MORAL REALISM AND EXPERT DISAGREEMENT

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Abstract: The fact of moral disagreement is often raised as a problem for moral realism. The idea is that disagreement amongst people or communities on moral issues is to be taken as evidence that there are no objective moral facts. While the fact of 'folk' moral disagreement has been of interest, the fact of *expert* moral disagreement, that is, widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers, is even more compelling. In this paper, I present three arguments against the anti-realist explanation for widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers. Each argument shows the argument from expert disagreement for moral anti-realism, that is, denial of morality's objectivity, to be in one way or another self-undermining. I conclude that widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers is not a problem for moral realism.

1. Introduction

Consider moral realism a genus of views whose species share each of the following three tenets:

    (i)   Moral sentences, statements, judgments, and beliefs are propositions capable of being either true or false.

    (ii) Some moral sentences, statements, judgments, beliefs, or propositions are true.

    (iii) The truth-values of moral propositions are 'stance-independent' (Shafer-Landau 2003: 15), meaning the truth or falsity of any given moral proposition is independent of any person's or groups' attitudes, preferences, or opinions toward it.

The thesis of moral realism is the conjunction of these three sub-theses[1] (McGrath 2010: 60-61, Shafer-Landau 2006: 209, 2013: 54, Horn 2017: 363, Horn 2020). While specific realist accounts differ in how they further formulate themselves, they are all species of the genus moral realism, and so inherit their genus' essential features. Understood this way, moral realism is a genus of meta-ethical views on which morality is an objective[2] matter in that moral beliefs have non-relativistic truth-values and at least some of those beliefs are true (Wedgwood 2014: 23). Accordingly, there are objective moral facts, and moral questions have objectively true answers. One may understand moral anti-realism as the opposite of this. Simply, moral anti-realism is the denial of the objectivity of morality, and therefore the denial of the claim that there are objective moral facts or objectively correct answers to moral questions.

One of the major challenges for moral realism is explaining why there remains widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers. Moral philosophers as a community disagree on issues ranging from questions about general moral principle and theories (such as utilitarianism or deontology) to questions about particular moral issues (such as what we ought to do about climate change, or whether abortion is wrong, etc.). After all, it seems reasonable to expect experts to tend towards consensus on the issues they have expertise in. This does not appear to be the case in moral philosophy. Moral philosophers disagree on a range of topics pertaining to morality and have disagreed on such matters for centuries.

When laypeople disagree on some issue, it is reasonable to think that such disagreement is a result of at least one party's epistemic failing. It is also reasonable to think that when one is an expert on some issue, they will not suffer the same epistemic failings as laypeople. We might then think there would be less disagreement on issues between those who are experts on those issues than there is between laypeople. However, this is not the case with moral philosophy. There is widespread and longstanding disagreement between expert moral philosophers, that is, those who are educated in and supposedly knowledgeable about issues in moral philosophy. If moral philosophy is a domain in which even the supposed experts radically disagree, what does this indicate about the objectivity of morality?

In this paper, I present three arguments against the anti-realist explanation of widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers. First, I argue that arguments from expert disagreement face a problem of overgeneralization that leads to their self-undermining. If we accept the abductive inference from expert disagreement to moral anti-realism, we can construct an analogous argument from *meta-ethical disagreement* to show that moral anti-realism is false. Second, because the moral anti-realist makes a probabilistic abductive inference from expert disagreement to moral anti-realism, theirs is an 'inference to the best explanation' style argument. I show that this sort of argument for moral anti-realism is also self-undermining as it allows enough normativity to posit objective moral facts. Third, I consider how both agreement and disagreement have been used to arrive at an

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[1] Sarah McGrath (2010: 60-61) calls these conjuncts the 'Cognitivism' thesis, the 'No Error Theory' thesis, and the 'Objectivity' thesis, corresponding to (i), (ii), and (iii), respectively.
[2] I use 'objective' to mean, and in place of, 'stance-independent'.

anti-realist conclusion and argue that neither has any evidential value for moral anti-realism or against moral realism. I conclude that widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers is not a problem for moral realism.

