

NON-NATURAL MORAL PROPERTIES: SUI GENERIS OR SUPERNATURAL?

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ABSTRACT

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If we grant that some moral claims are true, what is it that makes them true? Throughout the vast majority of history, it was believed that God was the source of morality. But the twentieth century saw a shift in ethics. Influenced by logical positivism and a broadly naturalistic worldview, scholars sought to develop a theory of ethics that did not depend on God's existence. One leading approach was *moral naturalism*, the view that moral properties are *natural* and thus can be investigated by scientific methods. But this view was plagued with problems, leading many to conclude that moral and natural facts were just too different to be one and the same.

Having rejected a divine conception of ethics and moral naturalism, some scholars turned to *moral non-naturalism* - the view that moral properties are not natural. One particular form of moral non-naturalism entails that moral properties are *sui generis*. I call this view *Moorean realism*.

The current trend suggests that Moorean realism is preferable to *divine command theory*, a competing form of moral non-naturalism wherein moral properties are reducible to supernatural properties. But, as far as the salient objections go, divine command theory is at least as plausible as Moorean realism. Indeed, if we look closely at the traditional versions of these views and the common objections to them, divine command theory offers compelling responses and Moorean realism has a difficult time meeting many of these challenges. In chapter one, I argue that divine command theory is as plausible as Moorean realism.

In chapter two, I consider the viability of a non-traditional form of Moorean realism - the view that moral truths are conceptual truths. I argue that the thesis that moral truths are conceptual faces a serious dilemma which renders the view in question implausible.

In chapter three, I argue that it is indeed the traditional divine command theory and not the intriguing deflationary one whereby God need not exist, that deserves the revival.

If moral properties are not natural, it is very plausible that they are supernatural. Divine command theory - the traditional non-deflationary form - is alive and well.

For my loves, Dan and Marion

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It wasn't until recently that I began to realize that my mom *really* believes that I can do anything. (I would argue that her optimism and confidence in her children's ability to achieve anything is unparalleled.) I now see that her belief in me has been a critical source of support in my life. Indeed, I am confident that it has carried me through trials and hardships more than I will ever know. I am thankful for her and for the blessing of learning how much I need her.

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PREFACE

Moral claims pervade our everyday lives. We are not hesitant to make moral judgments - that parents ought to be patient with their children; that we have an obligation to be good stewards of the earth; that unnecessarily separating families is cruel; that a global nuclear war would be bad and should be avoided at all costs; that people ought to be treated equally regardless of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

Most people believe that whether a moral claim is true or false does not depend on *us*, on what we believe, desire, or prefer. Believing that a moral claim is true does not make it so, and wanting to be morally blameless is not exculpating. Moral truths do not change simply because we do. Rather, in some ways we treat moral truths like laws of physics or principles of mathematics; we act and talk as if moral truths are “a part of the fabric of the world” (Mackie, 1977, p. 15), “prior to thought” (Boyd, 1980, p. 613), and “...out there, subsisting independently of us (Blackburn, 1985, p. 9). This is roughly what we mean when we call moral truths *objective*.

Objective moral truths stand in contrast to *subjective* or *relative* moral truths. A moral truth is subjective if its truth is ontologically dependent on, or fully constituted by, agents’ individual or collective attitudes, beliefs, desires, responses or the like. For instance, a simplified form of cultural relativism entails that whether a moral claim is true depends on whether the relevant culture adopts or holds that claim to be true. On this view, whether women are moral equals to men or torturing people for fun is morally permissible ultimately depends on the accepted social and cultural norms. If a culture maintains that women are inferior to men, then they are; if a society has accepted that torturing people for fun is morally permissible, then it is. But the propositions \langle women are equal to men \rangle or \langle torturing people for fun is wrong \rangle are widely held to be true regardless of cultural norms. Our discourse assumes earlier cultures were often mistaken about morality and that societies can improve with respect to it; our discourse appears to assume morality is therefore objective.

Importantly, the view that morality is objective is compatible with the further claim that agents’ psychological states or responses are morally relevant. For example, it may be wrong in a

given culture to tell people that they are overweight because doing so constitutes an act of shaming (in that culture) and, furthermore, it is an objective moral fact that it is wrong to shame individuals. In this case, a moral fact is dependent on agents' attitudes but not fully constituted by them; had it not been an objective moral fact that it is wrong to shame individuals and a contingent fact that the particular culture in question holds the norm that telling people that they are overweight is an act of shaming, it would not have been wrong to tell people in that culture that they are overweight.

I believe that our moral discourse and practice is not deeply misguided and thus start with these widely held assumptions: that moral claims are true or false (i.e., *truth-apt*), that some moral claims are true, and that these claims are made true by moral facts not fully constituted by humans' attitudes, beliefs, desires, responses or the like. I believe that there are objective moral truths.¹ In other words, I am a *moral realist*.

But the question remains, if we start with the assumption that moral truths are not ontologically dependent on us - humans' attitudes, beliefs, desires, or responses, what *makes* or *explains why* moral claims are true? What is the nature of moral facts and properties?

Notice that this question is different from asking *what is the correct normative theory*. Normative theories provide systematic accounts of what one ought to do and what has moral value. When we ask questions about what is the right or wrong thing to do, what is good or bad, or which moral theory is the correct one, we are asking fundamental questions of normative ethics. In asking what makes moral claims objectively true, I am ultimately asking a question about the nature of morality, in particular, *what type of fact are moral facts*. This is a question for metaethics.

The two predominant forms of moral realism are *naturalistic moral realism* or *moral naturalism*, and *non-naturalistic moral realism* or *moral non-naturalism*.² Moral naturalists and

¹Notice that this characterization of moral realism makes room for the view that moral properties are fully constituted by facts *about* human biology or human nature, such as, neo-Aristotelian views advocated by Philippa Foot (2001) and Judith Jarvis Thomson (2008).

²For brevity, I refer to naturalistic moral realism as "moral naturalism" and non-naturalistic moral realism as "moral non-naturalism."

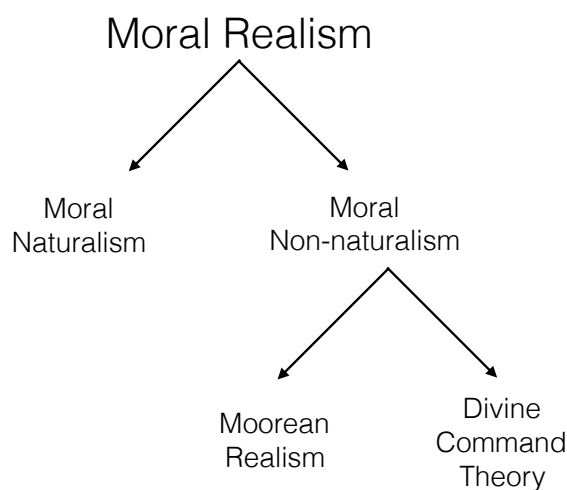


Figure 1 : Selected Forms of Moral Realism

non-naturalists disagree over the nature of moral properties, whether they are *natural* or *non-natural*. The distinction between natural and non-natural properties is admittedly difficult to characterize. Traditionally scholars have considered natural properties to be those that are causally efficacious, discoverable by empirical methods or scientific investigation, or some combination thereof. Others have offered more piecemeal characterizations and started by identifying clear, non-controversial examples of both natural and non-natural properties.³ In general, most philosophers tend to agree that natural properties do not conflict with a scientific worldview or naturalistic ontology.

By contrast, non-natural properties are generally held to be causally impotent and not discoverable by empirical or scientific methods. Examples of non-natural properties include *sui generis* and supernatural properties.⁴ A property that is *sui generis* is metaphysically unique and different in kind from any other property. Moral properties that are *sui generis* are thus non-reductive, irreducibly normative properties.⁵ Supernatural properties challenge existing

³For examples of philosophers that use a piecemeal method to distinguish “natural” from “non-natural,” see Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) and Enoch (2011).

⁴It is possible that there are other kinds of non-natural properties beyond supernatural or *sui generis* properties. However, given that the vast majority of the contemporary metaethical literature does not acknowledge a different kind of non-natural moral property, I focus on these two kinds of non-natural properties.

⁵Commonly, the term “moral non-naturalism” refers to the view that moral facts, properties and truths are “irre-

scientific principles, such as, *the causal closure principle* which states that all causes of physical events are physical.

This characterization of moral realism is compatible with the view that divine command theory is a form of moral realism.⁶ According to moral realism, moral truths are objective insofar as they are not *mind-dependent* - ontologically dependent on, or fully constituted by, facts regarding people's attitudes, beliefs, desires, responses, or the like.⁷ If we understand God as a supremely perfect being, it becomes clear that God's beliefs, desires, knowledge, decisions and commands are not subject to the same faults as humans' beliefs, desires, and so forth. Indeed, the attitudes and responses of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God are so different from humans that if moral facts were ontologically dependent on God's commands, then it would be hard to deny that they are objective.⁸ For the same reason, many find idealized agent theories compelling and sufficiently objective - because an idealized "perfect" agent is not subject to the same features and faults that threaten objectivity, such as, lack of information or limited cognitive abilities or propensity to biases.⁹

ducibly normative" rather than "sui generis." See FitzPatrick (2008), Parfit (2011a), Enoch (2011). However there is arguably no notable metaphysical difference between an irreducibly normative fact and a sui generis fact. Both terms - "irreducibly normative facts" and "sui generis moral facts" - are used to refer to non-reductive, non-natural facts or what is known as *non-reductive non-naturalism*. That is, both characterizations are ways of capturing the idea that morality (i.e. moral facts and properties) is metaphysically autonomous or unique. Philosophers even use the term "irreducibly normative facts" as synonymous with "sui generis facts." For example, Scanlon argues that there are irreducibly normative truths about reasons and that truths about reasons represent a sui generis class of facts (Scanlon, 2014, p. 69). Seeing that these terms are used synonymously and the vast majority of contemporary metaethical literature assumes that sui generis and irreducibly normative facts exhaust the class of non-natural properties, it is safe to assume that the predominant (possibly the only) form of moral non-naturalism is Moorean realism. I take this as a working assumption of this dissertation.

⁶Divine command theory has been classified in numerous ways, including as a form of subjectivism, error theory, non-naturalistic moral realism and naturalistic moral realism. See Harrison (2015), Huemer (2007), Fisher (2014). In the end, nothing significant turns on how one classifies divine command theory. The main thrust of this paper - that divine command theory is as plausible as Moorean realism - holds regardless of whether divine command theory is a form of non-naturalistic moral realism.

⁷Philosophers have characterized the idea that moral facts and properties are "independent of us" in a range of ways, including *response-*, *agent-*, *attitude-* or *stance-independent*. See Shafer-Landau (2003), Enoch (2011).

⁸As Gerald Harrison (2015) explains, "the god on whose attitudes morality depends is independent of and radically different from the rest of us and so god's view confers an objectivity on moral claims as robust as that conferred by the more standard naturalist or non-naturalist views" (p. 109).

⁹Note that on this characterization of "objective," moral views which entail that moral properties are fully constituted by actual or idealized human attitudes, beliefs, desires, or responses do not qualify as realist. Rather, such views would qualify as forms of *constructivism* or *subjectivism*. However, as was stated above, this characterization of "objective" is compatible with the view that moral facts are fully constituted by facts about human nature and biology.

This thesis defends an often neglected view of non-natural properties. It seeks to revive *divine command theory*, the theory that moral properties are reducible to God's commands and nature.

For context, let us consider a brief history of the contemporary literature. Metaethics in the twentieth century was heavily influenced and shaped by logical positivism and empiricism. Logical positivists argued that metaphysics and science were in conflict; more importantly, they maintained that metaphysics was outdated whereas scientific and empirical methods were the only ways to have knowledge of the world. Logical positivists notoriously argued that propositions do not have meaning if they cannot be verified or falsified by experience. Because moral propositions could not be verified or falsified, logical positivists argued that moral statements were meaningless. Naturally, the trend towards logical positivism and empiricism lead many to reject much of moral theory. Out of this trend grew *moral non-cognitivism*, the view that moral claims are not truth-apt. For instance, logical positivist, A.J. Ayer, defended a particular form of moral non-cognitivism called *emotivism*, the view that moral claims are expressions of attitudes.

Though logical positivism in its most extreme forms was eventually rejected, a commitment to the scientific method and a scientific worldview was not. With a rejection of logical positivism came optimism that moral claims were truth-apt, rather than meaningless or emotive, and some moral claims were true. But rather than adopt G.E. Moore's view that moral properties were *sui generis*, philosophers turned to moral naturalism; while naturalists granted that there was such a thing as objective moral truth they maintained that moral properties were no different than other kinds of natural or scientifically discoverable properties. Moral naturalists argued that they could have objective truth without having to undermine one's commitment to a scientific worldview. However, this view was plagued with problems of its own.

G.E. Moore famously argued that moral naturalism was subject to *the open question argument*. According to Moore's argument, it is always *an open question* whether a moral property is identical to a natural property. For example, a moral naturalist might argue that the moral property being good is identical to the natural property *being conducive to happiness*. But even if these properties were identical, one could still ask *is being conducive to happiness good?*

Compare this to questions such as, *I know that Joe is unmarried but is he a bachelor?* or *This object is three-sided but is it a triangle?* It would be unreasonable to ask whether an unmarried male is a bachelor, as the properties *being an unmarried male* and *being a bachelor* are identical. By extension, moral naturalists must explain how it is possible or sensible to ask whether moral property, *x*, is natural property, *y*, if *x* and *y* are already identical.

Though naturalists responded to the open question argument with a plausible solution (e.g., a single property may be referred to by distinct concepts or meanings), the objection has taken more nuanced and persuasive forms.¹⁰ *The normativity objection* is one offspring of the open question argument. According to this argument, we have good reason to believe that moral and natural facts are in different, distinct categories. Moral facts are about what matters - what is good, what we have reason to do or what obligations we have, whereas natural facts involve causal principles that govern matter and the physical structure of the universe. As Derek Parfit (2011) suggests,

Rivers could not be sonnets, experiences could not be stones, and justice could not be - as some Pythagoreans were said to have believed - the number 4. . . . if we claimed that rivers were sonnets, or that experiences were stones, we could not defend these claims by saying that they were not intended to be analytic, or conceptual truths. Others could rightly reply that, given the meaning of these claims, they could not possibly be true. This, I believe, is the way in which, though much less obviously, Normative Naturalism could not be true. Natural facts could not be normative in the reason-implying sense. (p. 324)

The normativity objection motivates the thesis that moral and natural facts are just too different to be identical. Not only is moral language unique, so too are the facts that would make moral claims true.¹¹

The objections levied against moral naturalism led to a division among moral realists. Those that were convinced the natural world could not capture objective moral truth often turned to moral non-naturalism. At the turn of the twentieth century G.E. Moore, a leading non-naturalist, defended the view that “good” was metaphysically *sui generis* and thus different in kind from any

¹⁰For a defense on behalf of moral naturalists, see Railton (1986).

¹¹For a response to the normativity objection and a thorough defense of moral naturalism, see Schroeder (2005) and Schroeder (2007).

other property. I call this particular form of moral non-naturalism - the view that moral properties are metaphysically *sui generis* - *Moorean realism*.¹²

Though Moorean realism offers objective moral truths, it does so at the cost of a questionable metaphysics and epistemology. A perennial challenge to the view that moral properties are *sui generis* is J.L. Mackie's *argument from queerness*. Mackie (1977) argued that moral properties have the strange or "queer" quality of being "intrinsically action-guiding and motivating" (p. 49). He maintains that objective values, if they existed, "would be entities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (Mackie, 1977, p. 38). In effect, Moorean realism entails that moral properties give us reasons for action and tell us how to live our lives regardless of our contingent circumstances or psychological states. In addition to having to justify positing ontologically queer moral properties, Moorean realists must explain how knowledge of properties that are not natural or part of the empirical world is even possible. If *sui generis* properties are causally impotent, how could one possibly have knowledge of them? Indeed, Mackie's argument from queerness is partly an epistemic critique of objective values. He argues that "if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else" (Mackie, 1977, p. 38).

The problem of supervenience is a further challenge to Moorean realism. It is widely held that two worlds that are alike in all natural respects must be alike in all moral respects; the moral does not float freely and independently of the natural world. To illustrate, consider the following example. Worlds w_1 and w_2 are exact duplicates in all relevant natural respects - each world has the same history of events and circumstances, the same physical and natural states of affairs obtain, the same causal laws, and there are the same types of individuals with all the same relations between them. At some point in time in world w_1 , a government commits mass genocide. It is a moral fact in world w_1 that this act of mass genocide is morally wrong. Now the same state of affairs obtains in world w_2 ; a qualitatively identical country committed mass

¹²Note that I am using the term "Moorean realism" to refer to the specific metaphysical thesis that moral properties are metaphysically *sui generis*.

genocide against its people at the same time in history, in exactly the same way, for the same reasons, and with the same effects. If the moral does not supervene on the natural, then it is possible that the act of mass genocide is morally wrong in world w_1 but not morally wrong in world w_2 . But, if the two worlds are exactly alike in all natural respects, what could explain this difference in moral facts? Surely, if mass genocide is wrong in world w_1 (at a given time, in a certain place, for a particular country, etc) and world w_2 is the exact replica of world w_1 , then it is also a moral fact that mass genocide is wrong in world w_2 .

Moorean realists must explain why, if moral properties are metaphysically *sui generis* and thus not natural, certain natural states of affairs necessarily instantiate moral properties. What could explain the fact that if genocide is wrong in w_1 the same natural state of affairs (i.e. the act of genocide) must be wrong in w_2 , if *wrongness* is *sui generis* and thus not a natural property? If moral properties are metaphysically unique then it seems that the necessary relation between moral and natural properties is either non-existent or a brute fact.

Within the field of philosophy, the twentieth century saw the ebbs and flows of moral naturalism and Moorean realism. As is evident, both moral naturalism and Moorean realism continue to face significant objections but the grand question still remains - what, if anything, makes moral claim true?

If we are to remain committed to moral realism, one remaining option is the view that moral properties are supernatural. In particular, one might defend *divine command theory*, the view that moral obligations and values are constituted by God's commands and nature respectively. Unlike Moorean realism, divine command theory offers a reduction of moral properties; unlike naturalism, moral facts are not discoverable by empirical or scientific methods. Interestingly, a survey of metaethics in the twentieth century reveals that divine command theory was not seriously considered until the late part of the century and even today is often not considered a serious alternative to moral naturalism or Moorean realism. But seeing that we have reasons to reject naturalism, divine command theory deserves to be given at least as much consideration as Moorean realism (perhaps more). And that is the aim of this thesis.

The current trend suggests that Moorean realism is undeniably superior to divine command theory, but, as far as the salient objections go, I argue that divine command theory is at least as plausible as Moorean realism. If moral properties are non-natural - either *sui generis* or supernatural - one must justify positing a new kind of entity, and explain how one has epistemic access to such properties and how they relate to the natural world. And in fact *sui generis* properties have a difficult time meeting these challenges. Thus, chapter one concludes that divine command theory is, at a minimum, as equally plausible as and no worse off than Moorean realism.

