Trusting Our Own Minds

Metaethical Constructivism and Moral Objectivity

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To J.

And this you can know – fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinct in the universe.

John Steinbeck, *The Graps of Wrath*

Zusammenfassung

Die Aufgabe des Erklärens und Begründens ethischer Objektivität nimmt einen besonderen Stellenwert innerhalb jeder metaethischen Untersuchung und Theorie ein. So herrscht innerhalb des metaethischen Diskurses Einigkeit darüber, dass eine der zentralsten und wichtigsten Aufgaben einer jeder metaethischen Theorie darin bestehen muss, die objektiven Eigenschaften der alltäglichen moralischen Praxis zu erklären und philosophisch zu begründen (Timmons 2010, 544; Miller 2013, 3; Hopster 2017, 764).

In vorliegender Dissertation widme ich mich dem Thema der moralischen Objektivität unter Annahme der Theorie des metaethischen Konstruktivismus und entwickele dabei eine neue und eigenständige Spielart des Konstruktivismus, die explizit zum Ziel hat, moralische Objektivität zu sichern. Die Frage danach, ob und wie der Konstruktivismus in der Lage ist, Objektivität in der Ethik zu begründen und zu etablieren, gehört zu einer der grundlegendsten und zentralsten Fragen zur Bestimmung von Möglichkeit und Plausibilität des Konstruktivismus schlechthin. Dies erklärt sich aus der Natur der konstruktivistischen Theorie sowie seines originellen Beitrages zur zeitgenössischen metaethischen Debatte.

Was also ist der Konstruktivismus und warum ist die Frage, ob und wie dieser die Objektivität der Moral stichhaltig erklären kann, so entscheidend für die Bestimmung seiner Möglichkeit und Plausibilität?

Der Konstruktivismus nimmt innerhalb der metaethischen Theorienlandschaft eine besondere Stellung ein, indem er zwei radikale Thesen vertritt: Erstens, dass es möglich ist, die Resultate einer realistischen Position gegenüber der Moral anzunehmen – nämlich moralische Wahrheit und Objektivität zu sichern – ohne deswegen zu der Annahme eines vollständigen realistischen Theoriegebäudes verpflichtet zu sei [1]; zweitens, dass diese alternative Form von Realismus allein durch die Leistungen des rationalen menschlichen Geistes sowie seiner mentalen Zustände etabliert werden kann.

Um die Radikalität der beiden Thesen und damit die konstruktivistische Position besser verstehen zu können, ist es hilfreich, die Konkurrenztheorien des Konstruktivismus genauer

[1] Diese Darstellung bedarf weiterer Konkretisierung, da es keine einheitliche Bestimmung darüber gibt, was unter einem moralischen Realismus zu verstehen ist. In 1.2 widme ich mich dieser Problemstellung im Detail.

zu betrachten. Dazu gehören vor allem der moralische Realismus auf der einen sowie der Non-Kognitivismus auf der anderen Seite.[2]

Der moralische Realismus ist die Position, nach der moralische Urteile aufgrund der Existenz eines global bewusstseinsunabhängigen Sets moralischer Tatsachen wahr gemacht[3] werden, die ebenso Teil der Welt sind wie beispielsweise physikalische Entitäten (Brink 1989; Rosen 1994; Bagnoli 2002; Shafer-Landau 2003; Asay 2012; 2013). Beide Thesen, also sowohl die These über die Bewusstseinsunabhängigkeit der Moral, nach der moralische Tatsachen nicht durch mentale Zustände konstituiert werden, als auch diejenige über die Existenz moralischer Tatsachen, gehen im Falle des Realismus Hand in Hand, da dieser behauptet, dass moralische Tatsachen nicht durch mentale Zustände konstituiert werden genau deshalb, weil sie Teil der Welt sind.

Auf der anderen Seite steht der Non-Kognitivismus, nach welchem es weder moralische Wahrheit, noch Tatsachen, noch Objektivität innerhalb der Ethik geben kann, da es in der moralischen Praxis zuerst darum geht, durch moralischer Urteile non-kognitive mentale Zustände wie Zustimmung oder Ablehnung auszudrücken (Gibbard 1990, 8; 2003, 6; Schroeder 2010).[4]

Beide Theorien werfen jeweils eigene, zum Teil schwerwiegende Probleme auf. So ist da zum einen der Realismus, der zwar explizit moralische Wahrheit und Objektivität erklären möchte, dabei aber grundlegende sowie zahlreiche Schwierigkeiten auf den Gebieten der Metaphysik, der Epistemologie (Mackie 1973) als auch der moralischen Phänomenologie (Bagnoli 2002 und Kapitel 2 der vorliegenden Arbeit) aufwirft. Auch der Non-Kognitivismus ist nicht ohne seine Schwierigkeiten. So kommt er zwar ohne die problematischen metaphysischen und epistemologischen Annahmen des Realismus aus, ist aber gerade aufgrund seiner Ablehnung der Existenz moralischer Wahrheiten und moralischer Objektivität wenig plausibel.

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[2] Damit ist natürlich das Theorienspektrum innerhalb der Metaethik nicht ausgeschöpft. Es soll damit lediglich gesagt werden, dass die beiden genannten Positionen die *wichtigsten* oder *zentralsten* Konkurrenten des Konstruktivismus darstellen (vgl. Korsgaard 1996; Bagnoli 2002).

[3] Der Ausdruck „wahr machen“ leitet sich hier vom Begriff des *truthmakers* ab. Siehe 1.2 für eine eingehendere Erläuterung.

[4] Auch diese Darstellung ist nur vorläufig, denn sie ignoriert modernere Spielarten des Non-Kognitivismus wie Gibbard’s Norm-Expressivismus (Gibbard 1990) oder Blackburn’s Quasi-Realismus (Blackburn 1984; 1993; 1998), die es sich ausdrücklich zum Ziel machen, die Existenz moralische(r) Wahrheit(en) und sogar moralische Objektivität zu erklären.

Es folgt aus diesen Schwierigkeiten, dass eine Theorie, die es ermöglichen würde, die Resultate des Realismus zu sichern, *ohne* seine profunden Schwierigkeiten in Kauf nehmen zu müssen, eine äußerst attraktive Theorie innerhalb des metaethischen Diskurses darstellen muss. Genau diese Theorie aber stellt der Konstruktivismus dar, der behauptet, dass er (genau wie der Realismus) in der Lage ist, Wahrheit und Objektivität innerhalb der Ethik zu begründen – allerdings ohne auf das problematische Theoriegebäude des klassischen Realismus zurückgreifen zu müssen, da diese Ergebnisse gerade nicht durch problematische metaphysische Annahmen gesichert werden sollen, sondern durch die Leistungen des rationalen menschlichen Geistes.

Auf diese Weise tritt der Konstruktivismus mit dem Anspruch auf, eine genuine und sogar bessere Alternative zu den Positionen des Realismus (sowie des Non-Kognitivismus) zu liefern, da sie mit einem metaphysisch sparsamen Theoriegebäude in der Lage ist, all das zu erklären und zu begründen, was der Realismus begründen kann, nämlich die Existenz moralischer Wahrheiten, Tatsachen sowie die Objektivität moralischer Praxis. Aufgrund dieses Anspruches wird der Konstruktivismus sogar von einigen seiner Kritiker als besonders interessante Theorie verstanden (Enoch 2009).

Dennoch ist auch der Konstruktivismus, trotz seines höchst interessanten und spannenden Ansatzes, nicht ohne eigene Probleme und Schwierigkeiten. Eine dieser Schwierigkeiten ist gerade durch das Projekt der Sicherung moralischer Objektivität gegeben, das im Mittelpunkt dieser Arbeit steht. Dafür sind zwei Gründe ausschlaggebend. Erstens besteht innerhalb der metaethischen Debatte Einigkeit darüber, dass eine jede metaethische Theorie moralische Objektivität erklären und begründen können muss. Dies gilt auch für den Konstruktivismus. Zweitens, und noch entscheidender, erscheint es als eine genuin offene Frage, ob der Konstruktivismus überhaupt in der Lage ist, Objektivität mit seinen theoretischen Mitteln zu sichern, oder ob diese nicht dem Projekt der Sicherung moralischer Objektivität grundsätzlich im Wege stehen.

Der Skeptizismus gegenüber einer genuin konstruktivistischen Theorie, die in der Lage ist, Objektivität zu erklären und zu etablieren, stützt sich auf die weit geteilte Annahme, dass Objektivität in der Ethik mit dem Konstruktivismus überhaupt nicht zu vereinbaren ist, da Objektivität letztendlich nur auf einer ontologischen Grundlage und/oder durch die Annahme der (absoluten) Bewusstseinsunabhängigkeit moralischer Tatsachen etabliert werden kann.

Da der Konstruktivismus seinem Wesen nach beide Thesen ablehnt, ist unklar, wie er in der Lage sein soll, moralische Objektivität plausibel zu machen.

Wären diese Zweifel an der Möglichkeit des Konstruktivismus, Objektivität in der Ethik stichhaltig zu begründen, korrekt, würde dies dem Konstruktivismus als solchen schweren Schaden zufügen, da aus den bereits genannten Gründen nicht mehr davon ausgegangen kann, dass es sich beim Konstruktivismus überhaupt um eine metaethische Theorie handelte, noch, dass diese mit Anspruch auftreten könnte, eine genuine (oder gar bessere) Alternative zu anderen Theorien zu präsentieren.

Gegen diese Zweifel verteidige ich in vorliegender Dissertation Theorie und Anspruch des Konstruktivismus, indem ich eine neue und eigenständige konstruktivistische Spielart entwickele, die nicht nur in der Lage ist, die allgemeine Möglichkeit und Plausibilität des Konstruktivismus, Objektivität in der Ethik zu erklären, aufzuzeigen, sondern darüber hinaus dieses Projekt überzeugender verwirklicht als andere Theorien innerhalb des Konstruktivismus wie der Kantianismus auf der einen Seite und der humeanische Objektivismus auf der anderen Seite.

Während dieser neuartige Ansatz einerseits zwar in einer komplexen Beziehung zu seinen Konkurrenzpositionen innerhalb der konstruktivistischen Debatte steht, und deswegen eine *hybride Theorie* darstellt, hat er gleichzeitig zentrale Vorteile gegenüber diesen Konkurrenten insofern er (anders als der Humeanismus) ein plausibles Konzept moralischer Objektivität vertritt *und* bei dem Nachweis der Existenz objektiver moralischer Gründe die vielfältigen – und oftmals problematischen – Annahmen des Kantianismus zu umgehen in der Lage ist.[5]

Die hybride Theorie findet damit Antworten auf zwei zentrale Fragen, die durch das Thema der moralischen Objektivität gegeben sind: Erstens, wie der Konstruktivismus das Konzept moralischer Objektivität ausbuchstabiert; und zweitens, wie er die Existenz objektiver moralischer Gründe zu sichern in der Lage ist.

Während der hybride Ansatz die erste Frage (ähnlich dem Kantianismus) beantwortet, indem er Objektivität als Universalität begreift, behauptet er weiter, dass die Existenz objektiver moralischer Gründe durch Reflexion auf unsere menschliche Natur begründet

[5] Tatsächlich handelt es sich beim Kantianismus – entgegen der weitverbreiteten Ansicht – nicht lediglich um eine objektivistische Position innerhalb des Konstruktivismus, sondern darüber hinaus um eine sehr komplexe Theorie, die zahlreiche und ziemlich spezifische Auffassungen über einen ganzen Komplex von Themen vertritt. Ich setze mich mit dem Kantianismus in 3.2 genauer auseinander.

werden kann. Vor allem im Falle des letzteren Arguments ist die hybride Theorie entschieden durch Aristoteles' *ergon*-Argument (wie in der Nikomachischen Ethik (I.7) entworfen) motiviert.

Gegeben der Korrektheit meiner Argumente, trägt der hybride Ansatz ganz entschieden dazu bei, den Konstruktivismus als diejenige interessante und plausible Theorie auszuweisen, die er ist. So verteidigt mein Ansatz einerseits den grundsätzlichen Status des Konstruktivismus als eine metaethische Theorie, indem er zeigt, dass der Konstruktivismus moralische Objektivität entgegen allgemeiner Zweifel etablieren *kann*. Zweitens hilft er, den Konstruktivismus in der Metaethik als eine attraktive und plausible Alternative zum Realismus auszuzeichnen, da er deutlich macht, dass (auch) der Konstruktivismus souverän mit der Herausforderung der Begründung moralischer Objektivität umgehen kann. Insofern dies dem Konstruktivismus unter Annahme einer – gegenüber dem Realismus – unproblematischen metaphysischen Theorie gelingt, zeigen meine Argumente, dass der Konstruktivismus letztendlich nicht nur irgendeine, sondern sogar eine weitaus *bessere* Alternative zu realistischen Theorien darstellt.

Dieses Ergebnis wird am Ende meines Dissertationsprojektes durch die innerkonstruktivistische Auseinandersetzung mit Sharon Street's viel diskutiertem Humeanischem Konstruktivismus gestützt.[6] Street argumentiert für zweierlei: Erstens, dass Spielarten des Konstruktivismus falsch sein müssen, die für die Annahme objektiver moralischer Gründe plädieren, und dass es sich deshalb, zweitens, beim Konstruktivismus um einen Subjektivismus handelt. Demgegenüber zeige ich, dass nicht nur diese beiden Grundannahmen des Humeanismus Street'scher Lesart falsch sind, sondern dass dieser Humeanismus selbst auf einem grundlegenden Irrtum beruht. Dies weise ich durch eine eingehendere Analyse der Haltung des Wertschätzens (*valuing*) nach, die Street in den Mittelpunkt ihrer Ablehnung einer konstruktivistischen Begründung objektiver moralischer Gründe stellt (Street 2008; 2010). Entgegen Street's Annahme, dass keinerlei Verbindung bestehe zwischen der Haltung des Wertschätzens *als solcher* (also unabhängig von der Annahme spezifischer Überzeugungen und Urteile eines gegebenen Akteurs) und (objektiven) moralischen Gründen, weise ich nach, das mit Hilfe des hybriden Ansatzes genau diese Verbindung aufgezeigt werden *kann*.

[6] Street ist bei Weitem nicht die einzige Vertreterin eines Humeanischen Konstruktivismus (vgl. Lenman 2010; Driver 2017; Dorsey 2018) aber sicherlich die prominenteste.

Meine Auseinandersetzung mit Street's Humeanismus ist dabei nicht lediglich als ein Nebenschauplatz meines Projektes zu verstehen, das sich dem Nachweis der Plausibilität und Attraktivität des Konstruktivismus in der Metaethik widmet. Das Gegenteil ist der Fall, wie sich leicht anhand einiger Überlegungen bezüglich der Konsequenzen der hypothetischen Korrektheit des Humeanismus zeigen lässt. Sollte Street demnach richtig liegen in ihrer Argumentation, dann würde daraus folgen, dass der Konstruktivismus generell nicht der richtige Adressat zur Begründung der Objektivität in der Moral sein kann, da er lediglich zu einem Subjektivismus führte. Dies würde aber gerade die konstruktivistische Theorie im Allgemeinen sowie ihren Anspruch gefährden. Denn nicht nur wäre der Konstruktivismus nicht in der Lage, seiner Verpflichtung als metaethische Theorie nachzukommen und die Objektivität moralischer Praxis plausibel zu machen. Darüber hinaus würde sich auch sein Anspruch, eine genuine (und sogar bessere) Alternative zu realistischen Position darzustellen, nicht einlösen lassen, dann dazu gehörte gerade, die Objektivität in der Moral erklären und begründen zu können.

Gegen diese Gefahr zeige ich, dass der Humeanismus zwar sicherlich als eine interessante, da herausfordernde Theorie zu verstehen ist, gleichzeitig aber weder den Konstruktivismus noch seine Ambitionen in Gefahr zu bringen in der Lage ist, da er gerade selbst auf einem grundsätzlichen Fehler beruht, dem Fehler nämlich, die Verbindung zwischen dem Bereich der Moral und der Haltung des Wertschätzens nicht erkannt zu haben.

Zweifelsohne wird mit vorliegender Dissertation das Thema der moralischen Objektivität für den Konstruktivismus nicht abschließend behandelt sein. Im Gegenteil; gerade aufgrund der Wichtigkeit dieses Themas dürfte es für den Konstruktivismus immer von entscheidender Bedeutung sein, sich mit der Objektivität der Ethik auseinanderzusetzen. Dennoch ist es meine Hoffnung, mit dieser Schrift einen wesentlichen Beitrag zur Verteidigung und Plausibilisierung des Konstruktivismus zu leisten und dabei zu helfen, seine Ideen attraktiver zu machen. Sollte mir dieses gelingen, sind alle Hoffnungen, die ich mit dem Verfassen dieser Dissertation verbinde, erfüllt.

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When thinking about philosophical work, we tend to envision philosophers sitting alone at their desks, meditating on their thoughts and, at some point, coming up with great answers to great philosophical problems – and all by him- or herself.

Writing this dissertation has been nothing like this. On the contrary, many people were immensely helpful for the development and refinement of my thoughts, arguments and claims. It is therefore safe to say that without these people and their valuable input, this dissertation could have never been written.

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Introduction

The Agenda

When it comes to the metaethical task of explaining and making sense of what it is that we are doing while doing ethics, the subject of moral objectivity occupies an important and special place within that task. Thus, it is often agreed that being able to explain and justify the objective features of common moral practice is one of (Miller 2013, 3) if not the most important task for any metaethical theory to undertake (Timmons 2010, 544; cf. Hopster 2017, 764).

In this dissertation, I tackle the issue of ethical objectivity on behalf of *metaethical constructivism*. To be more precise, my aim is to make plausible, strengthen, and defend the constructivist original contribution to contemporary metaethics by developing a novel constructivist account on the objectivity of ethics.

But what is metaethical constructivism? Why does it deserve special attention? And why does a constructivist view on ethical objectivity contribute to making plausible the constructivist contribution to metaethics in general?

