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Daniel N. Robinson: Praise and Blame

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1.

DEFINING THE SUBJECT

The final sentence, it is probable, which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praise-worthy or blameable; that which stamps on them the mark of honour or infamy, approbation or censure; that which renders morality an active principle and constitutes virtue our happiness and vice our misery; it is probable, I say, that this final sentence depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species. —DAVID HUME, *AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS*, SECTION I

Why has Thou made me thus? —ROMANS 9:20

The Greatest Horseman

There is a scene in Book XXII of the *Iliad*, much discussed by those seeking to comprehend the complex meritocracy of the Homeric world. The epic is nearly concluded. Troy has been defeated and many of the Achaians have already set sail for their homeward journeys. Patroclus has been honored, his bones cremated by his dear lamenting friend. Now is the time for celebration and the holding of games. A great chariot race is staged and concludes with honors and prizes. At this point, however, the modern reader is perplexed to discover that these are not to be awarded simply on the basis of how the contestants actually finished in the race. Rather, seemingly irrelevant factors lead to contentious exchanges.

It was Diomedes who finished in first place, followed next by Antilochos, then by Menelaos, the henchman Meriones, and finally by Eumelos. Presumably, that should have settled the matter. Instead, the results lead to discord and debate. Achilles, judging Eumelos to be “the best man,” insists that he therefore be given the top prize, and that Diomedes then receive second honors. Menelaos, edged out by the younger and more impetuous Antilochos, contends that he was defeated by guile, and demands that Antilochos’s prize be withdrawn. What does Antilochos say? Without hesitation and in full agreement, he surrenders his prize because Menelaos is, as he says, “the greater” and therefore should go before him in such matters.

If modern sensibilities are amused by the spectacle, it may be the result of taking for granted suppositions that actually call for closer examination. How, after all, should a prize be awarded after a horse race? Should it go to the best horseman, the best person, or the one who actually finishes first?

Suppose one contestant draws a horse patently superior to all the rest, such that victory is a certainty. Or suppose the winner wins by luck or by deceit, or by drugging the competing horses, or by bribing competitors, or threatening them with violence. Indeed suppose, as was the case in Troy, the gods take sides to the advantage of one charioteer and at the expense of others? Was it not Apollo who pulled the whip from the hand of Diomedes, and was it not wrathful Athene who, in response, returned it to Diomedes and then broke the axle of Eumelos's chariot? Indeed, in any contest of any kind whatever, who can say where true merit and worthiness end, and where luck, fortune, accident, the gods, and myriad uncontrollable contingencies decisively intervene? Had modern geneticists been present at Troy on the day of that epic race, they might have added yet another complication to the arguments offered for and against the several contestants. They might have informed Achilles that the sense in which Eumelos is "the best man" depends upon attributes for which Eumelos himself deserves no credit at all. To be the best charioteer requires skill, no doubt, but also the physical strength, endurance, family background, and general resources needed for any skill to reach the level of its full potential. And, of course, even under the most favorable conditions, this level of skill will count for nothing should the unseen stone in the road flatten a tire, or if the snake in the grass should cause the horses to bridle. Who can choose with finality those actions and persons warranting praise and blame or, in the words of Scripture, who has the unrestricted right and authority to throw the first stone?

The nature and purposes of praise and blame are at the center of moral judgment, legal sanctions, and social practices and, as such, illuminate otherwise overlooked aspects of all three. The aim of this first chapter is to reach a more precise understanding of the sources and the essential character of praise and blame. At the most molar level, it is important to establish whether so vast a subject is but a topic within an enlarged cultural anthropology or descriptive social psychology. If these are the proper disciplines, then moral philosophy and jurisprudence would call for the same classification. Attributing blame and rendering praise, it may be declared, is a form of giving vent to sentiments of aversion or pleasure. There is nothing of an objective nature in this, for to pay with praise and blame is to use a personal currency whose value can rise no higher than what is ordained by the prevailing and typically local customs.

Against this are arguments to the effect that moral terms have objective standing and reach something actually (objectively) at work in the world. On this understanding, of which the present volume is offered as a defense, praise and blame are topics within a systematic moral science, its practical application appearing in such disciplines as law and rhetoric. Moral science may be served by the social sciences but not exhaustively defined or explained by them. Rather, the moral realm derives its content from modes of

knowing that are in a sense intuitive but no more “subjective” for that reason. This intuitively reached knowledge is then absorbed into essentially rational modes of argument for the purpose of solving moral problems and providing moral direction. The relevant psychological characteristics warranting inclusion within a developed moral science are just those rational/intuitive powers, cognitive powers, by which proportionality, aptness, equity, guilt and innocence, and myriad comparable judgments are made in every culture, from the remote past to the current day.

The subject is, alas, vast and vexed. One moves toward it tentatively.

Praise and Blame: Legitimacy, Authority, and Consensus

The vignette from the *Iliad* prompts the question: should praise be reserved to persons or to outcomes? Should the object or target be those somehow known to be worthy, or, instead, should praise and blame be assigned to anyone who has satisfied a valued objective, no matter who performed the act, no matter what the impelling motive was? Put another way, can bad men do good things? Do good consequences arising from malign motives deserve to be praised? Even within an utterly utilitarian ethical framework, is it only the successful maximizing of utility or is it the *desire* to do so that should earn praise?

To ask whether an evil person can do good would seem to beg a larger question. Without a defensible theory of good and evil—a theory that dictates how praise and blame are to be distributed—it is unclear just how it is possible for the “good” or “bad” person to be identified. Presumably, one who does good would seem to satisfy at least the commonsense criterion for being a good person, but there are many instances of unintended good, as well as bad, consequences arising from noble intentions. A loud sneeze awakens a neighbor whose alarm clock failed. Thanks to the sneeze, the neighbor reaches the airport and retrieves the packaged kidney scheduled for implantation. The sneeze, however, occurred because of an allergic reaction to pollen which entered the house owing to a window left open by a thief in the night. No thief, no open window. No open window, no allergic response. No response, no sneeze. No sneeze, no kidney transplant. Thus, no unlawful intruder and uncle Toby dies. There are many such instances of good consequences at the end of a chain that include links that are morally jejune, tainted, even felonious, or just plainly fortuitous.

In referring to questions about the manner in which praise and blame are to be distributed, still another dilemma arises, this one pertaining to “collective guilt.” To what extent are bystanders blameworthy when, though taking no part in causing harm, they do nothing to prevent it? Are they as blameworthy as the perpetrator and, if not, what principle might be invoked by which to assess the degree of mitigation? To what extent can moral re-

sponsibility be *shared* and, if shared, is it thereby reduced in proportion to the number of persons sharing it? There are sound reasons for insisting that the fault of others does nothing to diminish one's own.¹ The driver of the getaway car may face the same legal penalties as those who committed robbery and assault, though the driver was nowhere near the scene of the crime. This, too, calls for critical analysis.

What do we seek to achieve or assert or affirm through praise and blame? Apart from material rewards and punishments, which could be rendered in the form of monetary emoluments and penalties, praise and blame seem to have, but not symmetrically, special places set aside for special kinds of actions. Though those who commit crimes are blamed, those who do not are not praised. Furthermore, to pay someone not to commit a violent crime would seem odd, and especially so as a form of "reward" or praise. It would be comparably peculiar to reward one for doing what everyone routinely does. Praise and blame are not reducible to material costs and penalties and are often blatantly out of place in the circumstance. Most would judge it to be insulting to offer a high salary to Mother Teresa, even on the assumption that this might encourage others to perform the saintly work for which she was known.

It seems, then, that praise and blame, to the extent that they are in some sense akin to rewards and punishments, are rewards and punishments of an unusual type. This alone indicates that they are intended to function in a way not fully embraced by standard forms of reward and punishment. Consider one of the expected consequences of blame. When validly directed at a person, blame is expected to cause feelings of guilt, remorse, and shame. Conversely, when wrongly leveled it may often cause anger, indignation, and the impulse toward reprisal. For praise and blame to achieve desired ends, there would seem to be at least four conditions that must be met, each different from those adequate to the purposes of ordinary rewards and punishments. First, the ascriptions must be *correct*. Heaping praise for heroism on the wrong person or blame for malfeasance on the innocent increases neither self-worth in the one nor shame in the other. Accordingly, a straightforward behavioristic analysis of the efficacy of praise and blame inevitably leaves out too much, for neither praise nor blame can function per se unless their ascription is apt.

Furthermore, the praising and blaming of actions or events must match up with something relevant about the recipients and *acknowledged* as such by them. A cash prize given to the thousandth person entering the new supermarket is surely rewarding, but winning it is not laudatory. Increasing the rate of taxation of those with the highest earnings is a species of penalty, but not a condemnation. Again, the connotations of "praise" and "blame" are not fully paralleled by rewards and penalties. Nor are they simple per-

formatives. When one says, "I promise," the utterance constitutes the actual performance. But when one says, "I praise," the utterance is subject to any number of tests and criteria having to do with the standing of the speaker, the aims and conduct of the intended beneficiary, as well as the social and cultural values that qualify both the intentions and the respective standing of speaker and target.

Additionally, for praise or blame to be accepted as such, the source must be recognized as authoritative and not merely in possession of power or material resources. Not only must the dispensers of praise and blame have standing, but the standing must be relevant to the context. Praise for achievements in physics proffered by the coach of the winning football match would be no cause for pride. Indeed, in certain contexts, the character of the dispenser of blame could raise blame itself to the level of an honor while sinking praise to that of censure. Whether in the form of utterances or of palpable objects (statues, certificates, gold stars) praise and blame presume standing and authority on the part of the source. It is not the utterance or the object that carries the moral content, but the office that bestows it. This will be considered at greater length in chapter 2 in connection with rhetoric as a source of action.

Tied to these conditions is another: the efficacy and legitimacy of praise or blame depend upon *shared moral understandings*, absent which the utterances and objects are unintelligible. It is owing to this feature that persons generally regarded as possessing utterly unique moral qualities often and honestly wonder what all the fuss is about! By ordinary standards, relinquishing one's material possessions to devote oneself totally to those in need is taken to be supererogatory. It is doubtful in the extreme, however, that Mother Teresa, for example, regarded her actions as in any sense above and beyond the call of duty. Quite the contrary. It is part of the makeup of saints and heroes that they find nothing exceptional in their own undertakings. If they are at one extreme point on the continuum of moral sensibility, those referred to as sociopaths would be at the other end; those who do not grasp what all the fuss is about when apprehended for repeated and unrepentant criminal conduct. To the ordinary observer, saintly or heroic self-sacrifice, like habitual criminality, are often inexplicable. The average person cannot readily imagine living either form of life, but has sufficient empathic resources to admire the one and condemn the other.

What some have concluded from this is that morality is but a species of consensus, formed within a given culture to satisfy the terms of life adopted by the members of that culture. Just in case, for whatever reason, one proves to be refractory in adhering to the local standards, one can expect to suffer the wages of sin. The aggressive, hostile, physically assaultive person who, in time of war, is turned loose on the enemy, returns from battle to receive

honor and decorations. The same person, similarly disposed and active within the local community is apprehended by the police and subsequently deprived of liberty. Praise and blame, then, seem so fully dependent on context and on the shifting desiderata of majorities as to have no stable content at all. A personality that expresses itself in aggressive and hostile fashion may be little more than a genetic outcome and is thus not a question of vice or virtue but of luck, in this case “constitutive luck” (chapter 2). Whether these foreordained expressions of personality result in honor or incarceration is, on this theory, less a question of vice or virtue than of luck, in this case the “moral luck” of finding oneself in one culture rather than another or with one set of parents rather than another, and so forth (chapter 3).

Praise and blame are surely tied to the customs and beliefs of those who have the required standing to proffer or receive them; to personal characteristics that depend to some uncertain degree on constitutive and cultural factors; to the vagaries of context and the sudden demands of the hour. At first blush, then, we seem to be steeped in sociological and psychological considerations that some would take as exhausting the sources and actual content of moral ascriptions. “Standing,” after all, is something conferred, and based on attributes regarded differently within different cultures and epochs. The standing of the shaman and witch doctor may oscillate between unchallenged authority and laughable quackery as one moves just a few degrees in latitude and longitude. Even within a given culture, one’s own standing can change markedly from neighborhood to neighborhood, from one church to another, from one playground or classroom or union hall to another. With each of these variants, praise and blame will take on a different character, will engage a different set of perceptions, will result in different patterns of accommodation and adjustment.

