Teaching Ethics: A Framework for Thought and Action[1]

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Education for ethics is a topic that is appearing frequently in journals and conferences, but there is little or no agreement on a theory of ethics education and action. This paper proposes non-naturalistic moral realism as a theoretical framework that can fit disciplinary and professional ethics. Alternatives to this framework are detailed, but the proposed theoretical stance is deemed both sound and useful. Examples of the application of the framework are included as a means to demonstrate the efficacy of the proposal.

Education for ethics has received considerable attention in library and information science in recent years. There is good reason for the attention, since the profession of librarianship has emphasized ethical action in practice. Journals and conferences have included more works addressing ethics and morals, both in practice and in education. There has been little agreement, however, about ethical theory and proposals about what types of theoretical considerations should feature in such activities as education for practice. This paper falls, primarily, under the topic of metaethics, or the study and theory *about* ethics. That is, what will be discussed is a way of thinking about ethics so that the *practice* of ethics, or ethical behavior, makes sense and works in the real world. There are several metaethical schools of thought, and these include moral relativism, moral skepticism, moral nihilism, and others. Some of these will be treated here, but only en route to the suggestion that moral realism is the most efficacious mode of thinking and acting. The framework that will be detailed here is what I will refer to as non-naturalistic moral realism. This is fairly complicated and will require some explication. First, it will be necessary to explain what this framework does *not* entail, since there are commonly held ideas about morals and ethics that are not included in the proposed conception.

Alternatives to the framework

Some of the ideas of morals and ethics that will not be featured in the proposed framework include very strong declarations. One such statement is that by J.L. Mackie (1977, p. 15): "There are no objective values." This notion is contrary to the framework that will be presented, and the objections to that idea are straightforward and numerous. Mackie attempts

to explain his position by saying, "The claim that values are not objective, are not part of the fabric of the world, is meant to include not only moral goodness, which might be most naturally equated with moral value, but also other things that could be more loosely called moral values or disvalues—rightness and wrongness, duty, obligation, an action's being rotten and contemptible" (p. 15). Mackie claims to be a moral subjectivist: one who believes that there can be no ontological or metaphysical prescription for behavior or action on the parts of human agents. In holding this position, both he and others who would claim to be moral subjectivists say that statements about values are neither true nor false. Values do exist, but no assertions about objectivity, quality, or "commendableness" can be made about them. Indeed, Mackie goes so far as to say, "Moral scepticism must, therefore, take the form of an error theory, admitting that a belief in objective values is built into ordinary moral thought and language, but holding that this ingrained belief is false" (pp. 48–49).

For the most part, Mackie follows David Hume in that he places desires above beliefs in determining motivation. As Jonathan Dancy (1993, p. 2) points out, "Humeanism is the view that there are two sorts of motivating states, the essentially motivating and the contingently motivating. The former are called internally motivative states and the latter externally motivating states." For Hume, each motivating state is a matter of the combination of belief and desire. This mode of thought is generally referred to as non-cognitivist; that is, the desires, which are fundamentally internal, override the thought processes that lead to assessment of beliefs on rational grounds. This is not to say that all internalist states are non-cognitivist; Thomas Nagel (1970) proposed that there can be cognitivist internal states. That said, most internalists tend to be non-cognitivists who emphasize the strength of desires. Russ Shafer-Landau (2003, p. 124) adds a refinement to Dancy's observation: "The anti-Humean does not say that every belief is sufficient to motivate. Only *evaluative* beliefs are sufficient. In other words, merely holding a desire is insufficient for rational action and choice. Further, merely holding a belief is insufficient; the belief must be of a sort that there is assessment of the nature of the belief and the consequences of actions flowing from it." As we will see, these factors that Dancy and Shafer-Landau suggest are necessary for a realist ethics.