To understand constructivism is at the same time to understand what is so special about it as a metaethical theory. Thus, constructivism marks a distinctive and unique position within contemporary debate in metaethics for two reasons. First, it endorses what I call the "very big idea", that is, the view that one can be a realist about morality without having to embrace the costs of the realist view.[7] Second, constructivism maintains that one can be realist about morality not in just any old way, but by embracing the distinctive idea that, ultimately, it is the human rational mind, including human mental states, that can account for everything that metaethical theories need to account for, such as the existence of moral truths, facts, and the objectivity of ethical practice and discourse.

In order to better understand the uniqueness and radicalness of both points, one needs to understand the two other kinds of theories that dominated metaethical debate

[7] Note, however, that this is a somewhat rough sketch because (as I show in 1.2) the constructivist theory can itself be understood in realist terms, depending on how exactly the position of moral realism is understood.

before the constructivist view came onto the scene. Thus, on the one hand, there is the moral realist view, according to which there is truth and objectivity in ethics because of the existence of a mind-independent realm of moral facts (Brink 1989; Rosen 1994; Bagnoli 2002; Shafer-Landau 2003; Asay 2012; 2013). The realist therefore endorses two crucial claims about morality, namely that morality rests on ontological grounds and that it is mind-independent, i.e. that moral truths and facts are not constituted by (human) mental states. On the realist understanding, both claims go hand in hand because the realist assumes that morality is mind-independent precisely because it is the world itself that contains facts about morality.

On the other hand, there is the non-cognitivist view, which maintains that there are no truths or facts about morality, nor is moral practice and discourse objective (Schroeder 2010). On the contrary, since doing or engaging in ethics means nothing over and above expressing non-cognitive mental states such as (dis)approval (ibid), morality is, in the end, not a factual matter but instead resembles more the matters of taste.[8]

As such, until the constructivist entered metaethical discourse, it seemed that there were only two possibilities to explain and make sense of morality. On the one hand, one could aim to secure the existence of truths and facts in moral practice and grant ethical objectivity, but doing so required the presumption of a mind-independent realm of extant moral facts. On the other hand, one may have granted the human mind and mental states to play a more constitutive role in moral matters, but could do so only on the premise of accepting the non-cognitivist theory.

The problem with both possibilities, however, is that they are equally hard to accept. Thus, the difficulty with the moral realist account is that it raises several difficulties regarding moral metaphysics, epistemology, motivation, and the theory's ability to account for what is actually going on in common moral practice (Mackie 1973).[9] Thus, while the realist view certainly comes with the advantage of presenting explanations of the key issues of metaethics (such as how there can be truth and objectivity in ethics), it does so with heavy theoretical costs that are often very hard to accept. But the non-cognitivist theory

[8] Again, this description of the non-cognitivist position is preliminary because it holds only for early non-cognitivist positions such as emotivism. Contemporary versions of non-cognitivism, by contrast, are highly sophisticated in the sense that they aim to secure the existence of truths and facts in morality and intend to grant moral objectivity.

[9] I argue at length particularly for the latter point in chapter 2.

fares no better. Thus, while it is in a good position to avoid the many problems of the realist position regarding moral metaphysics, etc. (Stahl 2013), it has the profound problem of not being able to explain those metaethical key issues that the realist does make good sense of (Shafer-Landau 2003).

It follows quite naturally from these concerns that if there were a view that could grant the exact *results* of the realist view *without* raising the profound problems of the realist *theory*, this view must be considered as especially interesting for metaethical debate and theorizing. It is then exactly this alternative that the constructivist aims to present insofar as constructivism seeks to account for the existence of moral truths and facts and the objectivity of ethics not by assuming the problematic mind-independent realm of moral facts that moral agents would have to discover or track, but by putting the rational (human) mind and (human) mental states at the center. To be more precise, constructivism has great trust in our minds insofar as it maintains that in order to account for the existence of moral truths, facts, or moral objectivity, it suffices to refer to nothing other than the nature and functioning of the rational (human) mind.

If the constructivist position were genuinely possible and plausible, it would present a strong alternative to moral realism insofar as it offers reasonable explanations of the central issues of metaethics on metaphysically parsimonious and rather unproblematic grounds (Enoch 2009).

Note, however, that despite the interesting and original contribution of the constructivist theory to contemporary metaethical debate, the constructivist ground-breaking theory does not come without its own problems, difficulties, and tricky questions. Indeed, the constructivist theory itself has raised and continues to raise some rather heavy criticisms against its outlines and ambitions. One of the central and most important challenges the constructivist faces is presented precisely by the subject of moral objectivity. This is for two reasons: the first is due to the constructivist status as a metaethical theory in general; the second is due to its aim to provide an alternative to realist views in particular. Regarding the first point, it is agreed that every metaethical theory, qua being such theory, must account for the objective features of common moral practice and discourse. Insofar as constructivism wants to be understood as an ordinary metaethical theory, it has strong reason to account for ethical objectivity. But this is not the only reason why the issue of objectivity presents a rather pressing issue for the constructivist, for especially in the case

of moral objectivity it appears as a genuinely open question how constructivism can even in principle account for it in the first place. What makes this question a genuinely open question is the fact that it is prima facie hard to see how the objectivity of ethics can be secured by a theory that grants the rational mind and mental states a constitutive role in explaining and justifying the moral realm.

This skepticism toward a constructivist position on the objectivity of ethics is the result of a broad agreement in metaethical debate that the very subject of ethical objectivity crucially hinges on theoretical commitments that the constructivist simply cannot accept from the outset. Thus, it is often said that the very concept of ethical objectivity either is an ontological matter and/or requires morality's independence from the mental. If this were true, it would imply that metaethical constructivism would just be the wrong theory to adopt when trying to account for the objectivity of ethics, a fortiori that constructivism is not well-placed to present a full-blown alternative to moral realism. For it appeared that were objectivity just an ontological matter or required the adoption of the feature of the moral mind-independence, then the realist would have all the necessary theoretical means to secure moral objectivity. Yet such means would not be available to the constructivist who rejects the existence of a mind-independent realm of moral facts to begin with.

It is then precisely because of the importance of the issue of moral objectivity for the constructivist theory that I focus particularly on the question of how constructivism fares in accounting for this. I do so by developing a novel account on moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism, which gives precise answers to two rather fundamental questions surrounding the issue of objectivity. These relate to: (i) how constructivism understands the very concept of objectivity; and (ii) how it secures the existence of objective moral reasons.

While the account that I develop herein presents a novel and independent approach to the subject of moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism, it also places itself between the two other positions within the constructivist camp that openly strive to secure ethical objectivity – namely Kantianism on the one hand, and the more recently developed Humean objectivist view on the other. It is for the latter reason that I call my own view the *hybrid view*. In order to better understand this view, one needs to fully grasp the other theories of Kantianism and Humeanism. As such, on a first approximation, while Kantianism

advocates a rather strong conception of objectivity insofar as it assumes the existence of universal moral reasons (Dorsey 2018), Humeanism aims at its very core to preserve the contingency of moral reasons and therefore maintains that moral reasons, even when objective, only hold for a limited class of moral agents, that is, (only) for a given collective (Driver 2017).

The advantage of the *hybrid* account over both the Kantian and the Humean views, then, is that, in contrast to Humeanism, the hybrid view offers a more plausible conception of moral objectivity but does so with a much more parsimonious theoretical framework than Kantianism. After all, Kantianism is a highly complex view endorsing rather distinctive views on the nature and function of practical reason, (human) agency, and rationality that not all constructivists share in the first place or are ready to accept in virtue of the goal of securing the objectivity of ethics. The hybrid account offers a plausible, neat, and parsimonious view on moral objectivity insofar as it fares at least equally well in securing ethical objectivity as Kantianism, yet does not require one to undergo any of the (sometimes problematic) commitments of the Kantian view.

If my arguments in favor of the hybrid account are correct, this would provide an important and interesting result for at least two reasons. The first is important for *intra*-constructivist debate insofar as the hybrid account demonstrates that one can grant a strong and plausible conception of moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism without having to accept the problematic conception of objectivity that the Humean endorses, or without having to undergo the several and often problematic theoretical commitments of the Kantian view. In this respect, the hybrid account presents a novel, interesting, and in some respects more plausible objectivist position than its rivals from the Humean and even from the Kantian camps.

Secondly, the hybrid position serves to make plausible and defend the constructivist position in general and to draw out its original contribution to metaethics. Again, there are two key reasons why this is the case. First, because the hybrid view helps to show that constructivism gives us everything we want from a plausible metaethical theory, at least when it comes to the subject of moral objectivity. Secondly, it contributes to showing that constructivism can be understood as a plausible alternative to moral realism insofar as it is the theory that secures the results of realism without having to accept the costs of a full-fledged moral realist framework. Again, this holds for the issue of moral objectivity so that

the hybrid account proves that the rational human mind is able to secure the objectivity of ethics. However, given that there is still a profound skepticism toward the idea that the capacities of the rational human mind (alone) can secure objectivity in moral discourse and practice, the hybrid account helps to reveal and bolster the strengths and very plausibility of the constructivist theory.

The Plan

Even though the chapters of this thesis are related to one another so as to support the overall aim of defending and strengthening the constructivist idea in metaethical debate, especially with regard to constructivist objectivism, each of the chapters contributes its own claim. Chapter 1 appears to be the least innovative due to the fact that it seeks to capture the constructivist's original contribution to metaethics. In order to do so, I have to refer to and make use of the work of those who have either introduced metaethical constructivism or helped to refine, reinforce or even criticize the position. That said, chapter 1 also provides something genuinely new to constructivist discourse since it presents a unified description of the constructivist position. Given that some doubt that there can be such a unified description, chapter 1, while modest in its ambition, nevertheless offers an original contribution to the ongoing debate.

Chapter 2 more positively and ambitiously moves on to not only delineate and defend the constructivist idea and its input in metaethics, but also argue why constructivism is an even more plausible and attractive view than many of its rivals, stemming from both the cognitivist and the non-cognitivist camps. My arguments in favor of the view that constructivism has some major advantages over many of its rivals are then especially addressed to realist views. The main result of my second chapter therefore is that of demonstrating that constructivism is a more plausible and attractive view than any realist theory (including ordinary realism as well as those theories within non-cognitivism that try to "mimic" the realist theory such as quasi-realism).

Chapters 3 and 4 shift the focus onto the subject that stands at the heart of my thesis, namely the issue of moral objectivity and the question of how metaethical constructivism can account for it. To be more precise, in both chapters I argue why constructivism is in a very good position to present a plausible view on moral objectivity by

developing and defending a new and independent account on behalf of constructivist objectivism. This hybrid account has two main features. One is its understanding of the concept of ethical objectivity in terms of universality; the other is its maintaining that the existence of objective moral reasons is granted by rational reflection under ideal conditions on a universal standpoint that is cashed out in terms of human nature.

In the fifth and final chapter, I apply the results of the hybrid account to Humean constructivism as introduced by Sharon Street. While Humeanism, on the basis of an analysis of the attitude of valuing, claims that constructivist objectivism is wrong and that metaethical constructivism in general must be interpreted in (moral) subjectivist terms (Street 2008; 2010), I show, contrary to this conclusion, that there *does* exist a relation between valuing and morality. Because my argument shows that every valuer as such – that is to say, merely in virtue of her being a valuing creature – is committed to accept certain moral reasons, my account establishes that there is a version of constructivist objectivism on the basis of an analysis of valuing, and that, a fortiori, Humeanism itself is false.

Some may wonder why I grant Humeanism such a prominent place within my overall project, indeed reserving a whole chapter for it. After all, Street's Humeanism is just one view within the overall constructivist theory, and it is just one among the variants of Humeanism within the constructivist camp (Bagnoli 2002; Driver 2017; Dorsey 2018). In this light, it needs to be made clear that my discussion of the Humean view and especially the result of my argument in chapter 5 have special importance for constructivism in general, which can be seen by the following considerations. Let us suppose that Street is correct and that Humeanism is the most plausible view that constructivists could come up with. This would establish not only that the constructivist view would fail in at least some important respect as a metaethical theory, but that it would fail to provide a genuine alternative to moral realism. The first reason holds because accounting for moral objectivity is an important task for every metaethical theory. Thus, if constructivism were in no position to account for it, it would fail as such a theory. It would further follow from the truth of Humeanism that there would be less reason to consider constructivism as an alternative to realism since it is often agreed that realism has no problem at all with accounting for the objectivity of ethics.

Finally, and to make things worse, it would follow from the truth of Street's argument that the "very big idea" of constructivism cannot be rendered plausible or successful after all, because the correctness of Humeanism would prove that the rational human mind, ultimately, *cannot* all by itself settle all metaethical issues such as securing the existence of moral truths or accounting for moral objectivity. It is precisely for these reasons that the question of the correctness of Humeanism is so important for constructivists to address because it carries great relevance for evaluating the prospects of metaethical constructivism *as such* – that is to say, the question goes right to the very heart of constructivism's theory, aims, and ambition(s).

Against these worries, I show at the end of my work that Humeanism, rather than threatening the constructivist position, itself rests on a rather profound mistake. I thereby grant that Humeanism remains an interesting and rather challenging view for the overall constructivist theory, but that it is nevertheless far from being correct about its crucial claims in respect of the relation between valuing and morality, and a fortiori its claims about the prospects of constructivist objectivism in particular and constructivism in general.

Of course, neither my hybrid view nor my refutation of the Humean constructivist view are intended to altogether settle the issue of moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism or to settle any dispute about the plausibility of constructivism in general. On the contrary, in view of the importance of the issue of moral objectivity for the constructivist theory, the debate around it is unlikely to abate any time soon. I am also well aware that the general skepticism that the constructivist faces in metaethical debate rests on a number of different reasons and issues that go beyond the matter of moral objectivity. [10] Nevertheless, it is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to establishing the plausibility of the constructivist theory, as well as showcasing its ideas and original contribution to contemporary metaethics. Thus, if the arguments I have presented herein are correct, and if they help to mark out constructivism as the kind of interesting and fascinating theory that I take it to be, then I will have achieved everything that I hoped to achieve with this project.

[10] See chapter 1 for further argumentation regarding this point.

1

What is Metaethical Constructivism?

1.1 Introduction

The overall aim in this thesis is to show that metaethical constructivism provides a genuine and more attractive alternative to moral realism, as well as to sophisticated non-cognitivist views (such as quasi-realism).

In order to render that project successful, it will be necessary to first determine precisely *what is* a *constructivist* theory in metaethics, and what it contributes to metaethical debate. To do so will constitute an important contribution to the constructivist and the metaethical debates more broadly. The reason for this is that, while there are some (including myself) who deeply and genuinely believe in the powers and attractiveness of the theoretical resources of the constructivist position, many theorists remain skeptical about the constructivist view.

In light of such skepticism, this opening chapter serves to clarify three basic issues: first, to set out what constitutes the specifically constructivist contribution to metaethics; second, to provide a unified definition of the constructivist view; and third, to defend it as a full-blown metaethical view.

The chapter will proceed as follows. In 1.2, I argue in detail for the original contribution of constructivism to metaethical debate and present in 1.3 a unified definition of the constructivist metaethical theory. In section 1.4, I argue that constructivism, contra the prominent skeptics, *can* be understood as a thorough-going metaethical theory and I present several arguments in support of this claim. Lastly, in section 1.5, I discuss two of the most serious objections against the merits of metaethical constructivism in general. Section 1.6 concludes.

1.2 Constructivism: Between Realism and Anti-Realism

Morality is a common part of human practice. People are, at least in some respects, familiar with what it means to have moral considerations or reasons, to be subject to moral obligations, or to argue for different solutions to moral problems and questions. People also, at least in some respects, know what it is like to hold one another morally accountable, and thus are familiar with the practice of assigning praise and blame that is intimately connected to it.

Yet, despite our being acquainted with morality on account of its role in common human practice, we sometimes ask about morality's nature and status. This might be because of a purely philosophical interest, just as an astrophysicist is interested in the nature of blackholes, without thinking that this has any impact on our lives and practices. But it might also be exactly because of morality's great influence on us, our identities and our lives that we sometimes ask what morality really *is* and whether it really is justified to make claims on us (Korsgaard 1996).

Any second-order or *meta*-ethical investigation of morality can thus change how we commonly deal with morality, and so the investigation of morality can sometimes have (quite troublesome) practical consequences for moral practice itself. For instance, let's suppose that error theory is true. If so, this would mean that our moral practice rests on a mistake (Svavarsdóttir 2001, 144–5, 149) either because its metaphysical foundations are at best dubious (Mackie 1977), or because moral practice presupposes that there is such a thing as a moral reason, which, after close examination of the very concept of such reason, is revealed to be philosophically untenable (Joyce 2001; 2002).

When it comes to the specifically constructivist view, I propose that the most essential and important contribution of the constructivist view to metaethical debate, its "very big idea"[11], is conveyed by the claim that one can be a full-fledged realist about morality without having to embrace a fully mind-independent ontological framework. This most central thesis consists in two more particular but equally important aspects. First, a reconsideration or interpretation of one of the most crucial and essential distinctions within contemporary metaethical debate, namely the distinction between moral *realism* and *anti-realism*. Second,

[11] This name is inspired by Schroeder 2010.

a novel theory or idea about the function and powers of the *human mind* and its *mental states* with regard to ethical truth(s), facts, and even objectivity.

In order to better understand the constructivist "very big idea", I will discuss both of these aspects in more detail. Let me start with the first concerning the reconsideration or interpretation of the distinction between moral realism and anti-realism. It is notoriously difficult to understand correctly what exactly is meant by "moral realism" and "anti-realism" (Sayre McCord 1988). While I will not come up with a unified characterization of the realist view here, I think that nevertheless there are important distinctions that can at least help us to better understand constructivism along these realist/anti-realist lines.