This is not the end of the difficulty, for still unanswered are questions concerning moral standing and not simply “standing.” Noted above is the requirement of a shared moral understanding, but what needs to be filled out is just what makes an understanding “moral,” as well as the degree to which it must be shared for there to be a recognizable moral community. Tied to all this are enduring questions regarding the alleged subjectivity and relativity of morals, the allegedly unbreachable chasm between *is* and *ought*, and various perplexities nested within these. If praise and blame are to be understood as moral resources, then just what can be claimed for judgments of that sort remains to be settled. When one is praised or blamed, and thus assigned a moral property, is there anything whatever of an “objective” nature in the assignation? To define the subject, then, the first step calls for an examination of moral ascriptions and judgments at large. Is there anything in external reality to which such ascriptions refer, or are they little more than terms tied to tastes and sentiments?

Against Moral Realism

Not much research is needed to establish the wide variations across cultures in what are taken to be praiseworthy and blameworthy activities. The basis of status and celebrity reveals nearly wanton diversity from place to place, era to era. In the matter of praise and blame, for example, there are rather striking consistencies observed in a wide variety of contexts; consistencies treated under the heading, “the fundamental attribution error.”² Where untoward outcomes are judged to have been avoidable, observers are quite strongly inclined to discover causality in the moral defects of the actor, though not in themselves. Thus, *you* slip on the wet floor because of clumsiness, *I* because the floor is wet, and the like.

“Blaming the victim” is habitual, even when rationalized in other terms. Rationalization itself often finds praise and blame allotted for little purpose beyond the need to render the affairs of the world more intelligible. How right it is that the impoverished family won the lottery. And is it not a kind of cosmic justice that lands the millionaire in prison for his greedy stock manipulations? There is a form of emotional gratification that attends the apparent labor of the Fates. Not only do the local practices of a given community but also the ticks of time bring alterations, some of them truly major, in the attributes held in highest esteem or greatest contempt. The present age admires the winning jockey and gives trophies for horsemanship, but it is obvious that much more was at stake in the Mycenaean age of Homer. In light of this, one might go so far as to insist that the targets of praise and blame have actually been the targets of good and bad luck, for what is likely to elicit moral judgments depends on passing fashions and the parade of cultures. As previously noted, understood in these terms praise and blame are instruments for preserving the customary practices on which the local community or tribe or an entire nation depends for its identity and continuity. The arriving stranger may cross the border with a radically different moral calculus, but its application, far from establishing an objective measure of what is found in the new land, can do no more than underscore the root fact of the subjectivity and relativity of morals.

These apparent inadequacies of and challenges to theories of moral realism and the supposed objectivity of morals have been advanced in every age of sustained moral discourse, from remote antiquity to the present. Bernard Williams has pointedly contrasted ethics and science in terms of the power of the latter to address questions that converge on ultimately settled answers. To explain the success of this convergence Williams attributes to scientific answers their representation of “how things are,” whereas in ethics “there is no such coherent hope.”³

Whatever that calculus by which to gauge worthiness for praise or blame, it would seem to have little in common with the tried and true methods of

science. Moral standards seems hopelessly internalized, even when constructed and maintained by the community. Indeed, “community standards” is a term referring only to those evaluative precepts that have been internalized by most if not all the members of the community. It is this feature of moral ascriptions that has encouraged many to remove them from that very reality with which scientific inquiry is concerned, the reality that addresses “how things are.” Arthur Fine puts it succinctly (here, as elsewhere in this study, italicized words in quoted materials appear thus in the original unless otherwise specified):

For realism, science is *about* something; something *out there*, “external” and (largely) independent of us. The traditional conjunction of externality and independence leads to the realist picture of an objective, external world; what I shall call the *World*. According to realism, science is about that. Being about the *World* is what gives significance to science.⁴

Moral Science and Natural Science: The House Divided

A persistent critique of moral theories finds them based not on fact but rather on custom and, as such, not accounts of the world as it is but a collection of artifacts designed to preserve a kind of local order. On this account, persons, too, are socially constructed by the forces of acculturation at work from birth and throughout the course of a lifetime. These forces supply values, dispositions, basic understandings, goals, and core principles. It is, of course, unarguable that social influences are formidable in the life of persons, especially in the early years of life, but there remains the question of just how determinative they are—the question of whether, in the process, the person is passively constructed or instead is, from the first, an active, selective participant.

There are moderate and quite radical forms of *social constructionism*. The most radical forms could not possibly be evaluated in terms acceptable to their adherents, for the analytical tools of challenge and criticism would be dismissed as coming from the very stores in which protected forms of thought and judgment have been preserved by the dominant culture. Such radical versions raise and have raised comparable objections to defenses of scientific objectivity. The claims of the moral realist, in the circumstance, would hardly be taken seriously.

Before such radical proposals could seem to be worthy of consideration, there had to be something of a rupture within the once unified (if bickering) community of searchers after truth; a rejection of the once widely shared “common notions” and fundamental precepts; a division of all that is thinkable into the mutually exclusive domains of fact and value.

The argument found its voice earlier in the Enlightenment, many concluding that there was a clear separation to be honored between psychological and moral modes of understanding and explanation. For all the energy and analytical rigor Hume spent in defending the distinction, however, he was still committed to the development of a moral science, one based on the general features of human life wherever it is found, on the needs, desires and habits broadly, if not universally, distributed in human communities. That is, Hume could maintain that “is” and “ought” can never be substituted for each other, that the two are drawn from utterly distinct ontological domains, and still aim to develop a moral *science* based on a universalistic anthropology.

All this is to say that the moral and scientific controversies abounding in Enlightenment circles were nonetheless beholden to those “methods of Bacon and Newton,” referred to like a mantra. These methods and the perspective reinforced by them comprised the stock notions of the Enlightenment. A far more fundamental division was to occur in the following century, however, and with it the long fruitful if hostile exchanges between the two schools of natural philosophy suddenly went silent. One consequence of the suspension of serious debate is the hardened confidence each side has in its central precepts. Contemporary opposition to moral realism and to the mere possibility of moral objectivity comes from quarters as divergent and independent as sociology and neurophysiology that have little else in common. The winner-take-all attitude of the protagonists is won at the cost of the mutually refining functions of critical inquiry. Examples abound. In *The Fragmentation of Reason*, Stephen Stich defends a radical reductionistic scheme that would embrace all rational inquiry and understanding. To speak of knowledge as a justified true belief now requires translation into statements about processes and states in the brain, “mapped by an interpretation function.”⁵

A theory of this sort is intended to replace views judged to be outworn, superstitious, bankrupt. At the other end of the theoretical continuum, Kenneth Gergen defends what he has called “social epistemology.” He rejects out of hand all claims of objectivity, and denies that there can be any systematic inquiry that is ultimate, whatever the subject matter.⁶ Those persuaded by Stich’s reductionist account (of which there are numerous variants) must judge the culture of science to be little more than certain habitual modes of information processing, subject to the contingent nature of brain function. Defenders of strong versions of the sociology of science regard the culture of science as just one among a wide range of cultures, none having trumping powers over the rest. It is worth repeating that these views, though controversial, have a long pedigree dating at least to the ancient Atomists and Skeptics. What is different now is neither the content of the theories nor the extremes to which they are stretched, but rather that, to a worrisome

degree, the major contestants write as if the argument was over, the other side having nothing to say that is worth hearing. Owing to their practical and theoretical achievements, the developed sciences were for some time insulated from the more radical critiques, the easiest targets typically drawn from moral philosophy. But that, too, has changed. To the confident dismissal of “value” as little more than prejudice posing as principle has been added the classification of science as just another cultural “artifact,” no more rational or protected than the rest. How did all this come about?

The Age of Newton—the era that included Francis Bacon, Newton, Galileo, Boyle, and Descartes—was the pillar that would support the entire Enlightenment project of reform and revolution. If the savants of the eighteenth century seem too confident under contemporary lights, it is partly because that very illumination includes rays and hues refracted by the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century disciples of romanticism.

In 1810 the first edition of Goethe’s *Theory of Colours* appeared.⁷ It is a detailed treatise of various color perceptions, in health and disease and under a very wide range of natural viewing conditions. Taken in its wholeness, the *Theory of Colours* is a rich documentation of the thesis that color phenomena must be understood subjectively, not objectively, and that the entire matter had been put on the wrong track by Newton. “The theory of colours,” says Goethe,

has suffered much, and its progress has been incalculably retarded by having been mixed up with optics generally, a science which cannot dispense with mathematics; whereas the theory of colours, in strictness, may be investigated quite independently of optics.⁸

Rejecting the analytical, reductive strategy of the received Newtonian science, Goethe warns his readers that

the worst that can happen to physical science as well as to many other kinds of knowledge is, that men should treat a secondary phenomenon as a primordial one. . . . Hence arises an endless confusion, a mere verbiage, a constant endeavour to seek and to find subterfuges whenever truth presents itself and threatens to be overpowering.⁹

The object of criticism is again Newtonian science (though, it may be noted, not Newton’s own!), and the Enlightenment conviction that complex phenomena are fully understandable through a process of reductive, abstract analysis and simplistic research.

The influence of Goethe’s thinking on Hegel is a worthy chapter in intellectual history but also beyond the scope of the present chapter. Nor was Goethe’s a lonely voice in a wilderness. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant set logical and conceptual limits on what is knowable, and advanced a formidable argument to the effect that all epistemic claims are located within the fixed categories of quantity, quality, modality, and relation. So, too, is all

experience grounded in the “pure intuitions” of time and space. Accordingly, what can be known or experienced is tied to the very modes and forms of thought and perception. There is no point outside these frameworks from which one might attain a critical perspective. In a word, the knowable is bounded, not limitless, and the modes of knowing cannot find validation outside the range of their own limited forms.

The German *Kritik* is, of course, not a “criticism” of pure (*reinen*) reason (*vernunft*) but a systematic account of the necessary preconditions permitting anything to be known through experience. The preconditions are the a priori constraints, the a priori filters, as it were, through which the knowable must pass if it is to be known. Kant’s, then, was not a veiled skepticism but an analysis of the structure of knowledge and, therefore, the limits of reason’s reach. His division of reality into “phenomena” and “noumena”—reality as perceived and reality as it is *in itself*—constituted no denial of the latter; only a recognition of the percipient’s dependence on the limited processes and apparatus of perception. In discovering the limits of experience and rational understanding, Kant perhaps unwittingly extended an invitation to those who would advance still other, and allegedly less limited, modes of knowing. For the romantic idealists, to comprehend that which transcends the sensual is to have intuitive and aesthetic powers not respected in some philosopher’s dull chapters on logic and epistemology.

Neither Goethe nor Kant nor Hegel was a relativist. None was hostile to science, though each found in the received sciences of the time a narrow one-sidedness, a complacency arising from the very commitment to simplification and reductionism. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the tensions were palpable. The world of systematic thinking was dividing itself into increasingly hard-line and defensive scientism and hard-line, aggressive Hegelianism. In an address delivered at Heidelberg in the Fall of 1862, Hermann von Helmholtz considered the essentially complete divorce that had taken place between science and philosophy. Searching for a brief way to convey the complication of causes, he pointed to the works of Hegel and declared, “His system of nature seemed, at least to natural philosophers, absolutely crazy. Of all the distinguished scientific men who were his contemporaries, not one was to stand up for his ideas.”¹⁰

Hegel’s followers were devoted to a grand system able to overcome the limitations of conventional science. The latter would then be subsumed under this more general system, one able to explain the rational character of the world as given. The general system was to be ultimate in that it would ground all knowledge. Hegel had dubbed this “phenomenology,” a detailed science of the mind’s own rational operations and transforming powers. Through this science it becomes possible to move from the mere causes of phenomena to the rational principles they express and realize. Conventional science can do no more—can attempt no more—than uncover assortments of otherwise unconnected descriptions and coinci-

dences. Faced with this sort of criticism, Helmholtz noted, scientists “went so far as to condemn philosophy altogether.” Prophetically, Helmholtz then concluded this part of his lecture with reservations regarding science’s agenda for moral issues:

We see, then, that in proportion as the experimental investigation of facts has recovered its importance in the moral sciences, the opposition between them and the physical sciences has become less and less marked. Yet we must not forget that, though this opposition was brought out in unnecessarily exaggerated form by the Hegelian philosophy, it has its foundations in the very nature of things, and must, sooner or later, make itself felt.¹¹

The so-called “romantic revolution,” the Kantian appraisal of the nature and limits of the knowable, the progress of Hegelian philosophy—these were the chief influences at work as the nineteenth century tested the optimistic promises of the Enlightenment. Though with various and numerous shadings, two distinct perspectives were developed and defended by the leaders of thought. In the patrimony of Hegel any number of sobering treatises rejected the ultimacy of science and even its relevance to an understanding of social, historical, and moral dimensions of life. In the patrimony of the Enlightenment, a confident positivism answered these claims and kept alive the optimistic conviction that disinterested, systematic, scientific research would answer the ageless questions—or show them to be nothing but verbal quibbles.

