and exciting understandings of moral learning.

The question of what defines the realm of morality is not a settled matter in either philosophical circles or in such scientific disciplines as human sociobiology and developmental psychology. What makes something substantially a matter of morality as opposed to, for example, a matter of custom, etiquette or aesthetics is still an open question, as are the functional requirements for being a moral agent (Rottschaefer, 1998). Nevertheless, many psychologists of different persuasions agree that voluntary behaviors intended to benefit another, such as helping, sharing and comforting behaviors that are altruistically motivated, (i. e., motivated by sympathy for others or by the desire to adhere to internalized norms) are within the moral realm (Eisenberg, 1992).¹¹

If we consider moral agency to be a complex of interacting capacities, we can ask questions about how these capacities are acquired and how they are put to work. I shall take moral learning to involve the processes by which we *acquire* our moral capacities. Of course, the factors involved in the acquisition of these capacities are multiple. One convenient classification (Eisenberg, 1992; Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989) includes biological, cultural, and socializing (both familial and extrafamilial) factors, as well as such "demographic" variables such as sex, age, ordinal position in family, and socioeconomic class. These factors, along with such "person" variables as sociability, emotional responsiveness, empathic and sympathetic

¹¹ That is not to say that there is no controversy. For instance, moral cognitive developmentalists have long argued that behavioristically oriented social learning theories of morality and moral agency are about neither. And within the moral cognitive developmentalist tradition, followers of Eliot Turiel have argued that social categories need to be distinguished more sharply from those of morality than Kohlbergians have been willing to do.

capacities, role/perspective-taking abilities, interpersonal problem-solving skills, and moral reasoning abilities, all function in moral learning.

Developmental psychologists have found that prosocial and altruistic tendencies increase as infants grow into toddlers, preschoolers, and young children.¹² In addition, they have found individual differences among children at all these points of development. In trying to answer the question of acquisition and, thus, account for moral learning, they have attempted to correlate these differences with the above mentioned factors and variables. The discovery of correlations leads to the search for causal factors that account for the phenomenon of increase in both the quantity and quality of prosocial behaviors and for the differences in prosocial tendencies among children.

Parents and siblings are the primary agents within the family for the promotion of moral learning. With respect to the role of parents, psychologists have identified several major methods of moral training including modeling, instruction, and discipline techniques. In addition, they have identified styles of parental interaction with children that affect moral learning such as warmth, nurturance, and degree of attachment between caregiver(s) and children. Combinations of these methods and styles make for different sorts of more or less effective moral training.

I shall focus on the relative effectiveness of the three distinctive discipline techniques that developmental psychologists have found that caregivers use in bringing about what psychologists call moral internalization. Moral internalization is a way that developmental psychologists often describe what moralists have discussed as the development of conscience. It designates a psychological state, and its development, in which one feels or believes that he or she has an obligation to act in accord with moral norms. Developmental psychologists mean various things by moral norms; but one acceptable and nonbiasing version is that a moral norm is a norm that enjoins one in a specific situation to act for the welfare of another.¹³ Successful moral internalization is manifested by an agent when, in situations where there is a conflict of interests between the welfare of another and

¹² *Prosocial* behavior is behavior that is intended to benefit another, such as helping, sharing and comforting, whether that behavior is motivated by concern for self or other. *Altruistic* behavior is prosocial behavior that is motivated by sympathy for others or by the desire to adhere to internalized norms (Eisenberg, 1992, Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989).

¹³ This specification of morality in terms of the welfare of another does not exclude other moral values such as personal fulfillment. Nor does it make the welfare of another the highest of moral values. Rather developmental psychologists take it to be a generally accepted and noncontroversial paradigmatic case of the kind of moral values that are embodied in moral norms.

his or her own interests, he or she consistently acts to promote the welfare of another person rather than to attain social approval or egoistic aims.

We can understand the background moral beliefs, motivations, and feelings assumed by both Harman and Sturgeon in their explanations to be at least partially the result of moral internalization. What does the study of moral internalization tell us about the sources for these background beliefs, motivations and feelings?

We can distinguish the following factors as relevant to moral internalization: (1) the *child*, for instance, her age, temperament, and relative cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioral capacities, (2) the *caregivers*, their moral beliefs and motivations and their own moral learning histories, and (3) *circumstances of moral learning*: situations of *parental discipline*, occasions for the child to *identify* with or *imitate* her caregiver; and occasions of *cognitive moral dissonance*. As a rough generalization, we can say that psychoanalytic theories allot a large role in moral learning to the parental discipline technique of love withdrawal as well as to occasions for identification; while behaviorists and social learning theorists have traditionally emphasized the role of power techniques and occasions for imitation. For psychoanalytically oriented theorists, identification has a large dose of mentalistic mechanisms, especially unconscious mechanisms connected with Oedipal and Electra complexes. Social learning theorists and behaviorists who eschew mental entities prefer imitation since it can be construed without such mentalistic baggage. Moral cognitive developmental theorists have emphasized as situations of moral internalization occasions of moral cognitive dissonance such as the classical moral dilemmas proposed by Kohlberg.