In chapter two, I consider a more recent attempt to defend Moorean realism. On this view, moral truths are conceptual and thus moral propositions are made true by irreducibly normative concepts. Proponents of this view argue that Moorean realism is increasingly metaphysically and epistemically plausible if moral truths are conceptual truths. Moorean realism without the traditional ontology allegedly solves *the problem of supervenience* - the burden to explain the metaphysically necessary relation between metaphysically distinct entities (i.e., moral and natural entities) - and a variety of epistemological problems, such as, *the problem of moral disagreement* - the burden to explain the presence of “deep and persistent” disagreement over moral truths, and *the remarkable coincidence argument* - the challenge to explain how moral knowledge is possible amidst the contingent evolutionary and social forces that shape our moral sensibilities.

I argue that the view that moral truths are conceptual faces a dilemma: moral truths must be *immediate* or *mediate*. An immediate conceptual truth is made true by the essences of its constituent concepts, whereas a mediate conceptual truth is made true by a series of “chaining” of concepts. The problem is that there is good reason to doubt that moral truths could be either mediate or immediate conceptual truths. It is for this reason that I argue that the thesis that moral truths are conceptual truths is highly dubious. Consequently, the view that moral truths are conceptual cannot make Moorean realism more appealing.

In chapter three, I proceed to argue that divine command theory deserves more respect than it has been given, but not just any divine command theory. It has been suggested that divine command theory could be a form of *idealized agent theory* such that moral obligations are

constituted by counterfactuals - what a non-existent, perfect being *would* command rather than what a perfect being does in fact command. But it is indeed the traditional view and not the intriguing deflationary one that deserves the revival. I argue that divine command theory is most plausible if God actually exists and moral obligations are constituted by God's actual commands.

This dissertation is in part an effort to identify an oversight in contemporary philosophy. If we are to seriously consider moral realism, we must consider all viable forms - that moral properties are natural, sui generis or supernatural. And, if there is reason to believe that moral properties are not natural, it is plausible that they are supernatural. Divine command theory - the traditional non-deflationary form - is alive and well.

CHAPTER 1 DIVINE COMMAND THEORY IS AT LEAST AS PLAUSIBLE AS MOOREAN REALISM

Moorean realism, the metaethical view that there are moral claims which are made true by metaphysically *sui generis* or unique facts, has had a revival in recent years.¹ In his book, *Taking Morality Seriously*, David Enoch (2011) confesses that one of his primary motivations for defending a *robust* moral realism - where moral facts are something “over and above” natural facts - is the intuitive belief that “nothing short of a fairly strong metaethical realism will vindicate our taking morality seriously” (p. 8).² To use Enoch’s characterization, natural facts can be broadly understood as those facts that “the usual sciences invoke” (Enoch, 2011, p. 103).³ In the same spirit, William Fitzpatrick (2014) maintains that he is “simply more convinced of the reality and robustness of various forms of normativity . . . than of the truth of metaphysical naturalism” (p. 562). Numerous contemporary philosophers have followed suit and defended the thesis that moral facts must be something over and above natural facts, including Russ

¹ As I clarify below, the vast amount of contemporary literature uses the term “moral non-naturalism” to refer to a particular form of moral realism whereby moral properties and facts are non-reductive, metaphysically *sui generis* and irreducibly normative. For example, see Shafer-Landau (2003) and Enoch (2011). I part ways with this common use of the term and use “moral non-naturalism” to pick out the kind of moral realism whereby moral properties are non-natural. On this classification of moral non-naturalism, non-natural moral properties are not necessarily non-reductive. There are numerous kinds of moral non-naturalism, including the view that moral properties are metaphysically *sui generis*, what I call *Moorean realism*, and the view that moral properties are supernatural, what I call *divine command theory*. This is a deviation from G.E. Moore’s use of the term “non-natural.” Moore (1959) argued that moral properties are “non-natural” insofar as they warrant their own metaphysical category. On his view, the class of non-natural properties was identical to the class of metaphysically *sui generis* properties and thus the class of non-natural properties did not contain supernatural properties.

² Enoch argues that there are “irreducibly normative truths,” (where moral truths are a subset of normative truths), rather than *sui generis* moral facts. Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that Enoch’s robust realism is a good example of Moorean realism. First, his view is not incompatible with Moorean realism. It is possible that irreducibly normative truths are *sui generis*. Second, his view may even be committed to Moorean realism, as it may turn out that irreducibly normative truths are identical to *sui generis* facts. At a minimum, the burden is on Enoch to explain how metaphysically and ontologically committal irreducibly normative truths are *not sui generis*. Thus, I take it that his view is a good example of contemporary Moorean realism.

³ Enoch admits that distinguishing “natural” from “non-natural” facts is a difficult task, and that this characterization (i.e. that natural facts are those that the natural sciences invoke) is vague. However, he maintains that other attempts to offer a precise distinction between natural and non-natural facts have not fared better. This one is no worse off and is also sufficient for the purpose at hand. I agree and follow suit. Below I suggest that we can fill in this piecemeal characterization by identifying clear examples of natural and non-natural properties.

Shafer-Landau, Terence Cuneo, and Derek Parfit.⁴

Like Moorean realists, divine command theorists argue that there are robust moral truths - that moral facts are something over and above natural facts.⁵ But rather than defend the premise that moral facts are *sui generis*, divine command theorists argue that moral facts are supernatural; on this view, a supernatural being's nature and commands are the source of morality. William Lane Craig (2009) explains:

On the theistic view, objective moral values are rooted in God. He is the locus and source of moral value. His holy and loving nature supplies the absolute standard against which all actions are to be measured. He is by nature loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so forth. . . . God's moral nature is expressed to us in the form of divine commands that constitute our duties. Far from being arbitrary, these commands flow necessarily from his moral nature. (p. 30)

William Alston and Robert Adams also argue that God is "the supreme standard of goodness" because God's nature is constitutive of goodness. In Alston's (2002) words:

Goodness supervenes on every feature of God, not because some general principles are true but just because they are features of God. (p. 292)

Adams (2002) compares God to Plato's Form of the Good:

⁴Derek Parfit (2011b) repeatedly argues that in a world without irreducibly necessary moral truths - moral truths which "cannot be defined or restated in non-normative terms" (p. 285) - "there would be no point in trying to make good decisions. Nothing would matter, and there would not be better or worse ways to live" (p. 425). Though on his view moral facts are not metaphysically *sui generis*, he was staunchly committed to the idea that moral facts are not reducible to natural facts. Parfit was one of several contemporary philosophers to see and argue for the merit and importance in defending moral non-naturalism. In his earlier work, Shafer-Landau (2003) implicitly suggests that moral non-naturalism is more plausible if we jettison *sui generis* facts and properties and replace with irreducible moral concepts (p. 66). On his view, there are fundamental moral truths that are conceptual truths. Though he concedes that this view is ontologically committal, he argues that it is more explanatory than traditional forms of moral non-naturalism wherein moral propositions are made true by moral properties (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, 2014, p. 425). See parfitmatters, Parfit (2011b), Enoch (2011), Shafer-Landau (2003), FitzPatrick (2014).

⁵A note about the relation between facts and properties. I take it that a moral fact is either a property instance or a possible or actual state of affairs wherein a property is instantiated. Thus, if acts of giving to the poor instantiate the moral property *being good* then it is a moral fact that giving to the poor is good. I will interchangeably refer to moral facts and properties, but what is essential for the time being is that moral realism entails that there are moral facts - moral property instances in either the actual or possible world. Note that moral facts and thus moral property instances exist even if humans do not; at a minimum, moral property instances exist in a possible world. If it is a moral fact that giving to the poor is good, this fact obtains even if nobody in the actual world gives to the poor. To be a moral fact, the state of affairs in which giving to the poor instantiates the property *being good* must obtain in some possible world and not necessarily the actual world. I take it then that if one is committed to there being moral facts, then he or she is also committed to moral properties. Hence, talk of moral facts implies that there are moral properties and is often times sufficiently fine-grained.

The role that belongs to the Form of the Good in Plato's thought is assigned to God, and the goodness of other things is understood in terms of their standing in some relation, usually conceived as a sort of resemblance, to God. (p. 14)

On this view, *goodness* just is resemblance to God. The truth of the proposition ⟨that patience is good⟩ depends on whether God himself, by his nature, is patient.⁶

At first glance, Moorean realism and divine command theory appear quite different. Sui generis properties are not identical to the class of supernatural properties. However, both classes of properties are non-natural and thus both views entail that moral properties are something over and above natural properties.⁷ Moorean realists and divine command theorists are thus in agreement that the rightness or wrongness of an act consists in it possessing a non-natural property or relation. Hence, proponents of both views accept the following thesis:

NOT NATURAL: Moral facts are non-natural.

The commitment to NOT NATURAL is the source of several objections to both Moorean realism and divine command theory. According to *the ontological problem*, one must justify expanding their ontology to include an entirely new kind of entity - a non-natural fact. *The problem of moral knowledge* is the challenge to explain how knowledge of facts that are not natural, not studied or invoked by the sciences, is possible. Lastly, Moorean realists and divine command theorists face *the Euthyphro problem*: the twofold challenge of grounding moral properties so that they are not arbitrary, and ensuring that moral properties do not entail horrendous moral truths, ones which clearly conflict with our strongly held moral beliefs.

⁶I will use brackets ⟨like so⟩ to denote a proposition and single quotes to denote concepts.

⁷Note that on some characterizations of "natural" supernatural facts qualify as natural and thus divine command theory is a form of *moral naturalism*, the view that moral properties and facts are natural. For example, one position states that to be a natural fact is to be causally efficacious. On this view, if God had causal power and moral facts were reducible to supernatural facts (i.e. facts about God's nature or commands), then moral facts would be natural. Similarly, if natural properties are those properties that can be known by empirical methods and God and his properties can be known by empirical methods, then this too would entail that moral properties are natural and divine command theory. On either of these views, divine command theory would qualify as a form of moral naturalism. I do not herein assume either of these characterizations of natural facts. Rather, I stick with Enoch's "piecemeal" view that to be a natural fact is to be invoked by the usual sciences. It seems relatively non-controversial that the usual sciences do not make room for supernatural facts. On the other hand, if it turns out that there is reason to believe that supernatural facts are natural, then so much the better for divine command theorists.

Moorean realists and divine command theorists must adequately explain how and why moral truths would in fact correspond to our strongly held, pre-theoretical intuitions.⁸

Given the similarity between the views and the relative success of Moorean realism, why, then, has not divine command theory undergone a similar revival? Among the contemporary seminal works on Moorean realism, few philosophers even mention divine command theory as a serious alternative.⁹ Instead, divine command theory is treated as an anachronism or as a normative ethical view. Of those philosophers that even consider it a worthy opponent, most take it as a given that the Euthyphro dilemma provides conclusive reason to reject divine command theory.¹⁰ Renown moral non-naturalist, Russ Shafer-Landau (2003), concludes that divine command theory “has been rejected by most philosophers who have thought about it, including most theistic philosophers” (p. 79). Jeremy Koons (2012) asserts that most agree that the consequences of divine command theory are “absurd, and a sufficient reason for rejecting divine command theory” (p. 178).

The current trend suggests that Moorean realism is superior to divine command theory, but, I’ll argue that as far as the salient objections go, divine command theory is at least as plausible as Moorean realism. Though both views face the same set of objections due to a commitment to NOT NATURAL - the ontological problem, the problem of moral knowledge and the Euthyphro problem - *sui generis* and supernatural properties are significantly different and, in turn, offer unique advantages and challenges. For instance, supernatural properties have causal power and are reductive whereas *sui generis* properties are causally impotent and non-reductive. A consequence of the unique advantages of supernatural properties and disadvantages of *sui generis* properties is that divine command theory offers more compelling responses to each argument.

⁸This question is often characterized as *the problem of supervenience*. For one of the most seminal works on this issue, see Blackburn (1984) and Blackburn (2017). For a treatment of the epistemic challenges of Moorean realism see Mackie (1977), Bedke (2009), and Street (2006).

⁹Seminal works that do not raise divine command theory as an option include Enoch (2011), Scanlon (2014), Kramer (2009). Works that consider divine command theory include Dworkin (2011), Parfit (2011b), Huemer (2007), and Shafer-Landau (2003).

¹⁰See Dworkin (2011) and Shafer-Landau (2003). Gerald K. Harrison argues that the main reason divine command theories are rejected is the Euthyphro problem, but that all forms of moral realism face it (and, in fact, it is not a problem at all). See Harrison (2015).

I begin by characterizing Moorean realism and divine command theory (§1.1). I then outline three of the most salient objections to Moorean realism and divine command theory, each of which stems from a commitment to NOT NATURAL. Proponents of non-natural properties must justify positing a new kind of entity into one's ontology, explain how one could have epistemic access to non-natural properties and how they relate to the natural world (§1.2). I argue that divine command theory has the resources to offer more compelling responses to each of the three objections. One might insist that divine command theory is still less plausible than Moorean realism because of the gravity of the problem of evil (§1.3). While I do not offer a full refutation to this challenge, I argue that the problem of evil rests on an assumption that God has causal power and in so doing highlights an important advantage of divine command theory - that, unlike Moorean realism, it does not face moral skepticism. And insofar as moral skepticism is a serious threat, even tantamount to nihilism, divine command theory fares significantly better. I conclude that divine command theory is, at a minimum, as equally plausible as and no worse off than Moorean realism (§1.4).

1.1 Moorean Realism and Divine Command Theory

There is a wide consensus among philosophers and non-philosophers alike that it is always wrong to torture a fellow person simply for fun, that humiliating others solely for one's enjoyment is evil, and that defending and caring for the downtrodden, the lonely, and the poor is good. One kind of *moral non-naturalism* - the view that there are true moral claims and these claims are made true by non-natural moral properties - maintains that the only way to account for such moral truths is to appeal to metaphysically sui generis moral facts. That is, in order to be made true, metaphysically unique moral properties must be instantiated.¹¹ Moorean realism can thus be summarized as a commitment to the following two theses:

TRUTHMAKER: To be true, moral propositions must correspond to moral facts.

¹¹There are numerous and incompatible renditions of Moorean realism and moral non-naturalism more broadly. One division among moral non-naturalists is over the metaphysics and, in particular, whether the constituents of moral facts are moral concepts or moral properties. See Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014). Seeing that nothing in this paper turns on this distinction, I follow the traditional view and take it that the constituents of moral facts as simply moral properties.

UNIQUE: Moral facts and properties are metaphysically *sui generis*.¹²

TRUTHMAKER is an essential tenet of *moral realism*, the view that moral propositions are truth-apt, at least some of them are true, and moral propositions are made true by moral facts.¹³ TRUTHMAKER states that moral propositions must correspond to moral properties to be true, meaning that in order for a moral proposition to be true, the relevant moral properties (or facts) must obtain. As John Skorupski (1999) explains, the view “that normative claims are true or false *according to whether some fact obtains ‘in the world’*” is simply “the realist’s thesis” (p. 437). David Copp (2001) explains this idea further:

[M]oral realism holds that ‘basic’ moral propositions are true, just as ordinary descriptive propositions are true, when the relevant things have the relevant properties; it adds that some basic moral propositions are in fact true. (p. 5)

Implicit to Skorupski and Copp’s views is the idea that moral realism entails a commitment to the traditional view of propositions - that, to be true, a proposition must correspond to the facts (i.e. to states of affairs which obtain).¹⁴ For example, if it is a moral fact that all acts of unconditional love are good, it is because all instances of unconditional love have the property of *being good*.

UNIQUE entails that the moral constituents of moral facts - moral properties or their instances - fall into a metaphysical category of their own and thus are *sui generis*. Using Tristram McPherson’s (2012) characterization of “*sui generis*,” a moral entity is metaphysically unique or *sui generis* insofar as it is neither reducible to, identical to, nor metaphysically continuous with

¹²In addition to TRUTHMAKER and UNIQUE, moral non-naturalism entails a commitment to the thesis that at least some moral propositions are true and by implication there are non-natural moral facts and properties. Or, if Moorean realism in particular is correct, there are *sui generis* moral properties. Consequently, *error theory* is false if moral non-naturalism is correct. Error theorists agree with Moorean realists that moral claims are true or false (i.e. truth-apt) and moral claims and propositions are made true by non-natural or *sui generis* moral properties, but deny that any such properties exist. Thus, an essential tenet of error theory is that all moral claims are false.

¹³As this paper should demonstrate, moral realists disagree over the nature of moral facts, or what *in the world* makes moral claims true - natural, *sui generis*, or supernatural facts.

¹⁴See Plantinga (1978) for a characterization of the traditional view of propositions. We might think that nobody could plausibly deny TRUTHMAKER so a defense of it is superfluous. However, this is not the case. Some readings of Parfit’s view suggest that there are true moral propositions which do not correspond to any state of affairs or facts. In his words, “these necessary truths are not made to be true by there being some part of reality to which these truths correspond” (Parfit, 2011b, p. 745). In addition, metaphysicians Augustin Rayo (2009) and Ross Cameron (2010) defend *trivial realism*, the view that there are truths which do not make any demands on the world or metaphysical reality. If trivial realism could be extended to morality and adequately defended, then it seems that we could have moral truths without truthmakers or which do not correspond to worldly facts.

any other kind of entity. If A is metaphysically continuous with B, then “B belongs to some category F such that A’s nature can be explained in terms of features that are essential to F (or vice versa). For example, if B is a natural property, then A is metaphysically continuous with B just in case A’s nature can be explained in terms of properties that render B a natural property, such as *being spatio-temporally located* or *being a natural kind*” (Cuneo & Shafer-Landau, 2014, p. 428).¹⁵

Like Moorean realism, divine command theory is also committed to TRUTHMAKER. However, in order for a moral proposition to be made true, facts about commands of God or God’s nature must obtain.¹⁶ In its most classic form, divine command theory states,

DCT: If God commands x then x is obligatory, and if x is obligatory then it is because God commanded x .

That is to say, if some act, x , is morally obligatory, God has commanded x ; and if God commands x , then x is, in virtue of God’s command, morally obligatory.¹⁷ However, the classic form of divine command theory is ambiguous and incomplete. Some interpret (DCT) - *one ought to do x if and only if God commands x* - as a fundamental principle of a normative theory. But contemporary divine command theorists treat their view as a form of metaethical reductionism according to which:

DCT*: (i) the Good *just is* God (or God’s nature); and (ii) moral obligation *just is* what God commands.

Whereas normative theories offer systematic accounts of moral obligations and values, metaethical theories explain the nature of moral facts - the metaphysics, epistemology and linguistics of such facts. According to DCT*, divine character and divine commands stand in a reductive relation, specifically, a *constitution relation*, to the Good (or goodness) and moral obligation respectively.¹⁸

¹⁵The idea of “being metaphysically continuous with” originally comes from McPherson (2012).

¹⁶I assume the traditional monotheistic picture of God, where God’s attributes include (but are not necessarily limited to) omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence.

¹⁷See Heathwood (2012).

¹⁸This modified form of divine command theory has also been referred to as “theological voluntarism.” See Kurtz (2009), Alston (2002).