Another position that is contradictory to the proposed framework is moral relativism. Probably the most prominent adherent of this stance is Gilbert Harman, who states outright that he is "going to argue that moral right and wrong (good or bad, justice or injustice, virtue or vice, etc.) are always relative to a choice of moral framework" (2000, p. 3). He expresses his stance in the form of a proposition: "There is no single true morality. There are many different moral frameworks, none of which is more correct than the others" (p. 5). While stating that his conception rejects both moral absolutism and moral nihilism, he admits that relativism entails

negotiation and compromise (some form of a social contract may work, according to his program). The very idea of "wrong" is not in any way absolute; it depends upon the relevance of values held by an individual or a group. Harman further expounds upon his notion: "My moral relativism is a soberly logical thesis—a thesis about logical form, if you like. Just as the judgement [sic] that something is large is true or false only in relation to one or another comparison class, so too, I will argue, the judgement that it is wrong of someone to do something is true or false only in relation to an agreement or understanding" (Harman & Thomson, 1996, p. 3). As is the case with Mackie, Harman adheres only to description; prescription has no place in his program. He even states that if someone is raised in a culture where the murder of those outside the culture is admissible, so be it. To use a contemporary issue, if one wishes to deny the existence of climate change, that opinion could be legitimate, if it is in keeping with a group's doxastic beliefs.

Almost all moral realists take issue with Harman's position, which is to be expected. Relativism is antithetical to the ideas of realism, as will be shown below in detail. Since Harman begins with the principle that there is no single morality, tools such as observation can play no role in the evaluation of moral action. Harman's program falls short of nihilism, but the claim that no framework is more correct than others is intensely problematic. Richard Boyd (1988), who does have some nascent naturalist leanings, counters the fundamental position of Harman:

> It is also true of moral knowledge, as it is in the case of other "special sciences," that the improvement of knowledge may depend upon theoretical advances in related disciplines. It is hard, for example, to see how deeper understanding in history or economic theory could fail to add to our understanding of human potential and of the mechanisms underlying the homeostatic unity of the good. (p. 205)

Kevin DeLapp (2013) makes the point that metaethical relativism—the kind which Harman espouses and which claims that the truth-status of ethics is pertinent only to individual sociocultural groups or entities—is, as he says, "mutually exclusive with moral realism" (p. 64). DeLapp also criticizes Mackie's stance in that Mackie says that moral disagreement must perforce deal with fundamental values or principles (p. 67). David Enoch (2011) also notes that relativism, or "response-dependence," is opposed to more efficacious theories of moral truth (p. 29). It seems clear that a relativistic position is not defensible and will not be considered here as legitimate.

Slightly akin to, but substantively different from, relativism is moral subjectivism. This is an internalist way of approaching ethics and morals (whereas the proposed framework is an externalist one). Seow Hon Tan

(2017) points out that subjectivists may, at times, adopt realism, but many hold to subjectivism:

> According to moral realists, moral facts and properties exist which are independent of a subject's thinking, belief or feeling. . . . In contrast, moral subjectivists, who are opponents of moral realism, are of the view that moral judgements depend on the perception of the subject. . . . I have argued that when push comes to shove, some moral subjectivists turn out to be moral realists. The moral subjectivists who do not turn out to be moral realists are gravely limited in what they can argue for in a moral dialogue. Those who turn out to be moral realists are really contending with others over the content of moral norms. They seem, at first blush, to be moral subjectivists only because they are of the view that individuals can decide what is right or wrong for themselves, and others cannot morally judge them because there is no moral law to which individuals are subject. (pp. 25, 35)

The contention over moral norms is not trivial; a realist is much more likely to seek the discovery of norms, whereas a subjectivist may be more likely to espouse something of a constructivist approach to the creation of norms (see below). If such is the case, the subjectivist is likely to tend toward antirealism.