2. Expert disagreement, and the state of moral philosophy

Pioneered by John L. Mackie (1977), standard arguments from disagreement have typically focused on interpersonal and cross-cultural disagreement, or 'folk' disagreement. David Enoch (2009) has argued that a variety of these folk arguments from disagreement do not pose a threat to moral realism. However, the argument I wish to consider here differs from these more familiar arguments from folk disagreement. The central concern is the disagreement and lack of consensus amongst *experts*. When laypeople disagree on some issue, say, whether vaccines are safe and effective, or the shape of the earth, or whether evolution explains the diversity of life on earth, the source of the disagreement is that at least one party is in error. The error in play will be some sort of epistemic shortcoming or defect, such as being ignorant of some relevant facts, being biased or prejudiced toward certain pieces of evidence or argument, being dogmatic, etc. Folk disagreement is often due to these kinds of epistemic errors. Things are different when talking to medical professionals, or geologists, or biologists. The difference is that we expect these people not to be in the sort of disagreement often seen between laypeople. This is because medical professionals, geologists, and biologists are *experts* in their respective fields. If there is a tendency amongst practitioners of a certain discipline of inquiry toward consensus it is sometimes taken as a sign their discipline is an objective one in the sense that it arrives at objectives truths. It is sometimes taken as a reason in favour of the reliability of a discipline's methodologies that they result in or tend towards consensus amongst experts in that discipline. It would be most perplexing to see so-called experts locked in widespread and longstanding disagreement, and it would be concerning to see them in such a state if their respective discipline was one which purported to aim at and reveal objective truths. The discipline of moral philosophy is exactly in this predicament.

What is to be made of the fact that there is such widespread and radical disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers? One possible explanation is simply that radical disagreement amongst moral philosophers is a result of morality's lack of objectivity. This would mean the thesis of moral realism, the family of views which takes morality to be an objective matter, is false. Taking this explanation seriously is to jettison the idea that morality is an objective matter, and therefore espouse moral anti-realism. Brian Leiter (2014) takes such an approach and defends Nietzsche's version of the argument from disagreement for the denial of the objectivity of morality, arguing that anti-realism about morality is the best explanation for widespread and longstanding moral disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers. It is an argument from expert disagreement. If it is the case that moral philosophers throughout history can engage in moral theorizing, but after centuries still not arrive at a consensus all the while radically disagreeing with each other, it would appear there is neither movement

toward rapprochement between the competing moral traditions (Leiter 2014: 140) and thus no progress in moral philosophy, nor that moral facts are epistemically accessible. Thus, we cannot reasonably posit objective moral facts.

The Nietzschean anti-realist explanation for this is that morality is not an objective domain. Looking at the most sophisticated moral theories of the Western analytic philosophical tradition, Nietzsche observes that a group of moral philosophers who share similar beliefs, practices, and many of the same judgments on concrete moral cases, remain in radical disagreement on the most important and foundational matters of moral theory (Leiter 2014: 134-135). Leiter (2014: 131) describes this as "the single most important and embarrassing fact about the history of moral theorizing by philosophers over the last two millennia".

Nietzsche's observation is equally pertinent to contemporary moral theory as it is to the history of moral philosophy. In recent empirical work, David Bourget and David J. Chalmers (2014) published results of a survey of 1,972 professional philosophers from around the world (though with an acknowledged analytic and Anglo-centric bias) asking what philosophical views they held on 30 central philosophical issues. The issue of 'Normative Ethics' produced the following results: "deontology 25.9%; consequentialism 23.6%; virtue ethics 18.2%; other 32.3%" (Bourget and Chalmers 2014: 476). As is evident from Bourget's and Chalmers' survey results, Nietzsche's observation about professional moral philosophers in the Western analytic tradition holds for contemporary moral philosophers as well, for the empirical evidence shows they are in radical disagreement.

I take the Nietzschean view to be essentially denying moral philosophy's status as a *Wissenschaft*, and therefore denying the possibility for moral theorists to find anything like 'objective truth' in their endeavour. If moral philosophy is not a *Wissenschaft*, then moral theorizing is not genuine inquiry aiming at truth. One of Nietzsche's principal critiques of the history of moral philosophy is that the variety of moral theories Nietzsche's targets think can be dialectically justified are "necessarily *sophistical*" (Nietzsche in Kaufmann and Hollingdale 1968: 233). Nietzsche seems to mean that while attempts at the dialectical justification of the central and enduring moral philosophies of the Western analytic tradition can be made, all such attempts will fail (Leiter 2014: 138). Moral philosophy contrasts with other disciplines. Other disciplines, such as the natural sciences, do not appear to have the problem Nietzsche observes in moral philosophy. These other disciplines are *Wissenschaft*, while widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers makes evident that moral philosophy is not, at least for Nietzsche. So, we can make an abductive inference from the radical disagreement between experts to an anti-realist conclusion about morality.

If it is the case that moral philosophers as a community disagree about *P*, where *P* is some moral proposition, and such disagreement has been widespread and longstanding, then we are, after weighing the anti-realist explanation against realist ones, to say that there is no objective fact of the matter about *P* (Wedgwood 2014: 26). This is to be taken as the best explanation for the disagreement between moral philosophers.