There are good reasons to consider situations of parental discipline as particularly apt for understanding the factors responsible for moral internalization. The reason for this is that situations of parental discipline bear important resemblances to those of moral conflict. Such situations are those in which the child's egoistic desires come in conflict with moral standards which are "external," that is, standards that are embodied in the physical and verbal messages of the parents or caregivers about how the child should or should not act. For one who has achieved moral internalization, these situations of moral conflict provide the opportunity to engage her conscience in the resolution of the conflict. The moral problem is to resolve the conflict between one's egoistic—and presumably nonmoral or immoral desires—and the moral standards applicable in the situation in favor of the moral standards. Successful moral internalization reveals itself in the ability to act on the basis of these moral requirements without regard to external reward or punishment.

Psychologists who study the moral development fostered by parental discipline have identified three importantly different disciplinary methods by means of which parents facilitate moral internalization. These are (1) assertions of power, (2) withdrawal of love, and (3) induction (Eisenberg, 1992; Eisenberg and Mussen 1989; Hoffman, 1988). Assertions of power involve such measures as the use of force, deprivation of privileges, threats and commands. Love withdrawal includes expressions of parental anger and disapproval, while in the use of inductive techniques, caregivers point out to the child, either directly or indirectly, the effects of the child's behavior on others, provide information about moral norms, and communicate their values regarding the consideration of others. The association of the moral norm with both empathic feelings, particularly empathic distress, and guilt feelings makes it a "hot cognition," one that has motivational power. It can thus enter into future considerations as a motivator independently of any concerns about approval or disapproval or fear of punishment. Some operational measures of internalization used in studies of moral internalization are: (1) the amount of resistance offered by the child to pressures and temptations to behave contrary to the standard; (2) the extent to which the actions of compliance are performed without thought of sanctions for failure to comply; (3) the amount of guilt experienced or expressed by child following failures to comply with the standard; and (4) the tendency to confess and accept responsibility for one's deviant behavior. Although it is something of an overgeneralization, behavioristically oriented social learning theorists predict the effectiveness of power techniques; and psychoanalytic theorists, the effectiveness of love withdrawal techniques.

Both naturalistic and experimental studies since the late 1950's and the early 1960's indicate that the most effective means of moral internalization are inductive techniques (Eisenberg, 1992; Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989; Hoffman, 1970, 1977, 1988; Macoby, 1982; Macoby and Martin, 1983; Moore and Eisenberg, 1984; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, and Chapman 1983; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, and King, 1979; Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow, 1990). However, there is some evidence that the occasional use of power assertion techniques by nurturant parents who usually employ inductive techniques plays a positive role in moral internalization by, for instance, letting the child know that the parent feels strongly about something or by controlling a child's defiant behavior (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1979). Love withdrawal, on the other hand, contributes to the child's inhibition of anger.

For example, in a naturalistic study Zahn-Waxler and her colleagues (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1979) studied the responses of trained mothers to both the prosocial behaviors of 1 and 2 year-olds and their failures to act in a properly prosocial

fashion. In the latter situation, some mothers corrected their children by pointing out to them in an emotionally expressive fashion that they had harmed or hurt someone and that it was wrong to do so. Other mothers corrected their children by emphatically commanding them to stop their behavior. The former children were later deemed to be more prosocial and more concerned to make up for the wrongs they had done; while the latter showed fewer prosocial and reparative behaviors.

The general message of these studies is that love withdrawal and power assertion techniques may play a role in getting the child's attention; while inductive techniques serve to point out to the child, for instance, the harmful consequences of her actions. These help to engage the child's empathic capacities and can also lead to feelings of guilt. The most successful moral internalization occurs as the result of repeated use of inductive techniques in varied circumstances of moral learning.¹⁴

Realist Implications of the Empirical Findings About Moral Internalization

Given these findings concerning moral internalization, what implications do they have for the issue of moral realism? The hypothetical case we have been considering, Katie's judgment that what Alfred is doing is wrong, is different from the moral internalization cases as we have described them insofar as Katie is not judging that what *she* has done or might do is or might be wrong. But this difference does not undermine the relevance of these findings for the issue under discussion. That issue concerns the role of moral facts in the formation of the background factors that enable Katie, or other moral agents, to formulate their

¹⁴ It might appear that the success of inductive techniques in fostering moral internalization is assured since the latter is defined as the state in which one feels or believes that she has an obligation to act in accord with moral norms, rather than for social approval or egoistic concerns. Since the motivations associated with love-withdrawal and power techniques appeal to social approval from parents and concerns about the self, it is no wonder that they are less effective than inductive techniques. Appearances to the contrary, the success of inductive techniques is not a matter of definition. Successful moral internalization is discerned in situations of moral conflict when pursuit of the welfare of another is at odds with social approval or self-interest. The claim about inductive techniques is a claim about its relative superiority to those of power assertion and love withdrawal in the *acquisition* of a moral capacity to act in accordance with moral demands that require actions that place the welfare of the other over that of one self. The superiority of inductive techniques implies that the caregiver's invocation in the child of motivations directed toward another's welfare rather than the child's own self-interest better enables the child in subsequent situations of moral conflict to act in accordance with moral demands. *A priori* things need not have turned out this way at all. Indeed, all the classical theories of moral development, Freudian, behaviorist and cognitive moral developmental, assume that the motivation of infants, toddlers and very young children is self-centered. Some contend that such motivation predominates even in adulthood.