One more thinker deserves attention here—Simon Blackburn. He states, "The position . . . is that the anti-realist is to describe a connection between moral belief and the will in such a way that it is clear that moral belief necessarily has connections that no realist belief need have" (1993, p. 113). He separates moral beliefs from states of affairs in the world, such that holding a moral belief does not entail a particular state of affairs. In this way the belief "must be distinguished from propositions with realistic truth conditions" (p. 112). Blackburn's position is a bit more complicated than those of Mackie and Harman, who dismiss a realist moral stance. He admits to what he calls "quasi-realism," which, he writes, "is not really another 'ism' is the sense of a position or an ideology in the same space as realism or anti-realism; it represents more an attitude of exploration of the reality of the boundaries that those 'isms' demand, and may issue in a complication or modification of the debate, as old oppositions prove incapable of carrying its weight" (p. 4). Quasi-realism is actually a more recent stage of evolution of Blackburn's thought. Earlier, he espoused a somewhat different mode of thinking:

> In particular there can be the attitude which I christen *quietism* or *dismissive neutralism,* which urges that at some particular point the debate is not a real one, and that we are offered, for instance, metaphors and images from which we can profit as we please. Quietism is a relative newcomer to the philosophical

world, owing much of its inspiration to the positivist mistrust of metaphysics, and to the belief of the later Wittgenstein that such problems required therapy rather than solution (1981, p. 146).

In his writings, though, Blackburn makes quite clear that there is not much difference between quietism and quasi-realism.

Blackburn tends to present attractive propositions and arguments, which is why they must be examined very closely before they can be accepted or rejected. His quasi-realism may almost seem to be a siren song, but we should take a look at some of his other statements as well. David Enoch (2011) offers a quotation by Blackburn that deserves attention:

> But sure we do have a serviceable way of describing the [realist-antirealist] debate, at least as far as it concerns evaluation and morals. It is about explanation. The projectivist holds that our nature as moralists is well explained by regarding us as reacting to a reality which contains nothing in the way of values, duties, rights, and so forth; a realist thinks it is well explained only by seeing us as able to perceive, cognize, intuit, an independent moral reality. He holds that the moral features of things are the parents of our sentiments, whereas the Humean holds that they are our children. (Blackburn, 1981, pp. 164–165)

A "projectivist" is a creation of Blackburn's that refers to adopting from Hume a stance toward morals and ethics where we extend our propositions and arguments to mean that there are causal and natural obligations. This the moral realist rejects. Blackburn's description of the realist is actually an accurate one and is completely acceptable within this proposed framework.

These are by no means the only positions that are opposed to the one I support. For instance, emotivism is an anti-realist stance that does not at all fit with what is proposed here. Judith Jarvis Thomson (1997) explicates emotivism very succinctly. She claims that it is actually an interrelated set of theses:

(I)   No-Truth-Value Thesis: Moral sentences have no truth-values . . .
(II) No-Fact Thesis: There are no moral facts . . .
(III) Speech-Act Thesis: One who asserts a moral sentence merely displays an attitude, pro or con . . .
(IV) No-Moral-Belief Thesis: There is no such thing as having a moral belief—being in the state that we (mistakenly) call "having a moral belief" is merely having an attitude, pro or con. . . . (pp. 297–298)

Rather than there existing actual beliefs, there are a variety of motivating factors, any one of which can lead to particular action by a human agent. A person may do a certain thing because she *wants* to, or because she feels

she *ought* to, but there is little or no difference between the motivating factors. This position is obviously at odds with any sort of realism.

Another problematic matter that Blackburn raises is supervenience. "Supervenient" tends to mean that an upper-level group, concept, or property is determined by a lower-level group, concept, or property. An example would be that social properties supervene upon psychological ones. For Blackburn, moral realism would hold that moral properties supervene upon natural properties. He describes supervenience thus:

> (S)   A property M is supervenient upon properties $N_1 \ldots N_n$ if M is not identical with any of $N_1 \ldots N_n$ nor with any truth function of them, and it is logically impossible that a thing should become M, or cease to be M, or become more or less M than before, without changing in respect of some member of $N_1 \ldots N_n$. (1993, p. 115)

Blackburn uses the proposition to demonstrate that moral properties do not supervene upon natural properties, so moral realism must be false. Both Shafer-Landau (2003) and Boyd (1988) show that Blackburn is mistaken. This is a complex argument, but, as Shafer-Landau shows, if physical properties underlie mental ones in our world, they must *always* underlie them. Further, and more importantly, "Morality is essentially a matter of regulating and assessing the activities of *agents*" (p. 102). For example, there is no possibility of categorizing something like "goodness" with the properties upon which it may supervene (supposedly, natural properties) (see Dancy, 1993, pp. 77–79). According to these writers, there is no intrinsic need or reason for accepting a naturalized moral theory (contrary to Blackburn). This idea leads us to the next section.