What does it mean to say that *goodness* and moral obligations are *constituted by* God's character and commands? Constitution relations are a kind of asymmetrical, reductive relation. On the one hand, it is correct to say that to be morally obligatory just is to be commanded by God. Since the constitution relation is asymmetrical, one relata explains or provides an analysis of the other. An act is morally obligatory because it is commanded by God. For example, consider the properties *being a triangle* and *being three-sided*. To be a triangle just is to be three-sided and, furthermore, an object is not three-sided by being a triangle; it is only in virtue of being three-sided that an object is a triangle. As Mark Schroeder (2007) explains:

[T]he term on the right-hand side of the identity [*being three-sided*] elucidates something about the *structure* of triangularity - that it involves *sides*, and *three* of them, and so on. What makes the view that triangularity is the property of having three sides a constitutive or reductive account is not that it simply picks out that same property using a different term, but that the term it uses to pick out tells us something further about the nature of that property. (pp. 64-65)

The constitution relation elucidates the nature of being morally obligatory - that moral obligations are constituted by God's commands. That is, something is morally obligated in virtue of or by being commanded by God. Similarly, something is good in virtue of or by resembling God.

Alston (2002) explains that we should think of "God himself, the individual being, as the supreme standard of goodness" (p. 291) and William Lane Craig argues that "commands flow necessarily from his moral nature" (Kurtz & Craig, 2009, p. 30). To summarize these constitution relations, consider the following explanation by Alston (2002):

Let's say that what makes a certain length a meter is its equality to a standard meter stick kept in Paris. What makes this table a meter in length is not its conformity to a Platonic essence but its conformity to a concretely existing individual. Similarly, on my present suggestion, what most ultimately makes an act of love a good thing is not its conformity to some general principle but its conformity to, or imitation of, God, who is both the ultimate source of the existence of things and the supreme standard by reference to which they are to be assessed. (p. 292)

Craig reinforces this idea:

On the account I suggest, the Good is determined paradigmatically by God's own character. Just as a meter was once defined paradigmatically as the length of an

iridium bar housed in the Bureau des Poids et des Mesures in Paris, so moral values are determined by the paradigm of God's holy and loving character. God's character is not malleable, as is a metal bar; indeed, on classical theism it is essential to him. Moreover, since according to classical theism, God exists necessarily, his nature can serve to ground necessary moral truths. (Kurtz & Craig, 2009, pp. 169-170)

Note that if goodness is constituted by God's nature and God is a necessary being with an essential or immutable nature, then it follows that there are necessary moral truths. God exists necessarily and has an essential loving nature. Following the lead of contemporary divine command theorists, I'll hereafter understand divine command theory as the modified form, as DCT*.¹⁹

Both Moorean realism and divine command theory are committed to TRUTHMAKER, but the views part ways on the nature of moral properties and facts. Moorean realism entails that moral properties are metaphysically *sui generis* and divine command theory entails that moral properties are supernatural.²⁰ Though *sui generis* properties are by no means identical to supernatural properties, both kinds of properties are *not* natural (i.e. non-natural). Moorean realists and divine command theorists thus agree that the rightness or wrongness of an act consists in it possessing a non-natural property and thus both accept NOT NATURAL. As was noted earlier, it is admittedly difficult to offer a precise characterization of the class of natural properties. Nonetheless, I suggest two strategies. First, Enoch's characterization seems to be a good starting point; that is, the view that natural properties are those properties that the usual sciences invoke. Of course, even this definition is vague. Second, we can rely on ostension to begin to identify properties that are surely not natural or not reducible to natural properties.²¹ Under these assumptions, it is relatively non-controversial that neither metaphysically unique nor supernatural properties are natural.

In what follows, I argue that divine command theory and Moorean realism face several of the same objections as a result of a commitment to NOT NATURAL and, furthermore, Moorean realism has a harder time overcoming these problems than divine command theory.

¹⁹I henceforth use the term "divine command theory" to refer to (DCT*).

²⁰I take it that supernatural properties must stand in some relation to a supernatural being, power, or feature. For example, if what one ought to do just is what God commands, then 'ought' is a supernatural property.

²¹This is the strategy that Terence Cuneo and Shafer-Landau use to demarcate natural from non-natural properties in Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014).

1.2 Objections to Non-natural Properties

Moorean realism faces three classic objections: the ontological problem, the problem of moral knowledge, and the Euthyphro problem.²² Interestingly, these happen to be the very same problems levied against divine command theory in some contexts. This is explained by the fact that these objections can be traced back to a commitment to NOT NATURAL. Herein I walk through these three objections and argue that divine command theory is better positioned to meet each argument.

1.2.1 The Ontological Problem

According to the ontological form of *Occam's Razor*, entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity.²³ Admitting a new kind of property into one's ontology creates a prima facie reason to question the plausibility of that view. Of course, if new kinds of properties are needed to express or develop our best empirical theory, then there would not be a violation of ontological parsimony or simplicity. These properties would be a necessary part of one's ontology. By implication, a theory can add new entities into one's ontology as long as it is necessary. The burden for moral non-naturalists is to justify positing non-natural properties given that these properties are inconsistent with a naturalistic picture of the world. This is what I'll call *the ontological problem*.

To see the problem, imagine that a cult believes that magical witches and unicorns exist in the actual world. Such views are not held in high esteem precisely because they conflict with a naturalistic picture of the world. The cult is obligated to offer a justification for why one ought to believe that such beings exist in the actual world. If there was reason to believe that witches with magical powers exist, everyone would be forced to rethink the nature of the universe and expand their ontology to include such strange beings. However, because the most compelling scientific theories of the world indicate otherwise, it is widely held that magical beings do not exist and anyone that adds them to their ontology undermines the plausibility of their view. The takeaway

²²As I explain below, the Euthyphro problem for Moorean realism has traditionally been labeled under the guise of "the problem of supervenience."

²³Of course, there are numerous renditions of Occam's Razor. A rough definition is sufficient for the purpose of this paper.

then is that one should not add an entity that conflicts with a scientific worldview into one's ontology without good reason.

Importantly, Moorean realists and divine command theorists face the same problem. Both theorists must justify expanding their ontology to include a non-natural property, something that conflicts with a naturalistic worldview.²⁴ Hence, both Moorean realism and divine command theory face the ontological problem.

Though proponents of divine command theory and Moorean realism both face the ontological problem, each kind of non-natural property - sui generis and supernatural - creates a distinct ontological burden. First, according to classical theism, God - a nonphysical entity - causes physical events. On the traditional view of divine command theory, God not only creates and sustains mankind, he intercedes in the lives of men. But this conflicts with *causal closure principle*,

(CCP): all causes of physical events are physical.²⁵

Matthew Kramer resolutely maintains that supernatural properties are less plausible than sui generis properties precisely for the reason that they conflict with the scientific method and principles of nature, such as, (CCP). In his words,

Virtually anybody who believes in witches or gods or angels or ghosts or astrological influences will assume that such occult beings or forces are endowed with causal efficacy. To be sure, virtually anyone gullible enough to believe in such beings or forces will think that their causal powers are combined with supernatural powers that lie outside the sway of the ordinary physical laws of nature. In that respect, witches and gods and angels and ghosts and astrological influences are very different from

²⁴Some philosophers have proposed that divine command theory does not require that God exists in the actual world or in actuality. On this view, moral obligation is constituted by what God *would* command rather than by what God actually commands. This view is a form of idealized agent theory whereby "God" is a theoretical, non-existent, agent with attributes that are identical to God. This view faces a variety of challenges. For instance, it is unclear whether the theoretical commands of a non-existent God could be as normatively authoritative as the commands of an actual God. In the third chapter, I raise several arguments against a deflationary form of divine command theory and conclude that the traditional divine command theory is in fact more plausible. For more thoughts on this view, see Harrison (2015), Morrison (2012), Adams (1979), and Adams (2002).

²⁵There are numerous renditions of the causal closure principle, but this characterization is one of the least controversial forms. For instance, Donald Davidson characterizes the principle as *all physical events have physical causes* (Davidson, 1970, p. 222). Unlike the characterization of (CCP) here, Davidson's rendition of the causal closure principle does not allow for the possibility that some physical events lack causes altogether.

moral properties. Supernatural phenomena are different from non-natural phenomena. . . . Anybody who properly esteems the achievements of science should spurn the empirically confuted doctrines of people who believe in witchcraft or astrology or deities or angels or wraiths, but her due admiration for scientific methods and accomplishments should not per se dispose her to feel the slightest unease about the genuineness of moral values. Those values are not, and cannot be, empirically discredited to the slightest degree. (Kramer, 2009, p. 204)

The commitments of traditional theism admittedly conflict with (CCP) and give proponents of divine command theory little choice but to deny it.²⁶ Moral non-naturalists however view moral properties as causally impotent, so they don't violate the principle.²⁷ For this reason, Stephen Finlay (2007) contrasts "radical, supernaturalist commitments" to the moral non-naturalist's "mild, merely metaphysical commitments" (p. 20).

Later, I'll suggest that divine command theory's unique violation of (CCP) may actually be a powerful reason to prefer it to Moorean realism. But for now, I show how Moorean realism has a special metaphysical problem of its own. Even in granting that metaphysically *sui generis* moral properties do not violate the causal closure principle or laws of nature, Moorean realism faces its own challenge to 'fit' moral properties within a scientific worldview. J.L. Mackie's multifaceted *argument from queerness* is perhaps the greatest ontological threat to Moorean realism. Mackie (1977) argues that "[objective values] would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (p. 29). In particular, objective values, if they exist, have the unique trait of being *categorical*:

So far as ethics is concerned, my thesis that there are no objective values is specifically the denial that any such categorically imperative element is objectively valid. The objective values which I am denying would be action-directing absolutely, not contingently (in the way indicated) upon the agents desires and inclinations. . . . An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it. (Mackie, 1977, p. 29, 40)

Objective values have the unique power to mandate individuals' lives, regardless of their

²⁶For arguments against the causal closure principle, see Garcia (2014), Wachter (2006), Lowe (2000).

²⁷See Shafer-Landau (2003), Finlay (2007), Kramer (2009).

motivations, desires, beliefs, or preferences. In his own words, Gerald Harrison (2015) echoes the queerness of *sui generis*, objective values:

[W]e are getting a landscape made of extra mental favourings. The problem is that landscapes are dead, lifeless things that can no more care about what we do or what happens than a pebble can. That seems as true of a non-natural landscape as of a natural one. In short, then, morality seems to do things only an agent can do: it favours and instructs. (pp. 121-122)

Moorean realism entails that *sui generis* properties are *brute facts* - that these facts obtain is not dependent on or explained by other states of affairs (i.e. other facts) - are normatively authoritative. How could a brute, mind-independent fact could take on the role of governing our lives? The problem is reinforced by a version of the open question argument. Even if Moorean realism were true and brute moral facts existed, it would still be reasonable to ask, *I know that x has a sui generous non-natural property but is x morally wrong?* The reason that this question gets any traction is that it is highly implausible to think that a non-sentient, disinterested reality dictates how one ought to act.

Though divine command theory also entails that moral values are binding or categorical, it can explain this feature. Classical theists can point to God's nature, the fact that God is loving and has created mankind with a purpose, that God has created and sustains the universe and so forth. These are plausible morally relevant factors which are recognizable options for explaining the authority of God's commands and nature. Even J.L. Mackie (1977) granted that divine command theory offers a more plausible account of the authority of normativity:

[I]f this theistic position were not only coherent but also correct it could make a significant difference to moral philosophy. . . . our task might be less that of making or remaking morality than of finding out, with the help of some reliable revelations, what God's creative will has made appropriate for man and what his prescriptive will requires of us. It therefore matters a lot for moral philosophy whether any such theistic view is correct: the theological frontier of ethics remains open. (pp. 231-232)

Importantly, supernatural and *sui generis* properties conflict with our expectations of what the world must be like for different reasons. Divine command theory entails that not every physical event has a physical cause, whereas Moorean realism entails that objective values would be queer

entities, extra-mental facts that guide and for whom there can be no explanation of why. As long as the divine command theorist is committed to traditional theism, she will have to deny (CCP). Though this may be a strike to the view, it is clear that Moorean realism is not without its own unique ontological problems.

One could argue that denying (CCP) is more troubling than accepting such queer entities into our ontology, or vice versa. But either conclusion is far from obvious. Without further argumentation, there is little we can say, however, below I'll explain why violating (CCP) is actually precisely why divine command theory is more plausible than Moorean realism.

1.2.2 The Problem of Moral Knowledge

A further consequence of accepting NOT NATURAL is the burden to explain how one could have epistemic access or knowledge of non-natural facts.²⁸ If non-natural properties are those properties that are not invoked or studied by the sciences, how can one have knowledge of such properties? Though each view faces this question, upon closer examination, it quickly becomes clear that supernatural and sui generis properties face different challenges on this front.

Assume for the sake of argument that traditional theism is correct and a personal, loving God is the creator and sustainer of all. On this account, there are several possible means of acquiring knowledge of supernatural properties. God may have created mankind with faculties that allow them to acquire "moral awareness" and knowledge of moral truths.²⁹ Similarly, one might think that "to be made in God's image and likeness," as the Judeo-Christian maintains, is to be capable of being rational. More importantly, this capacity may include the ability to acquire knowledge of God and, in turn, moral truths.

Seeing that God has causal powers, it is also possible that God could directly or indirectly communicate to mankind through divine revelation.³⁰ God may use religious texts, prophets, or

²⁸Admittedly, the epistemic issues surrounding Moorean realism and God are vast and deep. See Shafer-Landau (2003) and Enoch (2011) respectively. A complete treatment of the epistemic puzzles for each view requires much more space than is permitted here. For the purpose of this paper, I simply note that there are numerous questions and ways to carve up the epistemic puzzles and both moral non-naturalists and divine command theorists face them.

²⁹The term "moral awareness" comes from Swinburne (2009).

³⁰If natural facts were characterized as those fact that are empirically accessible, then in worlds with a God that exists and intercedes, divine command theory would technically qualify as naturalistic.

direct encounters with individuals to communicate moral knowledge. Divine command theorists would admittedly have to navigate competing accounts of divine revelation, God's nature and commands, but the takeaway is that there is a clear *possible* means of attaining moral knowledge or at least epistemic access to moral facts.

The outlook for Moorean realism is not as promising. While Moorean realists might take it as an advantage of their view that *sui generis* properties do not have causal powers and thus do not violate (CCP), granting supernatural properties causal power offers an epistemic advantage. If *sui generis* properties are causally impotent, how can one possibly have knowledge of them? Indeed, Mackie's argument from queerness is partly an epistemic critique of objective values. He argues that "if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else" (Mackie, 1977, p. 38). Mackie (1977) here explains the problem at greater length:

When we ask the awkward question, how we can be aware of this authoritative prescriptivity, of the truth of these distinctively ethical premises or of the cogency of this distinctively ethical pattern of reasoning, none of our ordinary accounts of sensory perception or introspection or the framing and confirming of explanatory hypotheses or inference or logical construction or conceptual analysis, or any combination of these, will provide a satisfactory answer; 'a special sort of intuition' is a lame answer, but it is the one to which the clear headed objectivist is compelled to resort. (pp. 38-39)

If there is not some special faculty which allows humans to have moral knowledge, it is unclear how metaphysically *sui generis* properties could be known. It seems then that Moorean realists are committed to some form of *ethical intuitionism*, the view that knowledge of moral truths is *self-evident* - knowledge of moral facts does not require argumentation or reasoning.

As Mackie suggests, ethical intuitionism is rife with problems. For example, according to Matthew Bedke's (2009) *cosmic coincidence argument*, ethical intuitionism is incompatible with the thesis that moral properties are causally inert. One can hold either ethical intuitionism or Moorean realism but not both.³¹ Bedke (2009) explains:

³¹Bedke (2009) frames the dichotomy as ethical intuitionism or "moral non-naturalism," where moral non-naturalism is the view that moral facts are "suitably mind-independent, but not reducible to the natural world" (p.

The general idea is that intuitions and beliefs have a causal history that can be told without every appealing to non-natural ethics facts. Holding the causal world fixed we will arrive at the same ethical intuitions and beliefs regardless of what the ethical facts happen to be. Given this, it would be a great cosmic coincidence if the causal world were orchestrated just perfectly, so as to produce intuitions and beliefs that accurately reflect the ethical facts. We would need something like a god rigging the ethical facts and the causal order to ensure their serendipitous coincidence. And without evidence of this happy coincidence one cannot justifiably hold that those ethical beliefs, insofar as they were previously supported by intuition, are true. (p. 190)

Assuming that the causal closure principle and ethical intuitionism are correct, the causal world is sufficient for moral knowledge. Moral intuitions interact with the causal world alone, thus, whether *sui generis* properties exist is irrelevant to moral beliefs. Yet, Moorean realism entails that moral knowledge is acquired via intuitions that track *sui generis* properties. Since the causal world is sufficient for moral knowledge, the idea that intuitions track moral facts could be nothing other than a grand, inexplicable “cosmic coincidence.”

Sharon Street (2006) offers a similar argument against the reliability of moral judgments for moral realism. It is widely held that moral attitudes have been shaped and influenced by evolutionary forces.³² But Moorean realists also maintain that there are moral truths that exist regardless of humans’ beliefs or attitudes. The question then is how the fact that evolutionary forces have influenced moral attitudes relates to the central commitment of moral realism - that there are human-independent moral truths. To have moral knowledge, there must be reason to believe that evolutionary forces have shaped humans’ moral attitudes in a way that is amenable to having moral knowledge. But Street argues that scientific commitments render this implausible. The alternative is that there is no relation between evolutionary forces on moral attitudes and moral truths, and thus moral skepticism ensues.

Interestingly, these arguments are originally levied against moral non-naturalism and moral realism broadly. Seeing that I have characterized divine command theory as a kind of realism and,

188). However, according to my characterization, some forms of moral non-naturalism entail that moral properties are not causally inert. To draw out this point, I here refer to “Moorean realism” instead.

³²Street (2006) refers to the more general term “evaluative attitudes” but I take it that “moral attitudes” are a kind of evaluative attitude and so nothing rides on this distinction (Street, 2006, p. 109).

more specifically, non-naturalism, one might think that these objections are just as relevant to divine command theory. But that is not the case. These arguments rest on the assumption that moral properties are causally inert, but it has been established that this is not an essential feature of all non-natural properties. Supernatural properties are not causally inert and hence divine command theorists can avoid these objections.

Where divine command theory makes moral knowledge questionable but possible, Moorean realism threatens to make it impossible. As is motivated by the preceding arguments, it is unclear how one could have knowledge of metaphysically *sui generis* moral properties that are causally impotent. Alternatively, epistemic access to supernatural properties is possible without reliance on a special faculty or cosmic coincidence. In the very least, divine command theory can rise to the challenge of the problem of moral knowledge as well as, if not better, than Moorean realism.

1.2.3 The Euthyphro Problem

The Euthyphro problem can be seen as a twofold problem: *the grounding problem* and *the extensional adequacy problem*.³³ Though the Euthyphro problem is often a charge against divine command theory, there is an analogous problem for all moral theories that entail that non-natural properties are the ultimate “source” or “ground” of morality.