moral beliefs. Since successful moral internalization implies internally prompted moral action on the basis of moral norms, we can infer that under normal circumstances Katie will be prompted on the basis of her moral learning to make a judgment about Alfred's actions. Of course, we would not expect that successful moral internalization demands heroism on Katie's part. If she knows that Alfred does not usually take well to moral criticism and is likely to retaliate if she lets him know what she thinks of his goings on, we might expect Katie to keep her judgment to herself or, perhaps, not even make it. Thus it is plausible to infer that the evidence about the methods of moral internalization is also applicable to situations of moral judgment about the actions of others. On that basis, we conclude that if Katie is a relatively successful moral learner, then the moral sensibility or background belief which functions in her formation of the observationally based belief that what Alfred is doing is morally wrong is probably the result of inductive techniques. What does this have to say about the role of moral facts in the explanation of her moral sensibility and thereby in the explanation of her belief about Alfred?

Consider Katie's moral learning situation at a point when the moral internalization process is beginning under the auspices of her caregiver(s). Although at the beginning of the learning period Katie is still a moral neophyte, we do not need to suppose that she is a moral blank slate, especially if the evidence concerning in-built empathic capacities is correct (Eisenberg, 1992; Hoffman, 1981). As far as her caregiver goes, we assume that no matter what internalization technique she uses, she considers the action in question wrong. The situation is one in which Katie is doing something wrong; for example, she is hitting her baby brother, Jimmy, for no reason at all. Her caregiver—say her mother—tells her that what she is doing is wrong or that she should stop hitting little Jimmy. No matter what kind of internalization technique her mother uses, we can suppose that the above factors are *constant* with respect to our example. The *only* relevant difference in the learning situation concerns the internalization techniques used by the caregivers.¹⁵ If her mother uses an inductive technique, she points out to Katie the harmful nature and consequences of her actions; and Katie takes note of them. In contrast, if her mother uses love withdrawal techniques, for instance, ignoring Katie or looking at her with displeasure, Katie feels the anger and disapproval of her mother. If, however, her mother applies power assertion techniques, Katie experiences fear of punishment or even bodily coercion. Applying our findings, we conclude that if Katie has successfully internalized her mother's norm, the most likely source of that success, and so of Katie's reliable moral sensibility or

¹⁵ Here I idealize the results of the studies; see text below for necessary qualifications and discussion.

background beliefs, is the repetition of learning situations in which her mother uses inductive techniques. Katie successfully internalizes her mother's norms because in her moral training her mother has repeatedly pointed out the harmful effects of her actions. This is something that those who use the less effective techniques of power assertion and love withdrawal do not do.¹⁶

Given this analysis of the learning scenario, we can conclude that the object-side facts of the situation, in particular the harm and distress being suffered by another person, play a causal role in inductively-based learning that they do not in power assertion or love withdrawal modes of learning.¹⁷ We suppose that in each of the situations, the child, the caregiver and the caregiver's norm remain the same. What varies is the mode of internalization. The inductive technique is distinguished from the power assertion and love withdrawal techniques precisely because it makes reference to object-side features in the situation, while the other two techniques do not. Assuming, then, that Katie has been a successful moral learner, she has internalized a reliable moral sensibility that enables her to make relatively accurate judgments and form relatively correct beliefs about moral matters, in particular, matters of moral rightness and wrongness. The sources of the reliability of her moral sensibility, and thus of the background beliefs that she brings to bear in making observational judgments about moral rightness and wrongness, are the inductive techniques used by her mother. These techniques have as an essential element reference to objective moral facts about harming and helping, as well as the consequences of doing so. Thus, we can maintain that they have played a causal role both in the formation of her moral sensibility and in her perception of, and subsequent belief about, the wrongness of Alfred's action.

Consider again the contrast that Harman makes between the explanatory power of theories in particle physics and the explanatory inertness of appeals to moral facts.¹⁸ In the former case, physicists appeal to the presence of protons to explain the observation of vapor trails in a cloud chamber, while in the latter case appeals to moral facts to explain moral perceptions and beliefs appear futile. But, if the studies to which we have referred are valid, the alleged contrast fails. The wrongness of Alfred's action as constituted by or connected with the observable

¹⁶ I once again idealize the example for purposes of clarity. No doubt, caregivers in real life sometimes use all three techniques of moral training either on different occasions or on the same occasion.

¹⁷ Although the studies in question are correlational in nature, there are, as we shall see, good reasons to interpret the results as showing that inductive techniques bring about moral internalization (Hoffman, 1975, 1988).