Non-naturalism

First of all, a naturalist argument would hold that moral facts or properties are reducible to physical facts or properties. Generally speaking, a naturalist will hold that moral or ethical beliefs are the result of psychological or neural activities within the brain. Those physical activities lead to the adoption of—and acting upon—ethical or moral intentions. It should be mentioned at the outset that anti-realist theories are not bound to be naturalist; in fact, many such theories (such as emotivism) are not naturalist. It must also be said that some realist theories *are* naturalist. Some who espouse evolutionary ethics, ethical hedonism, moral skepticism, and utilitarianism may consider themselves ethical naturalists. Many naturalists (or naturalizers) take the attitude that epistemology, phenomenology, or ethics should seek to emulate the hard sciences, especially physics and biology. The philosophical stances should draw from natural sciences and look to methods and objects as models for how to formulate philosophical positions. These are strong materialist ideas that seek to share the materialism with other disciplines. For example, a naturalist would urge

one to believe that ethical thought, such as altruism or generosity, has its basis in cognitive neuroscience; we are hard-wired to behave in particular ways. Again, naturalism is a reductionist way of thinking. Suppose we take the service imperative that is core to the American Library Association's Code of Professional Ethics (ALA 2008). What motivates professionals to offer the most complete and accurate service possible? Is there something innate in us as physical beings that leads to the composition of the Code and the following of it by librarians? Or is there a choice of values that has prompted the realization that others should be treated in certain ways and that we, as professionals, choose to adopt an explicit Code that guides action? The non-naturalist rejects the reductionist claim and edges toward the guide that looks to treat others in ways that we ourselves want to be treated. Elliott Sober (2015, p. 906) makes a comparison between scientists and philosophers without conflating the two: "Scientists appeal to observations in justifying the scientific theories they endorse; philosophers should do the same thing in justifying philosophical theories. Inference to the best explanation is a tool for both science and philosophy." It is not that there are not similarities between the ways in which scientists and ethicists work; the primary point is that they are not the same, and their objects of study are fundamentally different.

Harman (2000), who is not a realist but is also not a naturalist, describes the position of the naturalist: "The naturalist seeks to locate the place of value, justice, right, and wrong, and so forth in the world in a way that makes clear how they might explain what we take them to explain. A naturalist cannot understand how value, justice, right, and wrong might figure in explanations without having some sense of 'location' in the world" (p. 83). The naturalist, bound by the physical explanations for all belief and behavior, cannot find a professional altruism realistic. What is undertaken by humans is, and should be, bound by objectivity, which is not amenable to openness to values that might include human worth, need, or affection (as such). Utilitarianism may, indeed, include a compulsion to manifest "happiness" in the broadest sense, but even that should be undertaken scientifically, so that what is received is grounded in definable need that is abstracted from the emotive branch of philosophy. Much of today's economics (though not, by any means, all) relies on materialist measures of happiness and satisfaction as a means of calculating optimal gain for individuals and groups. A prime example of a naturalist is Gary Becker (1994), who, in his book *Human Capital*, propounded something of a calculus by which schooling, marriage, occupation, and other things could be determined. On the other hand, Hilary Putnam (1990, p. 159) states, "Nature—which imposed the constraints on how neural connection could be manufactured and installed—does not even have the pseudo-'intelligence' that selection pressure does; that is, nature has no *ends*, and does not simulate having any." Naturalism, then, is not teleological; there is no a priori purpose to what occurs. Humans, on the other hand, can

plan, can compose disciplinary and professional codes of ethics based on purpose and ends.