So, according to my proposal, we should distinguish the meaning of "moral realism" by differentiating between realism as a theory endorsing some special view about either (i) the *status* of (at least some) moral statements, sentences, judgments, and so on; or (ii) the *metaphysics* or *ontology* of moral facts and truths[12]; (iii) the mind-independence of morality; or (iv) moral *objectivity*. Whether *constructivism* is realist or anti-realist, then, depends on how exactly the realist position is understood, that is, whether we understand it as a distinct view about the status of moral judgments, moral metaphysics, ethical objectivity, etc.[13]

Let me start with the former characterization according to which to be a realist in metaethics means to advocate a distinctive position about the *status* of ethical sentences and judgments. Here realism entails firstly the cognitivist claim that moral judgments and statements in general are truth-apt (Miller 2013, 3), and the stronger claim that at least some of these judgments and statements are literally true or false (cf. Sayre-McCord 1988, 5; 1991, 157; 2006, 40; Blackburn 1984, 180; 2006, 153–4; Street 2010, 370).

We can therefore say that to be a realist about morality is to think that cognitivism is true and that there are at least some truths and facts about morality. I will call this theory

[12] Both (i) and (ii) figure most prominently in the characterization of moral anti-realism. Thus, to be an anti-realist can mean to argue against any special metaphysical commitments, or it can mean to reject the thesis that *there are* facts in the moral domain, or, finally, that moral judgments are truth-apt in the first place (Sayre-McCord 2006, 41f.; Asay 2012). The first brand of anti-realist theory is compatible with endorsing the thesis of strong cognitivism because it only objects to the distinct IMRealist view about (moral) metaphysics. The second is typically endorsed by moral error theorists who grant that cognitivism is true but argue that there simply are no moral facts. The last version is simply to advocate non-cognitivism (Sayre-McCord 2006, 41f.).

[13] My distinction suggests that all three points would be kept neatly separated in current debate. However, that is not true, especially when it comes to the feature of moral mind-independence. For instance, some already identify the position of what I call strong cognitivism with the endorsement of moral mind-independence (Sayre-McCord 2006, 40), while others do so in the case of moral objectivity (Dummett 1978, 146; Arruda 2016, 18). These conflations often rest on simply neglecting the constructivist position, and especially the constructivist objectivist position such as Kantianism (Street 2010, 379).

strong cognitivism. It is *cognitivism* because it claims that moral judgments are truth-apt, and it is *strong* because it does not amount to a moral error theory according to which moral judgments are truth-apt but systematically false (Mackie 1973; Joyce 2001, Ch. 1; 2008; cf. Svavarsdóttir 2001).[14] Accordingly, strong cognitivism entails the claim that, contrary to error theory, *there are* moral facts and truths, or *there is* a realm of moral facts (cf. Sayre-McCord 2006, 41 f.).

Given this characterization of moral realism, there are already two ways in which one can be an anti-realist about morality (ibid.). Thus, one can either endorse non-cognitivism, i.e. the view according to which moral judgments express non-cognitive states like (dis)approval (like "boo" and "hooray"), emotions, or desires that qua their very nature are not truth-apt (ibid; cf. Schroeder 2010). Another option would be to be an error theorist about morality insofar as one endorses cognitivism about morality but then claims that *there are no* moral facts that could render these judgments true (Sayre-McCord 2006, 41 f.). Therefore, while error theorists typically grant the *conceptual* understanding of moral judgments as truth-apt, they argue on substantive metaphysical grounds that the concept of our judgments is false (Mackie 1977; cf. Smith 1994; Svavarsdóttir 2001; Joyce 2001; Joyce 2008, 32).

Now, according to characterization (ii), moral realism first and foremost is understood as offering a *distinct* metaphysical view (Asay 2012, 373; 2013, 218ff.; Blackburn 2006, 155; Timmons 2008, 93):

> Moral realism is a kind of metaphysical thesis about the nature and status of morality and moral claims. A realistic view about ethics presumably asserts the existence of moral facts and true moral propositions. […] Thus, we might view moral realism as a special case of metaphysical realism. Realism about a discipline typically claims there are facts of a certain kind that are in some way mind-independent or independent of human thought (Brink 1989, 14).

We can make the metaphysical description of moral realism clearer by introducing Asay's notion of a "truthmaking account" (Asay 2012; 2013). According to this description, the moral realist who endorses her distinct metaphysical view arguably starts by accepting strong

[14] Nevertheless, some readily define cognitivism in terms of what I call strong cognitivism (cf. Scanlon 2003, 7; Sayre-McCord 2006, 40; Scheffler 2008, 47).

cognitivism, according to which there exist moral truths and facts, but then offers a metaphysical theory that aims to explain *why there are* those truths and facts (ibid, 374, 376ff.; 2013, 220; Blackburn 2006, 155; Sayre-McCord 2006, 53–4):

> Truthmaker theorists seek ontological accountability – they wonder what *metaphysical* commitments accompany what we take to be true. What motivates truthmaker theory is the idea that truth is not a brute, fundamental feature of reality. Instead, truths are true in virtue of the *way of the world* (Asay 2012, 374, my italics).

Of course, the metaphysical moral realist is not the only one in the strong cognitivist camp who claims what it is exactly that accounts for facts and truths in the moral domain; in fact, every strong cognitivist must be concerned with explaining *what constitutes* these facts (Sayre-McCord 2006, 53). It is, however, one thing to argue in virtue of what moral truths are granted to be true, and another to make use of truthmakers, since the latter, as Asay shows, crucially rest on an *ontological* justification (Asay 2012, 372; 2013, 214; cf. Skorupski 1999, 437; 2002, 116).

Now, moral realism, understood as a peculiar view about moral metaphysics, commonly claims two things: first, that moral truths and facts are *part of the fabric of the world*; and second, that these truths and facts are *mind-independent*: "Realists think that the truths of a domain are true in virtue of a mind-independent reality" (Asay 2013, 221). In the following, I will refer to this position with the term *independence moral realism* (IMR). Reconsidering the position of strong cognitivism, then, the IMRealist claims that moral judgments are either true or false in virtue of there being some mind-independent moral facts entailed in the world that render these judgments either true or not (ibid).

In the case of IMR, the distinct realist metaphysical claim readily entails the third way in which moral realism can be understood, namely in terms of independence from the mental (cf. Sayre-McCord 1988, 5). Often enough, characterization (iii) is thought simply to be entailed by (ii). While this is often enough true, there are nevertheless theories that only endorse (iii) while rejecting (ii). The most prominent example of such a theory is Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism, which rejects any metaphysical basis of moral facts but nevertheless strongly endorses moral mind-independence (Blackburn 1984, 217; 1993, 153, 173; 2006, 154; cf. Ridge 2006, 634). The quasi-realist position therefore suggests that to be a realist about

morality can mean to advocate the mind-independence of the mental while being strongly opposed to any metaphysical commitments (cf. Asay 2012, 382ff.).

I will provide a more detailed analysis of the term "moral mind-independence" later on[15], for now it will suffice to understand it as the claim that moral truths and facts are not constituted by human thoughts or attitudes.

Allow me then to briefly mention the fourth and final way in which moral realism is often understood, where this is taken to mean the endorsement of the *objectivity* of morality (Sayre-McCord 1988, 5). As in the case of moral mind-independence, I will not discuss the issue of moral objectivity any further here because it will feature prominently as my argument develops. What is important for the present purposes is to acknowledge, on the basis of these distinctions, the essential and original contribution of the constructivist theory to metaethics. Recall that in the beginning of this section I said that constructivism introduces two original claims into the metaethical debate. At this point I will introduce the first, namely that one can be a realist about morality without having to embrace an ontological framework.

To better understand this claim, it is first necessary to see that despite the possibility of distinguishing between the different meanings and senses of what it means to be a realist about morality, moral realism, in metaethical discourse, is predominantly identified with what I have called IMR. And it is this crucial but in fact fatal identification of realism understood in the sense of (i), i.e. in terms of strong cognitivism, with the meanings of (ii)–(iv) that is responsible for leading many metaethical theorists to claim that IMR is the *only* convincing theory out there that can give us all that we want in a metaethical theory, that is, an explanation of moral truth(s), knowledge, and objectivity.

The identification is fatal for two reasons: first, it systematically underestimates and even readily neglects the potential of anti-realist views about morality; and second, it motivates the (still) predominant view that the notions of moral truth(s) and objectivity can only be rendered plausible by referring to an already existing moral ontology, an ontology in virtue of which there can be truth and objectivity in moral discourse and practice in the first place. Accordingly, it appears that if any theorists were to reject this ontological foundation of moral truths, they would be committed to an anti-realist view, a view that rejects the claim

[15] See 2.4 and 3.3.2.

that moral judgments are truth-apt in the first place, and would thus claim that there is no moral truth and that objectivity cannot be secured in ethics.

Against this view, however, we have seen that one must distinguish between different forms of moral anti-realism, depending most importantly on whether being a realist is understood in terms of either (i), (ii), (iii). Thus, recall that to be an anti-realist can mean that moral judgments are not truth-apt in the first place (non-cognitivism), but it can also mean rejecting the thesis that *there are* truths and facts in the moral domain (error theory). But endorsing moral anti-realism may also entail rejecting the view that there is any special moral metaphysics or ontology that renders moral judgments true and thus accounts for the existence of moral truths and facts (cf. Asay 2012, 221).

Appreciating these more complex distinctions between realism on the one hand and anti-realism on the other is helpful in understanding the outlines as well as the contribution of the constructivist position in and to metaethics, for constructivism cuts right through the traditional but fatal identification of strong cognitivism with IMR. This is because constructivists believe not only that moral statements and judgments in general have propositional content that in principle is truth-accessible (Bagnoli 2002), but also that at least some of these judgments are literally true (Street 2010, 370; Copp 2013, 110). For this reason, constructivism in general endorses not only cognitivism but also what I call *strong cognitivism* about moral statements and judgments in virtue of its maintaining that there *exists* a realm of moral facts and truths (Shafer-Landau 2003, 14). In other words, constructivists are *realists* about morality, but only if realism is understood in terms of strong cognitivism (cf. Korsgaard 1996).[16]

On the other hand, however, constructivists present an *anti-* or *ir*realist view (cf. Street 2006; Bagnoli 2016a, 1230) due to three crucial claims that lie at the heart of the constructivist theory. These claims can be introduced here: (i) that there is no special moral ontology *in virtue of which* the existence of moral truths and facts, as well as the objectivity of moral practice, is secured (cf. Korsgaard 1983, 183; 1996, 30; Bagnoli 2002, 134; 2016a, 1230); (ii) that the moral realm is not mind-independent (Brink 1989; Shafer-Landau 2003; Hopster 2017), but rather (iii) the outcome of rational mental *activity* (Bagnoli 2002, 132; 2016a, 1230).

[16] As I have said before, for reasons of simplicity I omit the issue of objectivity here. As my further argument shows, constructivism is also a form of realism in virtue of its ability to secure of ethical objectivity.

All three aspects (i)–(iii) might make it seem like constructivists would not be concerned with the metaphysics or the ontology of morality. But on the contrary; just because constructivists claim that it is not an already existing ontology that *makes* moral judgments *true*, this does *not* mean that they must remain altogether silent about the existence of moral facts (Bagnoli 2016a, 1230). The same holds with regard to moral metaphysics in general. Hence, just because constructivism argues that it is *not* a prior existing realm of moral facts that *renders* moral judgments true, this does *not* mean that constructivism is not concerned with the metaphysics of morality. On the contrary:

> Constructivism is a *metaphysical thesis* about the relations of truth-making or correctness-priority between substantive results and the procedures leading to them. Constructivism about a relevant discourse is the claim that there are no substantive correctness criteria that apply to (or in) that discourse, and that the only relevant correctness criteria are procedural […] (Enoch 2009, 322, my italics).

The above passage shows that constructivism cannot be reduced to a mere epistemological view (Copp 2013, 112) merely because it highlights the role of the mind in metaethical discourse. In contrast, as we will see later, when it comes to a more detailed analysis of the mind-(in)dependence of morality, constructivism highlights the productive role of the human mind and its mental states leading to the view that it is the human mind that makes moral truths and facts come into existence. This clearly is a metaphysical thesis.

This argument shows how constructivism can endorse realism without needing to embrace an ontological framework. I have said, however, that there is also a second crucial aspect of the constructivist theory concerning the function and powers of the human mind and its mental states. To be more precise, the constructivist claim is not only that one can be realist about morality without embracing an ontological framework, but also that it is possible to put the human mind and human mental states at the center of metaethical discussion without losing any of the benefits provided by traditional IMR with regard to the existence of moral truths, facts, and the objectivity of ethical practice and discourse.

In order to (better) understand this crucial constructivist claim, one has again to appreciate the rather strong role of the view that I have called IMR, i.e. the view that moral judgments are rendered true by the existence of a mind-independent ontological realm of

moral facts. As I have said, IMR is often considered to be the one view that best explains what we want from any metaethical view: an account of moral truth, facts, and objectivity.

It is then the contents of the very theory of IMR as well as its hegemony in metaethical debate that constructivists attack when they claim that they can offer an equally strong theory as IMR but without offering an ontological framework *and* by allowing the human mind to play a *constitutive* role in what makes these truths and facts come to existence in the first place. And it is exactly in this respect that constructivism marks out an essential and original way of understanding metaethical issues, for while even some views within the non-cognitivist camp are willing to grant the existence of moral truths and facts, and want to secure the objectivity of ethical practice, they do so by invoking the mind-independence of morality (cf. Blackburn 1984; 1993; 2006). Constructivists, on the other hand, maintain that in order to grant truth and objectivity in the moral domain, one does not have to abandon the human mind altogether. On the contrary, making reference to the mind is even necessary in order to allow for truth in ethics in the first place (cf. Rawls 1980, 519).

It is in virtue of these two aspects that constructivism deserves genuine philosophical consideration, for both the ontological foundation of morality as well as the feature of moral mind-independence are often thought to be an indispensable and therefore necessary element for granting such things as the objectivity of moral practice and discourse[17], or the authority of moral reasons, norms, and claims (cf. Bagnoli 2002). For this reason, it cannot be overstated that it is the unique contribution of constructivism to bring these aspects together in virtue of the claim that one can secure all that is important to secure in metaethics – truths, facts, objectivity – while still believing that the human mind is, in the end, the ultimate source and authority of these elements.

While I discuss at great length the problem of connecting moral mind-independence with the aim of granting the objectivity in ethics in Chapter 3, at this point I only want to mention the special role that constructivists allow mental states and the human mind *in general* to play in metaethical discourse. Thus, before constructivism entered metaethics, it appeared that there were only two ways in which the human mind could be part of ethical or normative concepts broadly understood: either it could *discover* already existing moral facts, or it could *express* or "spread" non-cognitive states such as emotions and projections onto the

[17] See 3.3.2 for the relation between moral objectivity, mind-independence, and the constructivist theory.

world (cf. Wiggins 1988; Blackburn 1984; 1993; Bagnoli 2002, 127). Something similar held for human mental states, for either these were part of the process of forming moral judgments, or they were not. In the former case, however, one ended up with a form of subjectivism (cf. Warenski 2014), as early non-cognitivists themselves admitted (cf. Ayer 1936). Therefore, so the thought went, in order to secure objectivism, mental states could not form any part of what constitutes moral truth(s) (cf. Warenski 2014).

Constructivism, by contrast, offers a third option. Thus, not only does it aim to show how one can be a realist about morality by refusing to rely on an ontological framework, but it also aims to prove how one can be fully realistic while allowing (i) the human mind to play an active role in construing ethical truth, and therefore (ii) mental states to be part of what makes moral judgments true. At the end of this thesis, I will even attempt to show that, without any problems, one can rely on both (i) and (ii) and still grant the objectivity of ethical practice and discourse.

1.3 The Missing Unified Account

In the last paragraph, I introduced constructivism as the theory that contributes to contemporary metaethics by introducing a "very big idea", namely that one can be realist about morality without embracing a totally mind-independent ontology that makes moral judgments true or objective.

Now, while some think this account to be interesting and worth considering, others doubt that there could really be such a thing as constructivism in metaethical debate. One of the reasons that raise doubts against constructivism is that it is unclear what metaethical constructivism *is* in the first place because there is no unified description of the constructivist position in metaethics to begin with (Lenman, Shemmer 2012; Copp 2013; Dorsey 2018). Hence, in order to appreciate constructivism not only as offering something new and genuine to traditional metaethical debate, but also in order to show that it is a plausible alternative to the views of IMR on the one hand and non-cognitivism on the other, we should clarify how we should understand that theory. This is what I aim to show in the next paragraph.

Given what has been said so far, I begin describing constructivism as a theory that first and foremost offers a general view of the status of moral statements, and a more particular

and distinctive metaphysical thesis about the very nature of moral facts.[18] Hence, considering both aspects of "the very big idea", because constructivism believes in the existence of moral truth(s) and facts, but, in contrast to IMR, refrains from offering an ontological explanation for the existence of these truths and facts, it holds that moral truths and facts are neither discovered nor tracked but rather are constructed by human agents (cf. Korsgaard 1996, 37; Bagnoli 2013, 1; 2014, 318; 2016a, 1231, n. 7). Thus, as a first working hypothesis I will define constructivism along the following lines:

(1) Constructivism holds that moral truths or facts are not discovered or tracked but are constructed by human agents.

It is crucial to understand that on the constructivist account, moral truths and facts are not given *independently of* and/or *prior to* the constructive activity (cf. Rawls 1980; Korsgaard 1996, 36f., 38, 44ff.; Bagnoli 2002, 132–3, 135; 2016a, 1230, 1234, 1243–4).

