NONCOGNITIVIST MORAL REALISM*

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Contemporary moral realists insist there are moral facts that can be discovered and confirmed in the natural world, without appeal to mysterious moral intuitions or God's will or transcendent forms; and of course the moral realists are correct. The moral facts indicated by the work of experimental psychologist Martin E. P. Seligman are a substantive example. Seligman demonstrated that an animal repeatedly subjected to inescapable trauma (such as painful electric shock) learns a helplessness response, and will subsequently make no effort to escape such pain even when escape is quite possible.[1] From Seligman's work on learned helplessness it is easy to see (the moral fact of) the injustice of blaming the victim of violent abuse who makes no effort to escape: she has learned a helplessness response that makes it impossible for her to make the effort to escape, and is as helpless – and as blameless – as one who is held fast in chains.

Such moral facts can be discovered through empirical inquiry, and require neither mysteries nor faith. As Richard Boyd asserts, the question of whether we can discover moral facts reduces to the question:

> Have our beliefs about our own needs and capacities been good enough . . . that we have been able to respond to new evidence and the results of new social developments by expanding and improving our understanding of those needs and capacities even when doing so required rejecting some of our earlier views in favor of new ones? It is hard to escape the conclusion that this is simply the

> question "Has the rational empirical study of human kind proven to be possible?"[2]

Certainly it has been possible. We have discovered important facts about humans and human society that have resulted – as the naturalist moral realists emphasize – in new knowledge of moral facts.

The naturalist moral realists have elucidated the important and productive role of reason, observation, and scientific inquiry in improving our understanding of morality, and have thus dispelled the lingering mysticism that often shrouds ethical inquiry. We can make cognitive investigative efforts that improve understanding of ethics, rather than waiting passively for intuitive enlightenment or divine directives. Unfortunately, some moral realists have misconstrued their work as a refutation of noncognitivism: there are real moral facts, discoverable through cognitive empirical processes applied to the natural world; and so (naturalist moral realists conclude) noncognitivism is refuted. But that conclusion is a non sequitur, based on misunderstanding of both moral facts and noncognitivism. It is my happy purpose to reconcile naturalist moral realism with noncognitivism, and to show that naturalist moral realism is a complement – not a competitor – to noncognitivist metaethics.

Peter Railton's work exhibits both the virtues of moral realism and the flaws in moral realist attempts to refute noncognitivism. Railton first quotes Ayer's claim that "argument is possible on moral questions only if some system of values is presupposed"[3]. He then argues that that is grounds for ethical noncognitivism only if one is prepared to accept scientific noncognitivism as well (which Ayer and other noncognitivists certainly are not). For as Railton notes:

> What it would be rational for an individual to believe on the basis of a given experience will vary not only with respect to his other beliefs, but also with respect to what he desires. From this it follows that no amount of mere argumentation or experience could force one on pain of irrationality to accept even the factual claims of empirical science. The long-running debate over inductive logic well illustrates that rational choice among competing

> hypotheses requires much richer and more controversial criteria of theory choice than can be squeezed from instrumental reason alone. Unfortunately for the contrast Ayer wished to make, we find that argument is possible on scientific questions only if some system of values is presupposed.[4]

The fact that science presupposes values – values that permit the ranking and evaluation of scientific theories – has been a source of great interest and profound comfort to moral realists. For example, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord notes the essential role of evaluations and evaluative facts in science, and then argues that since in science the notion of "best explanations" involves values and value judgments, those who accept the essential role of value judgments in factual scientific investigations should not deny that values and moral facts can play an equally legitimate role in moral explanations.[5] All that is true, and insightful; but the noncognitivist contrast between science and ethics remains, and it remains important.

Before proceeding with an account of the contrast between science and ethics (and with arguments in support of noncognitivist ethics and for the compatibility of noncognitivism and moral realism) it is first necessary to look more closely at what noncognitivism is, and what it is not. Obviously the noncognitivist contrast between ethics and science is not the one Ayer initially suggested: between purely emotive value expressions (that do not even make statements) and statements of fact that are in principle confirmable or disconfirmable. Indeed, Ayer now acknowledges as much:

> To say, as I once did, that these moral judgements are merely expressive of certain feelings, feelings of approval or disapproval, is an oversimplification.[6]