Against this background, it is less startling to confront, say, Paul Feyerabend’s *Against Method*, which dismisses science’s claimed allegiance to disinterested, rational inquiry. Rather, one must recognize the essentially rhetorical function of “science” in preserving a particular set of cultural values.¹² Against all of this are recent defenders of a realist metaphysics able to afford safe epistemological moorings. Susan Haack’s *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate* is, indeed, a passionate defense of Enlightenment values, including the deference owed to authentic scientific undertakings. Those who must be answered, she says, are the

radical sociologists, radical feminists, radical Afro-centrists, and radical followers of (by now somewhat dated) Paris fashions in rhetoric and semiology (who) have turned their attention to science. Now it is commonplace to hear that science is largely or even wholly a matter of social interests, negotiation, myth-making. . . . ‘objectivity’ and ‘rationality’ are nothing but ideological constructs.¹³

If the developed sciences require so spirited a defense, one wonders whether it is even plausible to consider moral issues as in any sense distinguishable from “social interests, negotiation, myth-making,” their allegedly objective and rational character in fact being nothing but veiled “ideological constructs.” We see, then, that the case against moral realism boils down

to the claim that moral entities, owing to their utter dependence on the internalized values and sentiments of persons essentially “constructed” by way of genetic and cultural resources, are not external and independent in the required sense. They are not in the *world*. Even to assemble an evaluative inventory of actions and meanings requires a method by which to equate the inevitably different forms of action and of utterance. Thus, one cannot classify an action as a “theft” or an actor as a “thief” except by way of a necessarily flexible algorithm. Indeed, in the end, there are no “purely descriptive” inquiries in any field of scholarship, let alone one as charged with interpretive energy and diversity as the subject of morals.

With pure description off the table, what remains can only be an essentially psychological approach to the subject, in contrast to abstract philosophical approaches. The latter sooner or later must make contact with the actual moral work of the world, however this is to be identified and defined, and thus may be properly guided by that work at the outset. One might say that the criticism of moral realism here is an exhortation to moralists that they be realistic.

Defending the epistemological standing of the natural sciences, however, is typically a prelude to defending this same standing when it comes to claims originating outside the sphere of settled scientific fact and theory. If, as it were, the last word on ontological and epistemological matters must be drawn from the accepted vocabulary of the natural sciences, then a defense of moral realism is essentially ruled out *ab initio*. The vocabulary of the natural sciences produces accounts of causal determination, physical processes, energy exchanges, and the like. The realms of aesthetics, politics, and morality are then located within a promissory framework of projects to be completed when the foundational sciences are up to the task. Presumably it would be some rich combination of evolutionary biology and cognitive neuroscience that would take on the burden: if not they, then no one.

If there is a generally accepted body of reservations voiced in opposition, it comes from the *social* sciences, from cultural anthropology and more philosophically informed versions of social psychology. The reservations, sometimes expressed in a form dismissive of even the certainties of the physical sciences, are predicated on what are taken to be the fundamental differences between physical events and social practices. The latter, as irreducibly cultural, enter into the very “construction” of persons such that social beings are unimaginable in their absence.

As major sections of the next two chapters examine deterministic challenges to libertarian or absolutist or “incompatibilist” theories of moral freedom, it is sufficient here to sketch these two different forms of determinism, one “hard” and the other in some way less hard and perhaps more porous. The sketches include an estimation of the extent to which a realist theory of morality is put at risk by them.

Moral Science and Natural Science (Again)

The methods and findings of the natural sciences are so considerable and broadly applicable as to raise serious questions about the reality of anything alleged to fall beyond their reach. Though serious, these questions either miss the intended mark or prove to be less questions than the begging of same. “Natural sciences” covers a remarkably wide range. Across this range the thick book of facts often conceals philosophically arguable assumptions. Moreover, not every fact as such finds a perfectly proportioned niche within the framework of scientific understanding. Not every fact bears directly, or even by implication, on the large and indubitable affairs of life. There may be some sense in which the regular motion of large bodies (e.g., planets, neighbors, and the Clapham omnibus) “supervene” on the uncertainty relations at the level of particle physics, but there is neither a reason nor a means by which to include the former in intelligible and coherent accounts of the latter.

In yet another way, the very framing of the issue as one pitting facts against values—one pitting natural science against moral science—begs the central question: whether the last word on all matters of real, abiding significance is to be supplied by the natural sciences; put in other terms, whether the natural sciences, as now understood, possess not only the best, but, indeed the only, means by which to embrace the full range of facts, events, and phenomena constitutive of reality. There is something entirely evasive about dismissing as “values” whatever fails to fit readily into the received ontology of the natural sciences. Thus classified, “values” is a category that soon comes to include nearly all that matters, and thus the natural sciences are left with what nearly doesn’t matter at all; namely, with dead matter.

Lest the inventory be thus depleted, defenders of the ultimacy of scientific authority adopt reductionistic modes of inquiry and explanation such that the once refractory facts, events, and phenomena are now accessible to scientific treatment. In a most discerning critique of what he calls *the received scientific doctrine of causality*, Edward Pols summarizes the ruling dogma:

The procedures of science are capable of discovering the causes of things and thus of providing the only adequate explanation of things. . . . Causality has no telic feature, although human beings tend to attribute teleology . . . to nature. . . . Agency as such, whether divine or human, forms no part of a scientific causal explanation.”¹⁴

According to the received doctrine, then, the perception of color ceases to be a matter of aesthetics, for it is now understood as depending on coding mechanisms within the lateral geniculate nucleus and cerebral cortex. Anger, mediated as it is at the level of the limbic system, can be initiated and terminated by stereotaxically positioned electrodes. The measured successes at this level then support a widespread confidence that this same

reductive strategy will, in the end, absorb whatever is, indeed, real, the balance confidently classified as a species of “noise” in the system.

This perspective has strong and worthy support within philosophy of science, strong and worthy opposition within philosophy at large. It is not necessary here to rehearse William Dray’s critique of Carl Hempel’s project, for anticipations of this important debate were fully expressed in the so-called romantic rebellion late in the Enlightenment.¹⁵ What makes certain properties of reality interesting often includes elements that, if “reduced,” are no longer explicable in terms that match up with reality itself. What makes the Battle of Waterloo a *battle* is not recoverable from even the most detailed account of the physiology and biochemistry of the participants. As Dray made clear, significant historical events are *sui generis*, not suited to modes of explanation based on a repeated-measures paradigm, and utterly lost once reduced to a collection of corpuscular interactions. The Battle of Waterloo is no less “real” for being incompatible with reductionistic analyses or covering-law modes of explanation. The incompatibility is not a sign of ambiguous ontological standing but of the variegated nature of the reality with which the human understanding must contend. The tools forged by the human imagination include those of science itself, but there is no user’s manual able to declare in advance just which tool is not only the right but also only one for the multitude of problems arising from the complexities of real life as really lived. Accordingly, it is less hubristic than absurd to dismiss as somehow unreal the entire class of facts, events, and phenomena transparently inaccessible to reductionistic forms of analysis and explanation.

As will be discussed in the next section and elsewhere in this volume, the contents of moral science have been accepted by influential theorists as factual—even subject to a systematic treatment culminating in a *bona fide* “moral science”—but nonetheless to be understood as the merely contingent features of human psychology. The entire school of moral sentimentalists would defend this perspective. Thus construed, moral discourse can and should be converted into a descriptive psychology, making it possible to “explain” morality in nonmoral terms. Each factual “is” in this descriptive science is then shielded from any corresponding moral “ought” which, after all, cannot be connected to any describable feature of the perceptible world.

There is much to recommend in this move, but also much to criticize. If descriptive psychology is to be the guide, it becomes relevant that persons have no difficulty at all distinguishing between their sentiments on the one hand and their judgments as to whether a course of action is right or wrong in moral terms. That is, the actual persons who comprise the subject matter of this descriptive psychology do not reach or defend their judgments on the alleged affective basis, even in childhood! As John Darley and Thomas Shultz conclude, after a critical appraisal of scores of studies:

The learning of moral judgment begins early in life and is of great consequence to the child. Given this early appearance and importance, we doubt that the understanding of the moral and intentional world depends on the comprehension of many aspects of the physical world. . . . As we read the evidence, children make good, early progress in understanding both the moral and physical domains and do not often (as many have suggested) confuse the two.¹⁶

The process of moral judgment is not one of conflating external facts and internal feelings, nor is it one by which one attempts to rationalize a sentiment by incorporating it into a rule-structure. Moral judgment proceeds from the assumption that actions of certain kind are *generic*, and are drawn from genres that are readily classified according to the principles they instantiate. Competence in making such judgments is not easily acquired, may be retarded by any number of factors, and, as a skill of sorts, benefits from practice, good examples, instruction, motivation and perhaps some degree of natural talent. The same is true of keyboard virtuosi who would find it entirely unhelpful to be told that they need not worry, for all keyboard music calls for no more than, and can be reduced to combinations of, only eighty-eight keys.

Whether and to what extent the claims of a moral science match up with what has become settled (inevitably *pro tempore*) within the scientific community sets challenges that work in both directions. Where the fit is poor, it may signal the incomplete progress of science, the questionable content of the moral claims, or both, or some other limitation only to be recognized by later and wiser students.

Moral Science and Social Science (Again)

If moral realism is sound, there must be moral beings instantiating it. Moral beings, at least as traditionally understood, are those with requisite powers of self-control, judgment, and motivation to frame a course of action based on sound moral precepts and then act accordingly. Merely doing the right thing, however, does not certify the actor as a moral being, for one might be made to do so by hypnotic suggestion, under duress, through inadvertence, or as a result of being a manufactured device designed to behave in a certain way.

The source, nature, and standing of “moral beings” have been subjected to ever more detailed investigations of culture. A growing body of thought and theory stands behind the proposition that such beings are constructed, as it were, from resources afforded by evolution, by local history, by the vagaries of context. As genuinely cultural creations, moral beings and the lives they live are beyond the resources of the purely natural sciences, for

such beings are “situated” in spaces that are irrelevantly geographic. They are situated within a complex matrix of discourses, values, patterns of affiliation, rules of membership, and the like Charles Taylor puts it this way:

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.¹⁷

In a most interesting and suggestive account along these same lines, Ciaran Benson has written that “our system of core beliefs is the central nervous system of our identity.”¹⁸

The conclusion reached by many in the vanguard of an otherwise liberated and enriched social psychology is that morality as such is a vital, cohesive and defining feature of real life; a source of one’s identity, one’s authentic *selfhood*; perhaps the pivotal chapter in that narrative one constructs (even daily) to know just who one is. For, to know who I am, as Charles Taylor says, is to know *where I stand*. Needless to say, however, this same conclusion must be at the expense of any version of moral realism that opposes the relativity of moral imperatives. Moral science now as social science emerges as an anthropological subject, enriched by evolutionary and genetic science, discourse analysis, autobiography, and rule-governed social practices.

What appears to be ruled out in such accounts are transcultural rules themselves, the very rules that the moral realist takes to be essentially non-contextual. One who insists that the rule “Killing the innocent is wrong on Tuesdays,” contains two words too many need not be ignorant or intolerant of cultural diversity. But for the moral realist there is a limit to respect and tolerance, and that limit is reached when foundational moral tenets are violated.

The longer argument for moral realism is offered later in this chapter and again in following chapters. By way of introduction, however, it is useful to be reminded that a diversity of practices cannot of itself validate moral relativism. That there may be widespread differences in what various communities know or fail to know about the laws and principles of science may be an interesting study within cultural anthropology but surely has no bearing on the validity of the laws and principles themselves. By the same token, if every living person were to awaken on the morrow fully committed to precisely the same moral maxims, the ontological standing of those maxims would not thereby be established. In a word, whether there is a realm of reality constituted of moral entities is not a plebiscitary question. Real moral entities, just in case they turn out to be *persons*, but identifiable according to action-guiding principles of the right sort, would fill a defined moral space that is otherwise empty. But just in case an argument leading

to this conclusion is defensible, neither the number of residents inside or outside that space nor the acknowledgment of those outside that space would have any bearing on the success of the argument itself.

It is tempting to translate this line of reasoning into the worst excesses of a complacent colonialism that would regard cultural nuances as evidence of incomplete human development; the once stridently affirmed “white man’s burden.” As with many depreciatory temptations, this one, too, should be strenuously resisted. A consistent theory of moral realism may result in the judgment that, at any given time in world history, there are no identifiable occupants in the defined moral space! More likely is the judgment that most candidate moral entities move often, and often uncertainly, across physical, social, and moral domains, frequently sacrificing one in the interest of gaining entry to one of the others; that most candidate moral entities might tend to confuse one domain with another. Two physically similar houses might find the new resident confusing a neighboring house for what is his *home*, here physical reality being taken as social reality. So, too, might the merely social domain of enjoyable affiliation come to be regarded as the moral domain of principled affiliation. Such confusions and conflation do not erase the conceptual and, it will be argued, the ontological distinctions between the physical, the social (cultural), and the moral.