3. Why think moral philosophers are experts?

The discussion is framed in terms of expert moral disagreement where moral philosophers are the relevant experts. But why should we think moral philosophers are 'experts' at all?[3] Some empirical evidence suggests that moral philosophers show similar order effects on their judgments about hypothetical moral scenarios to those of laypeople (Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2012). There is also evidence that the phenomenon of rationalization, where one favours a particular conclusion and whose subsequent search of justification is biased in favour of that conclusion, is pervasive among both laypeople's and moral philosophers' thought (Schwitzgebel and Ellis 2017). If moral philosophers do not considerably outperform laypeople in tests of certain biases, then there are some grounds to think that moral philosophers are not experts in moral reasoning. If moral philosophers are not experts, then widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst them can be explained in the same way as disagreement amongst laypeople. We can say that disagreement amongst moral philosophers is explained by the same epistemic shortcomings and failings that would explain disagreement amongst laypeople. Thus, the argument from expert disagreement would lose much of its force because there would be nothing especially problematic about expert disagreement that was not already problematic about folk disagreement. But because folk disagreement is easily explained away, so too would be expert disagreement.

Whether to consider moral philosophers experts depends upon what we take expertise to be. Moral philosophers throughout history have painstakingly engaged in rigorous and methodical reasoning to inquire into and investigate questions about morality. For centuries, moral philosophers have inquired into moral questions with the kind of effort and rigour that at least resemble the way experts go about inquiry in other disciplines. One would expect moral philosophers to have a better understanding of major theories, views and accounts of morality, a better understanding of the arguments and objections for and against different moral positions, and the creative and critical thinking skills to better theorize about moral issues compared to laypeople. Each of theses capacities looks to be a sign of something like expertise.

But, if moral philosophers are not experts, what exactly does all the painstaking and rigorous methodological reasoning and inquiry mean for the label of 'moral philosopher'? While empirical evidence shows ways in which moral philosophers do not considerably outperform laypeople in tests of biases, it seems to me that moral philosophers are nevertheless better at thinking about moral issues and at moral reasoning than laypeople, all things considered, even if they are similarly susceptible to certain biases. Moral philosophers do seem to have a body of knowledge and skills others lack. This body of knowledge and skills seems to me to plausibly constitute some manner of expertise.

What matters for this paper is that moral philosophers are considered experts in the sense that they as a community have spent centuries rigorously inquiring into a wide range of moral issues and topics. This practice of rigorous inquiry sufficiently

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[3] I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

distinguishes moral philosophers from laypeople for purposes of investigating why there persists widespread disagreement amongst them. The question is whether the domain of moral philosophy is an objective one with objective moral facts given it has not produced the same sort of consensus amongst its experts that is seen in other expert populated domains, such as the natural sciences.

4. Why expert disagreement is no problem for moral realism

Thus far, I explained the argument from expert disagreement and discussed the sense in which moral philosophers are experts. In this section, I provide three arguments for why the argument from expert disagreement is self-undermining. Section 4.1 focuses on overgeneralization. In section 4.2 I show how 'inference to the best explanation' style arguments for moral anti-realism opens the door to moral realism. Section 4.3 argues that disagreement could be used to support moral realism and thus is most likely not evidence for either anti-realism or realism.

4.1. Overgeneralization

The problem Nietzsche observes is not particular to moral philosophy. Insofar as it is a problem, it is a problem for philosophy generally. Disagreement runs rampant in all areas of philosophy, not just in moral philosophy. Consider again the empirical data. In Bourget and Chalmers' (2014) survey, only 14 of the total 30 major philosophical issues asked about received for their respective top answers a response rate of at least 50%. So, it appears that radical disagreement amongst experts exists for most of the central issues in philosophy.[4] The empirical evidence indicates that the sort of problem Nietzsche points out is not unique to moral philosophy, but a problem with philosophy more generally. Following the Nietzschean line of reasoning, one must conclude general anti-realism about philosophy as a discipline that aims toward truths. One could argue that if general philosopher *A* believes *P*, where *P* is some general non-moral philosophical proposition, and general philosopher *B* believes that ~*P*, then we should think there is no objective truth of the matter regarding *P*. We could do this for all non-moral propositions meant to be answers to philosophical questions. If we accept disagreement amongst moral philosophers as grounds for moral anti-realism, then we have grounds for general philosophical anti-realism, including for areas of philosophy for which anti-realism is thought to be independently implausible (Risberg and Tersman 2019: 2).

Overgeneralization to philosophy is not the only threat to the argument from expert disagreement. David O. Brink (1989) has raised the issue of overgeneralization by appealing to disagreements in other domains. Brink (1989: 197) states, "no one concluded from the apparently quite deep disagreement among astronomers a short while ago about the existence of black holes that there was no fact of the matter

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4   Even if we do not think the issues listed in Bourget and Chalmer's survey are an exhaustive list of the central issues in philosophy, there is enough disagreement in enough of the central issues to say that there is widespread disagreement is philosophy generally.

concerning the existence of black holes". Brink points out that disagreement amongst expert astronomers does not count as strong evidence for there being no objective facts about celestial objects. Similarly, the same sort of disagreement amongst moral philosophers should not be taken as evidence that there are no objective moral facts.