The grounding problem is the concern that moral truths and facts would be *objectionably* brute or arbitrary. For instance, it is widely held that cultural relativism is false because, if true, moral truth would be arbitrary. If cultural relativism were correct, whether one would be morally obligated to feed the homeless or not would depend on the norms of a culture. If a culture happened to hold the view that you should always feed the homeless, then it would be morally obligatory. But a culture could just as easily not hold this belief. Neighboring cultures that are identical in all relevant respects could come to two different conclusions - that one is morally obligated to feed the homeless in one community and not in another and, consequently, moral truths would vary. But this seems wrong. It is widely held that moral truths should be grounded in something and not dependent on arbitrary desires, beliefs, or so forth. Metaethical theories should

³³Gerald Harrison (2015) raises this twofold problem.

either explain moral truths - why moral facts are the way that they are - or why it is reasonable that moral truths are brute.

The grounding problem for Moorean realism is often characterized as *the problem of supervenience*, the burden to explain how or why metaphysically distinct properties stand in a metaphysically necessary relation. The problem of supervenience rests on the assumption that *the general supervenience thesis* is true - that it is a conceptual truth that the moral *supervenes on* or is necessarily co-extensive with the non-moral.³⁴ To illustrate, consider the following example. Worlds w_1 and w_2 are exact duplicates in all relevant non-moral respects - each world has the same history of events and circumstances, the same physical and natural states of affairs obtain, the same causal laws, and there are the same types of individuals with all the same relations between them. At some point in time in world w_1 , a government commits mass genocide. It is a moral fact in world w_1 that this act of mass genocide is morally wrong. Now the same state of affairs obtains in world w_2 ; a qualitatively identical country committed mass genocide against its people at the same time in history, in exactly the same way, for the same reasons, and with the same effects. If the moral does not supervene on the non-moral, then it is possible that the act of mass genocide is morally wrong in world w_1 but not morally wrong in world w_2 . But, if the two worlds are exactly alike in all non-moral respects, what could explain this difference in moral facts? Surely, if mass genocide is wrong in world w_1 (at a given time, in a certain place, for a particular country, etc) and world w_2 is the exact replica of world w_1 , then it is also a moral fact that mass genocide is wrong in world w_2 .

Similarly, R.M. Hare (1952) motivates the supervenience thesis with another example:

Suppose that we say “St. Francis was a good man.” It is logically impossible to say this and to maintain at the same time that there might have been another man placed exactly in the same circumstances as St. Francis, and who behaved in exactly the same way, but who differed from St. Francis in this respect only, that he was not a good man. (p. 145)

The commitment to the general supervenience thesis is widespread, thus, to the extent that any

³⁴Similarly, Michael Smith (1994) states, “everyone agrees that it is an *a priori* truth that the moral supervenes on the natural” (pp. 22-21). For similar views on supervenience, see Enoch (2011) and Zangwill (1995).

moral theory cannot account for it the view loses plausibility.³⁵

This is precisely the problem for Moorean realism. Moorean realists have a difficult time explaining how the moral supervenes on the natural because of the following two commitments:

UNIQUE: Moral properties are metaphysically *sui generis*.

HUME'S DICTUM: Brute metaphysically necessary relations between distinct existences or properties significantly undermines the plausibility of a view.³⁶

UNIQUE is an essential tenet of Moorean realism. According to *Hume's dictum*, if there is a metaphysically necessary connection between distinct existences or in this case properties, then there is a burden to explain this relation.³⁷

Consider the (possible) moral fact that stealing is wrong. If *wrongness* is metaphysically *sui generis*, it is unclear what could explain why *wrongness* supervenes on the natural property *being an act of stealing*. If it is just a brute fact that *wrongness* and *being an act of stealing* are necessarily co-extensive, this is a violation of Hume's dictum. The only way to avoid violating Hume's dictum is to explain *why* moral properties stand in a metaphysically necessary relation to non-moral or natural properties. Simply asserting that the moral supervenes on the natural simply reinforces the problem that there is a metaphysically necessary relation between distinct entities.³⁸

³⁵Enoch (2011) makes the intellectually honest point that no theory - moral or otherwise - is perfect. Rather, the goal in philosophy is to evaluate the pros and cons of each view and to tally up and compare the "plausibility points" of each theory. In the end, one must look for "the philosophical theory that is best as a theory overall - and this is consistent, of course, with its losing some plausibility points on this or that issue, as long as it makes up for this loss with plausibility points it honestly earns on other issues" (p. 14). He also distinguishes two logically distinct supervenience theses: *the general supervenience thesis* - that the moral supervenes on the natural, and *the specific supervenience thesis*, that specific moral properties supervene on specific natural properties (Enoch, 2011, p. 143). Note that the claim that the moral supervenes on the "non-moral" rather than the "natural" is not consequential to any arguments made herein so long as the non-moral includes (but is not limited to) the natural.

³⁶This is a paraphrase of Tristram McPherson's "modest" rendition of Hume's dictum, what he calls "Modest Humean." See McPherson (2012). The stronger form of Hume's dictum states that there can be no metaphysically necessary relations between distinct existences. This stronger version is significantly more controversial than the modest thesis. Because the modest thesis is sufficient for motivating the problem of supervenience, I opt for it here. For a thorough analysis of Hume's dictum, see Wilson (2010).

³⁷An interesting and important question is how should one understand "distinctness." If to be distinct just is to be non-identical, then Hume's dictum seems to be easily refuted by the unobjectionable necessary relations between sets and their members. For instance, in the case of the set containing Socrates, this singleton is necessarily co-extensive with the member, Socrates. The set cannot exist independently of its member and yet the set is not identical to the member. Wholes and parts are also distinct in this sense but stand in necessary relations. For further analysis, see Wilson (2010).

³⁸One might think that the *general supervenience* thesis - that the moral supervenes on the non-moral - is also in

The grounding problem for divine command theory is analogous. For divine command theory, the moral status of acts does not depend on anything other than God's commands and, importantly, God cannot command x because x is wrong or x causes pain or x is selfish; it is only in virtue of God's command that x is wrong. As such, the fact that God commands one thing over another is seemingly without reason or inexplicable; to offer a moral reason for God's commands would be antithetical to divine command theory and the principle that what one ought to do just is what God commands. Just as there seems to be no necessary connection between *sui generis* and natural properties, so too there seems to be no necessary connection between the naturalistic facts about an act and whether God will command otherwise. Like the problem of supervenience (for Moorean realism), the grounding problem is the challenge to explain *why* particular acts are right or wrong, and yet it seems that there cannot be a *reason* for God's commands.

The extensional adequacy problem is a close cousin of the grounding problem. Some moral truths are so strongly held and intuitive that any moral theory which denies them is suspect, indeed, we'd say they cannot possibly be true. The fact that Hitler's actions were evil, or that torturing babies for fun is wrong are two examples. The problem is that there is nothing to prevent the possibility that Hitler was good or that it is morally permissible to torture babies for fun from being true. For if God is the creator of morality and moral obligations supervene on God's commands, then it seems possible that God could have commanded us to torture babies for fun, thereby making it morally obligatory to commit such atrocious acts. As an omnipotent being, shouldn't he have the power and the possibility of commanding otherwise? Analogously, Moorean realists must submit that there is no explanation why the brute moral facts - necessary or otherwise - align with our pre-theoretical intuitions about morality. It may turn out that it is just a brute fact that torturing babies for fun is morally permissible, or that there is a moral obligation to cause harm to the innocent. Even if brute moral facts happened to align with our pre-theoretical intuitions, it would be an inexplicable, coincidental fact.

need of explanation. A common view is that the general supervenience thesis is a conceptual truth and, furthermore, the fact that it is a conceptual truth is a sufficient explanation for this thesis. See Enoch (2011). Even if the general supervenience thesis were to need explaining, the fact that the moral supervenes on the non-moral is a metaethical, non-substantive fact and so does not create the same grounding problem for Moorean realism.

To avoid the problem of extensional adequacy, divine command theorists must give us reason to believe that God's commands and nature would necessarily entail moral truths that coincide with our strongly held, pre-theoretical intuitions; similarly, moral non-naturalists must explain what reason we have to believe that necessary moral truths would align with our pre-theoretical, strongly held intuitions. And, for both views, the grounding problem demands a non-arbitrary explanation of the supervenience or distribution of moral facts.

Divine command theory is much better positioned to solve both the grounding problem and the extensional adequacy problem. For starters, though divine command theory may entail brute moral facts, the brute moral facts are not objectionably brute. To see this, recall the essential tenets of divine command theory,

- (i) the Good *just is* God (or God's nature);
- (ii) moral obligation *just is* what God commands.

Again, this form of divine command theory is *reductive* - it reduces moral properties to God's commands and nature. Reductive views appear to avoid the grounding problem because if the moral is reducible to the non-moral, then there is no question *why* the moral is necessarily co-extensive with the non-moral - they are one and the same, the moral *just is* the non-moral. Hence, reductive views trivially explain why the moral supervenes on the non-moral.

Another important feature of divine command theory is that it entails that moral properties are not simply identical to God's commands and nature; they are constituted by them. The constitution relation is an asymmetrical relation and, as such, it offers an analysis the relevant relatum. To say that moral obligation is constituted by God's commands is thus to tell us something about the nature of moral obligation - that they are ontologically dependent on God's commands.

The upshot of this is that divine command theory does not entail brute moral facts, moral facts that are completely inexplicable or ungrounded. This runs contrary to the charge that divine command theory and Moorean realism entail the same metaphysics, in particular, that *at bottom* neither view can avoid positing brute, inexplicable moral facts. But, importantly, moral facts are

reducible to others facts if divine command theory is correct; thus, divine command theory entails that we can explain moral facts in a way that we cannot explain *sui generis* moral facts.³⁹ Consider Wielenberg's (2014) argument that divine command theorists cannot ground moral facts in God:

[S]ince the Good just is God, the existence of God cannot explain or ground the existence of the Good. In the context of Adams's view, the claim that God serves as the foundation of the Good is no more sensible than the claim that H₂O serves as the foundation of water. Indeed, once we see that, on Adams's view the Good = God, we see that Adams's theory entails that the Good has no external foundation, since God has no external foundation. It is not merely that Adams's view fails to specify where the Good came from; the theory implies that the Good did not come from anywhere. (p. 43)

Further:

It is somewhat misleading to characterize theorists like Adams and Craig as providing a theistic *foundation* for objective morality. Such a characterization can easily give the impression that, on their approaches, *all* objective ethical facts are *explained* by God. But that is not at all the case. What is really going on is that *some* objective ethical facts are explained by appeal to *other* basic ethical facts (*some* of which are *also* supernatural facts). Adams, Craig, and I all agree, then that objective morality is somehow built into reality. We all posit a moral foundation of substantive, metaphysically necessary brute ethical facts. They *also* see divinity as built into reality, whereas I do not. But it is a mistake to think that on their approaches, the divinity that is built into reality provides a complete external foundation for objective morality. On both types of views, the bottom floor of objective morality rests ultimately on nothing. (p. 56)

Though Wielenberg acknowledges that the Good is reducible to God's nature, he does not recognize that there are different kinds of reductive relations and, in particular, that the identity relation is not the only kind of reductive relation. The relation between H₂O and water is not the same as the relation between the Good and God's nature. The latter is a constitution relation - an asymmetrical relation between the Good and God's nature, one which elucidates and provides an analyses of the Good. The former is an identity relation - a symmetrical relation between H₂O

³⁹Wielenberg (2014) argues that both views entail "substantive, metaphysically necessary, and brute" facts; for instance, divine command theory entails the brute moral facts "that the Good exists, that the Good is loving, that the Good is merciful" (p. 43). Indeed, Wielenberg (2014) claims the following: "my version of non-theistic robust normative realism has an ontological commitment shared by many theists: it implies the obtaining of substantive, metaphysically necessary, brute facts. . . . Such facts are the foundation of (the rest of) objective morality and rest on no foundation themselves" (p. 38).

and water. As Schroeder (2007) argues, though it is common to equate all forms of reduction with identity, it is unwarranted:

The unwarranted move. . . is to give up on the idea of an analysis altogether, substituting instead the symmetric relation of identity. Switching to talk of identities was what made reductive views symmetric and hence incapable of supporting constitutive explanations. And it was what made reductive views uninformative about the *nature* of the properties involved, understanding them only as telling us something about how we talk about those properties, or about how we find out about them. (pp. 65-66)

The idea that there are different kinds of reductive relations, such as, identity and constitution relations, is key here. The constitution relation allows for the possibility that the Good could be both reducible to and explained by God's nature.

As a non-reductive view, Moorean realists do not have the same advantage. They cannot appeal to a constitution relation to explain the necessary connection between moral and natural properties.⁴⁰ Consequently, Moorean realism entails that there are brute moral facts whereas divine command theory does not. In general, divine command theory entails that moral properties are explicable - they are analyzed by and explained in terms of God's nature and commands.

Reductive views also guarantee that moral properties cannot just appear "willy nilly" anywhere. The moral status of acts is grounded or fixed by the natural features. If God commands or prohibits general types of behavior individuated by natural properties, such as, killing, stealing, or lying, then this will ensure that the moral status of acts is grounded in the natural features, and necessarily so if the commands "flow from" God's non-contingent nature.

Whether divine command theory can solve the problem of extensional adequacy depends on whether God's nature and commands are fixed in *the right kind of way*. According to classical theism, God's nature is essentially loving, just, kind, compassionate and so on, and God's

⁴⁰In his book, Shafer-Landau (2003), Shafer-Landau argues that sui generis properties are necessarily co-extensive with or supervene on natural properties because they are fully constituted by, but not reducible to, natural properties. An important implication of this proposed solution is that the constitution relation is explanatory, thus, if the moral was fully constituted by the natural then the relation between the moral and natural would be informative. Unfortunately for Moorean realists, one compelling critique of this proposed solution is that for *x* to be fully constituted by *y* is for *x* to be reducible to *y*. Moorean realists cannot appeal to the view that moral properties are fully constituted by natural properties without collapsing into a form of reductionism. See FitzPatrick (2008).

commands necessarily flow out of this nature. Hence, God would not command what is unjust or unkind or cruel, that is contrary to his very nature.⁴¹ This view thus solves the problem of extensional adequacy because the essence of God's nature likely aligns with our pre-theoretical, strongly held beliefs about what qualifies as *good*, and God's nature is essential or necessary.

One may still argue that the mere fact that what is obligatory is dependent on God is objectionable. As Morrision (2012) writes, "isn't it still true that according to the divine command theory eating our children would be morally obligatory if - *per impossibile* - God commanded it" (p. 20)? I, following Craig (2009), am inclined to question whether this objection makes sense:

[T]he counterfactual in question has an impossible antecedent and so, on the customary semantics, has no nonvacuous truth value. Even if we . . . reject the usual semantics and allow that some counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are nonvacuously true, how are we to assess the truth value of a statement like this? It is like wondering whether, if there were a round square, its area would equal the square of one of its sides. And what would it matter how one answered, since what is imagined is logically incoherent? I do not see that the divine command theorist is committed to the nonvacuous truth of the counterfactual in question nor that anything of significance hangs on his thinking it to be nonvacuously true rather than false. (p. 172)

The Euthyphro problem is surprisingly not as big of a problem for divine command theory. (Morrision (2012) even concedes that the divine command theorist has a way out, though he proceeds to object to the view for other reasons). Divine command theory has resources that Moorean realism does not, and Moorean realism, by its nature, precludes having any special resources of its own. The view that moral facts are explained by the brute, reductive fact that God - his nature and his commands - encompass morality, offers a plausible "source" or stopping point for morality. Moorean realism on the other hand does not have these resources to explain why moral truths do not conflict with our pre-theoretical beliefs about morality. At best, Moorean

⁴¹This raises the question of whether God is free to command evil, or whether one should understand "free will" as something other than being able to do otherwise. Consider two common views of free will: to be free one must be capable of doing otherwise; to be free is to be the ultimate source of one's will. See O'Connor (2016). Theists will likely deny the former view - that God is free insofar as God is always capable of doing otherwise, as this view would entail that God is capable of acting in ways that are contrary to our pre-theoretical, strongly held intuitions. At least on an initial reading, the latter characterization allows for the possibility that God could be simultaneously free and incapable of commanding or acting evil.

realists can insist that the world just is “value-laden” with brute moral facts.⁴² That compassion, patience, kindness, and justice just are good. Full stop.⁴³

1.3 The Problem of Evil

I have argued that divine command theory is at least as plausible as Moorean realism. In being committed to NOT NATURAL, these views face many of the same ontological, epistemological and metaphysical objections. Furthermore, divine command theory can respond to these objections just as well, if not better, than Moorean realism. Still, one might respond that the real issue with divine command theory is the problem of evil. For while there may be questions about how it’s even possible whether *sui generis* moral properties could be instantiated or how we could know about them, the problem of evil reveals a unique problem for divine command theory - that there is positive empirical evidence against the existence of God, but no such argument against *sui generis* moral properties. Divine command theorists face the unique burden to reconcile the fact that there is evil in the world and yet an all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing God exists. Consequently, if there is reason to believe that there are moral facts and yet we have empirical evidence that God does not exist, we’ve reason to conclude that moral facts don’t depend on God and hence divine command theory is false.

If divine command theory were correct and God existed, then one would expect the world to be a certain way, in particular, one would assume that there not be seemingly unnecessary or gratuitous evils or what Marilyn McCord Adams (1989) calls “horrendous evils.” Adams’s (1989) characterization of horrendous evils is particularly apt at motivating the problem of evil:

. . . evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which gives one reason *prima facie* to doubt whether one’s life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole.’ Such reasonable doubt arises because it is so difficult humanly to conceive how such evils could be overcome. . . . horrendous evils seem *prima facie*, not only to balance off but to engulf the positive value of a participant’s life. (p. 299)

⁴²Fitzpatrick (2008, 2009) defends what he calls a “dual-aspect view” of moral non-naturalism whereby there are empirically investigable and inherently value laden features of the world. Suffering is one example, as suffering can be studied by empirical methods but one also can have knowledge of its evaluative or normative features through experience and reflection.

⁴³Morrison (2012) argues that these brute moral facts are no worse off than the moral facts invoked by divine command theorists (Morrison, 2012, p. 29).

Examples of paradigmatic horrendous evils include,

. . . the rape of a woman and axing off of her arms, psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one's deepest loyalties, cannibalizing one's own offspring, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, participation in the Nazi death camps, the explosion of nuclear bombs over populated areas, having to choose which of one's children shall live and which be executed by terrorists, being the accidental and/or unwitting agent of the disfigurement or death of those one loves best. I regard these as *paradigmatic*, because I believe most people would find in the doing or suffering of them prima-facie reason to doubt the positive meaning of their lives. (Adams, 1989, p. 300)

Adams's observations constitute particularly striking instances of evil - evil of a kind that is apparently inconsistent with a divine purpose. How does one reconcile the presence of such evil with the existence of an all-good, all-powerful God?