¹⁸ Not all explanations need be causal. However, both Harman and Sturgeon assume that explanation in the contexts under discussion is to be understood in terms of causality. Since this is an assumption held by both sides, I do not need to defend it here. However, see my 1998.

physical harm done to his baby brother, given Katie's moral training and psychological set, leads her to judge that what she sees is wrong. Although moral philosophers have not attained the degree of theoretical agreement about the nature of moral value that their colleagues in physics have about elementary particles, the findings about the relative superiority of inductive techniques allow us to attribute to object-side factors an explanatory role in the formation of Katie's perception and belief similar to that found in physical explanations.¹⁹ However, while the object-side factors in the *explanans* of the physical case concern the activity of unobservable particles, in the moral case the *explanans* refers to observable features of the injured child. Nevertheless, there is no reason to assume that some theoretical account of the object-side moral features in the ethical case is in principle unavailable to the realist. Moreover, since in scientific cases empirical laws are acceptable, though not complete, sources of explanation, the moral realist is completely within her rights, given the validity of the role of inductive techniques in effecting moral internalization, to count references to object-side factors as partially explanatory of moral beliefs and actions as explanatory.

In addition, as I have noted, inductive techniques work in part because they engage inbuilt empathic capacities. Although I cannot argue for it here, there is substantial evidence that these capacities are evoked without moral training by the distress of others (Eisenberg, 1992; Hoffman, 1981, 1983, 1988; Radke-Yarrow et al., 1983). If this is so, there is further evidence for the role of object-side factors in moral development. In fact, there are good reasons to contend that empathic capacities, in particular, the one for responding to distress, are evolutionarily based (Hoffman, 1981; Eisenberg, 1992; Rottschaefer, 1998). Thus the realist can appeal to objective factors in the social interactions of primates and hominids as environmental selecting factors involved in the origin and maintenance of evolutionarily based empathic capacities (Rottschaefer and Martinsen, 1990; Rottschaefer, 1998). These capacities then would also shape the background beliefs and motivations that function in Katie's response to Alfred's behavior.

¹⁹ As I have observed above, Harman considers his argument from the explanatory inertness of moral explanations to be a separate critique of moral realism from that of moral disagreement. Thus it is significant that if the findings I have appealed to are correct, the differences between the explanatory power attributed to object-side factors in the physics and ethics cases respectively turn on the theoretical disagreements among moral philosophers about the nature of morality rather than on explanatory inertness per se. Thus the argument against moral realism on the basis of explanatory inertness is replaced by the one from disagreement. Indeed, Harman himself allows that, if agreement could be obtained about their nature, a naturalistic reduction of morality in terms of an ideal observer theory, for instance, would give an explanatory role to object-side moral properties (Harman, p. 46). Making implicit use of Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development, Harman speculates that such agreement might be achieved, if the highest stage of moral development is taken to describe what is morally right or wrong.

Considering again the stalemated dispute between the moral realist and the antirealist, we now seem to have a way to push that discussion forward, a way that gives a boost to the realist position. On the basis of the evidence of the *causes* for moral internalization, the moral realist has good reason to claim that the *fact that inflicting unnecessary harm on innocent people is morally wrong* plays a part in Katie's belief that it is wrong. Appeal to merely the psychological and/or sociological sources for that belief is insufficient. Generalizing, I conclude that in cases of moral internalization involving inductive techniques, explanations involving appeals to objective moral facts play an explanatory role. Thus, I maintain that to this extent current empirical findings about moral internalization support the objectivist moral realism urged by moral realists rather than the subjectivist or intersubjectivist position supported by antirealists.

Responding to Antirealist Objections

The antirealist is unlikely to be satisfied with the above empirically based argument for moral realism. She might reject the argument denying either the relevance of the empirical findings or their validity. On the other hand, she may accept both the relevance of the findings and their validity, while maintaining her antirealism.

The antirealist might object that the empirical argument does nothing to overturn her own argument since it remains *logically possible* that objective moral properties play no role in moral internalization. One can easily suppose, following Harman, that pro- or con-attitudes, either previously instilled in the child or introduced into the child independently of any reference of the caregiver to objective facts, can account for the child's internalization of moral norms. The moral realist must concede that the antirealist is entirely correct in her contention; but, no doubt, she will also note that the logical possibility of moral antirealism is not at issue. The issue is the actual role that objective facts play in moral learning.²⁰

The antirealist may respond that her position is based on more than arguments for the logical possibility of moral antirealism. She claims that one can suppose a set of very plausible scenarios concerning moral learning in which

²⁰ I concede that this sort of this-worldly scientific naturalistic response will probably not satisfy those opponents of moral realism such as Simon Blackburn (1988) and Terrence Horgan and Mark Timmons (1996) who contend that settling the moral realism issue involves discussion of possible worlds and the establishment of metaphysical necessities. However, I cannot address here the question of whether these more demanding requirements on moral realism are legitimate and, if so, whether or how they can be met.