One can see then how (1), that is, the very outlines of the constructivist theory, marks out its position in the overall map of contemporary metaethical theories. Thus, on the one hand, (1) entails the constructivist aim to distance itself from prominent IMR, according to which there already are moral truths and facts prior to any deliberative activity and that await to be discovered by agents (cf. Bagnoli 2014, 315, 317–18). In this respect, then, it is the rejection of the metaphor of "discovery" (cf. Korsgaard 1996; Bagnoli 2013, 1) that is often (albeit necessarily) associated with moral realism, which shows why constructivism is not only a brand of anti-realism but even thought to be "[…] *premised on* a rejection of realism" (Street 2008, 16, my italics).[19]

But, while characterization (1) adequately expresses the constructivist complex relation to realism and anti-realism, it nevertheless leaves open how exactly to cash out the term of "construction" in more detail. The most prominent answer to that question is given by constructivists in referring to and utilizing a certain *procedure* that prominently figures in the metaphor of "construction". Thus, Darwall, Gibbard and Railton argue that:

[18] I thus understand metaethical constructivism here primarily as a view about *morality*. There may be other constructivist attempts that focus on broader normative investigation such as how to determine the truth-conditions of practical reasons in general (cf. Tiberius 2012).

[19] As we have seen, though, matters are more complicated than Street suggests, for she does not distinguish at all between the different connotations of the very term "moral realism" but readily identifies it with IMR.

> [T]he constructivist is a hypothetical proceduralist. He endorses some hypothetical procedure as determining which principles constitute valid standards of morality […]. [The constructivist] maintains that there are no moral facts independent of the finding that a certain hypothetical procedure would have such and such an upshot (Darwall, Gibbard, Railton 1992, 140).

Following this description, we could then define constructivism as holding the following view:

> (2) Constructivism is the view that moral truths and facts are not discovered or tracked but rather are the output of a hypothetical procedure.

This characterization figures prominently in the understanding of the constructivist view because it goes back to Rawls' influential "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory" (1980), where the constructivist position was articulated and introduced for the first time by describing it exactly in the proceduralist terms.

Nevertheless, the proceduralist characterization gives rise to two immediate and interrelated worries that critics and even some advocates of the constructivist position itself formulate as follows. Thus, it is said that it is doubtful that constructivism, as understood along the lines of (2), contributes anything unique to metaethics. After all, so the objection goes, there are other theories out there that can also be interpreted as making use of a certain procedure like response-dependence or dispositionalist views (Enoch 2009, 328–9). Some constructivists, most prominently Sharon Street, take this objection very seriously and agree with Enoch that the constructivist procedure is merely a "heuristic" device that does *not* define the beating heart of the constructivist position (Street 2010, 366.; cf. Enoch 2009, 328). Hence, Street claims that constructivism is first and foremost understood as an inquiry of the so-called "practical standpoint", i.e. the attitude of valuing (Street 2010, 366ff.). Therefore, according to her proposal, the core of the constructivist theory is not captured by its making use of a procedure, but rather by analyzing what is entailed and what follows from the practical standpoint understood in terms of the attitude of valuing (ibid, 367).

However, it is then precisely from Street's own proposal to cash out the constructivist theory that the second objection emerges, namely that there simply exists no unified

description of the constructivist view (cf. Lenman, Shemmer 2012, 5; Dorsey 2018, 574). So, instead of their being a clear-cut characterization of the constructivist position in metaethics, there are instead two very different accounts: on the one hand, there is the "procedural" characterization; on the other, the "practical standpoint" interpretation. This is why, to this day, it remains unclear exactly what the position called *metaethical constructivism* really is.[20]

There is no easy answer to these two objections, but one can respond to them. Let us answer the first worry according to which the mere reference to a certain procedure is not adequate to distinguish constructivism from other metaethical views such as response-dependence accounts. The point of this objection is that if it is not only or solely constructivism that makes use of a certain procedure in order to determine true judgments about morality, then there is nothing distinctive about the constructivist position.

The objection in fact has two parts – one correct, the other incorrect. This is because the validity of the objection crucially hinges on whether or not constructivists are able to specify how to exactly understand the nature and functioning of the constructive procedure and how to evaluate the role of it within its overall theory.

To better understand this point, let us consider Enoch's argument in more detail, which, as noted, prompted Street to develop her practical standpoint description. Thus, Enoch maintains that constructivism is not the only view to make use of a procedure, for the same may hold for a dispositionalist view claiming the following: normative reasons are not tracking an independent order of normative facts; rather, they are the outcome of a certain procedure through which agents gather more information about what they are motivated to do and present them vividly to their minds (Enoch 2009, 328).

So, as I have said, there are two aspects of the objection – one incorrect, the other correct. Let's start with the former by giving two reasons counting against Enoch's argument in favor of the analogy between constructivism and other views such as response-dependence or dispositionalist positions. Both reasons result from his failure to appreciate the distinct

[20] Interestingly, though, this charge has never been raised against other theories, even though it is even harder in their cases to come up with a unified description. For instance, we have already seen that there is no clear-cut account of what it means to be a realist about morality because there are so many different connotations of the term "moral realism". Nevertheless, to my knowledge, it has never been objected against realism in metaethical debate that there is something wrong with this view on the basis that it lacks a unified description. The same holds for non-cognitivism, where it is impossible to give a precise description of what it means to be non-cognitivist about morality that is well-suited to include all the more particular views within the non-cognitivist camp – such as emotivism, norm-expressivism, or quasi-realism. As such, it is best to say that non-cognitivism, far from describing a unified theory, is rather a *family* of different views (Schroeder 2010).

description of the nature of the constructive procedure, as well as its *functioning* within the process of construction (cf. Bagnoli 2002, 132). Thus, when it comes to the first point, constructivists commonly maintain that it is not merely *some* procedure that suffices for defining constructivism, but rather the unique procedure of *rational reflection* (Korsgaard 1996; Bagnoli 2002). Therefore, according to metaethical constructivism, it is *not* just *some* procedure that determines moral truths, but *only rational reflection* that does so.

Second, constructivists are very clear in setting out what the procedure does. Commonly, constructivists do not think that the constructive procedure works like an algorithm that predicts in all cases very detailed results, nor do they hold that it serves merely as a decision-procedure (Bagnoli 2002, 132). Rather, on the constructivist understanding, agents are required to *actually go through* the procedure (themselves) in order to determine moral truth (ibid). This is important to note because it highlights the *active* aspect of constructing moral truths and facts (ibid, 133), meaning that the constructive agent cannot merely rely on what some procedure yields; instead, they have to *actually and actively engage* in the procedure.

In this way, one can see what went wrong with Enoch's objection, for apparently Enoch thinks that constructivists a) just refer to some procedure or other in order to make their position explicit (Enoch 2009, 331–2), and b) do not think that agents play something of an active role within that procedure (ibid, 331). Neither a) nor b) are true, however. First, constructivists are very clear about how to understand the procedure, i.e. in terms of rational reflection. Second, they are, on the constructivist reading, not supposed to merely rely on the results of the procedure but to yield these results themselves *through* active deliberation.

In addition, and independently of Enoch's objection, it is exactly this *active* part[21] of the agent engaging in the constructive process that is altogether absent from Street's practical standpoint characterization and thus ironically leads to the result that her own description of the constructivist position is not at all well-suited to cash out what marks constructivism as a distinctive view in metaethical debate. Thus, in order to avoid Enoch's objection that there is nothing genuinely distinctive about the constructivist account, Street construes an understanding of the constructivist position according to which constructivists simply lay out what is entailed and what follows from the practical standpoint, i.e. the attitude of valuing.

[21] I am grateful to Carla Bagnoli for pressing this point.

However, in doing so, Street develops an account in which constructivism resembles other metaethical accounts far more than the original description of constructivism in terms of the proceduralist characterization (cf. ibid, 336, n. 14). Following her description, constructivism suddenly appears to resemble non-cognitivist expressivism (cf. Lenman 2012)[22]. This is the case for two reasons. First, Street claims that constructivism is primarily about the analysis of what is entailed in and what follows from the attitude of valuing, where this attitude is understood as a state of mind (Street 2010, 376). Consequently, constructivism would be the investigation of what is expressed by a certain state of mind. But this is just expressivism (cf. Lenman 2012, 217–18; Bagnoli 2017, 359), for expressivism is concerned with analyzing normativity in terms of what kind of mental states it expresses (Gibbard 1990, 8; 2003, 6; Schroeder 2010; Lenman 2012, 217–18).

Second, Street claims that the attitude of valuing is intrinsically motivating (Street 2010, 376). Accordingly, if constructivism were about analyzing the attitude of valuing, which is primarily understood in terms of a state of mind, and if this state of mind is intrinsically motivating, it would follow that constructivism is about analyzing normativity in terms of an intrinsically motivating state of mind. Again, this is textbook non-cognitivism (cf. Enoch 2009, 336, n. 14; Blackburn 2006, 150–1; Lenman 2012, 218; Stahl 2013, 31)[23].

However, despite the problems with both Enoch's and Street's criticisms of the constructivist use of a procedure, the objection that the constructivist reference to a certain procedure does capture some truth and therefore correctly highlights something valid, namely that there is something to the constructivist position that (2) is missing. This is especially the case in Street's account. Thus, while it is often argued that one has good reason to favor either the proceduralist over her practical standpoint characterization, or vice versa (Copp 2013), I maintain that Street's account *does* highlight some crucial feature of the constructivist theory that is neglected when defining constructivism *solely* in terms of a procedure.

Therefore, what is also and in fact equally important for the constructivist position is that it not only uses a procedure in order to determine moral truths and facts, but that there

[22] Again, I thank Carla Bagnoli for helpful discussion.

[23] Street's account, however, is not the only theory that is said to be compatible with or in fact reducible to expressivism. Thus, Gibbard maintains that Korsgaard (too) in the end offers an expressivist account (Gibbard 1999).

is a distinct *basis* of construction that figures as the starting point of the procedure of rational reflection (Bagnoli 2002, 131; Tropman 2018).

Such a starting point is needed because constructivists do not think that rational reflection begins from *nowhere* or "nothing" (Bagnoli 2002, 131; 2014, 317ff.; Tropman 2018); rather, it is applied to some proper *input* (Bagnoli 2002, 131; cf. Korsgaard 1996; James 2013). Accordingly, constructivists are not solely reflecting on nothing, but are rationally reflecting on a wide range of such different inputs as general concepts of *what we are*, i.e. what it means to be a rational or sentient being, and/or more particular attitudes, emotions, thoughts, and outlooks (cf. Bagnoli 2002, 131 f.; 2014, 317 ff.; Shafer-Landau 2003, 14).

These general conceptions, as well as the particular attitudes, are a potential input for carrying out the reflective process because different views about *what we are* can and do differ in virtue of the more particular accounts within the constructivist theory. For instance, one of the most interesting and still unresolved quarrels within current constructivist debate is that between Humean and Kantian positions (Street 2010, 369–70). This quarrel is not just the result of Humeans and Kantians having different understandings of the truth-conditions of moral judgments. It also, more generally, derives from the fact that both endorse a very different understanding of human agency (cf. Bagnoli 2002, 131). Thus, while the Kantian constructivist thinks of humans primarily as "free and equal" (Rawls 1980; Bagnoli 2002, 131) and rational beings (cf. Korsgaard 1996; 2009), Humeans endorse the view that humans are sentient or valuing creatures (Bagnoli 2002, 131; Street 2010, 370).

What this shows, then, is that the reference to the *basis* of construction is *as important* for the constructivist overall as its making use of a procedure, or, a fortiori, that Street's contribution to the constructivist debate is *not* that of having offered a *new* account, but rather to have brought the second aspect of the constructivist account, i.e. the practical standpoint, into sharper focus. Consequently, I propose that the more traditional term "basis of construction" and Street's "practical standpoint" essentially refer to and highlight the same thing, namely the starting point of construction (cf. Lenman, Shemmer 2012, 3). If this is correct, then we arrive at the following understanding of the constructivist position:

> (3) Constructivism is the view that moral truths and facts are not discovered or tracked, but that they are the output of a hypothetical procedure that is applied to some proper input in terms of the basis of construction or practical standpoint which is understood

in terms of general concepts of *what we are*, including our (more particular) emotions, attitudes, thoughts, and outlooks.[24]

I take (3) to be the correct understanding of constructivism and will henceforth call it *Sophisticated Constructivism* (SC) since it bridges the gap between two descriptions of constructivism that until now were thought to be equally important yet mutually exclusive.

Arguably, SC does not offer a radically different definition from what is present in contemporary constructivist debate. But this might actually count as a virtue for two reasons. First, by bringing together both the procedure *and* the practical standpoint in a single definition of the constructivist theory, SC is well-suited to distinguish constructivism from other metaethical views such as response-dependence or dispositionalist accounts. After all, while these may be understood as making use of a procedure (as Enoch suggests), they do not refer to the conception of a practical standpoint or basis of construction.

Second, SC does justice to the variety of the many existing contemporary constructivist accounts because it allows for the fact that different constructivist positions (merely) highlight one of the two elements of the constructivist theory, namely the procedure or the practical point of view. As such, SC does not force one to completely give up either of these features or those constructivist views that highlight them.[25] On the contrary, because it allows one to understand both features as two equally important elements of the constructivist position in metaethics, it also accepts that there is nothing wrong with the variety of constructivist theories out there.

1.4 Constructivism as a Metaethical View?

In the previous paragraphs, I have argued what the genuine and original contribution of the constructivist position in metaethics consists in and have proposed a unified definition of the constructivist theory. Thus, concerning the first point, it is essential to understand what it

[24] As will become clear, my proposal is to identify the practical standpoint with the basis of construction. While this is a promising move, a caveat is in order. For sometimes by referring to the practical standpoint, theorists mean the *individual* set of an agent's beliefs, desires, evaluative judgments, and so on. In this case, it remains true that the practical standpoint can be understood as the basis of construction because of its function, which is to provide the materials of construction. Thus, as in the case of Humean constructivism, the individual practical standpoint provides the materials from which normative truth is constructed (cf. Street 2008; 2010; 2012). It becomes difficult, however, to understand the more general concepts of *what we are* in terms of this individual standpoint.

[25] As many constructivists in fact do (Street 2010; Copp 2013).

means to be a constructivist about normativity in general or about morality in particular: it is to claim that one can be a full-fledged realist about normative or moral matters without being committed to adopting a mind-independent ontological framework (in virtue of which there are truths or facts about these matters). In addition, regarding the second point, I have argued why the two most dominant descriptions of the constructivist position within the current debate must not be understood as two mutually exclusive definitions of the constructivist view, but rather as highlighting two core aspects of the constructivist *overall* theory: the use of a constructive procedure on the one hand, and the basis of construction to which the procedure is applied on the other.

Now, despite the genuinely new input that constructivism presents to metaethical debate, it is precisely its status as a metaethical theory that appears problematic to many. Hence, a standing objection or worry about constructivism is that it may at best be understood as a first-order ethical view, but not a thorough-going *metaethical* view (cf. Scanlon 2012; Enoch 2009; Lenman, Shemmer 2012, 5). Most prominently, the worry is motivated by the often-shared suspicion that constructivism does not answer those questions that most commonly and traditionally arise within metaethical theorizing. As Gibbard, Darwall and Railton argue:

> […] [C]onstructivism is not a metaethical view in the old sense. [It]does not pronounce on whether moral thinking is, at base, continuous or discontinuous with scientific thinking, what kind of objectivity moral judgments can claim. Rather, it is a family of substantive normative theories […] (Darwall, Gibbard, Railton 1992, 140).

We can make this point clearer by considering Street's influential distinction between *restricted* versions of constructivism in *ethics* and *thorough-going* or *metaethical* constructivism, where this concerns the *scope* of construction (Street 2010, 367ff.). Street argues that only the former theory is concerned with constructing, on a given but restricted set of normative claims, judgments about justice (Rawls) or what is morally right and wrong (Scanlon 1998) (Street 2010, 368).

For instance, when we are concerned with constructivism about justice, we are determining what makes judgments about justice correct, thereby using a specific procedure of construction in order to show how true judgments can be rendered from that procedure.

Similarly, when we are adopting constructivism about what is morally right and wrong, we use a procedure of construction and establish arguments for how to determine true judgments about what is morally right. In both cases, we start from an *already accepted* substantive set of beliefs and judgments (Street 2010, 366) and then determine substantive judgments about what follows from this set. Thus, take Rawls' argument for a theory of justice, where, on the basis of substantive assumptions about persons as free, equal, and equipped with certain specific kinds of capacities (Rawls 1971; 1980; Freeman 2003, 10ff.; 2007, 141ff.), the constructivist determines what follows from this conception for an account of social justice.

Hence, Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton claim that constructivism is only plausible in exactly this restricted version, but fails as *meta*ethical theory, i.e. a theory that is not primarily about determining principles of moral right- and wrongness or principles of social justice, but is concerned whether moral judgments are truth-apt, whether there is truth and objectivity in the moral domain, etc. Thus, if the objection was correct, it would provide a very strong reason against adopting the constructivist view in metaethics because it maintains that constructivism simply cannot be applied to a metaethical level in the first place.

I think that this worry has different levels of both adequate and inadequate components and therefore requires a complex answer. I thus hold that constructivists can give three kinds of answers to this worry. In the first instance, constructivist can – and often must – simply bite the bullet, for there certainly *is some* truth to this worry. Thus, when it comes to the semantics of moral language, it is true to say that constructivism has not dealt with this to the extent that it has dealt with other issues (cf. Bagnoli 2016b). True, there are accounts that explicitly deal with the semantic task (Dorsey 2012), but this is far from saying that semantics plays a central role within the constructivist debate, or that there is a unified constructivist account about the meaning of moral (or normative) terms.

However, even though there is some truth to the worry, this does not mean that it is well-suited to put so much pressure on the plausibility of constructivism as a full-fledged metaethical view as supposed by Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton. There are at least three reasons why that is. First, the objection rests on the rather problematic assumption that there exists a clear gap between normative and metaethics, meaning that metaethics must be entirely free from any first-order normative elements. This "narrow" description of metaethics (Bagnoli 2017) is problematic because it excludes so many contributions to metaethics that, while interesting and worth considering, do not fit this interpretation (ibid, 357), and indeed

the narrow interpretation itself has come under a lot of attack (Bagnoli 2017, 356–7; Kramer 2009; Dworkin 2011; Timmons 2001, 19 – 20). Thus, as Bagnoli argues:

> [T]he narrow definition can be questioned on methodological grounds. While it may be useful to separate the logical study of moral concepts from the normative principles of ethics, it has a longstanding matter of contention whether such separation is tenable (Bagnoli 2017, 356–7).