The way the argument from expert disagreement overgeneralizes to philosophy also leads to its self-undermining. As Eric Sampson (2019) argues, because there is widespread and longstanding disagreement in ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, or any other area of philosophy, and metaphysical and epistemological premises are used in arguments from disagreement, arguments from disagreement are self-undermining. So, for Sampson, widespread disagreement in philosophy is a problem for arguments from disagreement against moral realism because these arguments depend upon metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. But if disagreements amongst expert philosophers show anti-realism about the areas on which they disagree, then those metaphysical and epistemological assumptions are false, and those arguments fail. So, the argument from expert disagreement faces a problem of overgeneralization that leads to its self-undermining. To address this problem of overgeneralization, one would have to deny that philosophy, in general, is a *Wissenschaft*, which is plausibly an unacceptable consequence.

While Brink's argument compares meta-ethics to astronomy and other natural sciences, and Sampson's argument focuses on the metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings of arguments from disagreement to show them to be self-undermining, there is another way to show the self-undermining nature of arguments that appeal to disagreements amongst expert philosophers. We do not need to look to disagreements in the natural sciences, metaphysics, or epistemology to show that anti-realism in meta-ethics is false. Instead of analogizing between disagreements in moral philosophy and disagreements in the natural sciences, metaphysics, or epistemology, we can appeal do disagreements in meta-ethics itself. I present here an argument appealing to *meta-ethical* disagreement, that is, disagreement about what the correct meta-ethical theory is, to show that the argument from expert disagreement cannot support moral anti-realism.[5]

Consider that moral anti-realism is a meta-ethical position. Now consider the following argument for meta-ethical anti-realism (a metameta-ethical position).

P1. If there is widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert meta-ethicists or philosophers about what the correct meta-ethical theory is, then we can abductively infer that there are no objective meta-ethical facts.[6]

P2. There is widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert meta-ethicists and philosophers about what the correct meta-ethical theory is.

C. We can abductively infer that there are no objective meta-ethical facts.

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[5] Similar arguments that arguments from disagreement problematically generalize to meta-ethics can be found in Huemer (2005), Enoch (2009), and Shafer-Landau (2006).

[6] That is, objective facts about how ethical thought and talk, and what that thought and talk is about, fits into reality (McPherson and Plunkett 2018: 3).

If disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers is to be taken as support for moral anti-realism, then disagreement amongst expert meta-ethicists should be taken as support for the metameta-ethical position of meta-ethical anti-realism. Given that there is obviously disagreement amongst meta-ethicists on the correct meta-ethical theory, the moral anti-realist who appeals to expert disagreement must also accept meta-ethical anti-realism. But, if meta-ethical anti-realism is true, then there is no fact of the matter about what meta-ethical theory is true. If no meta-ethical theory is true and moral anti-realism is a meta-ethical theory, then moral anti-realism is not objectively true. The appeal to the fact of expert disagreement for moral anti-realism undermines moral anti-realism. Thus, the appeal to expert disagreement does not create a problem for moral realism due to its self-undermining nature.

Thomas Pölzler (forthcoming) states that moral anti-realists could not bite the bullet against overgeneralization arguments for the self-undermining of the argument from disagreement and accept meta-ethical anti-realism. The argument from disagreement cannot be reconciled with meta-ethical anti-realism, that is, anti-realism about the moral realism/moral anti-realism debate. Pölzler notes that if there were no objective truth about whether there were objective facts, moral realism would be defeated, but so would moral anti-realism. So, biting the bullet is not something a moral anti-realist can do about overgeneralization arguments for the self-undermining nature of the argument from expert disagreement.

A stronger strategy against overgeneralization arguments for the self-undermining nature of the argument from disagreement is to explore the best explanations for disagreement in non-moral domains. Pölzler (forthcoming) argues that realism is the best explanation for disagreements in non-moral matters even when such disagreement is widespread and longstanding, but it is not in the case of morality. Pölzler argues that in non-moral domains such as, say, history or physics, disagreements can be explained in realist terms without invoking epistemic inaccessibility of those domains' facts. Perhaps available historical sources cannot bring historians to a confident conclusion on some issues. This would not entail anti-realism about historical facts. Physicists might disagree about the truth of some theory not because there is no objective truth about the theory but because the technical equipment to test the predictions of the theory may not have been developed yet. Additionally, non-moral facts, such as physical facts of string theory seem to explain other phenomena apart from our judgements about physical phenomena. So, there is *prima facie* reason to be realists about, say, physical facts and historical events, where there is no such presumption about morality (Pölzler forthcoming).