A more plausible noncognitivism claims that at the most fundamental level there is no truth of the matter in ethics: when ethical disagreements are run to ground in the search for resolution, ultimately there will remain only basic value preferences that cannot be rationally justified, and alternatives to which can be favored without violating

reason. Carnap suggests such a position in his later writing: analysis of value judgments reveals "a pure value statement" without any factual component, but a statement that can nonetheless have logical implications.[7] Such value statements have meaning, but they cannot be established by any logical or empirical procedure. When all questions of empirical fact and logical process are resolved, intractable noncognitive value differences may remain. In most ethical disputes – disputes among our friends and compatriots, who have been shaped by similar acculturation processes – the noncognitivist foundation is rarely reached and seldom questioned. There remains nonetheless a fundamental noncognitivist value level, and if disputes are carried to that level they cannot be resolved cognitively. Our cognitive discussions and investigations of ethics presuppose basic noncognitive value preferences.

This neononcognitivism preserves an important contrast between science and ethics. But the contrast is not between inquiries and debates and explanations in ethics that presuppose values, and scientific inquiries-debates-explanations that do not: in short, not an invidious contrast between the objectivity of science and the subjectivity of ethics. For Railton is right that "argument is possible on scientific questions only if some system of values is presupposed", and his elegant example concerning inductive logic is more than is needed to establish that. After all, scientific argument is daily rendered impossible by fundamental differences in values. If, for example, we consider it blasphemous to try to understand and control God's miraculous Creation, and instead fundamentally value a childlike commitment of faith, then scientific arguments are unlikely to gain much purchase on our thinking. Scientific investigation does presuppose basic values, such as commitment to maximizing precise prediction and control of phenomena. Thus science and ethics are on equal footing in requiring value presuppositions.

What follows from the fact that science presupposes values? It does follow – as moral realists rightly insist – that there are evaluative facts in science, and thus that there is no reason to deny the analogous role of evaluative or moral facts in ethical discussions and debates and reflections: or at least no reason to deny such evaluative facts in ethics that would not also lead to the undermining of scientific evaluations.

That is worth noting, and insistence on that point is a worthwhile moral realist contribution. However, establishing the essential role of values in science (and a comparable range of values in ethics) does not refute noncognitivism; noncognitivism endures, but at a different level. In order to see the remaining noncognitive difference between ethics and science, it is necessary to examine what happens when the basic values of an ethical system are challenged, and contrast that with the quite different result of challenges to fundamental scientific values.

Science has a common core of values, shared by those participating in the scientific enterprise. The exact dimensions of those values may be vague, and certainly one can reject scientific values such as prediction and control (religious fanatics and ideologues often do so); but one cannot reject the basic defining values of the scientific enterprise and continue to be a scientist. One can pretend to be doing science (but instead be perpetrating a fraudulent pseudoscience); or one can argue that some alternative system (with values other than those of science) is better than science (as Pascal, for example, became convinced when he renounced scientific research in favor of faith). But one does scientific work only by adhering to basic scientific values. Obviously there are some fuzzy areas --and vexed questions – when we attempt to trace the values definitive of science, and especially so in any attempt to rank those values. Nonetheless, there are some basic accepted values governing – even defining – the scientific enterprise. If one has no interest in prediction, refuses to allow for the possibility that one's theories might be disconfirmed, steadfastly prefers theories that offer less rather than more control of the phenomena, and rejects all use of observation, then one has stepped beyond the boundaries of science, even if it is difficult to say precisely where those boundaries lie.

This appeal to definitive scientific values may seem a controversial one: an atavistic throwback to logical positivism, out of place in a holistic-pragmatic age in which all "scientific facts" are subject to revision and the most cherished scientific principles can be rejected. But even in that context, there remain definitive scientific values that cannot be rejected without rejecting science. One may decide that in some cases the value of making precise predictions carries less weight than the value of an elegantly unified theory; but in such cases one is

not rejecting the value of predictive power, but compromising it for some other scientific value. That the predictive value has not been rejected becomes obvious when the elegant theory grievously violates that predictive value, and is thus rejected, or when a new theory with both theoretical elegance and maximum predictive power is happily adopted. Thus there remain definitive scientific values that scientists continue to hold even when the values are compromised.