With these sketches and sketchy defenses in place, we are able to return to the sentimentalist theory of morals, which would give morality real standing but only owing to certain contingent features of human nature. Just in case moral terms and categories are accompanied by, or responsive to, characteristic sentiments, the question will persist as to what it is about certain facts, events, and phenomena that so reliably results in their elicitation of “moral” feelings.

The Naturalization of Morality: Right and Wrong as Sentiments

The objections that must be overcome in any defense of moral realism were established authoritatively by David Hume, whose influence is unabated after two centuries. Hume understood morality as an essentially psychological phenomenon, grounded in sympathetic dispositions at once natural but shaped further and conditioned by associational processes. What is virtuous or vicious in an action is not something in the action itself but in the percipient’s reaction to it. Moral content, properly understood, is not “out there” but internal and fully dependent on the sentiments of the witness.

Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar’d to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind: And this discovery in morals, like

that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; tho', like that too, it has little or no influence on practice.¹⁹

For Hume, there are widespread, even universal human tendencies to react to events in characteristic emotional ways. The grounding of these tendencies, however, is hedonic in that the moral judgments finally reached are tied to pleasure and pain. As "our own sensations determine the vice and virtue of any quality," different lives carry radically different experiences and thereby generate a diversity of sentimental attachments and associations.²⁰ How, then, is it possible for a shared moral outlook ever to arise? Hume answers:

Every quality of the mind is denominated virtuous, which gives pleasure by the mere survey; as every quality, which produces pain, is call'd vicious. . . . Every particular person's pleasure and interest being different, 'tis impossible men cou'd ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them.²¹

This common point of view on Hume's account turns out to be the *character* of the person whose actions are surveyed, as well as the character of those with whom that person associates. That is, by a process of association and generalization, the sentiments of sympathy are conditioned in such a way as to be attached to those thus judged "virtuous" or "vicious." Clearly, the moral ascriptions that arise from processes of this kind may be rationalized but are not themselves derived from reason. There can be no moral science as such, for the content is not in the "world" but in the person, in the passions.

There is value in considering at least part of the pedigree that includes Hume's theory. The period denominated "the Age of Newton" was one in which religious sensibilities were put on notice by the extraordinary achievements in natural science. Yet, even before Newton made a name for himself, there were religious philosophers striving to render the eternal truths compatible with the daily discoveries. Newton's Cambridge hosted the Cambridge Platonists, two of whose leading lights were Henry More and Ralph Cudworth. Although the latter's treatises on morality and free will did not reach a wider audience until the 1730s, they were composed and distributed nearly a century earlier. Given Cudworth's standing, these unpublished manuscripts, as well as his lectures and sermons, surely influenced the better minds of the period. Once published, Cudworth's work directly influenced Shaftesbury and Hume, to name only two of the British "sentimentalists," as

well as Joseph Butler, whose *The Analogy of Religion* moved away from the deism of the scientist and toward an experience-based vindication of Christianity.²² Butler's *Analogy* is considered in the next chapter.

In *A Treatise of Freewill*, Cudworth (1617–1688) opposes the materialism of Hobbes and a rapidly evolving deterministic *Zeitgeist*.²³ Against mechanism Cudworth opposes life and organicity. It is “necessary nature,” he says, that “must be the beginner and spring of all action.”²⁴ What nature itself expresses is that first principle of action—to *protos kinoun*—that “can be no other than a constant, restless, uninterrupted desire, or love of good as such, and happiness.”²⁵

It is by nature that man is equipped with “internal sense and common notions” and these are “confirmed by the Scriptures.”²⁶ The springs of action are at once judgments and desires, complementing each other, rather than a “blind will” somehow directing the understanding. The will is not blind, though the summons of vulgar desire causes it to be distracted. The composite man, with powers of volition, thought, perception, and action, is the unit of moral regard, able to control himself and direct his actions toward what the soul senses:

The soul of man hath in it . . . a certain vaticination, presage, scent, and odour of one *summum bonum*, one supreme highest good transcending all others, without which, they will be all ineffectual as to complete happiness, and signify nothing.²⁷

Cudworth exemplifies those in the new age of science striving for a *pax philosophica* capable of distinguishing between matter and mechanism on the one hand, and spirit and moral liberty on the other. The essential instrument illuminating the differences is a sound “psychology” (Cudworth’s prescient word), faithful to what each person finds when consulting one’s most abiding longings. As noted, it is this attention to the evidence of direct personal experience that Butler will emphasize as an alternative to purely rational or analytical approaches to the great questions.

Long before the Darwinian revolution, then, the instructed mind understood that scriptural literalism was on a collision course with science, one in which the greater damage would be sustained by the faith and the faithful. The compromise struck between the claims of revealed truth and the truths revealed by science came to be that vaunted deism of the Enlightenment, but the foundations had long settled. They had been thickly laid in the century beginning about 1630, not only through such movements as Cambridge Platonism but by Newton himself and his scientific contemporaries. Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity* is perhaps the work most cited now, yet there were works of comparable and even greater influence. Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* (1711) was behind only Locke’s *Second Treatise* on the list of the most frequently reprinted volumes in the eighteenth century.²⁸

The fourth treatise within this multivolume collection is *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, which opens with the bold observation that many religious enthusiasts are patently lacking in virtue, whereas there are rank atheists of transparently good character. The point that Shaftesbury will develop is that virtue and, more generally, the moral dimensions of character are distinguishable from allegiance to doctrinal teachings or, more generally, to sectarian enthusiasms. The moral dimensions of character are found within the person, partly as a result of native endowments, partly as a measure of social and cultural influences. Beyond these,

if there be any thing which teaches men either Treachery, Ingratitude, or Cruelty, by divine Warrant; or under colour and pretence of any present or future Good to Mankind; if there be any thing which teaches Men to persecute their Friends thro' love; or torment Captives of War in sport; or to offer human Sacrifice; or to torment, macerate, or mangle themselves, in a religious Zeal, before their God; or to commit any sort of Barbarity, or Brutality, as amiable or becoming: be it Custom which gives Applause, or Religion which gives a Sanction; this is not, nor ever can be *Virtue* of any kind, or in any sense.²⁹

Shaftesbury goes on in the very next lines to insist that, apart from law, custom, fashion and religion, there are “the *eternal Measures*, and immutable independent Nature or *Worth* and VIRTUE”.

To works such as Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* should be added his *The Freeholder's Political Catechism*, not to mention seminal treatises by John Toland, Matthew Tindal, Anthony Collins, Bolingbroke—the list is long and must include centrally Samuel Clarke's *Boyle Lectures*. Published as *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1705) and *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Religion* (1706) Clarke's lectures were probably even more influential than Locke's and surely aided in the construction of a religion of nature on the foundations of “natural religion.” His incisive critique of determinism is considered in the next chapter.³⁰

The common theme in these productions is naturalism itself; the reasonable assumption that the Author of Nature, expressing a visible *plan* in His works, is neither shaman nor mystic nor, in the vulgar sense, a miracle worker. Rather, the creation itself is the authoritative book. To consult its pages with an unprejudiced eye is find as much of the divinity as human powers can reach. Reason itself is limited. To compensate for its limitations, providence has seen fit to equip us with intuitive modes of knowing and with sentiments and native dispositions capable of directing our actions toward morally worthy and decent ends. Persons of sound judgment and an uncorrupted nature will agree fully enough on what is worthy and decent. It is in the court of common sensibility and common sentiment that actions

are to be judged, and human nature itself has all the standing needed if the rulings are to be just.

Much of the naturalization of morality had already taken place years and even decades before Hume's first publications on the matter; publications that cited approvingly Locke and Lord Shaftesbury. Nor was Hume alone in raising the most pointed questions about traditional and conventional notions of morality. A summary of debates within the Enlightenment regarding the "right" and "wrong" of morals is given in the next chapter. Here we need only draw attention to what Hume found in the writings of Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, and the rest: a commitment to unprejudiced observation of one's own mental and emotional life, one's natural sentiments as the means by which to understand the nature of all morality. The resulting introspective "data" would then be productive of general principles not unlike those unearthed by the inquiring scientific mind and surely could be incorporated ultimately into a systematic moral science. This, however, would be a science based on the contingent facts of human nature, which, had they been different, could well have yielded a radically different set of moral absolutes.

Sentimentalism—An Update (Ayer and Mackie)

This tradition, now more or less stripped of its once immensely important introspective methodology, is alive and prosperous in contemporary moral thought. It is as evident in Peter Strawson's theory of "reactive attitudes" (vide *infra* and again in chapter 2) as it is in neurobiological and evolutionary theories of emotion and motivation. The reasonable approach, on all of these accounts, is the scientific approach, and science begins with an impartial description of what is really there, or so the advocates have held. An authoritative recent version, calling for some amplification, is provided by A. J. Ayer:

In so far as statements of value are significant, they are ordinary "scientific" statements; and . . . in so far as they are not scientific, they are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false.³¹

Ayer identified four types of propositions supporting four different systems of ethics. There are propositions that consider the definition of ethical terms; others describing what Ayer calls "moral experience"; still others that are no more than exhortations; and then those that seek to reach ethical judgments. Philosophy's task, as Ayer sees it, is confined to the first class of propositions; the second class is reserved to a scientific psychology. For Ayer, the exhortatory in ethics is nothing but a species of command, whereas the evaluative has no scientific or philosophical content at all. He concludes, "A strictly philosophical treatise on ethics should therefore make no ethical

pronouncements.” All the evaluative terms are to be “reduced” to descriptive terms, the result being not valid ethical judgments but topics for scientific (psychological) study. Not only is moral objectivity ruled out, but subjectivism, as such, fares no better, for personal sentiments cannot confer reality on morals as such. Nor does utilitarianism pass muster for Ayer, since there is no logical justification for treating expressions of the sort, “*x* is pleasant” or “*x* makes me happy” as equivalent to expressions of the sort “*x* is good.”

In a way that would have won Hume’s endorsement, Ayer contends that statements declaring that “stealing is wrong” add nothing not already included in the meaning of “stealing.” What is added by including “is wrong” is not even or invariably a sign of the speaker’s “moral sentiments.” It is more akin to a cry of pain. In all, then, ethical philosophy consists simply in saying that

ethical concepts are pseudo-concepts and therefore unanalysable. The further task of describing the different feelings that the different ethical terms are used to express, and the different reactions that they customarily provoke, is a task for the psychologist. There cannot be such a thing as ethical science, if by ethical science one means the elaboration of a “true” system of morals.³²

In a related but different manner, J. L. Mackie would continue the attack on moral objectivism. The core question for Mackie has to do with what sorts of entities or items fill up the actual contents of the world. To answer this question within the context of morals, it would be sufficient for the antirealist to show that all values and moral ascriptions simply “are not part of the fabric of the world.”³³ What Mackie’s denial amounts to is the proposition that moral items or entities are not a “natural kind” and so their ontology is not to be found in the natural world as given.

Against Ayer’s project, however, Mackie insists that the task of philosophy here cannot be limited to linguistic analysis. If there is a point to determining just what goodness is, it will never do to limit inquiry to “finding out what the word ‘good’ means, or what it is conventionally used to say or do.”³⁴ The central task is not that of a linguistic but of an ontological analysis; to discover just what (if anything) moral ascriptions match up with in the real world. Mackie’s approach here takes its lead from the notion of secondary qualities as advanced by Locke and Boyle in the seventeenth century. Granting that there are no blue or yellow photons as such, nonetheless certain dominant wavelengths reliably excite the sensations of blue or yellow. The secondary qualities of color are functionally tied to the (real) physical properties (primary qualities) of electromagnetic radiation. None of this could be established by a form of inquiry limited to how the terms “blue” and “yellow” are conventionally used.

What is clear to Mackie is that moral judgments are made by those who take them to be “objective.” The task of philosophy is to determine whether

this is sound or in error. At the level of linguistic analysis, what is readily discovered is that moral judgments already include an objectivist presumption and in this, according to Mackie, moral judgments are simply based on a mistake. In the Lockean language of primary and secondary qualities, Mackie would contend that the error is one of regarding a secondary quality (e.g., “blue”) as if it were a primary quality, one that is independent of perceptual processes. It is akin to concluding, from the joint proposition that the light is corpuscular and is blue, that the corpuscles (photons) must be blue. Seeing through this error leads one to recognize that there are no moral facts as such, for morals do not figure among the furnishings of the world, even if certain objective events give rise to widespread perceptual or emotional responses of a “moral” sort.