But why treat moral philosophers differently from physicists or historians? Why not explain disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers with appeals to, e.g. the difficulty of doing moral philosophy, or the challenge of inquiry about issues that can often be socially and emotionally charged, or complexities of moral and philosophical arguments, theories, and views? Moral questions are amongst the deepest and enduring questions of human life. There is no reason to think answers to them will come easy. We could then say there is *prima facie* reason to be realists about morality despite longstanding disagreement because moral philosophy is

difficult, even for the expert moral philosophers. We could maintain that moral philosophers are experts just as we can maintain that historians and physicists are experts even when they are engaged in disagreement. So, the fact of widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst moral philosophers can be treated in the same way as disagreement amongst historians and physicists because the difficulty of moral philosophy gives us *prima facie* reason to be realists about morality, similarly to how we have *prima facie* reason to be realists about, say, history and physics.

Additionally, the phenomenology of moral disagreement lends in favour of objective moral facts, and thus moral realism, as well. As Enoch (2011) argues, preferential disagreements call for impartiality and compromise while disagreements about objective facts are not amenable to compromise the way disagreements about mere preference are. Imagine you and a partner encounter a dying animal on the side of the street. It is your moral belief that animals ought not to needlessly suffer and you together ought to help the suffering animal. Your partner believes that animal suffering is not morally significant and helping it would come at a cost to both of you, so your partner believes you together ought not to help the suffering animal. What sort of compromise would be appropriate here? In cases of preferential disagreements, compromise is welcome. But in cases of factual disagreements, it is not. The moral case is more like the factual case because impartial solutions do not work in either. Instead, you are justified in 'standing your ground' (Enoch 2011: 23) and ensuring you do not proceed in a way that will increase the animal's suffering (that is, proceeding in the way you take to be immoral). The proper way to proceed in cases of moral disagreement is more analogous to the way to proceed in disagreements about objective facts, rather than the way to proceed in disagreements of mere preference (Enoch 2011: 24). That moral disagreements are more analogous to disagreements about objective facts, and that moral philosophy is difficult, even for expert moral philosophers, is *prima facie* support for objective moral facts and moral realism. Thus, contra to Pölzler's claim, it is not the case that there is *prima facie* reason to be realists about, say, physics and history, but not about morality.

The importance of this is that anti-realists cannot claim that anti-realism is not always the best explanation for widespread and longstanding disagreement in all cases but is in the case of moral philosophy. They cannot do this because they must show there to be a relevant difference between moral disagreement and relevant non-moral disagreements. If other non-moral disagreements are not best explained by anti-realism because there is *prima facie* reason to be realists about those non-moral domains, then expert moral disagreements are not best explained by anti-realism because there is *prima facie* reason to be realists about morality. If an anti-realist were to maintain that anti-realism was not the best explanation for radical disagreement in some non-moral domain but was the best explanation for disagreement in moral philosophy, the burden of proof would be on them to give a non-question-begging explanation of the relevant differences between that non-moral domain and moral philosophy. The worry then is that whatever this difference is alleged to be would likely show that expert disagreement does not provide independent reason for moral anti-realism, as an anti-realist moral domain and realist non-moral domains would

be distinguished not by the fact of moral philosophers disagreeing but by whatever this other difference is. The moral anti-realist would be abandoning the argument from expert disagreement, and thus conceding expert disagreement is not a problem for moral realism.

Pölzler (forthcoming) notes that "proponents of the self-defeat objection may be right that those advocating the argument from moral disagreement cannot adopt anti-realism about the existence of objective moral truths and the soundness of this argument, and that there is widespread and persistent disagreement about these matters", and offers another strategy to show overgeneralization arguments for the self-undermining nature of the argument from disagreement do not lead to the argument from disagreement's self-defeat. Pölzler argues that disagreements in meta-ethics need not lead to meta-ethical anti-realism because they can be explained by cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), and philosopher's susceptibility to cognitive biases (Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2015), order effects (Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2012), and rationalization (Schwitzgebel and Ellis 2017). The susceptibility to cognitive and epistemic errors makes plausible that moral philosophers have not recognized the soundness of the objective truth of moral anti-realism. Meta-ethical realism may be true, so there is an objective fact about what the correct meta-ethical theory is, and that theory is moral anti-realism.