I do not intend to go further into the debate about whether or not the broader or narrower account is correct. I merely want to highlight that one problem of the traditional concern about the metaethical status of constructivism in one crucial sense hinges on the narrow conception of metaethics – a conception that is, however, far from being generally or uniformly shared.

However, even apart from the meta-discussion about how to understand metaethics itself, there is a second reason why the critique is problematic, even if one grants that metaethical investigation is correctly understood in that narrow sense. This reason relies on the rationale for the constructivist focus on some metaethical aspects while leaving out others. Thus, recall that one part of the objection that constructivism fails as a metaethical theory rests on the grounds that constructivism not especially interested in providing an account of moral semantics. As I have said, there is some truth to this objection. It is, thus, true that constructivism has not spent a great deal of time on the question of what moral terms mean. It is, however, important to note that constructivists show no flaw at all in their focusing on some issue while disregarding others, but rather mirror how metaethical investigation is commonly and ordinarily carried out. As such, it is a plain fact that any metaethical theory focuses on some issues while leaving out others, where this is just a consequence of the very *nature* of the theory in question. That is, "[o]nce we see that metaethical views may take a stand on one set of questions while setting others aside" (Asay 2013, 272; cf. ibid, 219), it becomes clear that there should be no general problem with the constructivist attempt to metaethical inquiry. On the contrary, (nearly) *every* metaethical position entails focusing on some issues while leaving out others. This can be best seen by considering non-cognitivism as well as independence moral realism (IMR) and their special focus on either the semantics or the metaphysics of morality.

Consider non-cognitivist theories, such as expressivism, which are not focusing on the metaphysics of morality but rather "seek to tame the mysteries of metaethics by first characterizing certain mental states of normative commitment or endorsement, the states, we might say, that normative utterances express, and then explaining what is conveyed by normative judgements in the light of this characterization" (Lenman 2012, 127).
By doing so, however, non-cognitivists are not thought to make any kind of mistake, for the shifting of their attention away from metaphysical problems is primarily grounded in the expressivist rejection of moral cognitivism, that is, the view that moral judgments are truth-apt, and, following on from this, their rejection of the idea that there is an existing realm of moral facts (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003, 18ff.; 2006, 49).[26]

For non-cognitivists, however, the truth-talk in the normative domain is simply mistaken because they think that moral judgments (or normative judgments more broadly construed) generally do not refer to any moral (normative) fact, but rather serve to express a distinctive kind of mental state such as feelings, approval, and so on (cf. Ayer 1936, ch. 6; Blackburn 2006, 148–9). Therefore, the primary focus of non-cognitivism is not that of spelling out how, i.e. on what metaphysical grounds, there can be moral facts. Rather, it is concerned with something entirely different, namely to "[a]sk what mental states of mind ethical judgments express" (Gibbard 2003, 6), or what the exact function of moral judgments is, given the assumption that they do not seek to mirror moral truth as cognitivists claim (cf. Blackburn 2006, 149).

Therefore, the metaphysical issues are not equally pressing for every metaethical view out there. On the contrary, it arises only for those that argue for the claim that there are true moral facts (Asay 2013, 219). Most prominently, then, the metaphysics of morality arises for IMR that, as a metaphysical theory, makes crucial ontological claims due to its maintaining that there are moral truths because of the existence of a realm of moral facts. The vital point, however, is how the IMRealist explains how we should think of these facts. And this in turn explains why advocates as well as many critics of the IMRealist position engage in metaphysical inquiry, for the plausibility of IMR, in the most important respects, hinges on the correctness of its metaphysical claims.

[26] Note that this is only a very rough sketch, because there are sophisticated non-cognitivists – like norm-expressivists, or quasi-realists – who claim that there are true (and even objective) moral facts. I will be concerned with at least one of these views in more detail in chapter 2.

However, while non-cognitivism focuses less on the metaphysics morality it is largely *about* moral semantics, because non-cognitivism *just is*, or at least started out as, a semantic theory (Schroeder 2010, 26ff., especially 30; Asay 2013, 219). After all, early non-cognitivist theories, as endorsed by Ayer and Stevenson, began their investigations in direct opposition to so-called truth-conditional semantics, the view that the meaning of a sentence is fixed by its truth-conditions in addition to the claim that we use sentences to communicate that these truth-conditions are satisfied (Schroeder 2010, 29). Both Ayer and Stevenson reject these requirements and think that it is neither necessary nor sufficient to know the meaning of a sentence in order to know what it is about (ibid). Hence, both Ayer and Stevenson think that moral expressions add no further statement to a sentence, but that the meaning of a sentence nevertheless changes. Thus, Ayer argues that where we say that you did well by not stealing an old lady's purse, the meaning just is that you did not steal from the old lady (ibid, 21–2):

> This is why noncognitivism is such a significant view in the philosophy of language. It is the major departure from the Very Big Idea of truth-conditional theories of meaning. The difference between the idea that meaning can and should be explained by what the words are about and what makes sentences true, on the one hand, and the noncognitivist idea that meaning cannot be so explained and must instead be explained directly by how we *use* words, is a very important difference to understand (ibid, 30).

And, of course, non-cognitivists then contribute to metaethical discourse by cashing out the function and purpose of moral sentences and judgments in terms of their more practical function (cf. Blackburn 2006, 149), such as to express (dis)approval (Ayer 1936), or to encourage someone to do something (Stevenson 1944), or to recommend a certain course of action (Hare 1952). This is what Schroeder means when he says that non-cognitivists highlight the *use* of a sentence.

Finally, it is clear from this characterization of the non-cognitivist pursuit that critics have paid much attention to whether or not the distinct semantic thesis advocated by non-cognitivists is correct. Thus, just as critics of the IMRealist view are concerned with the plausibility of its metaphysical commitments, so critics of non-cognitivism worry about the

plausibility of their account of the meaning of moral terms, how they figure in moral argumentation, and so on.

The most prominent example of such an objection is presented by the Frege-Geach Problem (put forward by Geach 1960), which counted (and often still counts) as one of *the* major objections against non-cognitivism in general. For this reason, more sophisticated non-cognitivist accounts have taken the problem very seriously (cf. Blackburn 1984; Gibbard 1990). This is not surprising, for the Frege-Geach Problem is decisively semantic in nature, and where non-cognitivism primarily presents a view about semantics, it is reasonable to expect that it is an especially if not the most pressing issue for non-cognitivism understood *as* a theory about moral semantics.

The conclusion of these observations is that in neither case is there any mystery at all why these two kinds of theories focus so intensely on *some* metaethical issues like moral metaphysics or semantics while neglecting others. Considering this general truth about metaethical theorizing, I want to suggest that the same applies to constructivism. That is, where it is a plain fact that *any* metaethical theory focuses on answering those questions that lie at the heart of its account, constructivists, too, focus only on some points in particular while neglecting others (cf. Street 2010, 379–80). Thus, as Wallace, for instance, argues:

> Constructivism, as I understand it, is addressed to a different set of questions. It is not intended as an account of the semantic and logical features of normative discourse, but as a philosophical explanation of the *nature of normativity*, offering a general account of the conditions that make true claims about what a given agent has reason to do (Wallace 2012, 25, my italics).

My claim, then, is that constructivists can provide a second answer to the worry that they are not concerned with the basic metaethical questions (after having bitten the bullet) by referring to the general character of what it is that one does by doing metaethics. Accordingly, it is not that constructivists have simply forgotten about doing semantics, it is just that they are more interested in other metaethical topics due to the very *nature* of their theory. Just as IMR explicitly focuses on metaphysical questions, and non-cognitivism on semantics, so constructivism, too, focuses more on some issues because they are thought to lie at the very

heart of the constructivist theory. Again, this is not a mistake on the constructivist's part; rather, she is just doing metaethics.

The third and final answer that constructivists can give to the argument that their theory cannot be understood as an ordinary metaethical view can be achieved by (re-)considering not only the objects that constructivists *have* been focusing on in particular, but also those that have arguably enriched and advanced metaethical debate (and continue to do so). This, besides their focus on the role of the rational mind and human mental states for answering the most central metaethical questions and issues, concerns at least three aspects: (i) the phenomenology of morality; (ii) the relation between morality and science; and (iii) the question about the authority of moral reasons, norms, and claims.

Let me start with (i), which consists in the constructivist attempt to account for moral as well as normative *phenomenology* (cf. Bagnoli 2002; 2014;James 2013), i.e. the attempt to explain and justify the very nature of normativity, as it normally appears to agents (cf. Korsgaard 1996; Bagnoli 2002; 2014; Street 2010, 366ff.). As such, constructivism in general aims to provide philosophical answers to basic experiences in normative practice that rational agents (as such) (necessarily) face (cf. Korsgaard 1996, 46–7) – the particular phenomena on which it focuses changes from author to author. Some constructivists, thus, wonder about the importance and authority of ethical judgments (Bagnoli 2002), while others wonder about the normative foundation of morality (Korsgaard 1996). Still others are pre-philosophically "puzzled" by the question about valuing (Street 2010, 6), or what it is that authenticates practical reason (O'Neill 1989).

Along these lines, then, constructivists draw the picture of human agents, who are deeply familiar with what it is like to be morally obligated, subject to justifying their behavior by giving reasons for it, with valuing something, and/or using their reasoning capacities. In this way, they are deeply familiar with practical normativity, but, at some point, they step back from all of this and wonder about the explanatory as well as justificatory *grounds* of their experiences of practical normativity (cf. Korsgaard 1996, 7ff., Street 2010, 366ff.).

Because I will present my own phenomenological argument in the next chapter, and will further dwell on the role of phenomenological investigation for constructivist inquiry, in what follows let me discuss the other aspects of the constructivist concern.

Recall the basic constructivist picture concerning the relation between granting the existence of moral truths and facts on the one hand, and the role of ontology and the human

mind (including its mental states) on the other. As I have described the constructivist view, it claims that one can be a realist about morality without being committed to adopting a mind-independent ontological realm of moral facts in virtue of which moral judgments are rendered true. Now, a rather important consequence of the constructivist account, therefore, concerns the relation between ethics and the natural sciences. Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton claim that constructivism does not establish whether or not the epistemic access to moral facts and truths resembles scientific forms of knowledge acquisition (Darwall, Gibbard, Railton 1992, 140). However, constructivists certainly have answered this point, which can be easily seen by reconsidering the constructivists' basic claim, namely that moral facts and truths are not *discovered* but are created via reflection on the practical point of view. The rejection of the view that moral facts are *discovered* is then meant to count directly against the thought that moral knowledge acquisition works in the same way as in the field of ordinary science (Korsgaard 1996). On the contrary, for constructivists, knowledge in the moral domain cannot in principle resemble the way in which we gain knowledge in science precisely because moral epistemology is not about discovering or tracking already given facts.[27]

Thus, if the basic idea of common scientific knowledge acquisition is that there are some facts in the world awaiting discovery, then constructivists, in virtue of their metaphysical commitments, claim that this picture is misleading. This is not to say that we "discover" moral facts, if "discovering" simply means coming to know some fact of which one was unaware before having engaged in reflection on the practical point of view. One can certainly, in its full sense, *discover* that rational agents as such are committed to the "value of humanity" as Korsgaard claims (ibid), or that valuers ought to endorse moral reasons merely in virtue of their being valuers (as I will show in chapter 5).[28]

These attempts, however, are certainly not in accordance with the sense in which *scientific* discovery is ordinarily understood. Here the idea is that some facts are *already and independently given*, and that these facts must be tracked in order to make epistemic contact

[27] It is, however, a further question as to how ordinary science is understood in more detail, for IMR certainly is not by itself committed to think that moral epistemology is identical with acquiring knowledge in the domain of, say, *empirical* science (Sayre-McCord 2006, 41). While some realists favour such model (Boyd 1988), there are others such as G.E. Moore, who claim that moral facts are discovered by the special faculty of moral intuition (Moore 1903; cf. Sayre-McCord 2006, 41). Arguably, ordinary science does not make use of such a faculty.

[28] That is to say, the relation between the basis of construction and morality might not be obvious at all, but rather highly complex. Korsgaard's work is a good example of this point.

with them (ibid). And this is certainly not true on the constructivist reading because moral facts (or normative facts more broadly understood) are created and thus brought into their very existence by human rational beings in the first place. It follows that where certain facts first have to be created, they cannot await their discovery from the outset. This explains why the metaphor of "discovery", as it is commonly associated with scientific inquiry, is mistaken on the constructivist account.

A third and final feature of metaethical debate, to which constructivism has contributed immensely, concerns questions of the *authority* of moral reasons and claims and the possibility of justifying them without causing them to lose their authority over us (cf. Korsgaard 1996; Shafer-Landau 2003, 46; Bagnoli 2002; 2012).[29] Both topics are neatly connected on the constructivist agenda because, as Shafer-Landau rightly argues, the constructivist does not presuppose that there is a realm of (objective) moral facts, but rather aims to explain and justify *what it is* that makes moral considerations true, or what it is that *grounds* these truths in the first place (cf. James 2013). However, by doing so, the constructivist is careful to give a justification that does not undermine the authority of the agent who is the subject of moral reasons, norms, and claims.

While the aspect of the authority of morality is especially highlighted and put at the heart of philosophical investigation in the *Kantian* variant of constructivism[30], it is nevertheless part of every constructivist theory. To see why that is, consider once again the constructivist view more generally. According to constructivism, moral truths and facts are not already given, waiting to be discovered, tracked, or mirrored by us; rather, they are the output of mental activity. This crucially relates to the issue of autonomy[31], for:

[29] In fact, some realists like Shafer-Landau even claim that the constructivists' immense focus on moral justification is an advantage over realism, which *just states* that there are moral facts, full stop (Shafer-Landau 2003, 46). I am, however, not sure that his argument really holds for all positions within the IMRealist camp. Constructivism definitively has explanatory advantage over Shafer-Landau's view, which holds that moral truths are self-evident (ibid, 247ff.). But there are other views within the IMRealist camp that also argue at length and in more detail how moral truths can be justified. To take just one example, Brink's functionalist view maintains that morality has the function to further or to promote human survival or flourishing (Brink 1984). It therefore seems problematic to claim that IMR does not invest much in justifying moral truths in general. That does not count against the fact that constructivism is largely engaged in justifying moral truth, though. It just means that it may not have as great an advantage over other views as Shafer-Landau thinks.

[30] See Bagnoli 2016a for a more detailed discussion on this point.

[31] See 3.2 for further discussion.

> When reasoning is directed from outside, from a domain of given objects, its authority is derivative and conditional upon the existence of these objects. […] Constructivism does not deny that there are facts or objects that can be called "moral" or, more broadly, "normative". What constructivism denies is that such facts and objects are "moral" or "normative" in themselves, *prior to* and *independently* of the intervention of reason. This denial *preserves the autonomy* of reason […] (Bagnoli 2016a, 1234, my italics).

I do not wish to go into the details of this argument, nor do I want to discuss what it means to be autonomous. Instead, I want to highlight that in view of the autonomy of reason preserved by the claim that there are no independent facts that reason has to track, it is in the end the general constructivist thesis that protects the autonomy of reason. For, after all, according to both Kantian constructivism in particular *and* constructivism in general, the activity of reason brings moral facts and truths into existence. Hence, on no constructivist account is it assumed that there exists an independent realm of normative or moral facts that reason needs to discover.

So, let me conclude the complex constructivist strategy with which to answer the prominent critique that its theory fails to answer the traditional metaethical questions. After having agreed that there is some truth to the objection, I have argued that it is nevertheless not well-suited at all to refute the possibility of metaethical constructivism in general. Thus, against the charge, I have argued for three things. First, that the objection itself rests on a specific understanding of what it means to do metaethics that is not shared by all. Second, I noted that just because the constructivist does not focus extensively on the semantics of morality, this does not mean that she fails to do metaethics in the first place, for every metaethical theory focuses some on some issues while neglecting others. Just as IMR focuses more on metaphysics, and non-cognitivism on semantics, so the constructivist position does not give equal weight to every metaethical field of investigation because of the nature of its metaethical pursuit. Thus, some metaethical theories start with the semantic analyses of the concept of reasons (cf. Scanlon 2014, 1; Wedgewood 2007), while others begin with the meaning of some moral term like "good" (cf. Moore 1903), and others still are mainly concerned with the problems of ethical objectivity and how to cope with it. And the kind of

special topic on which all those theories focus depends to a large extent on their unique starting point of metaethical analysis.

Finally, I have shown where constructivism has significantly contributed to and even furthered metaethical debate: by discussing the relation between morality and science; by putting into focus the phenomenology of morality; and by discussing how to furnish morality with its necessary authority while preserving the autonomy of those agents who are subject to it. Putting all of these more particular answers together, the original objection that constructivism cannot provide answers to the most pressing questions within metaethics becomes rather obscure. That does not mean that I expect all questions about constructivism's more particular claims and strategies to be settled once and for all. But note that this was not the aim or purpose of this chapter which has been to show that not only is it unfair, but it is also simply false to deny constructivism its status as a full-fledged metaethical theory.

1.5 Two Heavy Objections

In the previous section, I have delineated the constructivist view in the context of current metaethical debate, provided a unified description of the constructivist position (SC), and defended it against the charge that it fails to answer the traditional and most commonly raised metaethical questions and issues.

Nevertheless, there are still some worries with the constructivist position that figure just as prominently in the recent literature. Here, rather than questioning the metaethical status of constructivism, there are two crucial objections relating to how the constructivist theory seeks to explain and justify morality and normativity. After all, as we have seen, the constructivist claims that neither normativity in general nor morality in particular are merely given, but that both come or spring into existence by way of agents engaging in a process of construction. Against this explanation, there are two worries with which every constructivist in general has reason to contest.