Perhaps the earliest, and best-known, non-naturalist was G.E. Moore (1903). His objection to naturalism was both ontological and linguistic; there could be confusion between the use of a term in a particular argument and the definition of that term across arguments. Non-naturalism was picked up later by ethicists. For instance, R.M. Hare (1952, p. 92) asserts, "naturalism in ethics, like attempts to square the circle and to 'justify induction,' will constantly recur so long as there are people who have not understood the fallacy involved." He goes on to say that "my account of the meaning of value-words is not naturalistic; it does not result in sentences becoming analytic which are not so in our ordinary language" (p. 175). DeLapp (2013) notes the aim of convergence in science and quotes Bernard Williams (1985) on the matter: "In a scientific inquiry there should ideally be convergence on an answer, where the best explanation of the convergence involves the idea that the answer represents how things are; in the area of the ethical, at least at a high level of generality, there is no such coherent hope" (DeLapp, p. 136). The material world tends to allow for the kind of convergence that Williams speaks of; physical particles and matter are limited in how they may act and react, and those constraints are explained by laws and regularities. Human action is not so limited, so the explanatory apparatus that exists in the natural sciences do not exist in the human sciences. Enoch (2011, p. 103) takes up this point: "Facts and properties are natural if and only if they are of the kind the usual sciences invoke. This characterization inherits its vagueness mostly from the vagueness of the classification of facts and properties into kinds being assumed here, and to an extent also from the reference to the 'usual science.'" Shafer-Landau (2003) offers what may be the most articulate summation for this section:

> Moral facts register the instantiation of moral properties; natural facts register the instantiation of natural properties. . . . I think that some version of non-naturalism is correct. A start on showing it so requires supplying answers to two central metaphysical questions: (i) why think that there is this additional (moral) kind of property and fact, over and above those certified by so-called naturalistic disciplines; and (ii) what relations obtain between the moral and the natural? (pp. 65–66)

The questions (answers to which Shafer-Landau provides) are indeed important and need to be key components in the educational process.

Realism

It seems fitting to begin this section with an assertion that may seem controversial: "Moral realists believe that there are 'moral truths' in the world and that an individual or even an entire culture might be 'wrong' about

moral matters" (DeLapp, 2013, p. 1). Moral relativism has already been rejected as a possibility, so this statement should not sound out of place. In fact, the profession of librarianship includes some nascent agreement with it. When censorship is denounced in the Library Bill of Rights, there is a corresponding viewpoint that freedom of access is a truth that professionals should embrace. In other words, there is already some form of realism extant in professional thought and practice. DeLapp goes so far as to argue for what he refers to as a pluralist realism that encompasses semantics, metaphysics, ontology, anthropology, psychology, and epistemology (p. 9). He cites Jaegwon Kim (1993), who believes that moral realism must insist upon the instantiation of moral properties on the world itself or else risk dissolving into nothing more than a formal idea that has little or no application.

A comprehensive definition is provided by Shafer-Landau (2003, p. 2):

> Moral realism is the theory that moral judgements enjoy a special sort of objectivity: such judgements, when true, are so independently of what any human being, anywhere, in any circumstance whatever, thinks of them. . . . There are three complementary ways to defend moral realism. The first is to offer positive realist considerations that seem appealing. The second is to offer criticisms of antirealist views [see above]. And the third is to respond to objections that seek to undermine moral realism's plausibility.

One of the implications of what Shafer-Landau says is that there is no place for what can be called constructivism in this ethical program. That is, moral and ethical responses are *not* constituted by the thoughts or opinions of individual actors at various points in time. That would result in relativism, which has been shown to be unproductive. Instead, the objective moral judgments are of a special category, one that does not admit to variance according to personal stance or belief. Positive considerations exist in the profession in the form of, say, commitment to patron privacy when it comes to information use. There is a difficulty presented by Shafer-Landau, though, in the form of potential absolutism. If we were to take the admonition against censorship as absolutist, for example, we as professionals might find ourselves defending indefensible matters. It must be agreed that child pornography is wrong, and that disseminating it or making it available is likewise wrong. Further, child pornography is illegal *because* it is wrong; it is not merely wrong because it is illegal. Ethical action in libraries and information agencies is a challenge, in large part, due to the decisions about right and wrong that must be made as part of professional action. Because of these caveats, we should give two cheers to Shafer-Landau's position. Also, the challenges do not violate has third defense of moral realism—it is not undermined because the world intervenes with problematic instances.