objective facts play no relevant causal role whatsoever. For instance, on the occasion of Katie's hitting her baby brother, Katie's caregiver reprimands her, indicating that she has hurt her brother and so has done something wrong that should not be repeated. According to the antirealist interpretation of this scenario, her caregiver communicates to Katie a con-attitude toward hitting her baby brother on the joint occasion of Katie's doing so and her baby brother's reddened arm and crying. The object-side facts serve merely as cues for the invocation of subject-side factors. The realist can certainly concede that the antirealist has proposed an interpretation that is not only logically possible but seems to fit the facts of the hypothesized story very well. Nevertheless, the realist can also interpret this perhaps all too familiar family drama in a realist fashion. The scenario contains multiple possible and plausible causal factors that can be used to explain moral internalization; and both antirealist and realist are, no doubt, well versed in picking out their respective favorite causes. But the issue is not the compatibility of either realist or antirealist interpretations with an agreed upon hypothetical or real story about moral learning; rather, the question is what precisely are the causal factors involved in moral learning and how are these to be determined.

Nor will mere casual observation or anecdotal evidence enable one to determine the causal factors involved in moral internalization. Support for the realist position comes from empirical studies. Let us consider the nature of this appeal. I have presented the empirical results in a somewhat idealized fashion, portraying them as providing a sort of Mill's method of difference test. In fact, what researchers like Hoffman have done is to gather together and analyze a number of studies, some of them naturalistic and others experimental. As is well known, the most powerful evidence for an effect is a controlled study; such studies have the form of a method of difference test. However, naturalistic studies, and even experimental ones, can also take the form of prospective or retrospective tests, neither of which provides for as tight a handle on variables as do controlled studies. In the former sorts of studies, whether done in naturalistic or experimental settings, it is much more difficult to assure oneself that there are no relevant differences on the causal side save for the factors under test. Thus, the antirealist has every right to raise questions about such things as (1) the adequacy of the conclusions drawn from the examined studies, (2) the methods used in aggregating the results of different types of studies, and (3) the nature and strength of the conclusions of the individual studies themselves. The devil is in the details!

Although it is not possible here to examine the different sorts of studies and their relative merits nor the methods of aggregation used in the reviews of the

literature, the realist should concede that that is exactly what she needs to do to firm up and/or qualify her initial idealized presentation of the studies.²¹ At the same time, she should stress that by urging this sort of inquiry upon her, the antirealist has conceded, implicitly at least, the superior evidential force of such studies in the attempt to evaluate the argument from explanatory inertness. While hypothetical examples and/or interpretations of imagined or real life stories are often helpful for conceptual clarification and heuristic purposes, they are, in comparison with empirical studies, of secondary evidential value because of their armchair character. Moreover, the empirical studies of moral internalization, though not without differences, tend to confirm the pioneering work and conclusions of Hoffman concerning the superiority of inductive techniques to those of power-assertion and love withdrawal. Indeed, Macoby (1982), Eisenberg and Mussen (1989), and Eisenberg (1992) take his conclusions to be widely accepted. Thus the realist maintains her claim while granting that she has more work to do.

Finally, the antirealist can argue that the use of these studies to support moral realism is problematic because whatever the nature of the particular studies, the results themselves are correlational in nature. As is well known, it is fallacious to argue for any causal conclusions on the basis of correlational data. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to believe that if there are any causal relations involved, the line of causality is from the discipline technique to the state of moral internalization rather than vice versa (Hoffman, 1975). First, there is the fact that the use of disciplinary techniques to a large extent precedes the presence of any internalization. Secondly, since, for the most part, children generally conform to the demands of their parents, whether these demands be in the moral or nonmoral realm, the probability that the causality is in the direction of technique to state of child is much higher than that it is in the reverse direction.²² It has been estimated that parents attempt to influence young children to alter their behavior on an average of every 6 to 8 minutes during their waking hours; and for the most part they comply (Hoffman, 1983). Nevertheless, the correlational character of the

²¹ For a recent penetrating examination of the problems with drawing conclusions from so-called metaanalyses, focusing on their use in the evaluation of various psychotherapeutic techniques, see Edward Erwin (1994).

²² I do not want to rule out the influence of inbuilt tendencies, for instance, genetically-based empathic tendencies. Nor, as we have seen, does Hoffman. I interpret Hoffman's argument to be that inbuilt behavioral and affective tendencies are plastic and multiple and more likely to be shaped by learning history than to withstand it. Moreover, adaptive inbuilt tendencies, such as empathy, if they exist, are shaped by object-side factors in the social and natural selecting environments of social organisms.

findings demonstrates the need for studies that are designed to ferret out causal factors. Although it is unlikely that particular characteristics of the child determine the style of discipline used, it may be the case that some third factor brings about the correlation between inductive technique and successful moral internalization. Such studies should not only be macro-level in nature focusing on the relative influence of disciplinary techniques, modeling, and other variables on moral internalization, but they should also be done on the micro-level, for example, the hypothesized component processes of inductive techniques should be subjected to test. The work of Hoffman, (e.g., 1983) and Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (e.g., 1990) illustrate well attempts to discover the role of such component processes of moral internalization as the child's empathy and cognition and the caregiver's instructions and nurturance.