The first objection I want to consider is a variant of the often raised "Euthyphro" dilemma (cf. Street 2010; James 2012). There are now several variants of the Euthyphro dilemma, all of which are designed to challenge the constructivist position. Since I cannot deal

with every type of this objection here, I will only discuss Shafer-Landau's version (2003), which I take to be the best version of the dilemma.

So, why, according to Shafer-Landau, does constructivism face the Euthyphro dilemma? As we have seen, the constructivist's distinctive claim is that moral facts and truths are the output of a procedure applied to the practical point of view, or the basis of construction. This raises a worry about whether or not the initial conditions and constraints of that procedure are moralized. The problem with the latter is that "there is no reason to expect that the principles that emerge from such a construction process will capture our deepest ethical convictions, or respect the various platitudes that fix our understanding of ethical concepts" (Shafer-Landau 2003, 42).

But the former option is also unsatisfactory because if moral constraints already figured in the procedure, they would exist prior to the "*products* of construction" (ibid, my italics). Therefore, constructivism, instead of providing a new and genuinely *constructivist* view, would count as a brand of realism (ibid) insofar as the moral constraints would be conceived as merely given.

It is not easy to see why this is an example of the *Euthyphro* dilemma where the original question was whether some X is good because the gods approved of it or whether the gods approved of it because it is good. Shafer-Landau claims that the constructivist dilemma is nevertheless similar insofar as constructivism claims that idealized agents fix the moral truth (ibid, 43). However, if constructivists do not wish to "dignify" the responses of idealized agents and at the same time want to prevent their own position from collapsing into IMR, the only option left open to them is to claim that non-moral reasons in the end justify moral truths: "But if the reasons that are constraining the choices of the favoured agents are not moral reasons, it is hard to see why the outcomes of the initial conditions should be definitive of morality" (ibid).

Shafer-Landau's version of the Euthyphro dilemma is worth considering because it contains some truths about current constructivist accounts. As such, the constructivist has to confront a unique challenge, namely she has to show how, at the end of the day, moral truths are the *outcome of practical deliberation*. Without such proof, the constructivist account will inevitably fail because it will not be able to substantiate its original and central claim that moral (and normative) truth arises only after agents have successfully engaged in rational reflection.

Despite this worry, however, I do not think that Shafer-Landau's objection suffices to render constructivism *as such* implausible because one can still answer the proposed dilemma by claiming that while it may be *difficult* to see how reasoning alone can ground moral facts, this does not and in fact cannot mean that it is generally *impossible*. The constructivist can still maintain the hope that other accounts developed in the future may avoid the problems that beset existing constructivist views.

But even if the original objection is shown to be weaker than initially thought, Shafer-Landau gives the constructivist the resources needed to argue for future accounts by noting that constructing moral truths from rational reasoning alone requires hard work, because it has to be shown in detail, first, how morality can be generated by the constructive procedure, and second, that these moral facts can only be mentioned *after* the procedure has been successfully carried out.

So, for instance, one may take the easy route and argue that the sadistic, amoralist Caligula, who figures importantly in the Humean constructivist theory (Street 2010), is making "some deliberative mistake" by valuing the practice of torturing others for his own pleasure. But the question, of course, is *what kind* of mistake exactly? The constructivist, thus, has to be as precise as possible in responding to this question; they cannot simply claim that Caligula *just is* mistaken. While this response is available to some IMRealists such as Shafer-Landau who maintains that there are self-evident moral truths (Shafer-Landau 2003), constructivists cannot answer the problem so easily.

In addition, sometimes moral principles may enter the reasoning process instead of emerging out of it. For instance, one may, like James, say that Caligula's mistake is to not consider the "needless suffering or loss of life" of others (cf. James 2012, 66). But it seems that this answer relies on a distinctively moral principle, according to which needless suffering and the loss of life are repugnant or false, rather than relying on rational reasoning alone. In order for the constructivist account to be convincing, one has to show how the falseness of, say, needless suffering follows *from* practical reasoning, rather than being merely supposed during the course of it.

So, being aware of the difficulties that constructivists will inevitably face amid their project to ground morality in reasoning, constructivists can nevertheless defend themselves against the Euthyphro dilemma because the latter does not show that the constructivist project *necessarily fails*. Accordingly, it cannot count as a knock-down argument against its

very position, meaning that it is doubtful that the very thing called metaethical constructivism simply fails.[32]

But even where the first objection fails, there is a second worry. As with the first, it is targeted at the crucial constructivist explanation of normativity in general or morality in particular. Hence, in some ways similar to the first worry, it is said that there is a problem with constructivism accounting for the authority of its procedure that (inter alia) stands at the very heart of their theory (Wallace 2012). More specifically, this objection holds that constructivism about morality or normativity maintains that we reach the truth of ethical/normative judgments in virtue of engaging in a certain procedure. Thus, an agent's judgment about what is morally right, or what she has reason to do, is verified by the fact that it is the outcome of a certain procedure in which the agent has engaged. The underlying assumption then is that the procedure carries with it a certain kind of authority because the kinds of ethical truth that exist depend on those results, which the procedure has yielded. Given then the crucial importance of the procedure for the constructivist's overall position, there are some who, like Wallace, raise the objection that it simply is not clear what it is that ultimately accounts for the authority of the very procedure that constructivists use in order to ground normative truths and facts in the first place (ibid, 33).

This unfolds in the course of the two possible but equally problematic answers that constructivists could give to the question about the procedure's authority. Thus, one, relatively straightforward answer for the constructivist simply consists in pointing out that the procedure – properly understood – describes the standards of correctness for deliberation and reflection, and that it is exactly this fact that accounts for the authority of the procedure itself (ibid, 34). Against this answer, Wallace objects that the reply causes constructivism to lose its "philosophical aspiration" because it merely "presupposes" the normativity of the procedure while at the same time aiming to offer a *global theory of* normativity (ibid, 34). In addition, the reply raises the worry that if the constructivist answer to the proposed challenge were to say that the procedure *just is* normative, it would seem that constructivism collapses into realism in respect of normativity.

[32] Shafer-Landau himself seems to acknowledge the considered limitation of his objection (Shafer-Landau 2003, 43).

The second answer to this objection, however, is equally devastating. Thus, constructivists could argue that what accounts for the authority of the procedure is, ultimately, the fact that it is "firmly anchored in our *actual* commitments" (ibid, my italics):

> If something like this could be established, it would follow that a convincing answer to the normative question about the procedures would be available to any agent who might happen to pose it. In reflecting about why we should care whether you comply with the specified procedures, you would find that you are *already* committed to accepting them […] (ibid, my italics).

Wallace also rejects this possibility because constructivism thus understood would fail to offer a plausible theory of error (ibid, 36–7), for the problem with the proposed justification of the authority of the procedure is that normative thought becomes "peculiarly self-validating" (ibid, 36). This is so because constructivists could account for the authority of the procedure by claiming that it is anchored in our actual commitments. However, the constructivist also wants to say that some of our thoughts or attitudes are, or at least can be, mistaken because they would not survive the procedure (ibid, 36). Yet, given that constructivists deem the suggested answer to Wallace's objection to be correct, they would argue for a very odd result, for as long as the agent holds her judgments, thoughts, and/or attitudes, the mere holding of them means that they have a default authority that gives agents reason to act in accordance with them (ibid). The difficulty then consists in, first, how to rationally *criticize* those attitudes and thoughts that cannot stand up to the procedure, and second, how to avoid the consequence of normative bootstrapping.

Therefore, if Wallace's criticism is correct, then either constructivists cannot account for the authority of the procedure that inter alia stands at the core of its account, or the constructivist procedure loses its ability to explain or identify when an agent is falsely believing or judging that X. To make matters even worse, to claim that these false judgments would not survive the procedure does not help at all because the procedure itself carries normative weight only because it is anchored in our actually held judgments and beliefs.

I grant that Wallace presents a very serious objection against constructivism in metaethics. Nevertheless, his argument fails because it rests on a misunderstanding of the general constructivist claim. To see why that is, let us briefly reconsider the first kind of answer

that constructivists may want to give to the question of why the procedure is authoritative (and the one that Wallace has rejected). This answer held that the procedure has normative weight because it incorporates certain standards that define what makes deliberation possible. Wallace himself rejected the reply because it (merely) "presupposes" the normativity of the procedure, rather than accounting for or explaining it. However, I do not think that this is in line with what the constructivist would actually say, because the procedure is not authoritative *only* because of the standards of correctness of reasoning that it incorporates. Rather, it is normative because it is the procedure of practical *deliberation*. One could, of course, then ask why practical deliberation ought to be authoritative, but the constructivist has a good answer to this challenge, namely, as James rightly claims, that "[r]eason is the only game in town" (James 2012, 76).

As I understand it, there are two thoughts underlying James' point. First, it is a plain fact about human rational beings that they engage in reasoning or practical deliberation. One may wonder whether the constructivist is simply presupposing some normativity of a naturally given fact like the normativity of reasoning. One wonders, however, whether other metaethical theories argue differently. For instance, if one endorses, say, a naturalist version of IMR, then one will have to say some things about the metaphysics of the proposed natural facts. But no IMRealist account starts by seeking to prove the existence of the external world. Rather, this world is simply understood as given. This thought show that any metaethical theory at some point must presuppose and rely on already accepted accounts or truths of such things as the existence of an external world, or the existence or functioning of certain cognitive capacities such as reasoning. If the constructivist also does so in the case of reasoning, it is not clear why this should cause any problems.

A second kind of response would be to give a more thorough-going argumentation about the normativity of reasoning by showing why *skepticism* regarding practical reasoning is highly problematic or even self-contradictory. Constructivists could thus claim that to imagine someone sincerely judging that she has come to the conclusion that she has a reason to φ, but then asks: "But what is that to me?" (cf. Joyce 2001, 49), is fundamentally mistaken. I will not go into the details of such an argument, but I think it a promising strategy against anyone who (sincerely) wants to question the authority of deliberation or reasoning.

So, in the first instance, the constructivist, in order to answer the question about the authority of the procedure, claims that reasoning as such is authoritative. However, two

additional things need to be done. First, the very thing called “reasoning” has to be specified more in order for agents to know what it is in which they engage whenever they are deliberating about what to do, how to solve a moral problem, and so on.

Second, constructivists do not want to claim that every mental process that merely resembles reasoning counts as a genuine token of deliberation, because only certain patterns of thought qualify as part of what it is to reason. These criteria of correct reasoning then enable the constructivist to offer a distinct error theory about the reasoning process as a result of determining certain rules of reasoning that one has to follow in order to reason at all. Thus, the constructivist thought can be described as follows:

> To violate the ground rules of chess is not to play chess. Similarly, to violate certain requirements of reasoning (perhaps certain “formal constraints”, such as consistency), means that one is not engaged in the activity of reasoning, but doing nothing or something else (James 2012, 71).

So, true, the constructivist does make reference to those rules that make deliberation possible, as Wallace claims. However, as we now see, these rules are *not* what *ultimately* accounts for the authority of reasoning. Rather, constructivists think that reasoning as such is authoritative. However, because the constructivist needs to be more specific about what it is that we are doing when we engage in reasoning or deliberation, she provides a more detailed account of those rules and standards that are thought to make deliberation possible in the first place. At the same time, these rules or criteria enable, contrary to Wallace’s argument, the constructivist to offer an error theory of reasoning.

In this way, then, it can be seen that constructivists do *not* have to claim that the procedure is normative because its results are related to those judgments, etc., that an agent “already” holds. On the contrary, the constructive procedure is normative because it is the procedure of reasoning, a method we hold to be authoritative from the very outset. And this procedure in turn is specified in terms of certain criteria or rules that enable one to understand when it is carried out in a successful or correct manner.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have done three things. First, I have set out what I take to be the original contribution of the constructivist position to metaethics; second, I have provided a unified description of the constructivist theory; and finally, I have defended metaethical constructivism against three general charges. As such, with regard to the first point, I have claimed that the constructivist contribution to metaethics consists in "the very big idea" to establish a realist view about morality without having to embrace a mind-independent ontological realm of moral facts in virtue of which moral judgments are rendered true. Second, I have developed the unified description of Sophisticated Constructivism (SC) that is well-suited to bridge the gap between two of the most prominent descriptions of the constructivist position in the current debate, namely the proceduralist description on the one hand, and the practical standpoint characterization on the other.

Therefore, according to SC, constructivism is the view that moral truths and facts are not discovered or tracked, but are the output of an ideal procedure applied to the practical standpoint, or the basis of construction. As a result, one can see that there are not two contradictory accounts of the constructivist position in metaethics; rather, both descriptions highlight both crucial aspects of the constructivist theory.

Finally, I have defended constructivism against three important charges that are often raised against the constructivist theory. Thus, I responded to the worry that, ultimately, it is not clear whether constructivism is a metaethical theory in the first place. I also elucidated an easy way out of the prominent "Euthyphro" dilemma, and finally argued how constructivism can account for the authority of its procedure while at the same time offering a plausible error theory.

As I have said before, the arguments set out in this chapter provide an independent and important result for the constructivist overall theory in metaethics precisely because so many remain skeptical about the theoretical possibilities and merits of this view. In the next chapter, however, I will go one step further and argue that not only is constructivism an interesting view in metaethical debate, but also that there are good reasons for preferring it to many other rival theories.

2

Why Adopt Constructivism?
The Argument from Moral Phenomenology

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I described in more detail the constructivist contribution to metaethics, provided a unified definition of the constructivist position, and defended it against three of the most prominent charges. In this chapter, I want to go one step further and provide an independent, positive argument showing not only why there is good reason to endorse constructivism, but also why there is good reason to prefer constructivism to its main rivals – whether in the guise of what I have called independence moral realism (IMR) or views from the non-cognitivist camp, including early as well as the most sophisticated variants in the form of quasi-realism.[33]

My argument in favor of constructivism is built around the notion and analysis of *moral phenomenology* that has seldom been discussed in metaethical debate. My claim thus is that the phenomenological investigation of morality presents strong independent reasons not only for thinking of metaethical constructivism as an attractive theory, but as an even more attractive theory than (most) of its rivals from both the cognitivist and the non-cognitivist camps.

As such, my argument crucially rests on the notion and the importance of moral phenomenology for metaethical theorizing in general, especially concerning its status as providing a central and important standard for evaluating the correctness or plausibility

[33] It is thus important to note that I do not intend to show that constructivism should be preferred over *any* other metaethical theory. Therefore, my argument leaves open the question whether, say, dispositionalist views or McDowell's realism (McDowell 1998) are not well-equipped to offer equally plausible or even better metaethical accounts than constructivism. However, to show that constructivism is the best overall theory within current metaethics requires a work in its own right and thus cannot be answered here. Note, however, that the more traditional opponents of the constructivist view are exactly the targets of my argument, that is they are IMRealist and non-cognitivist views (cf. Bagnoli 2002). And my argument is well-equipped to show why constructivism is the more plausible and attractive view than any of these positions.

of any metaethical theory, claim, and argument in general. Given the importance of phenomenological analysis for metaethics *as such*, my argument that constructivism is rendered not just plausible but even favorable by phenomenology presents a strong reason for adopting constructivism and preferring it over its (main) rivals.

The plan of the chapter runs as follows. In 2.2, I introduce the investigation of moral phenomenology and argue for its importance in metaethical theorizing. In section 2.3, on the grounds of the importance of moral phenomenology, I provide a first argument in favor of constructivism in virtue of it being a brand of strong cognitivism. However, because there are other theories within the strong cognitivist camp besides constructivism, and because there are sophisticated non-cognitivist views out there, an additional argument is needed in order to establish the superiority of constructivism. The rest of the chapter explores exactly this argument by putting into focus the feature of moral mind-independence endorsed by the main rivals of constructivism, stemming from both the cognitivist and the non-cognitivist camps. Thus, section 2.4 clarifies how to understand this feature, while 2.5 shows why it is at odds with moral phenomenology. In 2.6, I discuss two main objections, before concluding the chapter in section 2.7.

2.2 What is Moral Phenomenology?

While in the first chapter I introduced metaethical constructivism and showed how to understand its genuine and original contribution to metaethics, in this chapter I propose a new and independent argument showing at once why there is reason to adopt the constructivist view *and* why we should prefer it over its rivals.

Of course, in the past, constructivists have given some reason or other for why it is more plausible or attractive than other theories such as IMR or non-cognitivist quasi-realism. For instance, some have argued that IMR is at odds with the very practice of doing ethics, that is, how we deal with ethical questions and problems, because IMR would deprive ethical practice of its genuinely practical character (Korsgaard 1996, Ch. 1; 2008, 315–16). Other constructivists have pressed evolutionary debunking arguments against IMR, as well as some non-cognitivist views, by claiming that these theories cannot account for the evolutionary influences on our actually held evaluative judgments (Street 2006; 2011). Others still have charged that neither IMR nor quasi-realism can make sense

of how moral judgments can be at once objective and motivating (Bagnoli 2002). Thus, each of these arguments is thought to count against rival theories and at the same time speak in favor of the constructivist's own position.

In this chapter, I offer a new argument in favor of the constructivist position on the grounds that it fares especially well in making sense of *moral phenomenology*. At this point, some may want to say that this kind of argument sounds somewhat familiar, for, after all, Carla Bagnoli argued in her 2002 "Moral Constructivism: A Phenomenological Argument" precisely for the claim that constructivism makes better sense of moral phenomenology than other theories such as IMR and quasi-realism.[34] However, as I show throughout my argument, there are two important differences between Bagnoli's argument and my own, concerning first of all the understanding of the term "moral phenomenology", and, accordingly, what kind of phenomena support the constructivist view.