Moral realists endeavor to make the same sort of case for ethics: there are basic definitive values for the ethical enterprise, just as there are for science. Ethics is concerned with general human flourishing, and human flourishing involves satisfaction of human needs and opportunities to pursue one's goals. Thus Boyd, in giving lessons on "How to Be a Moral Realist," notes that "there are a number of important human goods, things that satisfy important human needs," such as needs for love, friendship, and artistic expression. He then states that:

> Moral goodness is defined by this cluster of goods and the homeostatic mechanisms which unify them. Actions, policies, character traits, etc. are morally good to the extent to which they tend to foster the realization of these goods or to develop and sustain the homeostatic mechanisms upon which their unity depends.[8]

In similar fashion, Railton claims that "moral norms reflect a certain kind of rationality, rationality not from the point of view of any particular individual, but from what might be called a social point of view." And such social rationality seeks "what would be rationally approved of were the interests of all potentially affected individuals counted equally under circumstances of full and vivid information."[9] Railton notes that this will not give us absolute, cosmic moral facts; but it does yield "a form of moral realism that is essentially tied to a limited point of view, an impartial yet human one."[10] Thus Railton claims that his moral realism:

> gives us a way of understanding how moral values or imperatives might be objective without being cosmic.

> They need be grounded in nothing more transcendental than facts about man and his environment, facts about what sorts of things matter to us, and how the ways we live affect these things.[11]

As in science, the exact range of the ethics-defining values may be fuzzy, but nonetheless there are such ethics-defining values, and if one rejects them then one is not participating in the ethical enterprise. One may do that (one may be an amoralist, or an irrational egoist, or a moral monster); but that does not alter the fact that there is a defined ethical enterprise, and one who is part of that ethical community must agree to some basic ethics-defining principles. Of course there remains abundant space within ethics for disagreement, but – just as in the factual world of science – ethical disagreements can be rationally debated and (in principle) rationally resolved.

From there the moral of moral realism follows easily. Ethics is analogous to science: both have basic definitive principles, and both have room for rational debate and research and discovery within their respective systems. Science is the paradigmatic realm of facts, and ethics has an exactly equal realist claim to debating and discovering and establishing real moral facts.

Certainly moral realists are correct that within a given ethical system (defined by basic shared value assumptions) moral realism reigns supreme: there are natural investigations to be made, facts to be discovered, disagreements to be rationally deliberated. At that level, there is indeed moral realism – and cognitivist objectivism – that is the equal of science. But noncognitivism (neononcognitivism) does not deny that given a presupposed value framework (whether in science or in ethics) cognitive arguments and investigations and discoveries are possible. Instead, noncognitivism insists that when fundamental value conflicts arise and basic value questions are posed, then the disputes and values are noncognitive. Such conflict and challenge is possible in ethics in a manner in which it is not possible in science.

Science does presuppose some basic values. Those values can be rejected, but not within science. There are many types and levels of scientific dispute, ranging from disagreements concerning the accuracy of a simple observational count to debates over the proper role of

induction in science. Nonetheless, there remain in place some basic scientific values that are definitive of science and govern disputes within science. Challenges to the basic values of science become questions of ethics. "Should we pursue science?" That is an ethical rather than a scientific question. In contrast, the question whether we should follow the basic values of an ethical system (such as the values elegantly described by Boyd, or some radically different ethical system) remains an ethical question. Thus – in contrast to science – ethics cannot be confined to intraethics: there are inevitably interethical issues as well. Or to put it another way, noncognitivist metaethics acknowledges that there are moral facts within given ethical systems, or intraethically; but noncognitivist metaethics refuses to rule out the inevitable interethical issues that arise concerning competing value systems, in which the basic value frameworks of those systems are in dispute and cannot be assumed without question-begging. And it is at that level that noncognitivism reigns: the level of "megaethics" (we might call it) at which the most fundamental ethical-framework-defining megaethical questions are posed.

Consider the claim that: if you reject the value of the general flourishing of all human beings, then you have no concern for ethics, and you are not raising a meaningful ethical question. That is transparently a noncognitive megaethical tactic: a persuasive definition that attempts to emotively influence those who disagree, rather than a rational argument. For certainly it is possible to consistently propose and follow an ethical system – such as elitism – that disputes the general-concern ethical system. If one upbraids the elitist (who is unconcerned with the welfare of most humans) for "not really doing ethics," the answers are too easy. The elitist can respond that she does not care what one calls it, elitism is a consistent value system that one can fundamentally favor, and that is not subject to rational refutation by "ethical" opponents. Thus the question can and does arise of whether to follow that particular value-ethical system. And that meaningful and challenging question cannot – as in science – be dismissed as a question that belongs to another realm. Scientists easily dismiss those who reject prediction and control as scientific values: scientists read them out of the scientific enterprise, as people who have different interests and values and do not wish to pursue

science. But there is no analogous dismissal for those who favor radically different ethical systems, for ethics must include the megaethical realm in which we decide what basic values we favor and what principles we should follow. Science shifts its megaquestions to ethics, but ethics – at the megaethical level – must face them.