But the same could be said in support of moral realism. Perhaps it is moral anti-realists who are more affected by cognitive dissonance, cognitive bias, and rationalization that prevent them from seeing that expert disagreement does not undermine moral realism. It is not made clear why moral realists would be more susceptible to cognitive errors than moral anti-realists, or how such cognitive errors undermine the existence of objective moral facts. If the idea here is that moral realists have a desire to ground first-order moral commitments in objective facts while anti-realists have no such desire, it is contradicted by way of a counterexample. Consider the following quote by a serial killer and moral anti-realist, Ted Bundy:

> "I discovered that to become truly free, truly unfettered, I had to become truly uninhibited. And I quickly discovered that the greatest obstacle to my freedom, the greatest block and limitation to it, consists in the insupportable "value judgment" that I was bound to respect the rights of others… Surely, you would not, in this age of scientific enlightenment, declare that God or nature has marked some pleasures as "moral" or "good" and others as "immoral" or "bad"?" (Ted Bundy as quoted in Jaffa 1990: 3-4).

If the charge against moral realists is that they are engaged in motivated reasoning, meaning they defend moral realism because they want their first-order moral commitments to be objective, some moral anti-realists are worthy of the same accusation. In the above quote, Ted Bundy argues against some pleasures being 'moral' while others 'immoral' from what appears to be a desire to vindicate his view of what it means for him to be 'truly free'. Bundy's moral anti-realist view is

motivated by his desire to "become truly free, truly unfettered,…truly uninhibited". I do not mean to compare moral anti-realists to serial killers. What I mean to show is that if motivated reasoning increases one's susceptibility to cognitive error, then moral realists and moral anti-realists are in the same boat. Moral realists may have a desire to ground first-order commitments to objective facts while some moral anti-realists may have a desire to jettison objective morality because they view it as, for example, an obstacle to achieving selfish hedonistic ends. It is not clear that moral realists are any more susceptible to cognitive error than moral anti-realists because both can engage in motivated reasoning. Even if it were true that moral realists are more susceptible to cognitive error due to a desire to ground first-order moral commitments in objective facts, no conclusion about the correct meta-ethical theory could be drawn from this fact. It can both be true that moral realists are engaged in motivated reasoning and that their arguments in defence of their view are sound. What matters is the substance of the arguments, rather than the possible motives of the proponents of those arguments.

Further, whatever susceptibility moral realists have to various biasing cognitive errors does not explain why the argument from disagreement does not generalize to meta-ethics. While it could be true that meta-ethical realism is true and moral anti-realism is true, if the support for moral anti-realism is the argument from expert moral disagreement, then it still looks like it overgeneralizes to meta-ethics, meaning it supports meta-ethical anti-realism. And if meta-ethical anti-realism is true, then moral anti-realism is false. Thus, the argument from expert disagreement overgeneralizes in a way that is self-undermining.

Contra to Pölzler's claim that a moral anti-realist could not bite the bullet on the overgeneralization argument, a moral anti-realist sympathetic to a Nietzschean view could accept the consequence that philosophy, moral or otherwise, is not an endeavour that can deliver objective truth understood as the aim of a *Wissenschaft*. In doing so, they would embrace general philosophical anti-realism. If the argument from expert disagreement generalizes to philosophy and leads to general philosophical anti-realism, an anti-realist could say philosophy, in general, is not proper inquiry towards objective truth. Perhaps philosophy's nature is closer to that of an aesthetic pursuit than it is to that of the natural sciences. Aesthetic pursuits are not in any obvious way systematic inquiries toward truth. They are, however, creative and often expressive activities rather than facts or reasons.[7] But this faces a metaphilosophical problem. If philosophy is not an inquiry towards truth, then no philosophical positions are true. The position that philosophy is not inquiry towards truth is a metaphilosophical position, that is, it is a thesis about the activity called philosophy. But metaphilosophy is a branch of philosophy, meaning metaphilosophical positions are philosophical positions. So, if the position that philosophy is not inquiry towards

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[7] The assumption here is that aesthetic values are not to be understood realistically. However, this may be a mistake. Perhaps the idea of aesthetic realism ought to be taken more seriously, especially by those who wish to be moral realists (see Hanson 2018). So, perhaps the realist has no problem viewing philosophy, including moral philosophy, as aesthetic endeavor as they may preserve the existence of some objective normative facts.

truth is a philosophical position, and if it is true, then at least one philosophical position is true. If at least one philosophical position is true, then philosophy is an inquiry towards truth. Therefore, philosophy is an inquiry towards truth.[8] Widespread disagreement in philosophy does not undermine its status as an inquiry towards truth.

So, the moral anti-realist who wishes to bite the bullet of overgeneralization to philosophy and take on general philosophical anti-realism cannot do so. If the moral anti-realist cannot do this, and they have no other answer to the argument from expert disagreement's problem of overgeneralization to other domains where there is or has been widespread and longstanding disagreement, such as astrophysics, physics, history, metaphysics, epistemology, and meta-ethics, then the overgeneralization argument succeeds and widespread disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers does not undermine the existence of objective moral facts.