Before I can go into the details of my argument, however, I need to say more about the role and force of phenomenological arguments for metaethical debate in general and for the constructivist view in particular. Let's start from the constructivist perspective. Often, even critics of constructivism give a standard argument about what makes constructivism more attractive than its traditional rival IMR, namely that constructivism can give us everything we want from a realist view about morality without having to embrace its costs. Thus, take Enoch, for example, who writes: "Constructivism may be thought of as a way of securing the good realism (purportedly) delivers, for a more attractive price" (Enoch 2009, 324; cf. James 2013).

As I noted in Chapter 1, I agree with Enoch's argument. But at the same time, it is important to note that at least at this point it is not entirely clear that constructivism is indeed in a good position to deliver all the results that are commonly thought to derive from the realist views. That is to say, there is still work to be done on behalf of constructivism to show that the latter does *indeed* give us everything we want from a realist theory. One of the main reasons for being skeptical about this claim may be that only IMR is traditionally thought to be in a good position to deliver a very strong view on moral objectivity. As I will show in Chapter 3, there is some truth to this claim, and as

[34] See also Bagnoli 2015.

such, further, careful argumentation is required so as to establish the attractiveness of the constructivist position.[35]

But there is another caveat, namely that even if it can be shown that constructivism can be thought to provide a good alternative to IMR, this leaves unanswered the question of whether it is also more attractive than, say, views from the non-cognitivist theory. After all, not only does non-cognitivism feature rather prominently in metaethical debate, but it has also undergone immense progress over the last 30 years and itself has developed into a rather serious alternative to all cognitivist views, even to IMR.

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[35] Another problem with the standard argument is that one must clarify in what precise sense IMR is a "costly" view. To see why that is, consider Mackie's infamous argument from "queerness" which encompasses two (interrelated) reasons for worrying about IMR. As we have seen, IMR claims that strong cognitivism is true by offering a truthmaker theory, i.e. a theory according to which moral judgments are rendered true because there exists an ontological realm of moral facts out there in the world. In this sense, IMR makes a crucial metaphysical claim. Against this view, Mackie raises two worries. The first is about the very nature of the moral facts that IMR presupposes, for these would, as Mackie objects, require the existence of very "strange" entities that are "utterly different from anything else in the universe" (Mackie 1973, 38). But it is not just IMR's metaphysical thesis that is "strange"; so too is its account of moral epistemology, i.e. its explanation of how we can ever come to know the proposed facts. This motivates Mackie's second objection, according to which the IMRealist would have to presuppose a special kind of faculty that is, again, "utterly different from our ways to know everything else" (ibid, 40). If Mackie's argument were the basis for thinking that IMR comes with certain "costs", three difficulties would arise. First, the IMRealist may in fact have good answers to all the worries raised by Mackie. She may thus have good answers to the metaphysical and the epistemological objections and may, at least in principle, avoid the proposed difficulties after all (cf. Brink 1984; 1989; Enoch 2011).
Thus, a quick objection against Mackie's argument from metaphysical "queerness" rightly argues that Mackie's worries rest on a misunderstanding of the IMRealist position, namely thinking that it is committed to internalism about moral reasons or motives. Mackie's point was that what makes the IMRealist commitment so odd is that she is committed to assume there have to exist certain values that are *at once* objective and motivating (Mackie 1973, 49). Against this, Brink, for instance, argues that IMR is not necessarily committed to endorsing the claim that objective values have to be intrinsically motivating. Consequently, if a part of what makes the IMR position so odd is that it assumes intrinsically motivating facts, then IMRealists have a good point in arguing that they are not qua endorsing IMR committed to advocating internalism about reasons or motives (Brink 1984).
When it comes to the epistemological argument, there is also an easy way for IMRealists to answer Mackie's objection. Mackie's point was that the IMRealist needs to propose the existence of some strange faculty that puts people in the position to track independently given moral facts. Why should we think that realists must advocate such a faculty? Mackie here refers crucially to the results of Moore's Open Question Argument (Moore 1903). Moore's point was that there is an unbridgeable gap between the normative and the empirical realm (Blackburn 2006, 147). In order to argue for a version of moral realism, Moore then advocated ethical intuitionism, according to which moral judgments are distinctive in kind, that is, *sui generis*, and that these distinct judgments can only be judged right (or wrong) by an *equally* distinct faculty, namely intuition (Moore 1903). That explains why Mackie argues that the IMRealist is committed to endorsing intuitionism, and a fortiori why IMR is thought to be committed to propose a "strange" faculty. But clearly not every realist is an ethical intuitionist and she therefore has good resources with which to answer Mackie's challenge. Therefore, my point is that if Mackie's objection is taken as the main reason for thinking that IMR is problematic, and if that reason is in the end motivating the view that constructivism is more plausible than IMR, the whole argument becomes problematic. Other arguments against the "costs" of IMR fare better, such as Blackburn's critique of the IMRealist "ban on mixed worlds" (Blackburn 1984, 182ff.; 1988).

It is especially these more sophisticated non-cognitivist views, such as quasi-realism, that put the standard argument for the attractiveness of constructivism under pressure. For such views seek to explain and justify the "realistic-seeming nature of our talk of evaluations – the way we can be wrong about them, that there is a truth to be found, and so on" (Blackburn 1984, 180), while refusing to endorse any troublesome metaphysical assumptions. The quasi-realist thus wants to explain the notions of "moral truth", "objectivity", "moral knowledge", "fallibility", and even "mind-independence" (Blackburn 2006, 154; cf. Zangwill 1993, 288) without mentioning any kind of metaphysically odd entities (Asay 2012, 384; Tenenbaum 2003, 393). Thus, it can be said that the reasons for holding the constructivist theory to be especially plausible are exactly those that also render the quasi-realist account attractive, namely that it has all the advantages of IMR while avoiding its odd metaphysical commitments (cf. Tenenbaum 2003, 393). What this shows is that our reasons for thinking that constructivism is a particularly plausible or attractive view within metaethical debate are at best preliminary, for there are other theories that aim to save the realistic-seeming nature of moral practice while avoiding the troubles of IMR. Thus, if there is anything that marks constructivism as advantageous over these other theories, this has to be established on the basis of other reasons than those already presented.

Because of these legitimate objections, in what follows I will adopt a different argument that is better-suited to show why constructivism is not only a more plausible theory than IMR, but in fact more plausible than a considerable range of its rivals, including those from the non-cognitivist camp such as quasi-realism.

The argument rests on the results of a kind of investigation that is only seldom discussed (cf. Horgan, Timmons 2005, 56) but which proves something that is vital to metaethical investigation, namely *moral phenomenology*. In fact, as I show in the course of my argument, engaging in phenomenological analysis and accounting for its results lies at the very heart of doing metaethics as such. Therefore, if it is true that constructivism, on phenomenological grounds, fares better than all of its rivals, this would present a strong reason for adopting it and favoring it over other views.

But what is it that explains this special authority of moral phenomenology in the first place? Consider, as a starting point, theories within *normative* ethics that are commonly thought to be subject to certain standards to determine whether or not they

are attractive. Mark Timmons, for instance, mentions seven characteristics that are "ideally desirable for every moral theory to possess" (Timmons 2013, 12). Some of the characteristics Timmons mentions (ibid, 12ff.) are readily applicable to *metaethical* theories as well, such as the requirement that metaethical theories should be in themselves consistent.

But there are also other criteria that are especially relevant to metaethical inquiry like the issue of what Timmons calls "external support", where this concerns the relation between metaethical accounts on morality and other, non-moral theories that are concerned with the metaphysics, semantics, and epistemology. One of the best-known arguments about the external support for metaethical theories is that presented by Mackie who questions the correctness of both the metaphysical and the epistemological commitments of the IMRealist view. Another example of external support concerns certain brands of non-naturalistic realism, which sought to make sense of the relation between moral and natural facts (Sayre-McCord 2006, 40–1, 43).

Another very strong but often underestimated criterion for testing the plausibility of metaethical theories is provided by the investigation of moral phenomenology. Arguments stemming from moral phenomenology thus are often cited when scholars try to present the advantages of their metaethical position over other accounts, and these arguments are presented by a very wide range of different theories such as moral realism (cf. Brink 1989; Dancy 1986; Sayre-McCord 2006, 40, 42; Shafer-Landau 2003), non-cognitivist theories like norm-expressivism (Gibbard 1990) or Blackburn's quasi-realism, where Blackburn's explicit aim is to "save the ethical appearances" (Blackburn 1993, 167; cf. Harcourt 2005, Ridge 2006).

Moral phenomenology therefore is commonly recognized as providing a critical, independent, and important standard against which different metaethical arguments, claims, and whole theories must be tested (cf. Sayre-McCord 2006, 40). However, in order to grant moral phenomenology this rather special role in evaluating metaethical arguments and theories, it is first necessary to reconsider the understanding of what it means to engage in "moral phenomenology" and what comprise the proper objects of this science. The reason for this verdict is that the standard account of what it means to engage in phenomenological investigation in metaethics is very limited in scope and carries with it some rather fundamental difficulties.

So, according to the standard account, which some constructivists have also used to date (Bagnoli 2002; 2014, 36), moral phenomenology is the first-person study of the experiential aspect of our moral lives in virtue of its being concerned with the *experiences* and *feelings* that accompany our being subject to moral requirements, obligations, etc. (Kirchin 2003, 241–2; Drummon 2008, 35; Miller 2013, 2). Hence, what is analyzed in the phenomenological investigation is the "what-it-is-like features of concrete moral experience" (Horgan, Timmons 2005, 58), or, as Mandelbaum puts it: "the phenomenological approach to ethics starts from a point which all paths must eventually cross: a direct examination of the data of men's moral consciousness" (Mandelbaum 1955, 30, in: Horgan, Timmons 2005, 58).

However, if understood in this way, moral phenomenology gives rise to difficulties that render its authority as an important evaluative standard problematic. In this light, what is needed is a new, more sophisticated interpretation of moral phenomenology according to which phenomenological analysis examines more than just the "raw feeling[s]" (Kirchin 2003, 242) to which agents are subject whenever they are confronted with some moral requirements or whenever they form moral judgments. There are two reasons that prompt this need for a reinterpretation of moral phenomenology.

The first reason is that, arguably, many different people experience the what-it-is-likeness of being subject to moral claims, etc. very differently, which makes it doubtful that there could ever be a unified interpretation of these feelings (ibid, 263). Consider, for instance, Mandelbaum who claims that we experience moral claims as originating from "outside" and being "directed against us" (Mandelbaum 1955, 54, in: Horgan, Timmons, 60). We have good reason to be skeptical about the notion that Mandelbaum's experiences are shared by all agents. Imagine, for instance, what a full-hearted Kantian would tell us about her moral feelings. She surely would not claim that she experiences moral obligation as originating from outside of herself; on the contrary, she is most likely to argue that obligation is the *expression of herself*.

A second problem is that even if we succeeded in reaching a unified account of how we feel about morality, there are many possible ways in which to *interpret* and thus explain these feelings and experiences. Let's turn to Mandelbaum again. He claims that we experience moral claims as originating outside of and directed against us. Now, it is most likely that the IMRealist will conclude from Mandelbaum's observations that they

show the correctness of her realist account because, after all, she is the one claiming that moral truths are mind-independent and therefore originate outside of us. And it is precisely for this reason that some IMRealists explicitly refer to moral phenomenology in order to argue in favor of their theory:

> The simple form can be found in Mackie's view that we take moral value to be part of the fabric of the world; taking our experience at face value, we judge it to be experience of the moral properties of actions and agents in the world. And if we are to work with the presumption that the world is the way our experience represents it to us as being, we should take it in the absence of contrary considerations that actions and agents do have the sorts of moral properties we experience in them. This is an argument about the nature of moral experience, which moves from that nature to the probable nature of the world (Dancy 1986, 172, in: Kirchin 2003, 248).

At first glance, then, IMR not only makes perfect sense of our feelings accompanying moral obligation, but more importantly, it also appears to be the *only* theory that is in a position to account for them in the first place. After all, IMR just is the view according to which morality originates outside of human agents.

But there is a caveat, for there are other theories that can also explain those feelings while standing in radical opposition to IMR. For instance, theorists such as Mackie (1977) and Blackburn (1984) can make perfect sense of why we experience morality as originating from outside of us in virtue of their using the metaphor of "projection". According to the projectivist view, there are no moral or normative properties *in* the world as the IMRealist claims; rather, it is only our sentiments that we first spread *onto* the world and, at some point, take to be part of it (Blackburn 1984, 180–1; cf. Zangwill 1993, 288; cf. Tenenbaum 2003, 392):

> [W]e have sentiments and other reactions caused by natural features of things, and we "gild and stain" the world by describing the world *as if* it contained features answering to these sentiments, in the way that the niceness of ice-cream answers to the pleasure it gives us (Blackburn 1993, 152, my italics).

And:

> [W]e project some attitude or habit or other commitment which is not descriptive onto the world, when we speak and think *as though* there were a property of things which our sayings describe which we can reason about, know about, be wrong about, and so on (Blackburn 1984, 170–1, my italics).

Therefore, by using his projectivist account, Blackburn can explain why moral or, in fact, normative thought has "realistic-looking features", while in reality these features are only due to our "*projecting* attitudes, habits, expectations, or imaginative limitations *onto* the world" (Zangwill 1993, 288, my italics). It follows from this not only that projectivism, as much as IMR, can make sense of certain moral feelings, but, more importantly, that there can be two radically different theories that are able to make equally good sense of moral phenomenology.

Putting both worries together, some argue that it becomes dubious whether moral phenomenology can really provide a promising criterion for evaluating the plausibility of metaethical theories after all (cf. Kirchin 2005). But I think we should not be too hasty in dismissing the importance of phenomenological analysis for doing metaethics altogether. So, rather than ceasing to make use of phenomenological arguments, I propose a reconsideration of what is meant by engaging in phenomenological investigation in the first place. To be more precise, I argue that a broader interpretation is needed so that engaging in moral phenomenology is not just concerned with the raw feelings that accompany moral experiences, but also includes those phenomena that we find present in our *moral practice*. I therefore agree with Horgan and Timmons who argue along the following lines:

> In metaethical inquiry, talk of "moral phenomenology" is used very broadly to include such deeply embedded phenomena as: (1) the grammar and logic of moral thought and discourse; (2) people's "critical practices" regarding moral thought and discourse (e.g., the assumption that genuine moral disagreements are possible); and (3) the what-it-is-like features of concrete moral experiences (Horgan, Timmons 2005, 58).

The argument is somehow surprising because, following the initial description of moral phenomenology, only (3) is commonly thought to lie at the heart of phenomenological investigation in metaethics. After all, it is one thing to say that moral phenomenology is about the first-person experiences of what it is like to make a moral judgment, etc., and quite another to maintain that it is about the logical structure of moral thought and the "critical practices" of moral discourse.

Nevertheless, there are two important reasons why the broader understanding is fruitful. First, it is precisely this broader understanding of moral phenomenology that theorists often have in mind when they argue that some moral phenomena count in favor of their own position or against the view of others. Thus, consider Blackburn claiming that quasi-realism "removes the most important range of objections to projectivism – namely, that it cannot account for the phenomena of *ordinary moral thinking*" (Blackburn 1984, 180, my italics).

It becomes clear from Blackburn's further argument that the "phenomena" that projectivism until now has failed to account for are the phenomena of moral *discourse* and *practice*, that is, its truth-stating character and "realistic-seeming" nature (ibid). But clearly the truth-stating character of moral practice cannot be reduced to how agents feel about morality. Much more has to be taken into account, such as how moral language is used, how people deal with moral argumentation, and so on.

Another such case is presented by Sayre-McCord who argues that moral realism tries to "conserve the *appearances* when it comes to accounting for the nature of moral thought and its commitment to moral facts" (Sayre-McCord 2006, 40, my italics). Or take Railton who states that moral "pluralism and dilemma come onto the scene as purported facts of moral *experience*" (Railton 1992, 720, my italics).

Again, in the case of both Sayre-McCord and Railton, while the authors refer to moral phenomenology, they do not have the first-personal study of the what-it-is-likeness of moral experiences in mind. Rather, they are mentioning the phenomena that are entailed within common moral *practice* such as its realistic-seeming nature, i.e. "the way we think we can be wrong" about moral claims, "that there is a truth to be found" (Blackburn 1984, 180; cf. Sayre-McCord 2006, 40), or that, even after sophisticated philosophical debate, there are genuine moral dilemmas.

Independently of these considerations, however, there is another reason why we ought to adopt the broader understanding of phenomenological inquiry in metaethics. This is because the broader interpretation gives us a plausible rationale for considering phenomenological investigation to be authoritative for metaethical theorizing that is lacking in the narrow conception. Thus, while engaging in metaethics is often associated with investigating the metaphysics, epistemology, and semantics of morality, there is a reason why we are dealing with these topics in the first place. And this is because a great part of metaethics is, first and foremost, concerned with accommodating *what we are doing while doing ethics* (cf. Sinclair 2012, 161–2; Stahl 2013, 13):

> Meta-ethics is the second-order investigation of the practice of making moral judgments – the everyday practice and the more philosophical practice of normative ethics. Meta-ethical investigations do not attempt to figure out which moral judgments we should make, but rather try to understand what is going on when we engage in the practice of making moral judgments (Hussain, Shah 2013, 86).

Accordingly, given the nature of metaethical theorizing, to accommodate the appearances of common moral practice is not just *some* aspect of metaethics; rather, it lies at the heart of *what it means* to do metaethics. And this in turn explains why failing to account for moral phenomenology constitutes a profound mistake that heavily counts against the adoption of any view.

In this way, then, moral phenomenology can be part of metaethical theorizing in two ways. First of all, by providing a natural starting point from which theorists can construct their metaethical theory. For instance, we may start by gathering different phenomena that characterize moral practice, and then try to account for these phenomena by explaining or justifying them. Not surprisingly, this is exactly how many theories actually begin their investigation, as we have seen in the case of Blackburn's quasi-realism. Here, the idea is to proceed by analyzing some distinct phenomenon of moral practice, such as its truth-stating character, or the phenomenon of moral error, and then move on to develop a theory that can make sense of these phenomena.