Something more useful is stated by Boyd (1988, p. 182):

> By "moral realism" I intend the analogous doctrine about moral judgments, moral statements, and moral theories. According to moral realism:
>
> 1. Moral statements are the sorts of statements which are (or which express propositions which are) true or false (or approximately true, largely false, etc.);
> 2. The truth or falsity (approximate truth . . .) of moral statements is largely independent of our moral opinions, theories, etc.;
> 3. Ordinary canons of moral reasoning—together with ordinary canons of scientific and everyday factual reasoning—constitute, under many circumstances at least, a reliable method for obtaining and improving (approximate) moral knowledge.

What Boyd offers is more tempered and not as absolute as Shafer-Landau, and that is something the profession of librarianship not only can live with more readily but also can make work in professional settings. As we will see shortly, there may be the option of taking a generalist as opposed to a particularist approach to ethical issues. Boyd's scheme is well suited to a particularist approach.

The framework in librarianship

The test of an idea in professional fields is the degree to which it works in practice. Here we will examine the proposed framework as it has efficacy in the statements of the American Library Association (ALA) and situations in actual settings. To reiterate, the framework is intended to provide action-based guidance for professionals. To return first to the above point, an action-oriented plan is likely to be either generalist or particularist. We can turn to Dancy (1993) for a discussion of the distinctions between the two. First, generalism in the form of universability is supported by serious thinkers, such as Hare (1952). This is one signal that the stance should be approached seriously. The ALA Code of Professional Ethics tends to proffer generalist statements, but the prefacing statement avers, "Ethical conflicts occur when values are in conflict" (ALA 2008). The seventh tenet of the Code is an area where conflicts may occur: "We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources." The admonition may be difficult at times when personal beliefs are very deeply held by professionals. The question that may arise is this: Can the tenet be adhered to by all professionals at all times? If so, then a generalist premise may obtain; if not, then an alternative might be preferable.

What Dancy (1993) suggests is that a particularist approach may be more effective: "Underlying this particularism cannot be just the view that no set of principles will succeed in generating answers to questions about

what to do in particular cases. . . . Particularism . . . must give a stronger
sense to the thought that the moral relevance of a property in a new case
cannot be predicted from its relevance elsewhere" (pp. 56–57). He further
offers a mitigating possibility:

> If there were a cognitive theory which still allows the existence
> of general principles, but disowns the subsumptive theory of ratio-
> nality and refuses to countenance the idea that the shape of the
> relevant base must be recognizable by those who lack the concept
> of the higher-level property (i.e., the idea that the higher-level
> property can be disentangled from the lower-level ones), it should
> be immune from any criticism we have made so far (p. 92).

What is suggested here with the proposed framework is that such a cogni-
tive theory is possible, and that it can be a component of the framework.
This is to say that practicing professionals need not be professional eth-
icists to adopt moral realism; ideas of action in situations of conflict are
necessary, but holding fully articulated ethical and moral theories is not
necessary. What is presented here is a summary of a complex theory, with
the hope that the details offered can be a guide for practice.

To return to the tenet of the Code in question, it may be the case that
a professional is opposed to the notion of Holocaust denials on historical
and moral grounds. Someone approaches a reference desk and requests
The Anti-Chomsky Reader (Collier & Horowitz, 2004) and says he is look-
ing for something that counters leftist ideas about such things as the Holo-
caust. What does the professional do in this instance? Is it ethically suffi-
cient simply to give the individual access to the book? Can personal beliefs
be subsumed and the transaction simply completed? This is just such a
moment when values do conflict. Is it a time for a particularist response
and present to the patron a book that looks critically at Holocaust denial?
A generalist or universalist stance might be seen to be unacceptable to
some professionals. The difficulty that arises is when requests run counter
to the ethics of the professional. A somewhat different take on the matter
is whether the individual library should acquire the book and make it
accessible. That may allow space for something of a generalist viewpoint;
to presume to know how a book will be read by any individual smacks
of casuistry. The challenge is real; it is incumbent upon professionals to
reflect on the possibilities of such predicaments arising. In fact, collective
reflection of professionals within an organization and/or association
would be prudent. The nature of the conflict depicted here is profession-
ally complicating, and with good cause. The nature of the conflict, for one
thing, may necessitate choice, and the choice can lead to tension. Williams
(1988, p. 44) explicates the dilemma:

> If I discover two of my beliefs conflict, at least one of them,
> by that very fact, will tend to be weakened; but the discovery that
> two desires conflict has no tendency, in itself, to weaken either of

them. This is for the following reason: while satisfaction is related to desire to some extent as truth is related to belief, the discovery that two desires cannot both be satisfied is not related to those desires as the discovery of two beliefs cannot be true is related to those beliefs.

The internal conflict one can experience when two (or more) beliefs are at odds with one another is troubling, but not insurmountable. As has been said, reflection on difficult matters is necessary to reach a resolution (or, at the very least, an accommodation) to conflicts. The reflection, again, need not be solitary; in fact, given the nature of professional ethics, conversation and collective reflection are likely to be more fruitful. For one thing, colleagues who are working through similar conflicts are able to lend perspective on the elements of a specific instance where there can be dispute. Moral realists actually include disagreement in the overall ethical program. Efforts to resolve conflict can depend on (at least) a couple of considerations. One of these is suggested by Mark Platts (1988). The focus of his attention is on the disagreement that can occur among human agents who are attempting to address a thorny issue. (This kind of disagreement can arise during collective reflection.) Platts writes, "the fact that others apparently lack moral concepts that we possess (or vice versa) no more shows realism to be false in moral matters than the fact that others lack scientific concepts we possess (or vice versa) shows realism in science to be false. What the realist requires is an explanation, in realistic terms, of that lack" (p. 288).

Let us consider an example from the Library Bill of Rights (LBR). Tenet IV states, "Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas" (ALA, 1996). If we suppose that an American Nazi Party group wants to ensure that certain publications are represented in the library's collection, there could be conflict within and even among staff. The LBR seems unequivocal in its guidance relating to free expression. If there is a leaning in favor of including the said materials, there should be *more* than a reliance on the LBR statement. There needs to be an explanation of the decision that transcends the wording of one document. The realist must demand more than simple adherence to a doctrine. Platts (1988, p. 289) goes on to say that "People can have empty moral predicates (which they believe to be non-empty) . . . ; trivially, no realistic account can be given of such empty moral predicates." Disagreement, then, is not necessarily occurring on a level moral playing field. If the field were level, the conflict would require serious discussion of propositions, arguments, and so on, with careful weighing of each component taking place. If the field is not level, then empty moral predicates—such as the idea that some human beings are innately inferior to others—should not receive a realistic account. In other words, the LBR statement is an initial guideline that will

probably suffice in the majority of instances. When it does not suffice, a realist assessment should hold sway.

Conclusion

My hope here is that the case for a non-naturalist moral realism has been made. One of the key elements of this framework is objectivity. Any realistic program should hold objectivity—in deliberation as well as in evaluation—to be fundamental. Of what does objectivity consist? Dancy (1993) provides a succinct explication. He argues for an "understanding-oriented approach . . . which requires a putatively objective moral reason to survive reflection on the relation between our world and ourselves, but does not demand either validation or even merely tolerance from creatures relevantly difference from ourselves. It seems obvious to me that [this requirement] is not only a more sensible aim but one more suited to the moral reasons we are really concerned with" (p. 153). This requirement signals that the moral reality embraced by practicing professionals is the profession's own. There may be (perhaps there will be) disagreement with the foundations of the realist program, but through the application of objectivity, through reflection on the realist prerequisites noted above, there can be cogent moral and ethical decision-making and action.

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Endnote

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