The "megaethical" questions that arise to challenge any ethical system, no matter how it is naturalistically based, are not philosophic fancies; rather, they are obvious and genuine. A well-defined ethical system that values general human flourishing encounters an array of questions and challenges. First is the question of why there should be concern with all humans (rather than a much narrower special elite, with the elite being defined in terms of whatever intellectual or esthetic or power norms one chooses). And questions also arise from the other direction: should concern be exclusively for all humans? Does that include the severely defective, comparable in ability to dogs or pigs? Should we draw the line at groundhogs? mosquitoes? viruses? Should the concern extend even to the inanimate realm? Perhaps there should be greater concern for the inanimate than for humans, as suggested by Robinson Jeffers:

> And when the whole human race
> Has been like me rubbed out, they will still be here:
> storms, moon and ocean,
> Dawn and the birds. And I say this: their beauty has
> more meaning
> Than the whole human race and the race of birds.[12]

One can, quite consistently, consider it not very important that the human species survive. Indeed, one can consistently believe that the world would be a better place in the absence of our species. Such radical alternative value systems are not refutable by appeal to any given moral facts or basic values, for the realm of ethics (megaethics) is precisely where such basic values are proposed and challenged, favored and rejected.

The naturalist moral realist may resist this conclusion by pointing out natural tendencies in our species, our basic human goals-intents-desires. For example, both Boyd[13] and Lycan[14] note that our

evolutionary history may well account for our capacities to reliably recognize the fundamental needs of ourselves and of others, and may also account for the existence of our non-self-interested desires. And such capacities and desires have a special degree of trustworthiness (Boyd and Lycan argue), since they have evolved as mechanisms that enhance our collective survival and welfare.

It is not surprising to find altruistic, cooperative, non-self-interested desires in humans. Such desires facilitate the cooperative behavior that has enabled our species – short in tooth, soft in skin, and slow afoot – to survive and prosper. I am not denying, and certainly not disparaging, such desires: from my own value perspective, they are the best aspect of human behavior and the best hope of a decent human future. Such "intuitive" feelings or desires may be useful in promoting general human well-being and "our collective survival and welfare," and thus may be excellent guides to moral facts within the "general-human-flourishing" ethical framework. Still, they do not establish objective megaethical facts. For it is quite possible to acknowledge such human capacities and tendencies and still doubt – or at least consider it rationally possible to deny – that those are the correct values. For example, one might consider our "natural" tendency to altruistic cooperation a weakness or flaw in our species, and instead value our tendencies toward aggression and greed. Altruistic tendencies are the most promising path to cooperative human behavior and the general flourishing of all members of our species, but that does not exempt cooperative flourishing values from megaethical challenge. Moral realists, such as Lowell Kleiman, accurately note that "Cultures that are opposed to genocide, and killing in general, are more likely to be at peace with their neighbors." And that leads, by way of a rhetorical question, to moral facts: "Peace among nations is a moral goal. Why is it difficult to see any moral facts behind the achievement of a moral goal?"[15] The answer is that it is not difficult to see moral facts behind the achievement of such a goal, but such moral facts can be seen only within a system of presupposed basic moral principles. If those moral principles are called into question, then the "moral facts" cannot be employed to hold the system in place. Such "moral facts" are indeed there within the given system, but they cannot be used to refute noncognitivist megaethics.