The most simple version of this argument is taken from J.L. Mackie (1955):

- (P1) God exists, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.
- (P2) Evil exists.
- (P3) A perfectly good being would always eliminate evil so far as it could.
- (P4) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.

Therefore, God does not exist.

(P1) and (P2) are the main premises of the problem of evil. (P1) is based on our understanding of God's essential nature and (P2) is derived from experience in the world. Both (P3) and (P4) are implicit premises which are often assumed and are necessary to derive the conclusion that God does not exist. Divine command theorists must defend the premise that we have reason to believe that God exists even in the presence of horrendous evils.

Admittedly, the problem of evil is a serious challenge to theism. Though I do not offer a complete response in defense of theism here, a couple of points are worth noting. First, as with many challenges in philosophy, there is an extensive amount of literature responding to this objection.⁴⁴ So the case for atheism via the problem of evil is by no means cut and dried. At the

⁴⁴See Plantinga (1978); Stump (1985); Adams and Robert M Adams (1990); Adams (2000).

end of the day, the problem of evil may give us compelling reason to be atheists but that conclusion should not be drawn hastily.

Second, the problem of evil offers a sort of silver lining for theists. Several conditions must be met for the problem of evil to be a problem, and it turns out that these conditions are actually favorable to divine command theory. First, the problem of evil rests on the assumption that divine command theorists have knowledge of God and, in turn, moral knowledge. In order to levy the argument, divine command theorists must have extensive knowledge about God's character - that God exemplifies the supreme standard of goodness; that God is loving, just, compassionate, gracious and, in turn, that being loving, just, compassionate is good; that God is so powerful that he is capable of stopping "free" agents from committing evil acts; that God has the foreknowledge to know precisely when evil acts would occur.

A further implication of the problem of evil argument is that God has causal powers. If one accepts the widely held principle that *ought implies can* (and I see no reason to believe that God should not be held to the same standard) and God is blameworthy for not stopping acts of evil, it must be the case that God, a non-physical being, can cause physical events. God can only be held liable for not stopping evil if he is capable of interceding in the world.

Importantly, if God has causal powers, this helps explain *how* moral knowledge is possible. Supernatural facts can be known because, unlike *sui generis* facts, they are not causally impotent. God's ability to intercede in the world and make himself known explains how and why moral knowledge is possible.

Thus, though the presence of evil rightfully gives theists reason to question their faith in an all-good, all-powerful God, the argument is also an unexpected source of encouragement. The success of the problem of evil depends on the assumptions that one has knowledge of God and morality, and that God has causal powers. The fact that one has reason to believe that God has causal powers and that mankind has moral knowledge is a great advantage for divine command theory over moral realism, and it should be acknowledged as such.

God's existence is like a dubious explanatory theory, one we have positive evidence against. It

appears to have been falsified, but this is not as bad as a theory that has no explanatory credentials at all. I think the conclusion to draw from the problem of evil is that maybe we have, at worse, compelling reasons to think it most likely that God does not exist and hence there are likely no moral truths. Moorean views by contrast can brag that we have no empirical reason to reject them. However, they achieve this “advantage” by being explanatorily impotent, there could be no empirical reason to believe them at all. Arguably, this is much worse for the credibility of the objects it postulates and for our capacity to know about these objects.

1.4 Conclusion

This paper has been a level setting exercise. I hope to have demonstrated that divine command theory and Moorean realism face many of the same objections as a result of being committed to NOT NATURAL and that divine command theory offers compelling responses to each objection. Sui generis and supernatural properties are non-natural and so do not fit within a naturalistic worldview, but supernatural properties have the advantage of not running afoul of the impossibility of moral knowledge. Thus, there’s a unique case against Moorean realism that moral facts are impossible whereas it is clear that moral knowledge of supernatural properties is possible.

While challenges to supernatural properties and hence divine command theory certainly still exist, this paper seeks to reestablish divine command theory as a view worthy of legitimate consideration. Of course, I have not offered sufficient reason to conclude that either divine command theory or Moorean realism is in fact the correct metaethical theory, or even that one view is superior to the other. However, contrary to the trend in contemporary moral philosophy, I have argued that there is a powerful case to be made that divine command theory is at least as plausible as the ever-increasingly popular Moorean realism. If we are willing to take Moorean realism seriously, then we should be willing to take divine command theory at least as seriously.

CHAPTER 2 ARE MORAL TRUTHS CONCEPTUAL?

Terence Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau have recently defended a new form of Moorean realism wherein many moral truths are conceptual and are thus made true by their constituent concepts. On their view, moral propositions, such as,

- (1) It is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person

are made true by or in virtue of the essences of their constituent concepts. In this case, the truth of (1) is explained by the fact that it belongs to the essence of the concept ‘being wrong’ that, necessarily, anything that satisfies ‘recreational slaughter’ (of a fellow person) also satisfies ‘being wrong.’ Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) argue that “any reasonably comprehensive moral system” (p. 400) is constituted by a set of substantive moral propositions that are conceptual truths, what they call *the moral fixed points*. As such, I will call this view *the moral fixed points view*.

The moral fixed points view allegedly solves several perennial challenges to Moorean realism and in so doing makes the metaethical position more metaphysically and epistemically palatable. For instance, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau argue that the view solves *the problem of supervenience* - the burden to explain the metaphysically necessary relation between metaphysically distinct properties (i.e. moral and non-moral or natural properties). The view also allegedly solves a variety of epistemological problems, such as, *the problem of moral disagreement* - the burden to explain the presence of “deep and persistent” disagreement over moral truths, and *the remarkable coincidence argument* - the challenge to explain how moral knowledge is possible amidst the contingent evolutionary forces that shape our moral sensibilities (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, 2014, p. 422).

Even if the moral fixed points view offers solutions to these problems, it faces a serious dilemma. Conceptual truths are either *immediate* or *mediate*. An immediate conceptual truth is a proposition that is made true by the *immediate* essence of its constituent concepts, whereas a

mediate conceptual truth is a proposition that is made true by the *mediate*, “chained” or indirect essences of its constituent concepts. Kit Fine (1995) explains the distinction as follows:

[I]t is of the immediate nature, or essence, of singleton Socrates [the set containing only Socrates] to contain Socrates and of the immediate nature of Socrates to be a man, but it is only of the mediate nature of singleton Socrates to contain something that is a man. In general, the mediate nature of an object will be subject to chaining: the nature of any object (ineliminably) involved in its nature will also be in its nature. (p. 281)

If it is of the immediate nature of Socrates to be a man and of the immediate nature of a man to be mortal, then it is of the mediate nature of Socrates to be mortal. Or, assuming that it is a conceptual truth, the proposition \langle bachelors are unmarried \rangle is made true by the immediate essence or nature of the constituent concepts ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried.’ There is no further concept which chains ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried’ together; an essential part of what it is to be a bachelor is to be unmarried.

The problem is that moral truths are neither plausibly immediate nor mediate conceptual truths. If moral truths were immediate, then careful reflection on the constituent concepts would be sufficient to know moral truths, and denial of moral truths would render one guilty of conceptual incompetence. But I’ll show that there is good reason to believe that moral truths do not have either of these marks of immediate conceptual truths. Furthermore, moral disagreement would not be as pervasive as it is if moral truths were immediate. Lastly, seemingly tenable moral theories, in particular, varieties of moral nihilism, would be rendered conceptually impossible. For instance, there would be an argument against the conceptual possibility of *error theory*, the view that there are no true moral propositions because there are no moral facts (in this case, moral concepts) to make moral propositions true. Yet, no such arguments exist and it is widely held that error theory is conceptually possible.

If moral truths were mediate conceptual truths, then there would be an argument composed entirely of immediate conceptual truths which explains and entails any mediate conceptual truth. Thus, the view that moral truths are mediate conceptual truths faces all of the same problems as the view that moral truths are immediate conceptual truths.

I begin with an explanation of the moral fixed points view, as characterized by Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (§2.1). With a working understanding of the proposed view in hand, I then explain the dilemma in detail - that moral truths must be immediate or mediate but there is reason to believe that they are neither (§2.2). In light of this dilemma, I conclude that the essential thesis of the moral fixed points view, *that moral truths are conceptual truths*, is highly dubious (§2.3). Consequently, regardless of its potential explanatory power, the moral fixed points view is highly implausible.

2.1 The Proposal: the Moral Fixed Points View

On Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's view, the moral fixed points are propositions that are made true by the essences of their constituent concepts. To use one of their examples, consider the moral proposition,

(1) It is *pro tanto* wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.

According to traditional forms of Moorean realism, (1) is true in virtue of the fact that acts of recreational slaughter instantiate the *sui generis* property of *being wrong*. The moral fixed points view however entails that the essences of the constituent concepts - the essence of 'being wrong' and the essence of the concept 'recreational slaughter' - determine whether (1) is true or not.¹ Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) elaborate: (1) "is a conceptual truth in case it belongs to the essence of the concept 'being wrong' that, necessarily, if anything satisfies the concept 'recreational slaughter' (of a fellow person) it also satisfies 'being wrong' (in a world sufficiently similar to ours)" (p. 410). Analogously, the proposition ⟨triangles are three-sided⟩ is explained by the fact that it is a part of the essence of the concept 'three-sided' that, necessarily, anything that satisfies the concept 'triangle' also satisfies the concept 'three-sided.' As a general rule, "a proposition that *x* is *F* is a conceptual truth if it belongs to the essence of '*F*' that, necessarily, anything that satisfies '*x*' also satisfies '*F*'" (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, 2014, p. 410).

¹Where the concept 'pro tanto' fits into this analysis, that is, whether it modifies 'wrongness' or the entire proposition, is another question. I return to this topic below.

An adequate characterization of the moral fixed points view requires an explanation of what Cuneo and Shafer-Landau take moral concepts and their essences, and the ‘belong to’ relation, to be. I explain each in turn.

To begin, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) explain the nature of concepts as follows:

[Concepts] are abstract, sharable, mind-independent ways of thinking about objects and their properties. As such, they are very much objective, ‘out there’ sorts of things, extra-mental items whose existence does not depend on our employing them in thought or language. (p. 409)

The notion of a concept’s “essence” is used interchangeably with “nature.” We can gain further insight into the essence or nature of a concept by considering how Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) compare the essences of concepts to the essences of properties:

Now suppose that for every such conceptual truth T, there is a worldly fact that corresponds to it and is constituted by the properties that the concepts constitutive of T express. . . . Notice, however, that even if there were such a fact and it were constituted by the property being wrong, it needn’t belong to the essence of this property that it explains why recreational slaughter of a fellow person must be wrong. . . . there would be no need to, as it already belongs to the essence of the concept ‘being wrong’ to explain why any case of recreational slaughter of a fellow person must be wrong. (pp. 420-421)

On their view, both properties and concepts have essences. Either the essences of properties or concepts can determine and explain the truth of propositions. To use Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s (2014) example, the truth of the proposition \langle it is wrong to impose agony on others solely for personal gain \rangle could be explained in one of two ways. First, it may be explained by the “worldly fact” that it is wrong to impose agony on others solely for personal gain, where worldly facts are any “facts that hold but not solely in virtue of the essences of concepts” (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, 2014, p. 411). Compare the proposition \langle two plus two equals four \rangle to the proposition \langle Marion lives in Chicago \rangle . The former proposition - \langle two plus two equals four \rangle - is arguably a conceptual truth. The nature of the concepts ‘two’, ‘equals’ and ‘four’ explain and entail that the proposition is true. Furthermore, if one grasped these constituent concepts one would understand and know that the proposition is true. Alternatively, the proposition \langle Marion

lives in Chicago〉 is explained by a fact of the world - that a human being named Marion lives in a particular location, namely Chicago. The nature of the concepts ‘Marion’ and ‘Chicago’ do not explain or determine whether the proposition 〈Marion lives in Chicago〉 is true, and reflecting on the nature of the concept ‘Marion’ does not reveal that the person Marion must live in a particular city.

Returning to Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s example, the proposition 〈it is wrong to impose agony on others solely for personal gain〉 may be true in virtue of the fact that the act of imposing agony on others solely for personal gain has the property *being wrong*. Alternatively, the proposition could be true in virtue of the relation between the essences of the constituent concepts - ‘wrong’, ‘agony,’ and so forth.

So the term “essence” indicates a nature, metaphysical makeup or structure of a property; something belongs to the essence of a concept or property insofar as it is a part of the metaphysical nature of that concept or property. In other words, when we understand what *belongs to* the essence of a thing, we understand *what it is to be* that property or concept.

Importantly, on this view, conceptual moral truths are not mere analytic truths or tautologies. An analytic truth is a sentence that is true in virtue of the meaning of its constituent terms. The sentence “all bachelors are unmarried men” is analytic because it is true in virtue of the meaning of the linguistic terms “bachelor” and “unmarried man.” The meaning of the English term “bachelor” simply means “an unmarried man.” A tautology is a sentence or proposition that is trivially true, it is true regardless of the meaning or content of the sentence or proposition. As such, tautologies are not informative or revelatory. For instance, propositions of the form 〈P or not P〉 are tautologies. Even though the proposition 〈it will or will not rain today〉 is true its truth does not depend on worldly facts - whether it actually rains or not. Similarly, the sentence “bachelors are married or unmarried” is tautologous because it is true in virtue of its logical form, and not the meaning of “bachelor” and “unmarried.” Tautologies do not tell us anything about the facts - whether properties are instantiated, the nature of concepts or the linguistic meaning of words. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) deny that conceptual truths are simply analytic truths or

tautological truths:

[A]dvocates of the traditional view typically claim that concepts are the meanings expressed by our words. Still, not all concepts are expressed linguistically. Some we have yet to discover; others may permanently elude us, owing, perhaps, to their complexity. Two things follow: first, conceptual truths are not analytic truths, since the former are propositions while the latter are not. And, second, not all conceptual truths are expressed by analytic truths, even though it might be that all analytic truths express conceptual truths. (p. 411)

Further:

Many philosophers are accustomed to thinking of conceptual truths as formal or vacuous truths that are obvious. Clearly, that is not how we are conceiving of them. We hold that some conceptual truths have substantive content and needn't be obvious. (p. 408)

To summarize, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau propose that if the proposition ⟨it is *pro tanto* wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person⟩ is a conceptual truth, then there is a necessary metaphysical relation between the essences of the constituent concepts. In this case, it belongs to the nature of the concept 'being wrong' that, necessarily, anything that satisfies 'recreational slaughter' also satisfies 'being wrong.' Thus, on their view, conceptual truths need not be trivial or analytic but can be substantive necessary truths.

2.1.1 Pro Tanto Conceptual Truths

Before proceeding to the main argument - that the thesis that moral truths are conceptual truths faces a dilemma - I briefly raise a separate problem which muddies the waters for the moral fixed points view.

Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) propose a set of examples of the moral fixed points, including the following *pro tanto* truths:

- It is *pro tanto* wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.
- It is *pro tanto* wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure.
- It is *pro tanto* wrong torture others just because they have inconvenienced you.

A *pro tanto* truth or principle is one that is morally relevant and contributes to the moral status of the act, event, or object in question, but it is not decisive. If it is a moral truth that it is *pro tanto*

wrong to steal, then this wrongness does not necessarily outweigh all other considerations. It is possible that there are other morally relevant features of the situation which outweigh the moral wrongness of the act. Perhaps it is wrong to steal but also morally obligatory to care for your children by providing them with food. The conjunction of this moral obligation and the non-moral fact that the only way to feed your family is to steal the food may lead to the conclusion that one must steal. Pro tanto truths stand in contrast to *absolute* truths or principles, ones which hold and determine the moral status of the act regardless of any other considerations.

To illustrate further, consider the moral question of whether it is wrong to lie. If it is a moral principle that it is always wrong to lie, the act of lying is sufficient to make the act wrong. A common counterexample to this absolutist principle is a case of Nazis banging on the door and asking whether any Jewish people are hiding in the home. If telling the truth will surely lead to the death of several people, the moral status of the situation is muddled. One must weigh the ethics of lying against the ethics of saving lives. This case suggests that lying is only pro tanto wrong - we have a strong moral reason not to lie but this reason can be outweighed. If lying will save lives, one may have reason to believe that the wrongness of the lie is outweighed by the goodness of saving lives. Hence, a common view is that lying to Nazis to save the lives of innocent Jewish people is the right thing to do. In this case, the pro-tanto wrongness of lying does not succeed in actually making the lie wrong.

The challenge is to explain how one should understand a conceptual truth involving a pro tanto qualifier. Again, they state that, as a “a proposition $\langle x \text{ is } F \rangle$ is a conceptual truth if it belongs to the essence of ‘F’ that, necessarily, anything that satisfies ‘x’ also satisfies ‘F’” (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, 2014, p. 410). The proposition $\langle \text{recreational slaughter is wrong} \rangle$ is a conceptual truth if it belongs to the essence of the concept ‘wrong’ that, necessarily, anything that satisfies ‘recreational slaughter’ (i.e. anything that is an act of recreational slaughter) is ‘wrong.’ This seems intuitive enough, but it is not clear how the concept ‘pro tanto’ fits into this explanation. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau overlook the role of the ‘pro tanto’ qualifier in all of their examples and do not explain how it fits into the conceptual truth. That is, is there a concept ‘pro tanto

wrong’ such that *that* concept belongs to ‘recreational slaughter,’ rather than ‘wrong’? Or does the concept ‘pro tanto’ somehow modify or belong to the entire string ‘recreational slaughter is wrong’?

It is unclear what one is to make of pro tanto conceptual truths. Nonetheless, for the time being, I set this objection to the side and proceed to the main argument.

2.2 A Dilemma

All conceptual truths are either *immediate* or *mediate*. More specifically, a conceptual truth is either true in virtue of the immediate essences of its constituent concepts or in virtue of the mediate or indirect essences of the constituent concepts. The trouble is that moral truths do not fit within either framework and this casts serious doubt on the plausibility of the view that moral truths are conceptual.

2.2.1 Immediate Conceptual Truths

The proposition ⟨bachelors are unmarried⟩ is a good candidate for being an immediate conceptual truth. Notice that reflection on the essences of the constituent concepts, ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried,’ is informative and not tautologous; by grasping what it is to be a bachelor, one understands that bachelors are necessarily unmarried. Importantly, careful reflection *alone* reveals that it belongs to the nature of the concept ‘unmarried’ that, necessarily, anything that satisfies ‘bachelor’ also satisfies ‘unmarried.’

The idea that conceptual truths can be known by solely reflecting on their constituent concepts is widely held. Indeed, Timothy Williamson (2006) elaborates on this characterization of conceptual truths:

A common view is that analytic or conceptual truths are epistemologically unproblematic because whatever cognitive work is necessary for understanding them is somehow already sufficient for knowing them to be true. Thus principles like this are implicitly or explicitly proposed:

UKt Necessarily, whoever grasps the thought that every vixen is a female fox knows that every vixen is a female fox. (p. 2)

Similarly, Frank Jackson (1998) asserts that a conceptual truth is one where “a proper understanding of the concept” (p. 64) at hand is revelatory.