Thus does Mackie frame his famous “argument from queerness”: If there were real moral entities they could be known “only by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.”³⁵ Intuitionism of this sort, he insists, is out of favor and implausible. Comparably implausible is the notion that such strange entities, found nowhere else in the universe, nevertheless are action-guiding and motivating; further, that they make direct contact of some sort with the natural occurrences that engage them. Assuming there is, for example, something morally wrong with cruelty, there would have to be a means by which empirical events (in this case, actions) are immediately recognized as “cruel” by our (alleged and required) intuitive powers. The cruelty would have to inhere objectively in the act and be *seen* as such. Clearly (on Mackie’s understanding) there are no objectively “cruel” properties as such, so “cruelty” at most is in the eyes of beholders in much the same way that “blue” is.

None of this, in and of itself, would rule out widespread agreement on matters of moral consequence. All normally sighted persons, after all, will see “blue” under conditions that can be objectively specified. But what they see is different from what there is. In reality there are photons of a given wavelength and frequency capable of exciting the sensation of “blue.” The sensation, however, is the result of specialized cellular and biochemical features of the primate visual system. The same electromagnetic radiation results in radically different sensations in different contexts, in conditions of disease, in species with different retinal pigments, and so forth.

In a similar vein, critics have used Occam’s razor to strip away what they take to be the unwarranted assumptions of the moral realist. Richard Double is representative of a whole school of critics:

*Theoretical postulations, in ethics as with ontology, in general, are justifiable only if: (a) The postulated entities fit into an otherwise acceptable theory of what exists in an understandable way (the conformity condition), and, (b) the data that we use to justify the postulation cannot be explained equally well without making the postulation (the simplicity condition).*³⁶

Double concludes that moral realism fails to satisfy both conditions and, therefore, fails as a theoretical postulation.

An especially telling critique of moral realism has been developed over the years by Gilbert Harman, much of it a refinement and elaboration of an argument he set forth in *The Nature of Morality*.³⁷ It may be summarized as follows:

- a. Moral statements are not entailed by descriptive statements of fact.
- b. The only evidence for the truth of any moral statement would be in the form of inferences from true descriptive statements of fact, this being the very nature of evidence.
- c. The only other basis on which to establish the truth of moral statements is intuitive and reached non-inferentially.
- d. Owing to (a–c), factual evidence cannot establish either the truth of moral statements or the validity of non-inferential intuitive moral claims.

In a lengthy, if otherwise instructive, analysis of this argument, Judith Jarvis Thomson suggests counters based on the motivational power of certain beliefs, such that a moral statement of the form “*x* is kind to *y*” leads ultimately to some joyous bell-ringing celebration or announcement of *x*’s moral standing. Harman’s replies make clear that nothing essential to the adequacy of his aforementioned propositions is defeated by these counters.³⁸

We see, then, that the case against moral realism is venerable, powerful, various. Can anything be said in its favor?

For Moral Realism

The defense of moral realism has both critical and constructive components. First, the limitations and defects of moral subjectivism must be examined, after which the facts and arguments that seem to tell in favor of moral realism may then be considered.

Perhaps it is best to begin with Double’s useful denomination of the conditions that must be satisfied by theoretical postulates in ethics and ontology. Neither conformity nor simplicity is a univocal concept. Moreover, it is unclear just how a developed set of moral precepts could or should fit into an otherwise acceptable theory of what exists without begging the question. The moral realist affirms the existence of moral entities, taking them to be different from merely physical entities. The difference is essential, so the two cannot be expected to “fit into” the same ontological framework. No one seriously proposes eliminating the domain of physically real entities on the grounds that they fail to reflect moral properties.

“Simplicity,” which is inevitably protean when invoked as a standard of explanation or, for that matter, of taste, might usefully be contrasted with “complexity” as understood in systems theory. The complexity of a system is expressed by the number of sentences required to account fully for the

operation and performance of the system. On this understanding, any moral postulation achieving simplicity would be suspect on its face. To this point, then, the moral realist is able to defend the theory against criticisms based on positivistic assumptions expressly ruled out by the very nature of moral reality.

Beyond this, moral realists understand praise and blame as the means by which to evaluate persons and collectives objectively, and not as the privileged possessions of a local enclave. On this understanding, an account of what is valued and condemned leads not to a chapter in comparative anthropology but, as it were, to a diagnosis of moral health. The task is daunting, orderliness elusive, success partial at best. If there is to be a defense of moral realism it must be able to set aside skeptical arguments to the contrary where these rely not only on emotivist, subjectivist, and psychosocial alternatives, but also on the sort of conceptual challenge so skillfully developed by Harman and others. The last of these should be considered first, for if moral realism is ruled out conceptually, there would be little point in seeking its defense at some other level.

Is it the case that moral statements or claims are not entailed by descriptive statements of fact? This is a question riddled with subtle and protean terms. It might be understood as arising from the stock assertion of the moral skeptic; that is, *there are no moral facts as such*. If, indeed, there simply are no moral facts, then clearly no descriptive statement of fact can include a moral fact among its entailments. It might also be understood in a more subtle way: *How could evidence at the level of direct perception entail what cannot be known at that level or even reached by inference from one level to another?* In this form, the question would appear to ground a skepticism far too broad to be credible, and surely no more destructive of moral claims than of any number of nonmoral but objective facts of daily life. To wit: *How could evidence, in the form of factual description, entail that the musculoskeletal events displayed by the nine bodies distributed on the grassy field constitute the game of baseball?* And, of course, the answer is not that the musculoskeletal events *entail* the game of baseball but just constitute it. Given physical properties, the moral realist need not find an entailment-rule by which to reach moral properties. The moral realist need only argue that, comprehended properly, some occurrences are by their nature *moral*, though in some other sense also embodied.

If the question actually is predicated on the assumption that there are no moral facts as such, one must ask whether that assumption is broad enough to support skeptical conclusions regarding architecture (there are not Gothic cathedrals *as such*), national borders (there is no France *as such*), and so on. The arguments for moral realism are under no special burden in the matter of noninferential truth claims. In countless instances, an actuarial account of all that is directly perceived at the level of descriptive fact will fail to turn

up what any competent observer would notice immediately: games, battles, strategies, possessions, gifts. If the skeptic's thesis is that no truth about wrapping paper and ribbons warrants the conclusion that a gift has been prepared, then we have one more instance of armchair skepticism. Once out and about, under the light of the heavens and immersed in the toss and tumble of the world, the skeptic abandons the major premise and records sincere gratitude for so lovely a *present*.

Turning to the allegedly sentimental grounding of morals, it is clear at the outset that persons making moral judgments understand themselves to be expressing something different from personal aversions, pleasures, or whims. There will be disagreement as to whether what is being affirmed is valid beyond the boundaries of their own culture or religious beliefs, but there will be widespread agreement that "good" and "evil," "right" and "wrong," "Well done!" and "Shame!" register something weightier than merely personal penchants. The limitations, and what is finally the sheer peculiarity, of sentimentalist theories of morality were put in sharp focus by G. E. Moore. The question Moore poses is whether the reference of all moral or ethical ascriptions "is simply and solely . . . a certain feeling." If this were the case, Moore concludes, it would follow that, "all the ideas with which Moral Philosophy is concerned are merely psychological ideas."³⁹ In addressing the question, Moore finds, at least tentatively, that the sentimentalist thesis is opaque, both as a moral psychology and as a philosophical doctrine. What troubled Moore can be instructively recast in the following way:

1. When I judge an action or event to be morally wrong, I am judging it to be the sort of action or event that tends to excite within me feelings of, say, indignation.
2. When I judge one action or event to be clearly more wrongful than another, I am actually basing the judgment on my estimation of which would create a greater indignation were both to occur at the same time.
3. When *you* make the judgments given in (1) and (2), then you are estimating how the action or event would tend to excite feelings in *you*.
4. As neither of us has any means by which to know such tendencies in the other, there is simply no basis on which either of us can make sense of how the other is using words such as "wrong." Moral terms as such could not rise higher in their import than a kind of noise.
5. It follows, then, that between two such persons "there is absolutely no such thing as a difference of opinion on moral questions."⁴⁰

The problem for the moral sentimentalist does not end here, for if the thesis is not about the relationship between moral judgments and the feelings of the particular judge, then what relationship does it address? Moore regards as simply implausible the view that moral judgments can be based on guesses as to how someone else might feel when facing an action or event

of a certain kind. And it goes beyond implausibility to suppose that, in the given circumstance, one can estimate the feelings excited in “all mankind.” There is probably nothing in the realm of the possible that would engender precisely the same sentiment in the entire human race. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that, in making moral appraisals, persons engage in some form of actuarial exercise to calculate the fraction or percent of the human community likely to be excited to levels of indignation by an action or event. This is all sufficient for Moore to conclude that, whatever the reference of moral terms, it is not merely a psychological state or idea.

The persistence of sentimentalism within the body of moral thought requires additional comment here, partly by way of rehearsal, partly by way of amplification. For better or for worse, it is an undeniable fact of psychological life that one’s emotional reaction to wrongdoing is of a decidedly different character when one is the target rather than an uninvolved witness. The witness to historical events of a malevolent nature is able to condemn without sharing the actual feelings of those who were victimized. Nor would the estimation of wrongdoing be affected in any way at all were it proven that the victims—owing to treatment by drugs or surgery or hypnosis—did not mind what was being done to them. There are, it might be supposed, relatively few persons who feel the loss of a murdered child as acutely as do the parents, but the judgment that a terrible wrong has been committed is no less certain for that. To explain the judgment on the basis of “empathy” is to introduce varieties of cognitive and conceptual resources well beyond the range of mere feelings. Sharing another’s grief is at once to project oneself into the life of the other; to comprehend the other’s scale of needs and values; and to shadow the aspirations and imagine the memories by which the grief is deepened and uniquely personalized. Even when the assumptions of the moral sentimentalist are warranted, therefore, it is obvious that the part taken by sentiment qua sentiment is more as corollary than as cause. In a word, there is nothing at the level of psychology or of conceptual analysis capable of sustaining the main arguments of the moral sentimentalist.

Moral Ascriptions (Praise and Blame) as Conventional and Discursive

Where ordinary opinions settle for the conclusion that praise and blame are just a species of reward and punishment, philosophical thought has been more subtle. It has focused on the discursive-linguistic resources by which a moral world may be brought about. On this understanding, praise and blame are essentially *rhetorical* devices, used to establish and maintain social structures of value to the discursive community. This, too, is a defensible

but problematic thesis. It relies on a conventionalist theory of meaning, which itself is deeply problematical, despite an illustrious cast of defenders. To understand the deficiencies of this theory is to see further into the limitations of relativistic theories of morals.

Both Locke and Hume thought it obvious that the meaning of terms is established by social agreement or compact, as if that settled the question. As Thomas Reid observed, however, agreements and compacts require a language for their own production. Were there no means by which to signal approval and rejection, comprehension and confusion, and the like, there could be no “conventional” understanding at all. Rather, there must be some originating and entirely natural powers, widely shared and in place without benefit of learning or practice, by which to make public certain aims, feelings, desires, understandings. As Reid would argue, only if there is some natural language by which to signal agreement can there be the establishment of conventional meanings of signs and symbols in the first instance.⁴¹

Reid’s “natural language” takes the form of postural and expressive signs of approval, agreement, fear, aversion, pleasure; the full panoply of sentiments and concepts by which compacts can be formed, meanings settled, rudimentary social interactions effected. This natural language is as much a fact of nature as is binocular vision or finger-thumb opposition. The latter is possible only as a result of the contingent fact that some creatures have fingers and thumbs. The contingent nature of digitation, however, is at no cost to finger-thumb opposition being an “objective” fact in the world. If postural and expressive actions are the comparably species-wide means by which cooperative and agonistic transactions are brought about, then they, too, are as facts of the natural world as “objective” as is the Krebs cycle or photosynthesis. It is useful to note in this connection that the efficacy of the very terms of a natural language would be rendered utterly meaningless by any sort of reductionistic analysis. It is the ensemble of postural, facial, and gestural actions that conveys the desire for assistance. Thus it would be idle to ask what sort of “sense organ” is responding to or recording the actor’s plea for help. There is nothing in the transaction that is at all “queer,” though there is also nothing that is essentially “sensory” or particular.

In the same vein, it is not in virtue of a judgment being shared “conventionally” that it lapses into the “subjective” mode. The term “subjective” may be applied to opinions or perceptions that are merely *personal*, but not to those shared by nearly every member of the species. It is easy to be misunderstood on this point, for it is always tempting to beg this sort of question by assuming that the only “natural kinds” are unitary objects, inevitably and exhaustively defined in physical terms.