For at the megaethical level there are alternatives, even to our cherished value of peaceful altruistic cooperation. Ezra Pound writes chillingly of one such alternative:

> There's no sound like to swords swords opposing,
> No cry like the battle's rejoicing
> When our elbows and swords drip the crimson . . .
> May God damn for ever all who cry "Peace!"[16]

While we may (given our own basic values) find such sentiments appalling, it is quite clear that such "intuitions" also form a part of human society. As much as we may oppose and condemn them, it is something else to suppose that we can establish as moral fact the superiority of the peaceable, cooperative framework. Such megaethical proofs are impossible because the basic standards by which proof would be judged are here called into question. Of course we may easily show that the warlike ways Pound celebrates are profoundly harmful to human welfare, and that they inflict enormous suffering on huge numbers of human beings, and that – in an age of thermonuclear swords --they may lead to human extinction. But subscribers to such a martial ethic might well acknowledge that their moral system makes life nasty, brutish, and short, and nonetheless place great value on such a system, even maintaining that the thrill of a brutal warlike life is enhanced by its uncertainty and brevity. If there are shared values, then one may give cogent arguments against celebrating war. Within the system that values general human flourishing, the virtue of altruistic behavior is a natural moral fact. But when basic systemic conflicts occur – and we are opposed, at the megaethical level, by someone who does not share our basic value system – then there is no possible recourse to such moral "facts": the moral facts are internally real, but megaethically ideal.

To see the noncognitivism that dominates the megaethical level (and the futility of appeals to "moral facts" at that megaethical noncognitive level), suppose it were empirically ascertained that our species requires enormous doses of brutality and elitist exploitation for our long-term flourishing, and that cooperation and altruism would sap the vitality of the species and ultimately reduce its prospects for

survival. That would not establish the truth of – the megaethical moral fact of – the rightness of brutality and exploitation. Instead, we might well conclude that a briefer span of cooperative and egalitarian survival is preferable to enduringly successful savagery. Therefore in the actual case in which our "flourishing" is enhanced by a more cooperative and peaceful system, that fact does not establish the overall truth of a cooperative system of ethics. For if the facts were quite different our cooperative ethical system would not be undermined; and if a supposed underpinning can be pulled away while the system remains firmly in place, we are justified in concluding that something else must be holding the system secure. That something else – at the megaethical level – is noncognitive.

One more illustration may underscore the fundamental contrast between science (which is defined by allegiance to a general set of scientific values) and ethics (which includes megaethical questions that are noncognitive because – unlike in science – no value framework can be assumed in which discussion and debate can proceed). Suppose that human science (science developed by humans, including science about humans) continues to flourish, and humans develop scientific systems that greatly enhance prediction and control. In particular, a wonderfully efficient account of subatomic particles develops, held firmly in place by an enormous system of scientific theory and technical practice. Although this highly effective account of subatomic particles – that claims to give an exhaustive taxonomy of subatomic particles – fails to recognize one particle that extraterrestrial scientists of much greater intelligence have long since discovered, it is nonetheless a very useful account, and indeed is more useful to humans (of small brains) and human science than would be an account that included the overlooked particle. The more comprehensive account would prove too cumbersome for human scientific use, and it would undermine the genuine effectiveness of that entire scientific system. In short, human scientists have developed the optimum scientific account of subatomic particles for human scientific use. The discovery of an additional subatomic particle would prove detrimental to human scientific systematizing and predicting and controlling.

Imagine that one of the scientists should step back from that system and assert that it is not an account of what is truly real, but is

instead "merely" a useful account for human scientific purposes: some other species, or perhaps some extraterrestrial or deity, might find another system more useful or more complete. The human scientists would legitimately scoff at such extreme skepticism. The reply would be that this system is the most effective means that humans have for predicting and controlling and understanding the natural world, and that is sufficient. It need not be the scientific system that would be selected by God or by some super extraterrestrials in order to be a workable and realistic scientific account of the world. We are, after all, developing science for humans, not for gods or extraterrestrials. If this system optimizes our efficient and effective dealings with the real world, then that is all that can be reasonably asked of a realistic scientific world view.

But now the contrast between the realist case for science and the realist case for ethics is easily marked. Analogous questions concerning an effective and workable system of ethical principles would be quite legitimate, and could not be so easily dismissed. For suppose we have developed an ethical system that maximizes the flourishing of human beings (however we wish to define such "maximum human flourishing"). There would remain legitimate questions of whether such a system is just. For example, questions might arise concerning whether the system achieves benefits for humans at the expense of other species, or about what should be included among "humans" or "persons" (other species? computers? severely deficient members of the human species?). And one might legitimately question whether maximizing human flourishing is really the defining purpose of ethics: the question of whether humans should instead regard themselves as only one small part of an overall universe, and strive to further some transhuman goal, is a legitimate moral question. One might – as Robinson Jeffers suggests – deny that human flourishing (or even the flourishing of all sentient creatures) is the fundamental ethical touchstone. In short, we can rule out of order certain questions about the realism of science, but not the analogous ethical questions. So long as moral realism is confined to intrasystematic considerations, moral realism is as legitimate as scientific realism. But there are within ethics – unlike within science

– legitimate megaquestions, that are (notwithstanding the cognitive moral realism that guides intraethics) noncognitive.