4.2. Inference to the best explanation

The moral anti-realist draws probabilistic connections between longstanding disagreement on the foundational moral question and whether there are any objective moral facts. The inference being made is one of the best explanations. The notion is that widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers is best explained by moral anti-realism. Otherwise, moral philosophers would have converged on an answer by now. But moral anti-realism cannot be the best explanation here. This is because 'inference to the best explanation' style arguments for moral anti-realism are self-undermining.

If there are competing explanations for radical disagreement, then there must be some method of vetting each to determine the correct one. This suggests a background standard for discriminating between possible explanations. If it is the case that any explanation is the best explanation, and its status as such is non-arbitrary, non-relativistic, and not stance-dependent, then there appears to be at least one objective normative fact. Specifically, there is an objective normative fact about what is the best explanation for radical disagreement amongst moral philosophers. If the moral anti-realist wants to say their explanation is the best one, they will have undermined their moral anti-realism by positing an objective normative fact. By conceding some normativity, the moral anti-realist will have opened the door to the reasonable possibility of objective moral facts.

One may contend that the sort of normative fact presupposed by the existence of best explanations is not a moral or ethical one, but an epistemic one. The move from best explanations to objective moral facts appears to depend on an equivocation between 'best' in a moral sense and 'best' in an epistemic sense. Because the anti-realist is concerned with morality rather than epistemology, they have no problem positing enough normativity for there to be objective epistemic facts because doing

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[8]   Russ Shafer-Landau (2006) argues from this premise to moral realism. He argues because moral philosophy is a species of the genus philosophy it inherits philosophy's essential features, including its status as *Wissenschaft*. Thus, moral philosophy is inquiry towards objective truth. If that is the case, there are objective moral facts and moral realism is true.

so does not commit them to positing objective moral facts. However, the ontological cost of objective moral facts will have already been paid. If we accept there are objective epistemic facts, the step to positing objective moral facts is not a large one. As Enoch (2011: 92-93) has argued, once some normative facts are accepted there are no reasons to not accept moral ones, as there is no further ontological price to pay for moral facts once one has paid for normative facts. By allowing enough normativity for the existence of epistemic facts, 'inference to the best explanation' style arguments pave the road to objective moral facts. This happens by way of opening the door to 'companions in guilt' arguments. These arguments come in a variety of forms, but their basic thrust is to show a strong analogy between morality and other domains for which anti-realism is considered for one reason or another implausible, such as, epistemology, mathematics, philosophy, etc. Terence Cuneo (2007) argues that if objective moral facts do not exist, then objective epistemic facts do not either. But objective epistemic facts do exist. So, objective moral facts also exist and moral realism is true. Similarly, Nathan Nobis (2005) argues that if epistemic realism is true, then so too is moral realism. Richard Rowland (2013), while not arguing directly for moral realism, employs a similar argument against a kind of moral anti-realism (ethical error theory). Rowland argues that if there are no categorical normative reasons, then there are no epistemic reasons for belief, but there are epistemic reasons for belief, so there are categorical reasons, thus ethical error theory is false. If we can posit categorical normative reasons, then we can posit categorical moral reasons as there is nothing objectionably distinct about the moral that would not also be objectionable about other categorical normative reasons.

The problem then with 'inference to the best explanation' style arguments is that by presupposing at least one normative fact, they have allowed enough normativity to plausibly posit objective moral facts by already paying their ontological costs. If the response is that doing so only opens the door to epistemic facts rather than to moral facts, the door to epistemic facts, in turn, opens the door to moral facts via 'companions in guilt' style arguments, which give reasons to think allowing objective epistemic facts paves a path to objective moral facts. While there are objections against these sorts of epistemic 'companions in guilt' arguments, which attempt to show epistemic facts and moral facts are dis-analogous (Cowie 2016, Winokur 2017) and thus moral realism cannot be argued for by appeal to epistemic realism, there is nothing about the argument from expert disagreement that shows there to be a meaningful dis-analogy between epistemic and moral facts. In other words, it is incumbent on those who would advance 'inference the best explanation' style arguments for anti-realism to also deal with 'companions in guilt' style arguments, as they do not provide independent reasons to think allowing as much normativity as they do does not pave a plausible path to objective moral facts. 'Inference to the best explanation' style arguments for anti-realism open paths to moral realism and so have a self-undermining nature. Therefore, 'inference to the best explanation' style arguments for moral anti-realism fail.

4.3. The evidential (dis)value of disagreement

Another issue for abductive arguments from disagreement is that it is not clear that longstanding and widespread expert disagreement counts as evidence for moral anti-realism. If disagreement counts as evidence for anti-realism, then agreement should count as evidence for realism. However, Hanno Sauer (2019) argues that there is, in fact, widespread fundamental agreement on moral matters, and this agreement actually supports anti-realism rather than realism. Sauer argues that discovering truths in objective domains "requires often painstaking inquiry and methodical reasoning, frequently conducted by professional investigators" (Sauer 2019: 346). Given the complexity and difficulty of objective domains, widespread agreement should not be expected if those domains were in fact objective.