Whether or not a complete description of the natural world can be rendered in exclusively physical terms is a metaphysical question of great sub-

tlety. Common throughout the animal kingdom, at least as early in the phylogenetic series as the flatworm, is one or another sort of “dwelling.” For some species the dwelling is within its own shell; others actually build such places. Although all such structures are physically describable, it is questionable whether even an exhaustive physical account conveys what it is that makes a physical entity a “dwelling.” Even if such an account were produced, it is unquestionable but that it would fail to convey all that is readily conveyed by the notion of a “dwelling.” Thus, although dwellings are utterly natural facts, they are not readily reducible to a congeries of fixed physical attributes. Presumably, such entities could be recognized as dwellings only by creatures who have—dwellings! Yet it would be odd to insist that, because of this, the concept of a dwelling is purely “subjective.”

In this connection it is useful to consider again Mackie’s “queerness” argument. John McDowell has expressed serious reservations about Mackie’s position, again on the basis of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.⁴² Consider the sensation reliably associated with the word “blue.” Here is a color-name assigned by normal percipients when short-wavelength radiation is incident on retinas with receptors of a certain type and at a certain level of adaptation. As a given percipient’s “own” experience, blue may be said to enter into the subject’s awareness (“subjectively”), yet this has no bearing whatever on the objective relationship between wavelength and sensory outcomes as mediated by the pigment chemistry of cone receptors.

It is, of course, unwarranted to conclude from the fact that something is the subject of experience that this “something” is subjective. Most of the facts, events and measurements integral to the developed sciences are “subjects of experience” but no less real for that. And, as noted, a large number of facts in the natural world of living, breeding, competing, cohabiting species are not only subjects of experience but intelligible only to creatures possessing kindred inclinations and adaptations.

In defense of Mackie’s thesis it might be granted that “queerness” pertains not to every or any subject of experience but rather only to those subjects of experience denominated “good” or “bad” in the moral sense. Granting that there is a something generative of these assessments, just what this something is surely is not “in” the act itself. Relying again, as Hume himself did, on the concept of secondary qualities, the critic might insist that a given wavelength of incident light is generative of “blue,” but that the photons themselves are colorless. “Blue” is thus understood not to be in the world but in the experience, and one is thus driven back to the question of natural kinds. What sort of entity would morals have to be to qualify as a *natural* kind of thing?

Whether moral entities (“good,” “bad,” and so forth) are real in the sense of being instances of natural kinds depends on what one requires of such kinds, and on this issue there is no settled position. Are species distinct

and thus instances of a specific natural kind? What criteria are taken to be dispository in matters of this sort? Alexander Bird highlights the difficulty:

When one visits a greengrocer, in the section devoted to fruit one will find, among other things, apples, strawberries, blackcurrants, rhubarb, and plums, while the vegetable display will present one with potatoes, cabbages, carrots, tomatoes, peppers and peas. If one were to ask a botanist to classify these items we will find rhubarb removed from the list of fruit and tomatoes and peppers added. . . . Following this line . . . one might conclude that there really is no absolute sense in which there is a natural classification of things into kinds.⁴³

What is indubitable is that there are apples, rhubarb, and so on, which is to say that these names refer to entities that are reliable subjects of experience. They are no less reliable (and *real*) as subjects of experience for being difficult to classify in an undeviatingly consistent way. At a commonsense level, one would say that the term “apple” ranges over a variety of items with a set of attributes understood to be required if the term is to be applied correctly. Apples have a “nominal essence” that includes their shape and color, their taste and size, and the like. Actions and events routinely described as morally “good” or “bad” also have common properties and are classified, if not as consistently as apples are, with sufficient intersubjective reliability to qualify as having a nominal essence.

This is not to say that for anything to qualify as really existing it must have an abiding and universally recognized nominal essence. Consider only Saul Kripke’s tiger critique: To say that the tiger has a nominal essence that includes “large, quadrupedal, carnivorous, black and yellow cat populous in India”—and that this qualifies tigers as a natural kind—is to fall prey to epistemic credulity. After all, those who were the first to see such creatures may have had defective vision, or may have seen only the few tigers who actually eat meat, or may even have failed to see a fifth leg on half of the specimens. The point, of course, is that descriptions, no matter how consistent, are fallible accounts of *what is there* and cannot, therefore, be the last word on the nominal essence of a thing.⁴⁴ By the same token, the very complexity of moral events lends them to a wider range of descriptions, each perhaps focused more on one cluster of features than on another. As descriptive consistency does not guarantee a correct essentialist account, neither does descriptive inconsistency rule out the possibility that the described entities are natural and *real*.

It is not only philosophers who have considered the reference of evaluative descriptions. It was a matter of great interest to psychologists in the Gestalt tradition. If the core precept of Gestalt psychology is confined to a sentence, it is *the whole is different from the sum of its parts*. Events perceived as having or embodying values offer suggestive examples of Gestalt principles of perception. A passage from Wolfgang Köhler is instructive here:

Value may reside in the most varied classes of things. A dress may look elegant or sloppy, a face hard or weak, a street cheerful or dismal, and in a tune there may be morose unrest or quiet power. I admit, one's own self is among the entities in which values may reside. Such is the case when we feel fit or, at another time, moody. But the thesis that it is always valuation as an act which imbues its object with value as a pseudo attribute is perhaps nowhere more artificial than precisely in this instance. Here the self would have to equip itself with value attributes such as fitness or utter fatigue. The idea seems slightly fantastic. And if in this instance a thing per se manages to have value characteristics, why should we deny this possibility where other percepts are concerned?⁴⁵

It is, indeed, fantastic to assume that a percipient possesses a set of attributes such as, say, "fatigue," then deploys these (even inaccurately) as a way of describing some otherwise incompletely comprehended event, such as one's fatigue. Rather, the ascriptions reach something resident in the "thing per se," as Köhler says, as that something is registered in the process of perception itself. The clam withdrawing into its shell in response to a threat in the external environment is using the shell as a protective dwelling, which it is, and this property, the property of *being-a-dwelling* is as much in the shell as is calcium.

Objectivity and Intersubjectivity

Persons differ in their estimations of the morally good and bad and the degree of each. Such disagreements are routinely noted in attempts to establish the subjectivity of moral evaluations. Persons also differ in assigning names of colors, some of the differences based on the physical features of their different and nurturing environments. The Eskimo has many more words for snow than does the resident of equatorial regions and may also be more sensitive to the texture and color shadings of snowy scenes. It is a teasing question as to whether any two persons see the same "blue."

Though a teasing question, it is not without rigorous modes of address. Experimental psychologists settle questions of this sort according to the following general strategy: Find the range of stimulus variations over which both percipients assign the same term (e.g., "blue"), and that is the index of sameness of perception.⁴⁶ In this same connection, and still inspired by Mackie's critique of moral objectivity, suppose one were to ask whether "musical harmony" is part of the fabric of the world. The question would not be settled by the fact that harmony in music (as with "moral" for the moral realist) is rule-governed and thus permits assessments of success and failure, right and wrong. Chess, too, is rule-governed and certain moves can thus be classified as impermissible, though no one would claim that the

game of chess is part of the very fabric of the world. But chess, as such, matches up with nothing that is already and incontestably part of the fabric of the world whereas music does; namely, vibratory phenomena falling within the range of human auditory perception. Music, then, is an instance of sound, and sound arises from the compression and rarefaction of molecules that are certainly part of the fabric of the physical world.

This much accepted, the question now can be rephrased: What is the ontological standing of those acoustical properties by which a given sample of sound is classified as “musical” and “harmonious”? One reply would have it that nothing more than the tastes or predilections of the listener need be consulted, thus reducing “harmonious music” to an utterly subjective phenomenon. A more rigorous reply would note the fact that some persons are tone-deaf but that their auditory pathology should not be confused with a general failure to classify instances of “harmonious music.” Such persons may not hear the harmonies but could learn the theory of harmony and then test a given ensemble of acoustic frequencies against the theoretical requirements. There are mathematical criteria by which “harmonies” are understood, as well as the actual receptivity to such harmonies of specific auditory mechanisms, both peripherally and within the central nervous system. The finding, therefore, that there are widespread variations in musical genre and “music appreciation” would not, in and of itself, defeat the realist’s claims. Just in case the Eskimo language contains many more words for “snow” than does that of the Kalihari bushman, “whiteness” is still part of the fabric of the world.

To consider the realist’s claims in this context is to revive Thomas Reid’s subtle and powerful rejoinders to those he attached to the “ideal” theory. What Reid found in Hume was a theory both ancient and common; a theory that denies the percipient access to things in the world, confining the contents of consciousness to some sort of “representation” of them. What can be known, then, are not the items and events in the world, but only ideas in the mind. Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Malebranche, Hume—a veritable legion of philosophers accepted this thesis in one or another form and thus gave impetus to all varieties of skepticism.

Reid’s defense of direct realism is now well rehearsed. It is a common sense defense, naturalistic and even Darwinian in its rationale. The lowly caterpillar crawls across a thousand leaves until it finds one right for its diet, an achievement that would be impossible were such a creature hostage to the allegedly “mental” nature of all perception and comprehension. Speaking of defenders of the ideal theory, Reid notes that.

they made the secondary qualities mere sensations, and the primary ones resemblances of our sensations. They maintained, that colour, sound, and heat, are not anything in bodies, but sensations of the

mind. . . . Their paradoxes were only an abuse of words. For when they maintain, as an important modern discovery, that there is no heat in the fire, they mean no more than that the fire does not feel heat, which every one knew before.⁴⁷

No one sees the discharges of optic nerve fibers. One sees what is *out there*. Perception is of events and things, not of “representations.” How, after all, would the mind form an image of an odor? To repeat, from the fact that an event is the subject of experience, it does not follow that its standing is subjective. To the extent that the experience includes attributes not readily reduced to physical features it does not follow that the attributes are unnatural or “queer.” And from the fact that there are widespread variations in the manner in which such events are classified and evaluated, it does not follow that the events themselves are unnatural or queer.

Widespread variations in the evaluation of actions and events are often invoked to defend relativistic alternatives to moral realism. The thesis, often explicit, is that variations in moral ascriptions applied to the same phenomenon leave no doubt as to the relativity of moral values. But further reflection shows this also to be either irrelevant or compatible with an (empirically supported) alternative explanation. It may be dismissed as irrelevant on the grounds that the failure of one, another, or *every* community to recognize the objective truth of a systematic science cannot possibly constitute a challenge to the objectivity of the claims of that science. Were there communities, none of whose members had depth perception and thus all of whom denied the objective validity of spherical geometry, their denials would play no part in an attempt to establish the validity of the axioms of this geometry.

The alternative explanation begins with the recognition that it may not be the *values* that vary from culture to culture but the *meaning* of the action or event being evaluated. To show no more than that two groups evaluate the “same” event differently requires a method and measurement capable of rendering the event itself the same for the two groups. Obviously, snow removal will be evaluated differently by one attempting to get out of the driveway on the day of the storm and one who operates a ski resort. This is an example of the well-known and uncontested dependence of valuations on context. But room for unwarranted and misleading conflation is great here. That snow is to be removed is an objective fact of the world. That this pleases the commuter and worries the ski resort operator is something else. The misleading conflation is one that takes their different reactions as raising doubts about the objective nature of the event in question.

Karl Dunker, another member of the Gestalt school of psychology, conducted experiments on this matter years ago. In an illustrative experiment Dunker found (unsurprisingly) that attitudes toward moneylending depend on whether the practice is perceived as a form of exploitation or a desire to

assist.⁴⁸ This and related judgments clearly color and shape how a mere fact, such as the fact of lending “for a consideration,” is incorporated into one’s perceptual framework. Failing to probe more basic values, one is likely to conclude that it is attitudes toward usury that vary, rather than how the overall transaction, its purposes and affordances, are understood. What varies, of course, are attitudes toward actions judged as affirming, and attitudes toward actions judged as rejecting a settled moral precept. As it happens, the judgment that moneylending is a good practice owing to the assistance it gives to the borrower, and a bad practice owing to the usurious exploitation of the poor, is a judgment based on the same moral precepts. This is all too weighty to hang on the thin threads of a few psychology experiments. It is abundantly clear, with and without such research, that evaluations of events are subject to how the events are perceived in the first instance. To insist, therefore, that differences in the evaluations record differences in basic values is, in the circumstance, merely argumentative.

The Fabric of the World (Again)

Those attaching themselves to the empiricist school of realism cannot have it both ways. They cannot at once insist that all candidates for inclusion in “the fabric of the world” be reliably efficacious at the level of sensation and, at the same time, rule out a priori any number of experiences widely reported, reliably elicited, stubborn in their persistence. On the old, if troubled, Lockean notion of secondary qualities there are attributes of real things reflected in the manner in which they are perceived. Whatever stands behind “blue” or “harmonious” is really there, even if “blue” and “harmonious” require special apparatus, culturally modified, if they are to be sensed. The moral realist may contend without embarrassment that the moral sense of right and wrong is, too, generated by facts forming the fabric of the sensible world and experienced by creatures having adequate means by which to recognize these facts.