Setting aside these objections to the relevance and validity of the empirical findings, it seems that an antirealist could accept the validity of the findings about moral internalization while maintaining her antirealist position. She can argue her case in at least the following three ways: (1) the empirical findings show that it is subjective factors that are responsible for the relative success of inductive techniques; (2) if there are any object-side factors involved in the success of inductive techniques, these factors are indifferently moral, immoral, or amoral, and (3) the realist begs the question in calling these object-side factors *moral* facts. Let us discuss a realist response to each of these objections.

First, the antirealist argues that what the findings show is that inductive techniques are superior to love withdrawal and power assertion methods precisely because they appeal to the moral sensibilities of the child as manifested, for instance, in her empathic reactions to the distress of another person. Thus the success of the inductive technique is not due to object-side factors, such as little Jimmy's crying and reddened arm, but to the relative superiority of the subject-side factor to which the inductive technique appeals. In comparison with the subject-side factors of anxiety induced by love withdrawal or fear brought about by power assertion, the capacity for empathic distress, itself a subject-side factor, has superior motivating power.

The realist must concede that subject-side factors function in moral internalization. They partially cause Katie's judgment about the moral wrongness of her own and Alfred's action. Her learned moral sensibilities and empathic capacities contribute to her judgments about the wrongness of Alfred's action and her own. But, in contrast with power assertion and love withdrawal techniques, inductive techniques also involve appeals to object-side factors. Katie perceives Alfred to have done something wrong and forms a belief about that on the basis of both her learned moral sensibilities *and* the observable harm and distress that

Alfred has caused. Moreover, as a moral neophyte, Katie learns that hitting little Jimmy is wrong not only because of her empathic capacities but also because of the observable effects of her actions on him. The effectiveness of inductive techniques lies in their appeal to both object- and subject-side factors. Moreover, if the latter are themselves evolutionarily acquired traits, they have been selected for by certain object-side features of the social and/or natural environment. The antirealist might respond that the caregiver could refer to any sort of objective facts to establish an external cue to activate Katie's innate empathic capacities or learned moral sensibilities. For instance, the antirealist might claim that Katie's mother might just as well have had Katie attend to little Jimmy's dirty hands or ugly shirt than to the consequences of her hitting her little brother, that is, his crying and reddened arm. On the face of it, this seems implausible. The capacity for empathic distress, for instance, seems to be intrinsically connected with specific object-side features. It is these features that arouse it, and, in the case of an evolutionarily based capacity, it is these features that constituted the specific environment selecting for it.²³

A second line of antirealist response uses the findings about the relative effectiveness of inductive techniques to make a case for antirealism. Thus, a caregiver could use inductive techniques to teach racist behaviors and practices by focusing a child's attention only on the distress of those of the same color. She could either refrain from arousing empathy in the case of people of a different color or attempt actively to suppress it. Indeed, in the case of evolutionarily based empathic capacities, one might expect that such factors as the relative similarity of the person in distress to the potential empathizer played a role in the origin of empathic capacities. But, if this is so, argues the antirealist, then inductive techniques are as effective in teaching immoral behaviors and incorrect moral perceptions and beliefs as they are in teaching their opposites. This implies that the relevant object-side features that play a role in moral learning of this sort are indifferently moral or immoral or, indeed, amoral. Object-side features may play a role in moral learning, but these features are not moral features. However, even if the realist grants for the sake of argument the claims about the effectiveness of these techniques in the learning of both immoral and moral behaviors as well as correct and incorrect moral perceptions and beliefs, he or she need not concede

²³ Ruth Millikan (1996) has postulated the existence of representations that are intrinsically both descriptive and directive, "pushmi-pullyu" representations as she calls them. She does so to account for a range of human (and nonhuman) representational capacities evidenced by such phenomena as social communication in nonhuman animals, intentions, primitive social norms, performatives, and thick ethical descriptions. The object-side features to which I am appealing might be considered to be the causal sources for these sorts of representations.

that moral features play no role in genuine moral learning. What these examples show, if correct, is that inductive moral techniques are not the only techniques required for adequate moral learning. Empirical findings (e.g., Hoffman, 1988) show that empathic responses are limited and must be supplemented by more cognitive responses if an agent is to respond in a morally adequate fashion to those who are different from her or separated from her in time and space. However, the limitations of a learning mechanism do not diminish the role of the object-side factors in the situations in which it is effective. Consider the fact that our unaided perceptual systems do not have access to the atomic realm. Moreover, returning to the original antirealist example, inductive techniques will not be very helpful in the teaching of racist beliefs and actions. Inductive techniques of their nature appeal to a coordinated set of object-and subject-side features, those features of the object that invoke empathic and sympathetic capacities. The teaching of racist beliefs and actions appeals to differences and antipathies, not similarities and sympathies.²⁴

This brings us to a third objection that an antirealist can raise against a realist reading of these findings. Granting the validity of the empirical findings, he or she can argue that there is no reason for calling the object-side features that play a role in moral learning *moral* features. The realist has given us no reason for thinking that diminishing or eliminating another's physical or psychological distress or increasing or restoring her physical or psychological well being is morally valuable. The realist is begging a fundamental question by identifying norms that require avoiding harming innocent people as *moral* norms. She is reading philosophical conclusions about the nature of morality and moral values into the empirical findings about moral learning.