But perhaps this is a false comparison. Perhaps we can not "rule out of order" any scientific questions, and there is no realm – vague or otherwise – of presupposed scientific values. Paul Feyerabend maintains that anarchism – that denies there are any fixed facts or given values – "is certainly excellent medicine for epistemology, and for the philosophy of science".[17] Feyerabend argues that any "fixed method" defined by fixed values "rests on too naive a veiw of man and his social surroundings", and that:

> there is only one principle that can be defended under all circumstances and in all stages of human development. It is the principle: anything goes.[18]

Thus it is possible to dispute the claim that there is (or that it is desirable that there should be) any set of definitive scientific values. But a challenge from that quarter cannot be launched by the moral realist. The moral realist argument is that real moral facts can be established within a given value context, and that this is legitimate because it is analogous to the way facts are established in scientific practice (science is the realm of fact, and since the scientific presupposition of a given value framework does not undermine claims of scientific fact, the analogous presupposition of an evaluative framework does not invalidate claims of moral fact). Feyerabend's scientific anarchism denies the legitimacy of presupposed frameworks of scientific values and of fixed scientific facts; thus the moral realist defense of moral facts (by analogy to scientific facts within given value frameworks) cannot appeal to an anarchistic model of science. On Feyerabend's view, all scientific questions are ultimately similar to (what I have called) megaethical questions: where facts cannot be cited. So one cannot appeal to an analogy with anarchistic science to support claims of moral realism and moral facts. The claim of this essay is that even if we assume a strictly nonanarchistic interpretation of science – the most favorable interpretation for the moral realist – the analogy with science will not support claims of moral realism.

The dispute over noncognitivism has too long centered on comparisons between science and ethics – whether invidious comparisons by early noncognitivists or favorable comparisons by contemporary moral realists. Such comparisons have their usefulness, but their overemphasis has distracted from the key point concerning megaethical noncognitivism. That point does not depend on comparisons with science, invidious or otherwise. For the basic point to be made concerning megaethical noncognitivism is a simple one: ultimately, questions of what we value come down to basic noncognitive preferences that cannot be rationally justified and disputes concerning which cannot be rationally resolved. And ethics is the sphere in which such basic value questions are raised or such basic value commitments occur. Of course – as the moral realists rightly remind us – that is not the only level of ethics; but it is nonetheless an ethical level.

So there is a contrast between science and ethics, and it is this: science presupposes values, but when those basic values are queried or challenged, the issues raised move into a different sphere, namely the ethical ("Is it really good and right and virtuous to pursue science and attempt to predict and understand and control? Is it better to spurn such knowledge, and live in acquiescent acceptance of our present state of knowledge?"). Our ethical systems also presuppose values. When those values are challenged, we move to a different type and level of ethical issue (the noncognitive megaethical realm), but the questions posed remain ethical. Because of that noncognitive megaethical level – that has no analog within (nonanarchistic) science or philosophy of science – it is appropriate to call ethics fundamentally noncognitive. It is because the vast majority of ethics and value discussions and investigations never approach that megaethical noncognitive level, and are instead confined to a level at which basic values are presupposed and concurred in by the disputants and/or investigators, that the moral realist work is worthwhile and instructive.