Another quality that makes the proposition ⟨bachelors are unmarried⟩ well-suited to be an immediate conceptual truth is that one cannot deny it without committing a conceptual error. If Sue denies that bachelors are unmarried, she clearly does not fully understand or have the constituent concepts, ‘bachelor’ or ‘unmarried.’ Moral truths that are immediate conceptual truths should have this same quality.

Admittedly, it is possible to have a partial grasp of concepts. I may know that ‘unicorn’ refers to a four-legged animal that resembles a horse and has a single horn on its forehead, but not know that perhaps ‘being white’ or ‘being winged’ are a part of the essence or nature of the concept ‘unicorn.’ In this case, I do not have a complete grasp of the concept ‘unicorn,’ but I surely still have the concept to a significant degree. Likewise, it is possible to have a partial grasp of moral concepts. I may know that if anything satisfies the concept ‘recreational slaughter’ it satisfies the concept ‘being wrong’ but, at the same time, not know that if anything satisfies the concept ‘humiliating others for fun’ it satisfies the concept ‘being wrong.’ Nonetheless, the important point is that even if it is possible to have a partial grasp of concepts, it still follows that to deny a conceptual truth is to commit a conceptual error.

The question then is whether moral truths have these marks of immediate conceptual truths. Can moral truths pass this initial *litmus test* for being immediate conceptual truths - is reflection on the constituent concepts alone sufficient for acquiring knowledge of moral truths?; is there reason to believe that denial of a moral truth is an act of conceptual error? I argue that moral truths do not have these marks of immediate conceptual truths and thus do not pass the initial litmus test.

To motivate the conclusion that moral truths do not have the marks of immediate conceptual truths, return to the example:

- (1) It is pro tanto wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.

Again, if (1) were an immediate conceptual truth, then two things would follow: (i) careful reflection on the constituent concepts, including ‘being wrong’ and ‘recreational slaughter’ (of a

fellow person), would be informative and even reveal or give one reason to believe that the proposition is in fact true; and (ii) to deny the proposition ⟨it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person⟩ would be to commit a conceptual error.

But (1) does not appear to pass these tests. Notice that (1) does not have the same feel as the proposition ⟨bachelors are unmarried⟩. Relying on pure pre-theoretical intuitions, it seems possible that one could simultaneously grasp the concepts ‘being wrong’ and ‘recreational slaughter’ and deny the proposition ⟨it is wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person⟩. No matter how much one considers the nature of the concept ‘being wrong’ and ‘recreational slaughter’ it is not clear that the proposition ⟨it is pro tanto wrong to engage in recreational slaughter of a fellow person⟩ is true. Furthermore, an individual could deny (1) and not be guilty of conceptual error.

If moral truths were immediate conceptual truths, whenever an individual was guilty of incorrectly believing a moral claim to be true (or false), one would first and foremost be guilty of conceptual deficiency. To illustrate, consider two further propositions that Cuneo and Shafer-Landau argue are likely true: ⟨it is pro tanto wrong to torture others just because they have inconvenienced you⟩ or ⟨it is pro tanto wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure⟩. Is it plausible that a person that denies these propositions is guilty of conceptual deficiency? If a person reports that they do not find the humiliation of a person for pleasure alone pro tanto wrong, it would be fair to question her moral character and even her sanity. A very plausible pre-theoretical and intuitive explanation is that this person is cruel and morally bankrupt, not conceptually deficient. But the moral fixed points view leads to the strange consequence that people cannot have the concepts ‘being wrong’ and ‘humiliation of others simply for pleasure’ without believing that they are true. There is no room for both having moral concepts and having false moral beliefs.

A further problem is that if moral truths were immediate conceptual truths, then we would not expect much, if any, deep moral disagreement. Everyone with the same moral concepts would be inclined to agree on moral questions and have the same moral knowledge. Moral disagreement

could ultimately be remedied with conceptual competence. But, again, moral disagreement is ubiquitous and it does not seem that reflection on the concepts helps to alleviate the problem.

Lastly, the moral fixed points is incompatible with the conceptual possibility of error theory and moral nihilism more broadly. Consider error theory. Like traditional moral non-naturalists, error theorists accept that, to be true, moral propositions are true in virtue of sui generis entities - concepts, properties, or so forth. However, error theorists deny that there are any such moral properties or concepts, and hence deny that there are any true moral propositions.² But, if the moral fixed points view were true, error theory would be *conceptually impossible*. That is, it would be conceptually necessary that there are moral truths. Furthermore, those that denied moral truths would not have (or fully have) moral concepts; most notably, seeing that error theorists and moral nihilists deny all moral truths, they would be guilty of a grave, systemic form of conceptual deficiency.

If moral truths were immediate conceptual truths then all of the resources one would need to make a knockdown argument against error theory would be at our hands. One would only need conceptual competence to know moral truths; in particular, simply reflecting on the essences of the constituent concepts of moral truths would be sufficient to have knowledge of moral truths. But if it's that simple, why haven't we seen such an argument yet? What's keeping the philosopher, the ethicist, or the average person from being competent with moral concepts?

Cuneo and Shafer-Landau foresee the objection to an extent. They openly acknowledge that their view entails that error theorists are guilty of conceptual deficiency. However, they assure error theorists that, "having been convinced by sophisticated, albeit unsound, philosophical arguments," (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, 2014, p. 438) it is understandable that they have been lead astray. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) explain:

[W]e do find the error theorists methodology problematic. The mistake that error

²Note that error theorists can theoretically admit that there are moral concepts as long as these concepts are not 'out there,' metaphysically or ontologically committal sorts of entities. Seeing that Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) explicitly state that their "view is not intended to be 'metaphysically light' but ontologically committed, implying the existence of an array of robust nonnatural truths" (p. 400), error theorists cannot admit the sort of moral concepts proposed by Cuneo and Shafer-Landau.

theorists make, in our view, is not simply a failure to appreciate or acknowledge certain conceptual truths. It also consists in rejecting highly evident first-order moral propositions . . . on the basis of either highly controversial metaethical claims or speculative empirical claims. (p. 438)

Seeing that assessing philosophical arguments is difficult, error theorists are not guilty of making a “silly or obvious” mistake; rather, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau assure error theorists that they should take comfort in knowing that anyone could have just as easily made the same mistake.

However, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau do not seem to admit the full extent of the consequences of their view. They do not go so far as to concede that error theorists on their view are conceptually deficient all of the time. Furthermore, they do not address the argument that if the moral fixed points view were correct and moral truths were immediate we would have a clear argument against the conceptual possibility of error theory.

To summarize, it is unclear how one could make sense of conceptual truths about pro tanto claims. But, even if proponents of the moral fixed points view could overcome this challenge, the litmus test undermines the view that moral truths are immediate conceptual truths. Furthermore, one would expect that moral disagreement is not pervasive. Lastly, this view has the counterintuitive consequence that seemingly tenable moral theories are conceptually impossible. In what follows, I argue that the alternative is no better. If moral truths are not immediate conceptual truths then they must be mediate conceptual truths. But, as I argue, mediate conceptual truths are just as problematic.

2.3 Immediate Conceptual Truths, Again

If moral truths are not immediate, they must be mediate. Consider again the example,

(1) It is pro tanto wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.

If (1) is a mediate conceptual truth, then the immediate essences of ‘recreational slaughter’ and ‘being wrong’ do not fully explain why (1) is true. Careful reflection on the nature of the constituent concepts does not reveal the fact that (1) is true, rather (1) must be explained by a series of chains between the essences of concepts. Hence, one must look beyond the immediate

essences of the concepts ‘being wrong’ and ‘recreational slaughter’ to determine that (1) is true. For example, assume for the sake of argument that the following propositions are immediate conceptual truths:

(2) Recreational slaughter of a fellow person causes harm to a person.

(3) It is *pro tanto* wrong to cause harm to a person.

If (2) and (3) were immediate conceptual truths, one could fully explain the fact that recreational slaughter is wrong by these propositions. The reason that the proposition ⟨it is *pro tanto* wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person⟩ is true is twofold: (i) it belongs to the essence of the concept ‘being wrong’ that anything that satisfies ‘causes harm to a person’ also satisfies ‘being wrong’; and (ii) it belongs to the essence of the concept ‘causes harm to a person’ that anything that satisfies ‘recreational slaughter of a fellow person’ also satisfies ‘causes harm to a person.’ Thus, by transitivity, it belongs to the mediate essence of the concept ‘being wrong’ that, necessarily, anything that satisfies ‘recreational slaughter of a fellow person’ also satisfies ‘being wrong.’

As this example shows, if a moral claim is a mediate conceptual truth, it must be true in virtue of some immediate conceptual truths. Accordingly, for any mediate conceptual truth there should be a set of immediate conceptual truths that entail it; that is, there must be some available argument, composed of relatively non-controversial immediate conceptual truths for that claim. But where are they? Why don’t they give them? And without them, what evidence could one have that it’s a mediate conceptual truth? As argued in the previous section, the prospect of moral truths being immediate conceptual truths is highly dubious.

To make matters even worse, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau stipulate that the moral fixed points and thus the mediate moral truths are *substantive*. To use Christian Coons’s (2011) characterization, one can understand a substantive or “substantial” moral claim as a claim that “(1) can be denied without immediate contradiction, and (2) attribute valenced moral properties (e.g., *being right*, *being wrong* *being what you morally ought (or ought not) to do*, *being good*,

being bad, being supererogatory, being evil, being just) to actual objects or object-types non-normatively described” (p. 84). Coons explains that a valenced moral property is one that entails a normative reason to do or not to do some act. For example, claims about morality, such as, “ought implies can” or conditional moral claims, such as, “sex without consent is wrong, if anything is,” are not substantive because they are compatible with moral nihilism. In contrast, moral claims such as “intentionally terminating a pregnancy is bad,” “sex without consent is wrong,” and “people ought to give ten percent of their wages to the church” are substantive.

The challenge is that substantive moral truths can only be derived from other substantive moral truths. Thus, if there are substantive, mediate moral truths then there must be substantive, immediate moral truths. And there is very little reason to believe that moral truths are both substantive and immediate. To clarify, the argument is formalized as follows:

(P1) There are substantive mediate moral truths.

(P2) For any mediate moral truth, x , there is a set of immediate moral truths that explain and entail x .

(P3) A substantive moral truth must be deduced from a substantive moral truth.

Therefore, there are substantive immediate moral truths.

(P1) is an assumption of the argument. Again, substantive moral claims, if true, tell us how one ought to live and entail normative reasons to do or not do particular acts. (P2) follows from what it is to be a mediate conceptual truth. As it has already been explained, mediate conceptual truths entail chains between numerous concepts. The proposition $\langle \text{Socrates is mortal} \rangle$ is a mediate conceptual truth because it does not belong to the immediate essence of Socrates to be mortal. The fact that Socrates is mortal is explained by the following chain of essences of concepts: it belongs to the immediate essence of Socrates to be a human being, and it belongs to the immediate essence of a human being to be mortal.

The premise that a substantive moral claim must be deduced from a further substantive moral claim, (P3), is relatively noncontroversial.³ At a minimum, the burden is on proponents of the counterintuitive view that non-substantive moral claims could entail substantive moral claims to defend this claim. Furthermore, all moral claims are either substantive or non-substantive and there is good reason to believe that substantive moral claims cannot be deduced from non-substantive moral claims. Consider the general supervenience thesis,

GENERAL: that the moral *supervenies on* the non-moral.

It is widely held that GENERAL is an immediate conceptual truth because it can be known by reflecting on the immediate essence of the concept ‘morality’ or ‘the moral.’⁴ The concept ‘morality’ allegedly reveals that the moral cannot float freely in the world and, in turn, motivates the conclusion that GENERAL is a conceptual truth. David Enoch (2011) explains:

It is conceptually impossible for there to be a normative difference without a natural one. We can support this claim by reflecting on our responses to a hypothetical speaker who professed to reject general supervenience, or whose specific judgments seemed to constantly violate general supervenience - we would be inclined to treat her as using the relevant terms in some non-standard way. (p. 149)

In addition to being immediate, GENERAL is non-substantive. GENERAL is a metaethical principle that offers insight to the nature of morality but does not involve any specific instantiation of moral properties. Knowing that the moral supervenes on the non-moral does not entail that anything is actually right or wrong, just as knowing that unicorns have one horn does not tell us anything about whether unicorns actually exist. Consequently, it is compatible with moral nihilism.

³Few philosophers have argued otherwise. Christian Coons and Michael Huemer offer parallel arguments that one can infer substantive moral facts from the possibility of non-substantive moral facts. See Coons (2011) and Huemer (2013).

⁴The general supervenience thesis is also commonly characterized as the thesis that moral entities supervene on natural rather than non-moral entities. See (Enoch, 2011, p. 142). When determining how one ought to characterize the general supervenience thesis, it is critical that any characterization uphold the essential tenet of Moorean realism that moral entities are metaphysically *sui generis* and so unlike any other kind of entity, including the class of subvenient entities or the class of entities on which they supervene. By using the term “non-moral” in place of “natural,” we avoid the need to distinguish natural from non-natural entities and adhere to the key idea that moral entities supervene on, or are necessarily coextensive with, entities of a different category, whatever that category may be. Furthermore, the class of non-moral entities includes but is not limited to the class of natural entities.

The same goes for other non-substantive moral claims. Consider the widely held principle *ought implies can*. Without the addition of a further substantive moral claim, how could this principle alone be used to infer a substantive moral principle?

The prospect of the view that moral truths are mediate conceptual truths is as problematic as the alternative view that moral truths are immediate conceptual truths. In the end, the mistake is to believe that concept fundamentalists can avoid immediate (moral) conceptual truths. If moral truths are conceptual, then at least some moral truths will be immediate and this is problematic.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

Cuneo and Shafer-Landau set out to defend the moral fixed points view, a form of Moorean realism that is allegedly metaphysically and epistemically advantageous to traditional renditions. However, the essential tenet of the proposed view - that moral truths are conceptual - is dubious. As conceptual truths, moral truths would have to be either immediate or mediate but there is good reason to believe that they are neither. Immediate conceptual truths should pass a litmus test and have the 'marks' commonly found in conceptual truths, such as, to deny a conceptual truth is to be conceptually incompetent, or reasonable reflection on a concept should lead to knowledge of that concept. But moral truths do not have these qualities. We would also rightly expect to see much less pervasive moral disagreement and decisive evidence against error theory and moral nihilism more broadly. But we do not have such arguments.

It is more likely that moral truths are mediate conceptual truths. This would explain why one is not guilty of conceptual incompetence when they deny a moral truth, it is difficult to gain knowledge of moral truths, and so on. But if moral truths are mediate conceptual truths, then there must be some available argument composed entirely of immediate, substantive conceptual truths for the mediate conceptual truths, and this is implausible.

Given the implicit resources needed to motivate either mediate or immediate conceptual truths, if moral truths were either variety of conceptual truths, we should have arrived at more support for this view by now. In light of these arguments, there is good reason to believe that moral truths are not conceptual and, in turn, that the moral fixed points view is false.

CHAPTER 3 THE IDEAL DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

A common assumption is that divine command theory just is *classical divine command theory*, the view that moral obligation is constituted by what “God” - the god as characterized by classical theism - actually commands. According to classical theism, God exists in actuality, and is *supremely perfect* or *a being than which no greater can be conceived*.¹ Such a being is essentially omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, and is the creator and sustainer of the universe. But Wes Morriston argues that divine command theory is more plausible if one takes God’s actual existence out of the picture. That is, rather than the ontological ground for morality being constituted by God’s *actual* commands and character, Morriston (2012) suggests that obligations and values are constituted by what God *would* command or would be like:

Here is another option. It is a variant of the ideal spectator theory. Even an atheist might consistently identify duties with commands that *would* be given by a perfect being. . . . Interestingly, such an account fits nicely with Craig’s claim that God’s commands ‘flow necessarily from’ his perfect moral nature. Even by his lights, there must be a fact of the matter about what a being possessing a perfect moral nature *would* command if there were such a being. Once again, it turns out that the actual *existence* of God makes no difference to the ontological foundation of morality. (pp. 31-32)

If divine command theory could take the form of a kind of ideal agent theory, as Morriston suggests, then moral obligations would be constituted by counterfactuals - truths about what a non-existent, perfect being *would* command rather than what a perfect being does in fact command.² I call this view *ideal divine command theory*. For brevity, I will refer to ideal divine command theory as “IDEAL COMMAND” and classical divine command theory as “ACTUAL COMMAND.”

There is a compelling case to be made for IDEAL COMMAND. The view initially seems to offer all of the benefits of classical divine command theory (or ACTUAL COMMAND) without

¹Classical theism is commonly associated with the work of St. Anselm. See Anselm (1965), Descartes (1993).

²Compare this to other forms of ideal agent theories or “idealizing views,” including those of Roderick Firth, Bernard Williams, Peter Railton and David Lewis. See Firth (1952), Railton (1986), Williams (2011), Lewis (1989).

some of its drawbacks. Like the classical form of divine command theory, IDEAL COMMAND entails that morality is objective in the sense that moral truths are not contingent on or constituted by social norms or what individuals actually prefer, believe or desire. Neither view falls prey to J.L. Mackie's argument from queerness, that there are brute or ontologically independent moral facts that have the inexplicable authority to dictate how we ought to live our lives. Unlike classical divine command theory, IDEAL COMMAND is consistent with a naturalistic ontology. The view does not entail that God exists, and so proponents need only posit "natural" entities - objects, qualities, and relations which are studied and invoked by the sciences.³ Furthermore, moral truths are not dependent on the existence of God and so, contrary to ACTUAL COMMAND, moral nihilism does not follow if God does not exist. That is, IDEAL COMMAND respects the strongly held intuition that even if God didn't exist we would still be inclined to say and believe that certain moral truths hold - that the recreational slaughter of a person is wrong, that Hitler was evil, or that humiliating others for fun is cruel, to name a few. IDEAL COMMAND thus offers objective, non-queer, moral truths without having to accept non-naturalism or even theism.

Why *not* accept IDEAL COMMAND over ACTUAL COMMAND? Upon closer examination, I'll argue that it becomes clear that IDEAL COMMAND is far less attractive than ACTUAL COMMAND. I begin in §3.1 with a characterization of the two aforementioned versions of divine command theory: classical and ideal divine command theory (ACTUAL COMMAND and IDEAL COMMAND, respectively). I'll further explain the appeal of IDEAL COMMAND (§3.2). Most notably, the view is consistent with there being objective moral truths within a naturalistic ontology and it upholds the strongly held intuition that moral truth does not depend on God's existence. However, IDEAL COMMAND faces significant problems (§3.3). I first argue that it is conceivable that a perfectly good God could make one of several commands in a given circumstance and at a particular world, and thus it is possible that God's commands are indeterminate. This possibility raises a dilemma:

³I here follow David Enoch, Terence Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau and rely on a piecemeal characterization of "natural." Enoch maintains that something is "natural" if the usual sciences invoke it, and Cuneo and Shafer-Landau use ostension to identify clear examples of "natural" versus "non-natural" properties or entities. Starting with clear examples and the usual sciences one can begin to fill in a sufficiently thorough distinction of natural and non-natural properties. See Enoch (2011) and Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014).

either there are no moral facts or moral facts are disjunctive. If there are no moral facts, then moral nihilism and skepticism ensue. The only alternative is for moral facts to be disjunctive, but this result is counterintuitive and violates the conceptual truth that to be morally obligated to x one must be capable of failing to do x . I call this *the indeterminacy dilemma*.