There are several sorts of realist response to this charge of begging the question. First, he or she replies that the antirealist has changed the nature of the issue in question. The mutually agreed upon assumption of the discussion is that the *explanandum* for which both parties are posing differing explanations concerns genuinely moral matters, for instance, moral actions, beliefs or perceptions. If the antirealist denies that there is a moral phenomenon to be explained, then the original question under discussion between realist and antirealist, the question of the explanatory power or inertness of moral facts, disappears. But both parties had to agree that they had identified a genuinely moral matter in need of explanation

²⁴ This is not to say that some means of instruction are as equally effective in teaching immoral behavior as they are moral behaviors and beliefs, for instance, modeling in the case of aggressive behavior (Confer Rottschaefer, 1998).

for the disagreement about explanatory power or inertness to get started. So the realist has begged no question because in order to meet the antirealist challenge that object-side factors are explanatorily inert, he or she has to assume that there is some moral phenomenon, whether moral perception, belief, action or practice to be explained; so too, the antirealist. Both are seeking to determine to what extent, if at all, object-side factors, as opposed to subjective or intersubjective factors, play a causal role in *moral* perceptions, beliefs or actions. So the antirealist, who demands that the realist establish that there is a moral phenomenon to be explained is questioning a premise of the discussion that both parties had agreed upon, and raising a different sort of question. Although the antirealist's question is a perfectly legitimate one, the burden of answering it surely does not lie only with the realist. For if there are no moral phenomena to be explained, then the antirealist project of finding subject-side factors that alone are sufficient to explain moral phenomena also collapses.

Secondly, there are good reasons for taking the *explanandum*, for instance, Katie's judgment, to be a *moral* judgment and probably a correct one. Lay persons and philosophers often use examples of this sort to illustrate correct moral judgments. Sociobiologists and psychologists studying human morality use similar sorts of examples, and often treat them as paradigm cases of moral beliefs and actions. In addition, one can appeal to any major contemporary ethical theory, religious, Kantian, Utilitarian, or virtue ethics, in support of the claim that Katie's judgment concerns a matter of morality and is, at least *prima facie*, correct. Thus the working assumption of the discussion is relatively unproblematic and seems to beg no questions. The entire dispute between the realist and antirealist about the explanatory inertness of moral facts begins with the assumption that there is an agreed upon *moral explanandum* for which the contending parties are offering opposing explanations. The realist begs no questions since both realist and antirealist are assuming the existence of some moral phenomenon for which they both seek an explanation.

Third, even if the antirealist concedes the validity of the empirical findings and grants that object-side factors play a role in explaining, for instance, Katie's perception about the morality of Alfred's action, the case for moral realism is not complete. The identification of object-side factors as causally relevant in explanations of moral phenomena leads legitimately to the designation of these factors as objective *moral* factors. The object-side properties that play a causal role in the formation of moral beliefs, perceptions, motivations and actions are the moral properties of the object-side things that possess them. However, even if we grant this realistic interpretation of the empirical findings, it does not follow from

this interpretation that the nature of moral facts is clearly, let alone completely, specified by these empirical findings. Indeed, there is no reason for a moral realist to make such a claim. Ethical theories are required for a complete specification of the nature of moral facts. If the realist is right, ethical theories that make some reference to theoretical object-side properties will provide the sort of theoretical explanations in ethics that have been identified as distinctive of the sciences. But, even without these theoretical developments, what the empirical findings already indicate is that moral facts in an objectivist sense of that term play a role in the explanation of moral perceptions, beliefs and actions, a role that makes those explanations more adequate than explanations that do not make such appeals.

Moreover, since the thesis of moral realism I am advocating is an empirical one, it could turn out that it is false, and that the antirealists are, in fact, correct after all. My claim is only that current psychological findings about moral internalization favor a realist rather than antirealist thesis. Indeed, even if moral realism turns out to be the empirically superior view, the moral realism involved need not be a common sense moral realism. The moral properties or facts asserted by the moral realist to play a causal role in the explanation of moral and nonmoral phenomena need not be those observable object-side features specified in common sense moral discourse or those observable features delineated in the empirical regularities discovered by psychologists. Paralleling the development of other scientific endeavors, the nature of these moral facts may turn out to be more accurately characterized by the theoretical predicates of some future scientific theory.

However, the antirealist is unlikely to be satisfied with this sort of response. Even if one grants that the empirical research I have used establishes a case for the role of object-side factors in the explanation of a moral phenomenon, moral internalization, I have yet to establish that these object-side factors are, *qua moral* factors, explanatory.²⁵ Thus, the antirealist may argue that the findings about moral internalization show that object-side factors, such as the observable harm done to Alfred's little brother, play a causal role in the internalization of moral norms by Katie, but they do not show that the observable harm, *qua moral*, plays such a causal role. For one and the same property may be explanatory in one respect, but not another. For instance, the color of a male bird may constitute its attractiveness for females and it may also make him vulnerable to predators. But it does not follow that its attractiveness for females makes him vulnerable to predators.