Conversely, if widespread agreement is evidence that there are no objective moral facts, then widespread disagreement would be evidence that there are objective moral facts. Sauer's reasoning can be used to construct an argument in favour of moral realism that goes like this: If there is lots of moral disagreement, then we can expect there to be objective moral facts. We know there is lots of moral disagreement from the empirical evidence. So, we can expect there to be objective moral facts. Sauer's claim that discovering truth in objective domains "requires often painstaking inquiry and methodical reasoning, frequently conducted by professional investigators" (Sauer 2019: 346), strongly supports the view disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers counts in favour of moral realism. As Leiter (2014) pointed out, moral philosophers have been theorizing and disagreeing for centuries. If Sauer is right about objective domains being those which require intense effortful inquiry frequently conducted by professionals and we should expect lots of moral disagreement if there were objective moral facts, then the fact of widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers supports moral realism rather than anti-realism. This is because moral philosophers have spent centuries painstakingly inquiring into morality and there is lots of disagreement amongst them. So, it is both the case that there is a lot of disagreement in moral philosophy, and moral philosophy is an activity that requires painstaking inquiry and methodical reasoning conducted by professional investigators. So, it looks like moral philosophy meets Sauer's criteria for what is to be expected from objective domains. Therefore, we can expect that moral philosophy is an objective domain, there are objective moral facts, and moral realism is true.

But what has happened here? Expert disagreement is supposed to be evidence against moral realism, not evidence in support of it. In Leiter's view, sustained expert disagreement supports anti-realism. In Sauer's reasoning, sustained expert disagreement supports moral realism. So, expert disagreement appears to be both evidence for and against moral realism. This cannot be right. That the argument from expert disagreement can be used to show moral realism (at least for some philosophers) further demonstrates its self-undermining nature. What is most plausible, given its contradictory nature, is that the argument from expert disagreement supports neither moral realism nor moral anti-realism. That is to say, the fact of sustained expert disagreement does not function as evidence for or against

moral realism and so has no evidential value relevant to the meta-ethical question of whether moral realism is true. Thus, sustained expert disagreement is not a problem for moral realism.

An anti-realist may respond by saying that while certain kinds of disagreement do not support moral anti-realism, there could be other kinds of disagreement that do. As mentioned previously, folk moral disagreement does not seem to be strong evidence in support of moral anti-realism. But perhaps specific kinds of expert moral disagreement would be strong evidence in support of moral anti-realism. So, a moral anti-realist could say that even if some kinds of expert moral disagreements do not support moral anti-realism, there could be some other kinds of expert moral disagreements that do.[9] However, the burden of proof would be on the anti-realist to explain what these specific kinds of disagreement are and why they would be relevantly different from any other sort of expert disagreement. The argument for moral anti-realism being considered here already appeals to a specific kind of disagreement: widespread and longstanding disagreement between expert moral philosophers. It is unclear what other kind of disagreement the anti-realist would be better off appealing to or how that other kind of disagreement would not fail for much of the same reasons the appeal to expert moral disagreement fails. The phenomenon of widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers is the basis of the strongest version of the argument from disagreement as it is the sort of disagreement that would least likely be expected. Since the fact of such disagreement does not undermine moral realism, it is not clear how other kinds of disagreement would.

5. Conclusion

I have presented three arguments against the anti-realist explanation for widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers. In section 4.1, I showed arguments from expert disagreement for moral anti-realism have a self-undermining nature. If we can appeal to disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers to support moral anti-realism, then we can appeal to disagreement amongst expert meta-ethicists to refute meta-ethical realism, which would mean moral anti-realism is false. In section 4.2, I explained abductive 'inference to the best explanation' style arguments for moral anti-realism are also self-undermining, for they presuppose the existence of at least one objective normative fact, namely the existence of an objectively best explanation for radical disagreement. By presupposing at least on objective normative fact, a path to objective moral facts opens up. In section 4.3, I argued that given how both agreement and disagreement have been appealed to in order to support an anti-realist conclusion about the objectivity of morality, it is not clear what either is really evidence for. If disagreement supports moral anti-realism, then agreement should support realism. But, if agreement supports moral anti-realism, then disagreement should support moral realism. Given both agreement

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9   I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

and disagreement have been employed to support moral anti-realism, and the two strategies are not compatible with each other, it is most likely that neither agreement nor disagreement supports either moral anti-realism or moral realism. I thus conclude that widespread and longstanding disagreement amongst expert moral philosophers is not a problem for moral realism.

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