A further challenge is *the authority problem*. It is widely held that moral facts and truths have the unique quality of having *moral authority* or *bindingness*, that is, they “make claims on us . . . [and] when we invoke them, we make claims on one another” (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 8). We thus treat moral facts and truths as reasonable sources of guidance for how we ought to live our lives and which actions are right, obligatory, or impermissible. But there are several reasons to believe that hypothetical commands are not authoritative or, at a minimum, less authoritative than actual commands. First, I use examples to motivate the idea that hypothetical commands do not matter in the same way that actual commands. Furthermore, the most common arguments for the authority of God’s commands appeal to the fact that God is the enforcer of moral laws, that God is the creator or sustainer of all, or to the fact that God’s commands are made within the context of a valuable relationship between a loving God and mankind. But if God does not exist, then these explanations cannot explain why God’s hypothetical commands are authoritative.

Lastly, an essential feature of a divine nature is being the creator and sustainer of all, but, if ideal divine command theorists are correct, God does not exist and so does not create or sustain the actual world. This essential attribute of God plays no plausible role in IDEAL COMMAND and hence the view should not be regarded as a form of divine command theory at all. This is what I call *the essential attributes problem*.

To summarize, IDEAL COMMAND threatens moral nihilism and skepticism in all worlds, and could only potentially avoid the problem by violating a conceptual truth about obligation. It cannot explain the authority of morality as well as ACTUAL COMMAND, and even to the extent that it does, it does not appeal to essential features of the divine nature. Thus, it does not appear to qualify as a genuine version of divine command theory. I conclude that the sum of these challenges - the indeterminacy dilemma, the authority problem and the essential attributes

problem - undermines the appeal and plausibility of IDEAL COMMAND (§3.4).

3.1 Two Kinds of Divine Command Theory

Both classical and ideal divine command theory are *response-dependent* theories. In particular, the nature of moral obligations and values is ontologically dependent on the response of some agent - God. Yet, classical and ideal divine command theories offer different accounts of the ontological foundation of morality. In the case of classical divine command theory, whether there are moral obligations and values depends on whether God actually exists (and makes commands); whereas, ideal divine command theory entails that moral obligations and values depend on the counterfactual existence of God.

Classical divine command theorists typically hold the following two theses:

COMMAND: moral obligation *just is* what God commands.

GOOD: being good *just is* resemblance to God's nature.⁴

According to COMMAND and GOOD, God's character and commands stand in a constitution relation to goodness and moral obligation respectively. William Alston (2002) explains that we should think of "God himself, the individual being, as the supreme standard of goodness" (p. 291). Furthermore, goodness is explanatorily prior to the right. That is, God's nature informs and shapes God's commands. To use William Lane Craig's words, "commands flow necessarily from his moral nature" (Kurtz & Craig, 2009, p. 30). Craig explains the constitution relations between God's nature and moral values, and God's commands and moral obligations as follows:

On the theistic view, objective moral values are rooted in God. He is the locus and source of moral value. God's own holy and loving nature supplies the absolute standard against which all actions are measured. He is by nature loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so forth. Thus if God exists, objective moral values exist. (Kurtz & Craig, 2009, p. 30)

⁴Broadly speaking, Robert Adams, William Alston, and William Lane Craig each defend a version of this view. In addition to accepting that moral obligations are constituted by God's commands and moral values are constituted by God's nature, each form of classical divine command theory entails that goodness is prior to moral obligation. That is, God's commands are a product of his nature. See Adams (2002), Alston (2002) and Kurtz (2009).

And,

On the account I suggest, the Good is determined paradigmatically by God's own character. Just as a meter was once defined paradigmatically as the length of an iridium bar housed in the Bureau des Poids et des Mesures in Paris, so moral values are determined by the paradigm of God's holy and loving character. God's character is not malleable, as is a metal bar; indeed, on classical theism it is essential to him. Moreover, since according to classical theism, God exists necessarily, his nature can serve to ground necessary moral truths. (Kurtz & Craig, 2009, pp. 169-170)

A few important points of clarification. First, classical divine command theory entails that God is "God" according to classical theism or the monotheistic, Judeo-Christian traditions. Consider Saint Anselm's characterization of God's nature and attributes as found in the *Proslogion*. Anselm (1965) argues that God is *the greatest conceivable being* or *that than which no greater can be conceived*. From the concept of the greatest conceivable being, Anselm and subsequent Christians have maintained that God must be, among other things, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, self-existent, and the creator and sustainer of all things. Second, ACTUAL COMMAND is compatible with the existence of necessary moral truths because goodness is constituted by God's nature and God is a necessary being with an essential or immutable nature. Furthermore, an implication of ACTUAL COMMAND is that moral truths depend on God's actual existence or that God exists *in actuality*. If there are any obligations, God actually exists, not as a merely possible, fictional or mythological entity. If God does not exist, then classical divine command theory entails there are no moral obligations or values. As Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote, "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted."

In contrast to classical divine command theory, ideal command theory may be characterized by a commitment to the following two claims:

COMMAND*: moral obligation *just is* what God *would* command.

GOOD: being good *just is* resemblance to God's nature.

According to IDEAL COMMAND, an agent's nature and counterfactual commands act as the truthmakers for moral claims. What one ought to do just is what God would command, and what

is good just is resemblance to God's nature.⁵ Proponents of IDEAL COMMAND can accept GOOD because God need not exist in actuality for one to be capable of conceiving of God's nature and, in turn, for something to resemble God's nature. This is no more controversial than the view that other fictional objects, such as, unicorns or Harry Potter, have natures that one can conceive of and objects can resemble more or less. One can conceive of what it is to be a unicorn or the essential attributes of being a unicorn and for this reason it is widely held that horses can resemble unicorns in some respects (e.g., being four-legged and having mane and tail) and not in others (e.g., lacking a horn or being unable to fly). In the same vein, if the essential attributes or nature of a fictional God are conceivable, then things can resemble God's nature more or less.

3.2 Why Ideal Divine Command Theory?

IDEAL COMMAND seems to offer all of the advantages of classical divine command theory and more. Like ACTUAL COMMAND, ideal divine command theory entails that moral truths are *objective*; that is, true moral claims neither depend on nor are constituted by social norms or an individual's actual (other than God's) desires, beliefs or preferences. Admittedly, divine command theory entails that God's character and commands are the truthmakers for moral claims, but surely God's attitudes and nature are significantly different from humans'. As Gerald Harrison (2015) states, "god's view confers an objectivity on moral claims as robust as that conferred by the more standard naturalist and non-naturalist views" (p. 109). As such, IDEAL COMMAND respects the widely held intuition that moral values, whatever they are, do not change simply because we change our attitudes. Rather, "Normative facts are out there, subsisting independently of us" (Blackburn, 1985, p. 9).

IDEAL COMMAND also manages to offer moral truths that are objective in this sense yet also

⁵Note that it is logically possible to be both a theist and an ideal divine command theorist. The question of whether God exists is distinct from what makes moral claims true. However, it is not clear what reason one would have to believe that God exists and at the same time maintain that one ought to do what God would command rather than what God actually commands. Why prioritize God's hypothetical commands over his actual commands? Perhaps this view is only plausible if God exists but is silent and so does not command anything. Though in this case it might be more feasible to believe that moral obligations do not exist, especially given that the arguments in this paper raise several problems with hypothetical commands and thus cast serious doubt on the view that moral obligation is constituted by what God would command.

not objectionably strange or “queer.” In his *argument from queerness*, J.L. Mackie (1977) argued that there is something especially troubling about objective values and principles. Because objective values would have the queer, utterly different and inexplicable quality of “to-be-pursuedness,” they would be “entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe” (Mackie, 1977, p. 29). In particular, objective values, if they exist, have the unique trait of being *categorical*:

So far as ethics is concerned, my thesis that there are no objective values is specifically the denial that any such categorically imperative element is objectively valid. The objective values which I am denying would be action-guiding absolutely, not contingently (in the way indicated) upon the agents desires and inclinations. (Mackie, 1977, p. 29)

Objective values are metaphysically *brute facts* - whether they obtain does not depend on other states of affairs obtaining - yet they have the unique power to mandate individuals’ lives, regardless of their motivations, desires, beliefs, or preferences. Harrison (2015) echoes the queerness of objective values:

[W]e are getting a landscape made of extra mental favourings. The problem is that landscapes are dead, lifeless things that can no more care about what we do or what happens than a pebble can. That seems as true of a non-natural landscape as of a natural one. In short, then, morality seems to do things only an agent can do: it favours and instructs. (pp. 121-122)

The argument from queerness is not just a metaphysical challenge. Given that objective values are metaphysically unique and causally impotent, it is unclear how one could possibly have knowledge of them. Mackie (1977) points out that “if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else” (p. 29).

Interestingly, Mackie (1982) proceeds to argue that brute objective values would be so queer that theism and the view that God is the source of morality is more plausible: “objective intrinsically prescriptive features, supervening upon natural ones, constitute so odd a cluster of qualities and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events,

without an all-powerful god to create them” (p. 115). And, at greater length, he acknowledges:

[T]he objectivist may have recourse to the purpose of God: the true purpose of human life is fixed by what God intended (or, intends) men to do and to be. Actual human strivings and satisfactions have some relation to this true end because God made men for this end and made them such as to pursue it - but only *some* relation, because of the inevitable imperfection of created beings. (Mackie, 1977, p. 48).

Both classical and ideal divine command theory thus offer a solution to Mackie’s argument from queerness. Rather than posit brute objective values, the nature of God and God’s commands (hypothetical or actual) explain the authority and categoricity of moral truths. Furthermore, epistemic access or knowledge of moral facts does not require a special faculty or intuition. It is possible that one could use reflection on God’s nature or divine revelation to gain knowledge of moral facts. Divine command theory entails that moral values and obligations are explicable.

IDEAL COMMAND offers the same objective and categorical moral truths as ACTUAL COMMAND, without having to pay the cost of positing a supernatural or non-natural entity into one’s ontology. Thus, it is compatible with a naturalistic ontology whereby the only entities that exist are compatible with and invoked by the usual sciences. In contrast, classical divine command theory entails that there are properties and entities that are not natural, in particular, supernatural properties. As such, ACTUAL COMMAND has the drawback of being incompatible with a naturalistic ontology.

ACTUAL COMMAND also entails the counterintuitive consequence that if God does not exist, then moral nihilism is true. It is a widely held intuition that, even if God did not exist, surely there would still be facts about what is morally right and wrong, or good and bad.⁶ Torturing babies for fun *must be wrong*. Full stop. The pre-theoretical intuition that such moral truths must hold is often used to infer that morality must not depend on God’s existence; even if God did not exist, these moral claims or propositions would still be true. But this is not an option for proponents of ACTUAL COMMAND. Moral truths depend on the existence of God and thus if God does not

⁶This view is not strictly speaking “atheist.” Many theists hold this position too. For instance, theist and philosopher, Richard Swinburne, argues that moral truths are not ontologically dependent on God and so we do not need God to exist for there to be moral truth. See Swinburne (2009).

exist, neither do moral truths. IDEAL COMMAND has the benefit of avoiding nihilism if God does not exist. Moral truths exist even if God does not.

So IDEAL COMMAND seems to give us everything we want and nothing we do not. It offers a naturalist-friendly account of morality that is objective and categorical in just the same way as ACTUAL COMMAND, all while respecting the widely held intuition that moral truths exist even if God did not.

3.3 Objections to Ideal Divine Command Theory

Ideal divine command theory looks promising. But upon closer examination, it is not a superior version of divine command theory. Herein I raise three arguments against IDEAL COMMAND: I call them respectively, the indeterminacy dilemma, the authority problem, and the essential attributes problem.

3.3.1 The Indeterminacy Dilemma

According to IDEAL COMMAND, moral obligations are constituted by God's hypothetical or counterfactual commands. The viability of the view thus depends on there being counterfactual or hypothetical commands of God and, importantly, these commands must be *determinate* or unique. In order for Joe to be morally obligated to donate to Oxfam in circumstance, C, at world, A, there must be a fact of the matter that a supremely perfect God *would* command Joe to donate to Oxfam in C at A. The following claim must be true:

DETERMINE: God's commands are determinate.⁷

DETERMINE entails that for any particular context there is a unique command that God would make. If DETERMINE were false, then God's commands would be indeterminate and consequently there would be different sets of commands issued by God in worlds otherwise qualitatively identical to A. In the case of Joe, God would not make a unique command in C at A

⁷Note that I assume that God's commands must be indexed or fixed within a context - set to a particular individual, circumstance, world, time, and so on. Thus, when I refer to the counterfactual commands of God throughout the remainder of the paper - "the commands that God would make" - I assume that the commands are indexed to some set of circumstances.

and, consequently, there would be no moral fact about what Joe ought to do in that situation.

The challenge is that it is logically possible and even plausible that a perfectly good God's commands are indeterminate and thus DETERMINATE is false.⁸ But if God's commands are indeterminate, then proponents of IDEAL COMMAND face a dilemma: either there are no moral facts or moral facts are disjunctive. If there were no facts about what God would command, then there would not be any moral facts and moral nihilism and skepticism would follow.

Alternatively, moral facts may exist but be disjunctive. Not only is the idea of disjunctive moral facts questionable, this view entails that one must deny the conceptual truth that to be morally obligated to x one must be capable of failing to x . This is *the indeterminacy dilemma*.

God's essential nature "fixes" his commands so that they are not arbitrary. However, this fact does not preclude the possibility that God's commands are indeterminate. Having an essential nature is consistent with having indeterminate commands. It is conceivable that a perfectly good God could weigh values differently in a given circumstance. To see this, consider *Saving a Life*:

A woman is five months pregnant when she discovers that she has an aggressive, life-threatening form of cancer. The doctors warn her that if she does not start treatment soon she will likely succumb to the disease in the near future. However, there is a high probability that with treatment the woman will significantly benefit or maybe even be cured from the cancer. Unfortunately, the treatment would likely result in the termination of her pregnancy and the fetus is not far enough along to be viable outside of the womb.

It is hard to know what a perfectly good God would command in such a situation.⁹ It is conceivable that a good God would command the woman not to abort her baby because it is

⁸If God's commands are indeterminate, then moral properties cannot supervene on natural properties. Rather, moral obligations and values supervene on God's nature and commands. It follows that it is possible that two worlds that are identical in all natural respects may differ morally. So long as it is possible that God can make different commands in a particular situation then it is possible that moral obligations also can differ in that particular circumstance. (This is also assuming that neither God's nature nor commands count as part of the natural world.) The interesting question is whether this leads to an arbitrariness problem. Notice that God's commands would still be constrained or fixed by God's nature - God's nature is essential to him and cannot change. Arguably, as long as God's nature is essential, then the set of possible commands is constrained and also a product of who God is. God's commands are not arbitrary or without direction or purpose. Perhaps God's nature is arbitrary insofar as it is brute, but all moral theories depend on some brute facts. The more important question is which stopping points are objectionably brute and which are acceptable. Of course, this topic warrants more attention than I have the space to give it here.

⁹It is of course possible that God may not command anything in certain ethical dilemmas. Perhaps all one has is the general moral obligation to respect moral values. Nonetheless, this test case motivates the greater point that it is logically possible that God's commands are indeterminate.

taking the life of an unborn child. It is also conceivable God's love and compassion for the sick woman is so great that God would not command her not to abort the baby. It is surely logically possible that a perfectly good God could make one of numerous commands in this circumstance and each of them be consistent with his nature. The takeaway is that our conceivability of God's goodness does not give us reason to believe that there is only one answer for what God would command. Meditation on God's nature alone won't seem to ever resolve this issue. The indeterminacy of God's commands is thus a live possibility and, importantly, problems like these threaten the idea that IDEAL COMMAND is compatible with having moral knowledge. Indeed, Robert Adams (2002) echoes this problem:

I do not believe that there is a unique set of commands that would be issued by any supremely good God. Some commands, surely, could not issue from a perfectly good being; but there are some things that such a deity might command and might not command. This is most obvious, perhaps, where religious ceremonies are concerned. Many people believe they are under divine commands to perform certain rituals. Few of them would claim that any supremely good God must have commanded everyone, or someone, to perform those particular rituals. Something similar may be true of more controversial cases. It is not obvious to me, for example, that there is not a diversity of principles regarding euthanasia that could have been commanded by a supremely good God; perhaps different weightings of the importance of preventing suffering as compared with other values at stake would be possible for such a deity. (pp. 255-256)

It is also conceivable that God's commands are not determinate because different acts or commands realize the same moral values. For instance, consider "the perfect parent." The perfect parent desires that his or her teenager, Susie, develops a good work ethic and learns to take responsibility. It is conceivable that the perfect parent may demand that Susie do one of several things: get a job, join more extracurricular activities, or perform more household chores. Any of these requirements seem compatible with being the perfect parent because each one is compatible with the perfect parent's values and goals: developing responsibility and a good work ethic.

One might press the question, *but is it probable that God's commands are indeterminate?* Even if it is a logical possibility that God's commands are indeterminate, this is not a real threat as long as it is probable that God's commands are in fact determinate. This question may be a bit

confused. If it is logically possible that God's commands are indeterminate, then there is a logically possible world where God commands differently in two otherwise identical worlds. Furthermore, the fact that there is a possible world where God's commands are indeterminate plus the fact that God does not actually exist makes it such that there is no way for proponents of IDEAL COMMAND to avoid indeterminate commands. Proponents of IDEAL COMMAND must either argue that it is not logically possible that God's commands are indeterminate or explain why the fact that God's commands are indeterminate is not troubling.¹⁰ If I am right that it is logically possible that God's commands are indeterminate, the burden is on ideal divine command theorists to provide a compelling explanation of the nature of moral obligations.

There is good reason to believe that if God's commands are possibly indeterminate, moral nihilism and skepticism follow from IDEAL COMMAND. Consider the *Saving a Life* case. As long as God could make one of numerous commands, there would be no particular fact of the matter about what God would command and, in turn, no moral fact about what one ought to do. Without moral facts, moral nihilism and skepticism ensue.