²⁵ I want to thank Tom Cooke for posing this objection to me in a very forceful fashion.

One realist response to this objection is to take the constitution relation to be one of strict identity. The observable redness in the arm of Alfred's little brother, along with his crying can be taken to be strictly identical with the moral wrongness of Alfred's action. On this interpretation it follows that the observable harm, qua moral wrongness, plays a causal role in moral internalization. However, this understanding of the constitution relation seems too strong. Alfred may have just accidentally hit his baby brother with the stick while playing pirates with his friends. Thus it seems that the constitution relation involves something less than strict identity. The realist, I think, must concede that the constitution relation involves both object- and subject-side factors. The difference between the realist and the antirealist is that the latter allows only subject-side factors to be constitutive of the moral wrongness of Alfred's action, for instance, the lack of universalizability of the maxim under which Alfred is acting or the fact that it violates a divine command.

The antirealist might even concede that—in some sense of the term 'constitution'—object-side factors are partly constitutive of the wrongness of Alfred's action. But, it does not follow from the fact that, for instance, the crying and reddened arm of Alfred's baby brother constitutes in part the moral wrongness of Alfred's action, that these observable phenomena, qua moral, play a causal role in Katie's judgement about Alfred's action or that similar observable phenomena, qua moral, have helped in bringing about the moral internalization achieved by Katie. Some observable aspect of a moral phenomenon may be causally responsible for internalization without it being so *qua* moral.

In response, it is important to notice that a realist interpretation of the empirical findings does not require that these findings alone enable one to specify the nature of the moral facts involved in moral internalization. Indeed, I believe that the findings leave their nature highly underdetermined. A moral theory will be required in order to specify the nature of moral facts. Thus the object-side constituents of a moral value are, I contend, theoretically specified object-side properties. If this is so, the observable phenomena that play a role, for instance, in Katie's moral internalization, that is, her baby brother's crying and reddened arm, constitute the moral phenomenon involved in moral internalization only in a weak sense of the term, 'constitute.' They are linked to the constitutive object-side factors by a set of causal relations such that their presence often indicates a departure in some specifiable way from a morally valuable state.

The observable phenomena, therefore, provide access to the sort of theoretical explanations in ethics that Harman has identified as distinctive of the sciences. Vapor trails or spectral lines are the observable phenomena that provide

perceptual access to the microphenomena of nuclear and atomic structure. Upon observing such phenomena, and with the aid of theoretical background knowledge, the physicist makes judgments about the presence or absence of certain microphenomena and about relevant features of the microphenomena. These observable phenomena are causally linked to those underlying, theoretically specified, microphenomena. So too the observable phenomena that are causally relevant to moral internalization, in our example, the crying and reddened arm of Katie's little brother, are linked to theoretically specified, object-side natural phenomena, for example his physical health and psychological well-being. In the example of Katie's internalization of moral norms and the subsequent judgments that she makes with the use of these norms, the ultimate causal responsibility for moral internalization is hypothesized to lie with these theoretically postulated object-side features, qua moral values. It is because of this postulated causal link that the observable phenomena are claimed to play a causal role qua moral phenomena. Although the antirealist may claim that the object-side factors, qua moral, are epiphenomenal and argue that subject-side factors alone play a causal role, qua moral, the findings about moral internalization, make such a claim less likely than the realist's claim. These findings support an appeal to causal links between physical and psychological well-being and the observable features of the arm of Alfred's baby brother rather than an hypothesis that connects these observable features exclusively to such subject-side factors as the universalizability of the maxim under which Alfred is acting, accordance with the divine will or the attitudes and preferences of the caregiver.

However, since the claims that I make are intended to be fallible, empirical claims I do not rule out a priori the antirealist's alternative suggestions of subject-side factors as entirely constitutive of the moral facts that are operative, qua moral, in the case of Katie's successful moral internalization. Nevertheless, given the findings about the relative superiority of inductive techniques in moral learning, the naturalistic realist's inclusion of object-side features as constituents of the moral factors operative, qua moral, in moral learning is *prima facie* more plausible than the antirealist's alternative.

Conclusion

A successful challenge to the argument against moral realism from explanatory inertness leaves the antirealist with the two other classical arguments against moral realism, those from disagreement and queerness. Although I believe that these arguments are also problematic, I have not tried here to refute them. Moreover, if the empirical findings for moral realism that I have examined stand, I

contend that the moral realist is on the right track in supporting the reality of object-side moral facts, as manifested in the causal role they play in bringing about both moral and nonmoral phenomena. Moreover, whatever the final resolution of the issue of moral realism, I conclude that, as has been the case with moral psychology and, to some extent, with moral epistemology, an examination of the findings and theories of scientific psychology will prove helpful in the exploration and resolution of issues in moral ontology.

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