It should be noted, however, that the very concept of primary and secondary qualities was troubled from the first. George Berkeley was among the first to develop a systematic critique of the distinction, concluding that everything Locke would have as a primary quality was as much a subject of experience as were the secondary qualities. Stretching Locke’s empiricism to what he took to be the limits of its tether, Berkeley concluded that all that is, to use Mackie’s graphic expression, part of “the fabric of the world” is so in virtue of being perceived. *Esse est percipi*. A more plausible alternative rejects the notion of “qualities” altogether and contends that what is seen (heard, etc.) is just what is *there*.

Specifically rejected is that representational theory (as much Descartes’s as Locke’s) according to which we have knowledge only of our own repre-

sentations of the external world rather than of that world directly. Indeed, the senses are prey to illusions but if there were not veridical perceptions there could be no category of the illusory. Reid again is the textbook realist, his criticisms of the representational (“ideal”) theory now widely cited. The lynchpin of his argument is the demonstrable fact that the visually perceived world of figures has as its content the tangible properties of these figures and not the properties of their retinal projections. That is, the right-angle triangle drawn on the page is seen as rectilinear (it is seen as it would be felt) and not as the spherical triangle projected onto the retinal surface. For present purposes, this realist position translates directly into matters of value. That natural language that includes facial expression, posture, and vocal intonations is a language conveying states, dispositions, intentions, and feelings that are really there—really part of the fabric of the world. If it is a leap from this to the proposition that “cruelty” is *in the act* in just this way, it is at least not a heedless one. Just in case moral ascriptions are nonetheless taken to be in some sense akin to naming colors or identifying harmony, they still are not on that account subjective, let alone queer, and they may well on that account express an entirely natural connection. To test this further, two principal objections must be met; that identified as “the naturalistic fallacy,” and the second arising from contemporary notions of objectivity itself.

Objectivity and the Naturalistic Fallacy

It may be argued that even a “natural connection,” such as that between wavelength and sensed color or between an act and one’s moral aversion to it, establishes no more than a matter of fact incapable of sustaining moral conclusions. Dubbed “the naturalistic fallacy” by G. E. Moore, the famous nondeducibility of “ought from is” was influentially anticipated by David Hume:

In every system of morality . . . the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning . . . when, of a sudden . . . instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is* and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought* or an *ought not*.⁴⁹

There have been numerous criticisms and defenses of the alleged naturalistic fallacy. Presumably, taking an oath is a fact that establishes an obligation and this has exemplified for some the possibility of deriving “ought” from “is.” This line of defense, though suggestive, is different from what I would propose in the present context. Rather, I would ask directly the basis on which to reject the reality of moral “oughts” once it is granted that they arise from the stable dispositions and sentiments widespread in human communities. What is it that such dispositions and sentiments are lacking such that they fail to “objectify” moral obligations?

I recur yet again to the “secondary qualities,” to “blue” and to “harmonious music.” To insist that blue is not in the physical stimulus is to have some sort of theory that settles what is (naturally?) “in” a physical object. Surely any adequate theory by which to determine what is “in” an object must include any property that renders the object causally efficacious in its relationship with other objects and events. On this account, it would be a patently incomplete account of what is “in” electromagnetic radiation with a wavelength of 390 nanometers to leave out the property of causing the sensation blue in normal percipients. The same would be the case in any complete account of patterns of vibrations generating a major chord.

There appear to be aspects of the world that excite sentiments of approval and revulsion, these fully noted by Hume as he attempted to translate moral terms into psychological states. But one cannot eat one’s cake and have it, too. If the ultimate authority on all matters of fact is that of experience, the widespread experiences of approval and revulsion—expressed also in the language of moral praise and blame—must be said to provide the very same grounding for moral ascriptions as is available for blue or harmonious music. What is relative in such a scheme is the relationship between events external to the percipient and the species-determined registration and interpretation of such events; that is, the causal consequences as determined by this relationship. Thus did Thomas Aquinas note, rather in passing, that, were our natures different, our duties would be different. But our natures are what they are, what they *really* are. The cognitive and conceptual resources available to us by which every other aspect of reality is established are available as well to establish the reality of moral events and items. This should be uncontroversial once “concept” is assigned a stable meaning. Laurence Bonjour has done as much when he concludes that, to have a concept such as “redness” is, among other considerations, to be able think about and represent a particular thing or kind of thing,

where the item in question is usually represented as a feature or aspect of the objective world, of *an sich* reality. Thus, if I have the concept of red, I have therewith the ability to think of things as red, to reflect on the property redness, and normally at least to recognize things as red. There is nothing wrong with saying that my rational insight or justified belief that, for example, nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time pertains to my concept of red (or redness), but this means merely, I suggest, that it pertains to the putatively objective property that I represent, not that it pertains to some distinct subjective entity, whose nature and metaphysical status would be extremely puzzling.⁵⁰

Deriving “ought” from a complex pattern of events is no more puzzling, let alone fallacious, than to derive “blue” from wavelengths, just in case the two kinds of events are comparably common in human experience owing

to their being tied to features of the natural world. In a word, the sense in which moral qualia are queer is no different from the sense in which all qualia are queer. Put another way, moral qualia are not to be denied the status of natural kinds on the grounds that they are qualia, for all natural kinds enter their taxonomic slots as a result of, alas, qualia.

The antirealist rejoinder is not that moral judgments fail to refer to a metaphysically puzzlingly subjective thing, but that what they refer to just is subjective; that is, feelings. And feelings are no more than feelings, no matter how natural or uniform or general in their distribution. Of contemporary writers on the subject, none has done more to “naturalize” the emotions and sentiments than has Peter Strawson in his essay “Freedom and resentment,” where he develops the concept of “reactive attitudes.”⁵¹ The thesis will be considered again in chapter 3. Here it is useful to consider his thesis that there are utterly natural dispositions and emotions captured by such terms as “gratitude,” “indignation,” “resentment,” “guilt,” and that these are so integrally related to social and interpersonal life that such life would be inconceivable in their absence. In any direct combat, therefore, between determinism and the presumption of moral responsibility, the victory of the latter is ensured by the most fundamental pragmatic considerations. The reactive attitudes, at once natural and pervasive, give a protected status to the very terms of moral discourse, thus insulating it against the claims of science. If Strawson does not go as far as Hume in declaring the hegemonic status of passion in relation to the assertions of reason, he goes far enough to preserve the essentially social function of moral ascriptions.

One might agree with all of this and, turning the tables, go on to insist that this establishes the utterly subjective nature of morals. What is implicit in this rejoinder is a kinship between physical entities and objectivity, and between perception and subjectivity. Common though this implication is, it seems to be a distortion of the manner in which objectivity actually arises and is recognized in the realms of perception and judgment.

The widespread view is that genuinely scientific aspirations must incorporate and display “objectivity,” and that this is achieved through a steadfast commitment to what is typically dubbed “value-neutrality.” On this understanding, an enterprise is “scientific” to the extent that its claims and essential character are in no way obnoxious to such (culturally based, fictitious, subjective, affective, sentimental . . .) “values” that are the stock-in-trade of morality. A value-neutral enterprise, so the account goes, places no special premium on one set of epistemic claims over another, for to assign standing is already to have adopted an axiology. Such an enterprise arises within, and claims fidelity to, no identifiable and merely “local” culture, for to have such a pedigree or allegiance is at once to embrace and to preserve a settled system of values; indeed, it is to be disposed to acquire and transmit ideas, practices, possessions in such a way as to honor and fortify the generative and nurturing culture.

This, however, has never been a valid characterization of science, nor could it have been. Rather, the emergence of what we might call the “culture of science” is dated from the birth of philosophy itself, when thinkers began to distinguish between facts and beliefs, knowledge and opinion, the enduring and the evanescent; when they were willing—often under pain of censure and even death—to draw a line between the received values and certainties of cohorts or kings, and the real certainties revealed through an unprejudiced and daring inquiry into the very nature of things. By whatever name, such an orientation and commitment cannot be understood in totally nonmoral terms.

What may be called the moral disposition of objectivity is not foundational for any and every mode of inquiry. There are many contexts in which hunches, guesses, hopefulness, unreflecting faith, coin tossing, and unbridled whim might well dispose someone to take a position, even a firm position, on something being so. Thoughtful persons cast votes, offer up prayers, buy lottery tickets, find perfection in their children, and something of their own identity in the local football team. None of this can be predicated on the moral requirement of indifference or judicious disinterest, which is precisely what “objectivity” entails. Indeed, the scientific community, which is in this capacity drawn from the moral community in just the way jurors are so chosen, is credible insofar as it is able to suspend just those dispositions that yield faith, hope, blind affection, party loyalty.

To hear parents blame teachers for the lackluster performance of their children is to be inclined to lower one’s gaze in sympathetic embarrassment. One is far less inclined to censure the parents than to understand their controlling passions and motives. Yet to discover that a scientist has recast the data in order to render the findings more compatible with a favored hypothesis is to be shocked and to regard oneself not only as cheated but even imperiled. The offense now is on a par with forms of treason, for the deception is recognized as potentially harmful to all. As the parents are judged in sympathetic terms, the scientist is judged in moral terms; and this is as it should be.

This special status of the scientific enterprise is based less on cost-benefit calculations—by which it is not inevitably vindicated—than on the light it actually sheds on, yes, undisciplined subjectivity. The status of science is a reflection of a powerful, if often repressed, motive in human affairs, the motive to self-perfection: the motive a rational being has to become ever more rational, ever less vulnerable to the gothic productions of the unlit mind. If the scientific project serves a given culture it is not for that reason a mere expression of the values of the given culture. In this we discover what one might call a “culture of science” as a distinct historical undertaking, not unlike the “culture of law.” The moral relativist’s most important contribution is the reminder that attempts at “objectivity” are not routinely an unequivocal success. There is nothing, however, in the developed arguments

of the relativist to establish the inevitability of failure, and the culture of science is but one source of modest optimism. This optimism is tested in a later chapter.

Cognitivism and “What Moves Us”

Moral theories are intended to explain what seems to be an otherwise eerie state of affairs; that is, the power of a moral judgment or belief to induce a course of action that may be complex, of long duration, sometimes at the personal expense of the actor. How, after all, can a mere state of mind generate such consequences? The difficulty faced by cognitivists is that they require of moral judgments and beliefs a rational character that is separated in fact and in principle from appetites and desires, but this very separation seems to strip them of what a genuinely motivating state of affairs possesses. The noncognitivist, on the other hand, requires of any motivating belief or judgment that it include the ingredient of desire or “conative” state, such that there is an impulse or commitment to act on the judgment or belief, this being the manner in which rhetorical exhortations are effective. In itself this is a thesis warranting careful examination. It is taken up in the next chapter in connection with just what it is in rhetoric that is capable of initiating and guiding action.

The cognitivist may and the noncognitivist must adopt an “internalist” thesis that locates the cause of actions in states within the actor that, by their very nature, are not “moral” states at all. Rather, they are emotional states of pleasure or dread or desire or revulsion. The cognitivist can accept this, while insisting that rational criteria and standards of evaluation must first qualify the objects of such emotions. This still would not establish an authentic moral realism, for the rational criteria may nonetheless be explained in terms of the nonmoral values, needs, and circumstances of the authorizing community. A defense of moral realism must therefore go beyond a defense of cognitivism. It must offer a compelling argument to the effect that one’s powers of rational comprehension are able to identify the real moral content of actual or potential events.

Typically, there is a further cognitivist constraint on internalism, in that the internalist must offer a plausible account of the entirely practical, coherent, and predictable relationship between desires of a certain sort and the actions arising from them. As Michael Stocker has observed, there are clinical and quasi-clinical conditions (depression, apathy, weakness of the will) that seem to disrupt the relationship between moral judgments and beliefs and the actions that would ordinarily arise from them.⁵² In response to this, the only option available to the internalist is to require that the connection between motives and actions is the basis on which to accept actors as, to use Michael Smith’s term, “practically rational agents.”⁵³

One begins to sense a makeshift psychology at the bottom of all this, and one that William James might have absorbed into his notion of *the psychologist's fallacy*. The very nature of any systematic analysis of action is likely to find the analyst breaking the event into separate components—antecedent conditions, past “reinforcement history,” current states of need or desire, behavioral options, the given course of behavior. But the leap from the unavoidable steps in a formal analysis to the conclusion that the action itself necessarily followed the same steps is at once daring and deceiving. If it is disconcerting to think that a judgment is able to induce a complex sequence of actions, it is no less so to think that the same is achieved by neuronal excitation, oxidation rates in the gastric epithelium, or patterns of activation in the extrapyramidal pathways.