Proponents of IDEAL COMMAND might try to salvage their view by arguing that moral facts are disjunctive. Recall the perfect parent example. The parent may command their child to do one of three things: get a job, join more extracurricular activities, or do more chores. Though there is no unique fact about what the perfect parent would command, there might be a disjunctive fact: the fact that the perfect parent would command their child to get a job or to join more extracurricular activities or to do more chores. Analogously, proponents of IDEAL COMMAND might argue that, even though God's commands are indeterminate, there are disjunctive facts

¹⁰It is worth noting that classical theism provides reason to believe that God's commands are indeterminate. Consider the role of intercessory prayer, a form of prayer that is intended to and allegedly has a causal effect on the world. Theologians have argued that through intercessory prayer God has given mankind the dignity of partaking in creation and being *co-laborers with God*. See Pascal and Trotter (2010). An implication of this characterization of intercessory prayer is that humans have the capacity to in some sense "change the mind of God." (Note that the idea of changing God's mind is a sort of anthropomorphism and does not necessarily commit one to the view that God does not have foreknowledge. Perhaps God took the non-actualized prayer of a person into account when choosing which of the possible worlds to actualize and which course of events to play out.) If one's prayer has a causal effect on the course of events, then it follows that there was a given event or circumstance that was selected or considered by a perfectly good God and would have occurred had an individual not prayed. In light of the individual's prayer, a different circumstance or event occurred. This view of intercessory prayer suggests that it is possible for a perfectly good God to choose or will more than one action, event, state of affairs, or even commands.

about what God would command in any given circumstance.

But this view quickly runs into problems. In the *Saving a Life* case there would be the strange disjunctive moral obligation to abort the baby or not abort the baby. But the very concept of a ‘moral obligation’ may be incompatible with being disjunctive. Moral obligations are *demanding* and have *force*. To say that I have a moral obligation to do x , is to say that I am blameworthy for not doing x ; to uphold a moral obligation is to be praiseworthy. A disjunctive moral obligation does not have the same ‘feel’ or ‘mark’ of demandingness. The problem is made salient in light of the possibility that God could command x or not x . It would then follow that,

(1) S is morally obligated either to X or not to X.

(1) highlights a serious concern with IDEAL COMMAND. If God’s commands are indeterminate and it is conceivable that God could command either x or not x in a particular situation, then one could have a moral obligation either to do or not do a given action. And this is what the *Saving a Life* case motivates - that there are cases where God could possibly command x or not x ; it is conceivable that one could be morally obligated to either have an abortion or not have an abortion. But, the concept of ‘morally obligated’ to do x is incompatible with being unable to do x . One could not be praiseworthy for doing what they had to do, rather, it is a conceptual truth that to be morally obligated to x one must be capable of failing to x . IDEAL COMMAND entails that one must deny this conceptual truth and deny the deeply held understanding of the concept ‘moral obligation.’

To summarize, it is conceivable that God’s commands are indeterminate. As a result, IDEAL COMMAND faces a dilemma: there are no moral facts or moral facts are disjunctive. One might bite the bullet and accept that there are no moral facts, but then moral nihilism and skepticism follow. Alternatively, one may try to salvage moral facts by defending disjunctive moral facts. But a serious cost of this view is having to deny a conceptual truth - that to be ‘morally obligated’ to do something one must be capable of failing to do it.

Proponents of ideal divine command theory might argue that even though their view faces the indeterminacy dilemma, the fact that God’s commands are possibly indeterminate highlights a

problem with classical divine command theory. In particular, if God's commands are indeterminate, then the moral does not supervene on the natural. God could command that a particular natural state of affairs - such as, wearing purple at a particular religious ceremony - is wrong in one world but permissible in another. Proponents of ACTUAL COMMAND must accept that God's commands do not supervene on or are not necessarily coextensive with particular states of affairs.

Two important points are in order. First, IDEAL COMMAND clearly fares no better. Even if IDEAL COMMAND were correct, the moral would not supervene on the natural. Second, the fact that it is possible that a good God's commands are indeterminate is revelatory - it clarifies the problem of arbitrariness or when something being brute is qualifies as "objectionably brute." There is good reason to believe that the mere fact that moral does not supervene on the natural does not entail that God's commands are arbitrary. Why? God's commands are fixed by a nature that is essentially "good." God is just, merciful, kind, compassionate and so on. God's choices and commands are a product of his essentially good nature; as Craig argues - God's "commands flow necessarily from his moral nature" (Kurtz & Craig, 2009, p. 30). Thus, God does not command just anything and at the same time God's commands are not necessitated or supervenient on natural states of affairs. What we have here is an explanation for why the moral often looks supervenient on the natural - God has a fixed nature, one that is necessarily good. A good God would not command genocide to be morally wrong in one world and morally permissible in a world that is identical in all morally relevant respects.

3.3.2 The Authority Problem

The second problem facing IDEAL COMMAND is that it is unclear that hypothetical or counterfactual commands are authoritative or, at a minimum, as authoritative as actual commands. In this section, I raise two distinct points or sub-arguments to support this conclusion. First, I argue that actual commands matter in a way that hypothetical commands do not and consequently actual commands are better situated to explain the authority of morality better than hypothetical commands. Not only does ACTUAL COMMAND provide a more plausible

explanation of the authority of morality than IDEAL COMMAND, IDEAL COMMAND has a difficult time explaining the authority of God's commands. None of the traditional explanations for the authority of God's commands are compatible with IDEAL COMMAND because they rest on the assumption that God exists.

Importantly, the question, *Are hypothetical commands normatively authoritative?*, is not synonymous with the question, *Ought one to do what a hypothetical God would command?* If it is the case that moral obligation is constituted by what God would command, then what one ought to do *just is* what God would command. Rather, the question being addressed is whether it is plausible to believe that the view in question - that moral obligations are constituted by a hypothetical God's commands - could be motivationally strong. In other words, is it reasonable to believe that a hypothetical God's commands are the sort of thing to give one normative reasons?

Before asking what, if anything, could explain the authority of hypothetical commands, consider a significant difference between hypothetical and actual commands. Actual commands are commonly treated as if they matter more than hypothetical commands, thus, actual commands tend to carry more authority than hypothetical commands.

To see this, consider an example. Your best friends are getting ready to move and you know that they will ask you to help. As your best friends, you know that they could request you to help in one of several ways: pack boxes, clean up their new home, or babysit their children while they pack. These counterfactual requests seem to create a disjunctive obligation to pack, clean or babysit in the future. However, on the actual day of the move, your friends ask you to babysit their children. It is reasonable to believe that the actual command (to babysit) is more authoritative than the previous disjunctive, hypothetical command to pack, clean or babysit. The actual command is so authoritative that if, upon hearing their actual request the day of the move, you were to ignore their actual request to babysit and tell them that you will clean the house or pack boxes instead of babysit, you would be doing something wrong. Actual commands have greater authority than hypothetical commands and thus override hypothetical commands. In this case, the actual request to babysit overrides the disjunctive request to pack, clean or babysit.

The same view of hypothetical and actual commands should extend to divine command theory; it is reasonable to believe that the actual commands of God have more authority or power than the hypothetical or counterfactual commands of God. Thus, ACTUAL COMMAND is better situated to capture the authority of morality than IDEAL COMMAND.

Nonetheless, the fact that hypothetical commands are less authoritative than actual commands does not entail that hypothetical commands are necessarily lacking all authority. Proponents of IDEAL COMMAND can still offer some explanation of why God's hypothetical commands are authoritative. An obvious place to start is with the question, *what makes God's commands authoritative or binding according to classical divine command theory?* In other words, how does the classical divine command theorist answer the perennial question, *why be moral?* I consider three of the traditional explanations for the authority of God's commands and argue that none of them is compatible with IDEAL COMMAND. The authority of God's commands cannot be even partly grounded in God's role as enforcer, or creator and sustainer, or the fact that his commands are made within the context of a relationship to mankind.¹¹

One of the most common views is that God's commands are (at least partly) authoritative because God, as an omnipotent being, has the power to enforce moral laws by punishment and reward. In effect, God's power is necessary to make moral obligations normatively relevant or authoritative. Christine Korsgaard (1996) summarizes this view with the statement that "[t]he legislator is necessary to make *obligation* possible, that is, to make morality normative" (p. 27).¹² On this view, God's commands are normatively relevant and authoritative because God is powerful and can enforce moral law. Assume for the sake of argument that this position is successful. If correct, God must actually exist to enforce his commands and this is clearly antithetical to the essential tenets of IDEAL COMMAND. God clearly cannot enforce moral law if he does not exist. Thus, it won't be the case that God's hypothetical commands are authoritative

¹¹Throughout this section, I discuss how we can explain the authority of God's commands broadly. Note, however, that I assume that the features of God may only partly explain or ground the authority of God's commands and hence moral obligations. I need not defend the more controversial claim that any one of these features of God is wholly responsible for the authority of morality for my argument to be successful. Of course, if this were the case, then this would be all the more troubling for IDEAL COMMAND.

¹²Korsgaard (1996) explains at length that Thomas Hobbes and Samuel Pufendorf held this view.

because God is the enforcer of moral law in some other world.

The authority of God's commands may also be explained by the fact that God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and all it contains. This view differs from the argument that God's commands are authoritative because he has the power to punish or reward. Rather, as creator and sustainer, God is the proper object of reverence and gratitude. However, this is clearly not an option for proponents of IDEAL COMMAND either. If God does not actually exist, then God cannot perform the act of creating and sustaining.

Another compelling explanation for why God's commands are authoritative is that God's commands are made in a relationship between God and his followers. But this option, too, quickly runs into problems. If God does not actually exist, there cannot be a valuable relationship between God and people.¹³ Robert Adams (2002) motivates this idea and argues that one of the problems with counterfactual commands is that they are not "actual demands made on us in relationships that we value" (p. 246). In particular, a counterfactual command of a non-existent God does not compare to "the motivational or reason-generating power of the belief that something actually is demanded of me by an unsurpassably wonderful being who created me and loves me" (Adams, 2002, pp. 255-256). Adams (2002) captures the potential value of the relationship between God and his followers:

I would particularly stress reasons for compliance that arise from a social bond or relationship with God. As in the case of human social bonds, the force of these reasons depends on the value of the relationship, which theistic devotion will rate very high indeed. If God is our creator, if God loves us, if God gives us all the good

¹³One might try to argue that we can have a relationships with non-existent, abstract entities. After all, people act as if they have genuine relationships with characters from fictional books and movies. But, there is a substantive difference between a "relationship" with a character and a relationship with an actual individual. Though one may gather extensive (fictional) knowledge of a character, even to the point of feeling like a part of that character's life, that is not the same kind of relationship one can have with an individual that exists in actuality. For one, individuals that exist do not require our imagination to act or engage with us. A relationship with a character is in effect a one way street, where we do all of the work. A relationship with an actual individual goes two ways. One might also wonder, *but doesn't faith require religious people to have and build a relationship with God as if he did not exist? And if that is possible, why wouldn't it be possible to have a relationship with a counterfactual, non-existent God?* Though it may seem and many times even feel this way, it is an essential tenet of the Judeo-Christian faith that God can and does communicate to mankind by various means. A common view is that one can use the spiritual disciplines, such as, prayer, fasting, and meditation, to further one's relationship with God. These are means for opening oneself to God and communicating with him. So the argument goes. Accordingly, one can build a relationship with God without having to simply imagine what God is like or act as if God does not exist.

that we enjoy, those are clearly reasons to prize God's friendship. (p. 252)

The relationship between God and mankind is normatively relevant on this account. But, of course, IDEAL COMMAND cannot account for this relationship. If God does not exist, then there cannot be a relationship between himself and mankind.

None of the traditional accounts for the authority of God's commands - that God can enforce his commands, that God is the creator and sustainer of all, or that God makes commands within the context of a valuable relationship with mankind - can even partly explain the authority of God's commands and, in turn, moral obligations. The success of each of these justifications requires that God exists in the actual world. If God does not exist, then these features of God cannot play a role in explaining the authority of God's commands. IDEAL COMMAND thus entails the counterintuitive consequence that the authority of God's commands is not even partly explained by these features of God.

3.3.3 The Essential Attributes Problem

It is widely held that an essential feature of the divine nature is *being the creator and sustainer of all*. But, this attribute cannot play a plausible role in IDEAL COMMAND. To be the creator and sustainer of all, God must actually exist. Consequently, IDEAL COMMAND risks not being a form of divine command theory at all if the idealized agent, "God," does not have all of the essential attributes of God. This is *the essential attributes problem*.

This argument stems from ideal divine command theorists' commitment to the following claims:

- (i) God is the creator and sustainer of all;
- (ii) God does not in actuality create or sustain.

As noted, one of the noncontroversial essential attributes of God is (i) - that he is the creator and sustainer of the universe and all it contains. If the idealized agent, "God," did not have this attribute then he would not be God (or even a god); a god without this attribute is no god at all. For instance, simply becoming smarter and more powerful - even to an infinite limit - is not

sufficient to make an individual a god. For that, one needs to have been the creator and sustainer of all things. Think of brilliant and strong superheroes, such as, Superman, Iron Man, or the Hulk. Regardless of how much Superman becomes stronger or smarter, he will never be a god because he lacks the essential attribute of being the creator and sustainer of the universe.

The fact that God has the attribute of *being the creator and sustainer of all things* is a reason for individuals to obey God's commands and thus partly explains why God's commands are authoritative. Note that this claim - that being the creator and sustainer of all explains the moral authority of God's commands - is relatively weak. It does not follow that the *only* reason that God's commands are authoritative is that God is the creator and sustainer, rather, only that this counts in favor of or is reason to consider God's commands binding and authoritative.

As is stated in (ii), proponents of IDEAL COMMAND accept that being the creator and sustainer is an essential attribute of God, but deny that any actual being has this attribute. God does not exist and thus cannot create or sustain the actual world. IDEAL COMMAND entails that God has the attribute, *being the creator and sustainer of a any world in which he exists*. In other words, the authority of God's commands cannot stem from the fact that God actually creates or sustains, only that God has the *nature* of possibly creating and sustaining.¹⁴

Two problems follow from these commitments. First, God's commands lose authority. If IDEAL COMMAND is correct, God is the creator of a possible world, B, but is not the creator of the actual world. A reasonable argument is that the fact that God is the creator and sustainer of all is morally relevant and gives one a reason to take God's commands as authoritative. But, IDEAL COMMAND cannot appeal to the same explanation. At best, one could argue that the reason that one may have a moral obligation to do *x* in the actual world is that God has the attribute of *being the creator and sustainer of a possible world*; the fact that God creates and sustains world B is part of the reason that *x* is morally obligatory in the actual world. But why should the fact that there is a possible world that God creates and sustains be morally relevant to our moral obligations here and now, in the actual world? This explanation is questionable.

¹⁴Again, I take it that the authority of God's commands need not be fully explained by the fact that God is the creator and sustainer of all; this feature of God may only partly explain why God's commands are authoritative.

Compare this to ACTUAL COMMAND where God's commands are authoritative because God is the creator or sustainer of the actual world. The plausibility of this explanation suggests that the normatively relevant attribute is not simply *being the creator and sustainer* but, to be more specific, *being the creator and sustainer of the actual world*. Simply creating and sustaining some possible world is not normatively relevant. Contrary to IDEAL COMMAND, ACTUAL COMMAND offers an intuitive explanation - God's commands are authoritative because God is the creator and sustainer of this world. But if God does not actually exist and God only creates some possible, non-actual world, then it is hard to see how the attribute of being the creator and sustainer could be normatively relevant. God's commands lack authority if he is not the creator and sustainer of all.

But not only are God's commands less authoritative if God lacks this attribute, the view should not even be regarded as a form of divine command theory. Again, IDEAL COMMAND entails that "God" does not have an essential attribute of a god, *being the creator and sustainer of all*. As such, the view would be just as good if it mentioned a powerful and intelligent creature who was not God. It is thus not a rival version of divine command theory at all.

3.4 Conclusion

Ideal command theory promises us that we can have our cake and eat it too. We can get the benefits of divine command theory - objective, categorical moral truths - without having to incur the cost of positing supernatural entities into one's ontology or having to accept the counterintuitive view that if God didn't exist neither would moral truths.

But ideal divine command theory is not without serious problems. IDEAL COMMAND threatens moral nihilism and skepticism in all worlds, and can only potentially avoid the problem by violating a conceptual truth about moral obligation. IDEAL COMMAND also cannot explain the authority of morality as well as ACTUAL COMMAND and, even to the extent that it does, it does so without appealing to essential features of the divine nature. Thus, it does not appear to qualify as a genuine version of divine command theory.

The implications of the arguments herein are important. If divine command theory is plausible, the next natural question is what is the most plausible form of divine command theory?

If the answer is ideal divine command theory, then the success of divine command theory cannot support the existence of God. Alternatively, if there is reason to believe that classical divine command theory is the most plausible form of divine command theory, then an argument for divine command theory is implicitly an argument for theism. We could then begin to make sense of the oft ambiguous and poorly defended claim that morality requires the existence of God.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this project has been to re-establish divine command theory as a view worthy of legitimate consideration. I have argued that, contrary to the current trend in contemporary moral philosophy, divine command theory is at least as plausible as the ever-increasingly popular Moorean realism. Both views are forms of moral non-naturalism, the view that moral properties are not natural and, as a result, both Moorean realism and divine command theory face many of the same ontological, epistemic, and metaphysical challenges. Furthermore, divine command theorists are well-suited to offer compelling responses to many of these challenges, while in numerous cases Moorean realists are not. In an attempt to defend Moorean realism, one may turn to Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's view that moral truths are conceptual. However, as I have argued, there is good reason to believe that moral truths are not conceptual truths. In reconsidering divine command theory, I have argued that the traditional, ontologically committal form of divine command theory is more plausible than the deflationary one.

Moorean realism is thus not the only viable form of moral non-naturalism. Indeed, if moral properties are not natural, then they may be either *sui generis* or supernatural. However, I have not argued that divine command theory or Moorean realism is in fact the correct metaethical theory, or even that one form of moral non-naturalism is superior to the other. Rather, the implications of the arguments herein can be taken in two very different ways.

On the one hand, I have taken the first steps in offering a defense of divine command theory. Although Moorean realism is generally acknowledged as a plausible metaethical theory, over the past century the majority of scholars have not seriously considered divine command theory as an alternative. I have argued that divine command theory should not be overlooked, as it is just as plausible as the most common and widely cited rendition of moral non-naturalism, Moorean realism. If one is willing to take the view the moral properties are *sui generis* seriously, then given the many similarities between the two views, one should be just as willing to reconsider the merits of the view that moral properties are supernatural. Though this is not a defense of divine

command theory, it is the first step in bringing divine command theory back on the scene as a credible metaethical theory.

On the other hand, the conclusions drawn herein may be used as part of a *reductio*. As I have argued that supernatural properties are at least as plausible as sui generis properties and thus divine command theory is at least as plausible as Moorean realism, one may use this to drive the conclusion that Moorean realism must be false. One may argue that, surely, if anything is false, it is the view that moral properties are supernatural. Thus, if supernatural properties are on par with sui generis properties, then clearly moral properties cannot be sui generis.

A variety of questions still remain. For starters, it is worth asking which form of moral non-naturalism is most plausible - Moorean realism or divine command theory? Determining which view is more plausible raises interesting methodological questions about metaethics and philosophy more broadly. For example, how ought we to weigh the pros and cons of each theory? Are epistemic challenges less problematic than ontological ones (or vice versa) and, if so, why? Are some challenges decisive (e.g., the problem of evil)? And, if we find divine command theory to be more plausible than Moorean realism, what is the most best form of divine command theory? How does divine command theory differ from natural law theories, where God's creation is intrinsically normative rather than God's commands? These are just a few of the many questions remaining and indeed worth pursuing.

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