Thus noncognitivists leave wide range for cognitive ethical inquiries, and can comfortably accommodate – at the intraethical level, where the preponderance of our ethical discussions and inquiries occur – the moral facts cited and celebrated by moral realists. Even at the level of noncognitive megaethics, there are limited but significant roles for

cognitive argument and inquiry. For example, most people rarely examine their basic values, and so probably harbor inconsistencies among their fundamental values. By making us aware of such value contradictions, cognitive inquiries can lead to modifications of our basic values. Also, many of us hold "inherited" values without giving much thought to those values or their implications. Careful cognitive scrutiny can reveal details and implications of such values, make us more vividly aware of our values and their ramifications, and may result in rejection of values we had uncritically accepted. In that manner, the jingoist may revise her basic values when there is direct experience of – and greater knowledge of – the brutal and inglorious horrors of war. (That does not change the fact that a basic noncognitive level exists, for it is also possible for one who initially opposes war to become more favorable to a jingoist view after she has had more direct experience of the brutal nature of war.) Furthermore, psychological or sociological investigations into their causes may shake some of our value foundations. If I become convinced that my profound valuing of the joys of individual competition stems from my indoctrination into an exploitative capitalist class structure, or through psychoanalysis I find that my profound valuing of violent punitive retribution is the product of my abused childhood, then I may reject such values and replace them with others. But one might remain committed to one's values even after learning such lessons about their causal history: I might decide that the one positive thing from my abusive childhood is my unswerving commitment to retributive justice. When all such cognitive inquiries are exhausted, fundamental – rationally intractable – value system conflicts may endure.

In sum, moral realists carry out a worthwhile task by reminding us of the role that reason and empirical research plays in ethics. That is a valuable accomplishment for two reasons. First, since ethical discussions and debates commonly are among people who share basic value frameworks, it is important to be reminded that if such discussions are to be useful they must be conducted with careful reasoning based on thorough knowledge of empirical facts (from psychology, economics, sociology, and elsewhere). Second, when it is recognized that the impressive rational and empirical work of the moral realists can be comfortably and profitably pursued on a megaethical

noncognitive foundation, that may allay some of the fears of noncognitivism: that noncongitivism would impose an irrational, touchy-feely structure on ethics in which the work of moral philosophers and applied ethicists would be replaced by crude, thoughtless, unanalyzed emotive outbursts. That is not an implication of noncognitivism.

Will this leave sufficient realism for naturalist moral realists? It should. It will not, of course, preserve a realm of noumenal moral facts or Platonic forms. But it will leave room for empirical moral investigations, and for discovering new moral truths and correcting old moral errors (as shown by the initial example of the moral facts revealed by Seligman's work on learned helplessness). If, on the other hand, moral realists insist on a more radically independent realm of moral facts – independent of megatethical values, in contrast to the way in which science is dependent on scientific value presuppositions – then the arguments offered here must count as arguments against moral realism. But my preferred interpretation of these arguments is not as a refutation of moral realism: when both are properly understood and appreciated, there is no conflict between intraethical moral realism and megaethical noncognitivism. They operate in different but harmonious spheres.

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NOTES

* Thanks – for very helpful suggestions and discussions – to John W. Bender, Stanley Browne, James Dale, Richard Garrett, George Graham, Asa Kasher, Brendan Minogue, Charles Reid, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, George Schlesinger, Tom Shipka, J.-C. Smith, John G. Sullivan, and Larry Udell.

1 Martin E. P. Seligman, *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1975).

2 Richard N. Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 207.

3 A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952), p. 111.

4 Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 45 (1986): 167.

5 Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 277; a similar argument for moral realism on the basis of analogous scientific value presuppositions has been developed by Lowell Kleiman, "Morality as the Best Explanation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1989): 161-167.

6 A. J. Ayer, "On the Analysis of Moral Judgements," in *Philosophical Essays* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1954), p. 238; see also A. J. Ayer, *Part of My Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 155. A similar suggestion is made by C. L. Stevenson, "Relativism and Nonrelativism in the Theory of Value," in *Facts and Values* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 79.

7 Rudolf Carnap, "Replies and Expositions," in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1963), p. 1011; a similar position is developed by Herbert Feigl in "'De Principiis Non Disputandum . . .?' On the Meaning and the Limits of Justification," in *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Max Black (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), pp. 113-147, and in "Validation and Vindication," in *Readings in Ethical Theory*, ed. Max Black (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), pp. 667-680.

8 Boyd, p. 203.

9 Railton, p. 190.

10 Railton, p. 200.

11 Railton, p. 201.

12 Robinson Jeffers, "Their Beauty Has More Meaning," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1963).

13 Boyd, p. 209.

14 William G. Lycan, "Moral Facts and Moral Knowledge," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 24 (1986): 89.

15 Kleiman, p. 166.

16 Ezra Pound, "Sestina: Altaforte," in *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1957).

[17] Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), p. 17.
[18] Feyerabend, pp. 27-8.