Actions that warrant moral appraisal are more akin to playing a sonata than to striking a note. And, though, in a certain sense, the best explanation of a note being struck might be in terms of events at a given neuromuscular junction, that same explanation would be queer if offered as an account of a concert performance. That is, the best explanation of Emil Gilels's rendition of Beethoven's “Emperor” concerto is one that will include biographical, contextual, and even political factors unique to that performance and that performer; factors largely isolated from the particulars of neuromuscular “efficient causes.” Whatever it is that qualifies an action as “moral,” it is surely not merely the means by which it was produced. A lethal assault on the innocent is of the same moral quality whether the offending weapon is poison, gunshots, a sword, or a hired assassin.

Needless to say, actions presuppose actors and actors can achieve ends only by doing *something*. To suppose, however, that the right moral theory has some special obligation to identify the particular mechanical or biochemical mode of activation is a supposition that would reach comic proportions in any other sphere of significant human endeavor. The best accounts of the architect's plans, the university's curriculum, Fall fashions, and peace initiatives in the Middle East are not “internalist” or “externalist,” but rather commonsense accounts, based on a folk psychology, the validity of which must be granted if the notion of an “account” is to be intelligible.

Must one have the desire to do good in order to do it? The question is miscast. Rather, it is understood that no one has “done good” in the world except in so far as this was the desire. To be sure, good ends can result from malign intentions or even by chance. In that case, the persons involved are judged respectively as either malign or as bystanders. We say of the first that they were “foiled,” and of the second that they were just at the right place at the right time. But judgment, except in the formal contexts of philosophical analysis, scarcely ever partitions the actor into a cognizer, an emoter, an evaluator, a perceiver. We judge the *person*, recognizing (on the basis of our own moral experiences) that actions proceed from complex and often competing tendencies. Alfred Mele notes that

the *self* of self-control is not properly identified with reason. It is, rather, to be identified with the *person*, broadly conceived. Even when one's passions and emotions run counter to one's better judgment, they are not plausibly seen as alien forces.⁵⁴

How does rhetoric move us? It certainly does not move us as a mechanical device moves an object. Rather, we move ourselves in such contexts, typically as a result of a rational appraisal of options in light of our own powers, needs, sentiments, and duties. Aristotle knew how idle it was to ask which "part" of the soul is responsible for a significant undertaking, and he satisfied himself with the conclusion that it is the person who does these things. There is, indeed, something odd about a belief causing an action. Beliefs don't cause actions; rather, actors act, typically on the basis of beliefs as to the likely efficacy of their actions. There are, too, occasions calling for the futile gesture, this performed in full recognition that the action will not change the course of events but will stand itself as a rhetorical statement.

There is much more to be said on this point in the two succeeding chapters. Here it is sufficient to extricate moral phenomena from an explanatory thicket in which no robust form of human activity could find a place. If radical reductionistic analyses are transparently defective in explaining complex social, institutional, aesthetic, and historical phenomena, there is little cause for alarm in discovering that moral phenomena are comparably ill-suited. There is even less cause for alarm just in case moral beings themselves resist such modes of analysis.

A holistic perspective is inescapable in such matters, but one to be built on the discoveries, and not just the failures, of more granular approaches. Considerable progress has been won by patient inquiry into aspects of moral life that remain problematical chiefly because of enduring conceptual and linguistic ambiguities. If there is a moral dimension of events, it is one that must be extricated from the subtleties of discourse, but also from the narrow and artificial straits of semantics. It is simply counterintuitive to suggest that those moral issues that have stood as the defining marks of entire lifetimes—even entire epochs—have been rooted in nothing more substantial than the parts of speech!

Moral Realism: Praise and Blame Understood

Praise and blame are the instruments as well as the record of moral appraisal and thus, like the law itself, especially vivid expressions of deeper and often impenetrably complex moral theories. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that much of both criminal and civil law serves as the institutionalized form of praise and blame. So, too, are those features of early education

that are aimed at character, those features of our interpersonal relationships that would be considered “improving,” those self-critical episodes that generate new resolutions, even entirely new ways of living.

Both as an instrument and as a record, the activity and content of praise and blame have been subjected to assessments leading to divergent conclusions. The primary objectives of this book are to test the major conclusions and, subsequently, to defend one against the rest. The objective is that of marking out the true contours of praise and blame, the conditions of their valid application, their proper location within a conceptual space that is distinguishable from the world of personal preferences and social practices. To accomplish this, it is necessary to consider with respectful care theories that have located morality precisely within the world of personal preferences, the world of sentiment and desire. Thus far I have noted only a few of the more influential theorists (Hume, Ayer, Mackie) opposed to moral realism and their attachment to one or another conventionalist or psychological alternative. In response to them I have sketched in bare outline a defense of moral realism. To this point, the defense has been limited to showing that moral properties are neither queer nor ineffable, and that they are surely not merely conventional in any transparent sense of the term.

I have added to this a gloss on the social constructionist account, itself a conventionalist theory of morals according to which morality is but the triumph of one set of values over others in the serious matter of preserving social cohesion. Thus understood praise and blame express our deeper (perhaps “natural”) sentiments, provide a means by which to control others, and prevail upon us to comport ourselves in ways pleasing to the community in which one seeks to gain or preserve membership. Theories of this sort, as we have seen, explain praise and blame not as ascriptions correctly or wrongly assigned to the real moral properties of actions, but as consequences of a certain type of natural constitution, shaped by local customs and values. Specifically rejected is the very notion of “real moral properties,” as well as the suggestion that local customs and values are subject to valid external moral appraisals. Also rejected is that version of libertarianism that renders the actor subject to praise and blame owing to powers of autonomy, rational deliberation, and self-determination. What libertarianism fails to acknowledge, critics insist, is that those actions that generally call for moral appraisal are so inextricably bound up with matters of luck, of chance and contingency, of personal biogenetic and biographical influences as to render the actions in question either inevitable or inexplicable.

Sentimentalism, social constructionism, conventionalism, subjectivism, emotivism—these are the worthy alternatives to a theory of moral realism that includes objective standards for the assignment of praise and blame. In succeeding chapters, variants of each of these alternatives are considered in greater depth and with attention to relevant historical foundations. The

alternative theories are various but do have in common grave reservations about the very concept of moral freedom in the most robust (libertarian) sense. They are, then, deterministic and no less so when developed as one or another version of compatibilism. On various grounds, these theories, which might be referred to generically as “nonrealist” theories, are found to be deficient, the very deficiencies pointing toward what is most defensible in theories of moral realism and libertarianism.

The conclusions sketched in this chapter become more defined in succeeding chapters. They yield a theory of moral realism that includes these main points: first, that praise and blame are rhetorical actions. Often but not always verbal, they function in ways at once evaluative and educative, juridical, and motivational. The proper target, subject, or object toward which they are rightly applied is an assumed or inferred “real moral property” of actors, actions, and events. Typically, the real moral property of the actor is “character,” as this term encompasses those volitional, evaluative, deliberative, and affective powers and dispositions generative of aims and actions. The manifestations of these powers and dispositions are public and give the powers and dispositions themselves the status of a natural kind. In this, there is a similarity between, on the one hand, the relationship between natural and artificial languages and, on the other, the relationship between the behavioral expression of these dispositions and the moral ascriptions developed and refined within the culture.

In speaking of powers and dispositions it is useful to recall the distinction G. E. Moore makes between “rules of duty” and “ideal rules.”⁵⁵ Moore draws attention to a commandment of the form, “Do not steal” and contrasts it with one such as, “Do not covet.” The difference is fundamental in that the former reaches actual actions over which one may be expected to have full control, whereas the latter refers to feelings and desires that may often fall beyond the range of personal control. To forbear from *taking* what belongs to another is to exercise a power that is different from what would be needed in the case of not *desiring* what belongs to another. Throughout the present work the term “character” should be understood as referring to those dispositions that incline one toward obedience to “ideal rules,” where complete success is achieved rarely, if at all. One committed to obedience at this level would be expected to follow “rules of duty” more or less in passing, for these impose far looser constraints on conduct than those set by ideal rules. Commitment to the latter reflects a perfectionist disposition that is just the enlargement and refinement of those moral properties that comprise character as such.

The functions served by moral appraisal (praise and blame) require special standing on the part of those engaged in it, and suitable powers on the part of those fit to be thus evaluated. The practical function of praise and

blame is *moral judgment and improvement*, understood as the enlargement of one's actual powers of self-improvement, as well as the moral improvement of the community. As moral properties themselves are real properties, the function of praise and blame is to alter that actual state of affairs obtaining in the world and in the actor. It is to restore or improve the *health* of persons otherwise competent to live a moral form of life. What is relative within the entire process is so with respect to the defining nature of rational beings for whom the flourishing life has a point that is itself ineliminably moral.

A theory of moral realism, if consistent, is ontologically radical. It requires of any complete account of the contents of reality entities that are inescapably and irreducibly moral. As these cannot be reduced to, for example, human sentiments or cultural habits, they must be assumed to have ontological standing independent of any and all merely biosocial aspects of this or any other world. Thus, if moral properties are *in the world* it is not because we, too, are in that world, although we, too, are in that world.

What, then, is the relationship between real moral entities and entities such as ourselves? The question is too broad as stated. Clearly, "entities such as ourselves" may call for either an essentialist account or a descriptive anthropological account. The category "entities such as ourselves" on one of these accounts will indifferently include infants, the brain-dead, the profoundly retarded—whole clusters of beings utterly uncomprehending of moral properties. It may also include those of such defective character as to render them inaccessible to such properties, though otherwise cognitively competent. It may include still other enclaves of those who, owing to limited resources, have not cultivated the powers of comprehension by which moral properties come to be known. Analogically speaking, this state of ignorance is akin to the enclave of accomplished physicists who lived before the discovery of subatomic particles. The (anthropological) fact that no scientist was then aware of subatomic particles had no bearing whatever on the ontological standing of muons. The (anthropological) fact that some number of persons cannot discover the moral properties inhering in persons, actions, and events has no bearing on the praise and blame correctly applied to these persons, actions, and events.

Centrally, praise and blame are properly applied on the basis of real, natural properties, though never *merely* physical (behavioral) properties as such. Rather, real moral properties are *known*, not *sensed*, just as the properties constitutive of dwellings, battles, and parades are known rather than sensed. Just as objects are perceived as being blue because, among other considerations, they *are* blue, so events and actions are known to be morally weighted because they include knowable and known moral properties giving them this weight. Moreover, as the moral ascriptions assigned to such events and actions arise from cognitive and epistemic processes, they are corrigible and

thus fundamentally different from sentiments, sensations, and emotions. Contrary to Hume's proposed sequencing, the thesis defended here requires a rational appraisal of events and actions if they are to generate or sustain sentiments of any sort. Passion therefore is (as it ought to be) in the service of reason, at least if the "passion" in question is of any moral consequence. That the thesis defended in this book is, in the current parlance, "cognitivist" should be by now obvious.

Ruled out by a theory of moral realism is that *causal* account of praise and blame by which moral appraisals are thought to be (somehow) produced in those making the judgment or rendered efficacious in controlling others. One is not "caused" to praise in any sense akin to being "caused" to be thirsty or tired. Neither does praise (or blame) cause its target to do something in the way that coercion or low blood pressure or hypnosis might cause one to drop a glass. In the face of such declamations as "Well done!" or "Shame on you!", the response of the recipient is not based on the acoustic achievements of the speaker but on the rich congeries of factors previously discussed. Finally, one is not correctly praised or blamed "luckily" for, as noted in chapter 3, it is one of the aims of praise and blame to extract from the target-actions and events precisely those ingredients falling beyond the agent's powers of control or even contemplation, and reserving moral appraisal to what remains.

As will be developed in succeeding chapters, the very intelligibility of praise and blame arises from introspectively known powers of action and restraint, these subject to projection onto creatures of the same or similar type. Properly understood the objects of praise and blame are actions and events that alter by design the real value inhering in persons and things. Broad cultural variations in the targets of praise and blame signal variations in the comprehension of the meaning of actions and events rather than in the core precepts of morally competent beings. The comprehension of moral properties requires robust epistemic resources. There is no reason to expect uniformity of achievement. Similarly, there is also no a priori basis on which to foreclose the possibility of the enlargement of moral knowledge. Rather, it is to be expected that the comprehension of the moral realm will be progressive just in case it is subjected to the same disciplined, critical scrutiny that has guided progress in the other departments of knowledge. Indeed, an implicit defense of moral realism is that it provides the best explanation of moral progress itself.