Second, phenomenological investigation can figure as a *corrective* to the claims and arguments of metaethical theories and even to the theories themselves. Here, the idea is to take the phenomena of moral practice to test the correctness or plausibility of one's own or another argument or theory. Again, it comes as no surprise that many counterarguments against different metaethical theories use phenomenology in exactly this way, as I show in the next section by discussing why early non-cognitivism cannot make sense of the phenomena of moral error and objectivity (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003, 22ff.).

Now, if moral phenomenology is understood in the broader sense that I have proposed here, there is indeed a powerful rationale for why it provides such an important criterion for testing any kind of metaethical argumentation and theory. For if it is correct to maintain that moral phenomenological investigation lies at the very heart of metaethical theorizing as such, then any failure to make sense of phenomenology looms large.

In addition, the broader definition is well-equipped to sidestep the problems of its original, narrow interpretation in terms of the first-person study of the feelings and experiences that accompany a person's being subject to moral obligation. For in the broader description, first of all, it is not so easy to disagree about the nature of those phenomena that we find present in common moral practice, and second, it becomes muss less likely that there will be two or more radically different views that can account for *all* the phenomena included in the broader interpretation. This is even more so due to the fact that I do not aim to suggest that in the broader understanding of moral phenomenology, feelings and experiences ought not to play any role whatsoever. On the contrary, as we have seen, the broader description only claims that phenomenology cannot be *reduced* to the first-personal aspect of morality. This does *not* mean that the first-personal aspect suddenly should no longer be part of phenomenological analysis.

Now, after having clarified the difficult and complex point concerning how to understand phenomenological analysis and its role within metaethical theorizing in general, in the following I want to demonstrate why, on phenomenological grounds, there are not only good reasons for adopting metaethical constructivism, but that these reasons even count in favor of preferring constructivism over many rival theories. To be more precise, I claim that because constructivism fares much better than many of its

rivals in accounting for and thus making sense of moral phenomenology, we have good reason to favor it over those other positions. Given that being able to accommodate the phenomena of morality counts as an important and rather essential criterion for testing the adequacy and attractiveness of metaethical arguments and theories, my arguments strongly counts in favor of the constructivist position.

2.3 The Appeals of Strong Cognitivism

Many constructivists have provided arguments for the attractiveness of their position and for why it is more convincing or promising than others. In doing so, they focused mainly on two other positions: IMR and non-cognitivism. In the following, I want to resume their line of argumentation in virtue of taking into account considerations stemming from moral phenomenology understood in the way I set out in 2.2, that is, in terms of the broader analysis including the first-personal experiences of moral agents *as well as* what is entailed in common, everyday moral practice.[36]

Throughout my overall argument, I propose that constructivism is a more attractive view than many other metaethical theories in virtue of two reasons: first, because it endorses strong cognitivism; and second, and more importantly, because it rejects the feature of moral mind-independence. While I will postpone until 2.4 discussion of the feature of moral mind-independence that has so often been criticized by constructivists when arguing against IMR, in this paragraph let me consider in more detail why constructivism is an attractive view in virtue of its endorsing strong cognitivism. Thus, recall, first, that the reason why constructivism entails strong cognitivism is because it holds not only that moral judgments and statements in general are truth-*apt*, but also that at least some of these judgments and statements *are* literally *true*.

[36] My discussion of the nature and importance of moral phenomenology at the same time explains why I do not consider error theory in my further argument. After all, I have maintained that it is commonly agreed in metaethical discourse that a rather important aim of metaethical theories consists in accounting for moral phenomenology. To be more precise, I have shown that it is important to account for *both* kinds of phenomena: the first-personal feelings of moral agents, as well as what we find present in common moral practice. Now, recall that error theory is the view that common moral practice rests on a global mistake (1.2). It is then plain to see that error theory, on principled grounds, cannot be in accordance with moral phenomenology in the first place and that it therefore does not do a good job at all in accounting for it. Thus, if moral phenomenology is as important for metaethical theorizing as I have argued, no further discussion of error theory is needed.

As we will see in the following, the investigation of moral phenomenology plays a crucial role in showing why there is good reason to adopt strong cognitivism in the first place, and, a fortiori, why one should prefer it to non-cognitivist theories. In fact, *the* major reason for adopting strong cognitivism is the fact that the latter just is the view that most adequately captures the nature of our practice of engaging in morality, that is, the way we speak about morality, argue about moral questions, discuss solutions to moral problems, make mistakes in moral debate, and so on (cf. Brink 1989, 25; Shafer-Landau 2003, 24ff.; Sayre-McCord 2006, 42; Sinclair 2012, 160f.). Strong cognitivism thus has much greater plausibility when it comes to explaining common moral practice and discourse than non-cognitivism in virtue of accounting for at least three different but crucial phenomena. First, that one of the most important characteristics of moral practice is given by the agents' aim to reach at moral *truth*; second, that moral practice allows for the genuine possibility of *error*; and finally, that only strong cognitivism seems to account for the *authority* of moral statements and claims.

To better understand the argument, let us consider the outlines of the non-cognitivist view in more detail. Non-cognitivism is a theory that approaches metaethics in a very distinct way insofar as it endorses a more *practical* approach to metaethics, meaning that it ascribes to moral judgments primarily the function of *expressing* an agent's distinct kind of mental state such as approval or disapproval (Blackburn 2006). According to the standard non-cognitivist account, then, *nothing more* is involved in the forming of moral judgments than this practical, expressive aspect (cf. ibid). As Shafer-Landau correctly argues:

> […] the fundamental mistake [according to non-cognitivism] […] is that the purpose of moral language is to describe facts. As non-cognitivists see it, the point of moral discourse is not to report some fact about oneself, one's group, or the larger word, but instead to give vent to one's feelings and persuade others to share them […], prescribe some rule of conduct for oneself and others […], or express one's commitment to norms regulating guilt and anger (Shafer-Landau 2003, 20).

The best example of how this practical function is supposed to work can be found in the earliest forms of non-cognitivism, that is, emotivism. Hence, consider Ayer's analysis of the judgment that stealing money from an old lady was wrong, where

> […] I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole that money", in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with some special exclamation marks. […] It is as if I had written "Stealing money!!" – where the shape and thickness of the exclamation marks show […] that a special sort of moral disapproval is the feeling which is being expressed (Ayer 1936, 107).

It is plain that such a view can account for neither the truth-stating character of common moral practice, the possibility of moral error, nor the authority of moral claims. After all, the position explicitly claims that there simply *is no* truth in moral practice, and Ayer, like many other non-cognitivists, therefore argues in favor of differentiating between ordinary factual discourse on the one hand, and moral discourse on the other, because only the former aims at truth (cf. Sayre-McCord 2006, 49). However, if there simply is no truth to be mirrored in moral practice, then it logically follows that making a mistake in that practice generally is impossible.[37] For making mistakes in any domain is premised on the idea of some truth being attainable (or not). But, according to non-cognitivism, there simply is no truth in ethics. Hence, there can be no such thing as a moral mistake.

Finally, then, we think that morality is authoritative in the sense that it not only guides us, but also makes claims on us that are sometimes quite hard to meet (Korsgaard 1996, 9f.). But it is very hard to see how morality could be able to carry this kind of authority that moral practice suggests if it were simply about the expression of brute approval and disapproval (Bagnoli 2002). People are approving or disapproving of many different things, like the poor performance of their favorite soccer club, or the weather, but obviously there is a difference in how we think about the status of claims about the weather compared to the status of distinctly *moral* claims and judgments.

[37] The same problem seems to apply to error theorists who are claiming that moral practice *as such* rests on a global, fundamental error. Therefore, if *all* moral judgments, however well-formed and justified, etc., are simply mistaken, it seems impossible to identify a *single* moral judgment as false.

Now, if the phenomenology of common moral practice counts more in favor of strong cognitivism because the non-cognitivist view simply cannot account for *what we are doing while doing ethics*, then we ought to adopt the former theory and neglect the latter.[38] Accordingly, because constructivism is a brand of strong cognitivism, there are good reasons to prefer it over non-cognitivism.

But one should not be hasty here, because one needs to make two clarifications about the scope and strength of the argument. The first clarification concerns the obvious fact that the argument shows only why constructivism is more plausible than non-cognitivist views, not that it is on these grounds shown to be the most plausible view in metaethical debate. After all, constructivism is not the only view within the strong cognitivist camp, and therefore the argument does not show that constructivism is more plausible or attractive than, say, IMR.

A second clarification is needed with regard to the strength of the argument against non-cognitivism itself, for while the presented argument may be correct, it shows only that constructivism – in virtue of a strong cognitivist view – is a more plausible view than merely *some* non-cognitivist theories such as emotivism. Thus, recall what has been said about the important development within the non-cognitivist position in the second half of the last century.[39] In fact, sophisticated non-cognitivists even go one step further and maintain that they are able to give us everything we want from a view such as moral

[38] There is, however, one objection coming from Gilbert Harman, which states that the existence of moral facts does not at all explain our experiences in the moral domain (Harman 1988). Harman draws a contrast between the experiences in the domain of natural sciences and those in moral practice, where only in the former case is one entitled to refer from certain experiences and observations to the existence of some facts about the matter. In the latter case, no such inference is necessary because it suffices to explain our experiences by referring merely to our moral sensibilities or to social and psychological forces (ibid, 122; Sayre-McCord 2006, 54). Against this objection it has been argued that moral facts are indeed necessary to explain our moral experiences (Sturgeon 1988; Sayre-McCord 1988; 2006, 55f.). One argument seems especially promising that avoids any troublesome and rather strong metaphysical commitments and merely focuses on the role of beliefs in the moral domain (Sayre-McCord 2006, 54). Therefore, what is argued against Harman is that if there are beliefs about what is morally right and wrong, then the aim is to capture certain facts about morality. However, what explains the mere having of these beliefs is the fact that there are moral truths, so that "if the facts were different, [people] would think differently from the way they do. To hold otherwise of one's own views, is to see them as insensitive to the truth they purport to capture" (ibid). So here the *very existence* of moral beliefs as well as their specific function is indeed only explainable due to the existence of moral facts, because if moral agents formed moral beliefs, then they *thereby* have a commitment to capture moral facts.

[39] Ridge puts this nicely when he argues that non-cognitivism had to "grow up" (2006, 634).

realism[40] (cf. Blackburn 1999; Asay 2012, 382; Tenenbaum 2003, 393; Ridge 2006, 634), but that they can do so without embracing any problematic metaphysical framework.

To take an example, let us consider quasi-realism. Because this theory is immensely complex, I can only roughly sketch it here. Blackburn, who is the pioneer of quasi-realism, generally argues that moral practice starts with human attitudes that are not truth-apt by introducing the idea of *projectivism*. Quasi-realism and projectivism are not one and the same thing, though; quasi-realism figures as a kind of addendum to projectivism, that is, one can be a projectivist without endorsing quasi-realism and the other way around (Blackburn 1984, 180; cf. Joyce 2009, 54ff.; Price 1986, 222). Now, projectivism is the view that

> […] the disputed judgements express non-cognitive mental states, such as emotions, desires, habits, or expectations; but the projectivist also holds that such non-cognitive states are *spread* or *projected* onto the genuine facts and states of affairs. So we come to speak and think as if there were an extra layer of properties in the world (Zangwill 1992, 161).

This explains why quasi-realism still counts as a non-cognitivist – and specifically expressivist – view, insofar as it is (still) committed to the expressivist view that moral judgments do not serve to mirror any moral facts (Blackburn 2006). Rather, moral agents speak and act *as if* there were some moral properties in the world, while in reality there is no such thing; there are only human attitudes that we tend to project onto the world and then think that it is what the world itself contains (Blackburn 1984; cf. Hale 1986, 70; Zangwill 1993, 288).

But at this point the quasi-realist enters the debate and argues that the non-cognitivist commitment does not mean that one could not in the end "*earn the right*" to speak of moral truth, facts, and objectivity (Blackburn 1984; 1999; 2006, 154; cf. Asay 2003, 382; Miller 2013, 76). I will not go into the details of Blackburn's argument, but suffice it to say that quasi-realism argues that we can earn that right in virtue of engaging

[40] This has motivated the objection that some of these sophisticated non-cognitivist positions do so well in mimicking realism that in the end there is no difference between the two views (Wright 1985; Rosen 1998; Dreier 2004; Harcourt 2005; cf. Ridge 2006 for a counter-argument).

in the constant process of "*improving*" our moral attitudes (Blackburn 1984, 216; cf. Hale 1986, 75ff.).

We can make better sense of this claim by appreciating how Blackburn interprets moral judgments. He does so in the expressivist light by thinking that they express approval and disapproval through the operators "Hooray" "H!" and "Boo" "B!". Therefore, if speakers are judging that lying is morally wrong, their judgment takes the form of

(1) "B! (lying)"

Now, Blackburn acknowledges that moral speakers (also) have the need for "endorsing or rejecting various *couplings* of attitude, or *couplings* of belief and attitude" (Hale 1986, 73, my italics), and therefore allows for so-called *second-order* sensibilities.[41] Therefore, when it is judged that it is morally wrong to get little brothers to lie, the judgment is expressed like this:

(2) "H!([B!(lying)]; [B!(getting little brother to lie)]"

The meta-sensibility thus states that one *approves of the disproval* of getting little brothers to lie.

Now there are two important things to note here. The first is that the process of improvement is in the end limited as well as guided by assuming the existence of an ideal, best possible set of attitudes M*, understood as "the limiting set which would result from taking all possible opportunities for improvement of attitude" (Blackburn 1984, 198; cf. Hale 1986, 76). The second is that with the concept of meta-sensibilities quasi-realism is able to account not only for the notions of truth and objectivity, but it even aims to capture what has traditionally been associated solely with IMR, namely the *mind-independence* of morality:

> [A] projectivist who avails himself of quasi-realism can assert those tantalizing expressions of apparent mind-independence: it is not my sentiments that make

[41] Originally introduced in order to save non-cognitivism from the Frege-Geach-Problem (Blackburn 1984, 194ff.; cf. Stahl 2013, 83–4). I won't discuss this any further.

> bear-baiting wrong; it is not because we disapprove of it that mindless violence is abominable; it is preferable that the world should be a beautiful place even after all consciousness of it ceases (Blackburn 1993, 153).[42]

Arguably, this is a surprising result, for, after all, Blackburn is a non-cognitivist expressivist, hence from this it should follow that if there were any moral truths on this account, they obviously must be mind-*dependent* (Warenski 2014, 861). While I will return to the issue of mind-independence shortly[43], for now it suffices to acknowledge another point, namely that especially quasi-realism shows that the theory of strong cognitivism can no longer be defended solely on the basis that it preserves the truth-talk of moral practice (cf. Sinclair 2012, 173ff.). For, after all, explicitly quasi-realism shows that there are sophisticated non-cognitivist theories that also preserve the existence of truths and facts in the moral domain. A fortiori, it needs to be acknowledged that thus far my argument in favor of constructivism has just shown that cognitivist constructivism is more plausible than *some* non-cognitivist views such as emotivism. For, as we have seen, contemporary non-cognitivist views also strive to accommodate the existence of moral truths, facts, and even objectivity. And in this respect, they are plausible on the exact same grounds as constructivism as a strong cognitivist view.

Given, then, what has been argued thus far, in the next paragraphs I will offer the missing, more complex argument that is well-equipped to show that constructivism fares better than IMR *as well as* non-sophisticated quasi-realism. As we will see, it is exactly the considered strength of sophisticated non-cognitivist views, namely their aim to mimic IMR, that causes them to fail to account for moral phenomenology on the same grounds

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[42] At this point, the reader will ask what it is that allows Blackburn to talk like a naturalist realist. One should note that Blackburn is entitled to do so because of his adoption of projectivism (Asay 2013, 228): "For naturalists, the natural world makes moral judgments true by way of its essential features. The natural world settles what's true with respect to ethics just as it settles what's true with respect to water. Uncovering these relationships of necessity is a matter of *discovery*. Quasi-realists, by contrast, hold that what accounts for the truthmaking relationship between the natural world and moral judgments is not any kind of metaphysical necessity, but rather our practices of *projection*. Moral properties are projected onto the natural world, for they are not antecedently 'out there' awaiting discovery. As a result, the reason why certain natural facts stand in the truthmaking relation to moral facts is due to our projection […]" (ibid). Thus, Blackburn tells us that we think that the natural world itself contains the properties of moral right- and wrongness exactly because certain events in the world cause us to feel some moral sentiment, and after a while we tend to forget that it is really our sentiments that are constitutive of moral right- and wrongness and we begin to think that the world itself contains these properties (Blackburn 1984). In this way, the projectivist makes perfect sense of naturalism by using a distinctively non-cognitivist framework.

[43] See also 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

as IMR. More specifically, it is the crucial but problematic feature that both IMR and sophisticated forms of non-cognitivism share which, given the results of moral phenomenology, renders their accounts problematic. In order to better understand this argument, however, it is first necessary to obtain a clearer picture of this feature of mind-independence.

2.4 Moral Mind-Independence

This chapter aims to show that constructivism is a more attractive view than many other metaethical theories. As we have seen in the last paragraph, endorsing strong cognitivism alone is not sufficient reason to adopt constructivism, let alone to prefer it over rival views. There are two reasons for this: first, constructivism is not the only theory within the strong cognitivist camp; and second, there are some sophisticated non-cognitivist theories that themselves aim to secure truth and even objectivity in the moral domain.

This shows that if there is anything at all that marks out constructivism as more attractive than its rivals, an additional and independent argument needs to be presented. In the following sections, I present this missing argument that is well-equipped to show that there is indeed good reason to see constructivism as more attractive and plausible than its most prominent rivals IMR and quasi-realism due to their adoption of the feature of moral mind-independence.[44] Because my argument is built around the notion of moral phenomenology, the aim is to show that endorsing moral mind-independence is at odds with the phenomena entailed by common moral practice and discourse.

In order to see why mind-independence theories (from now on MI-theories) are really at odds with moral phenomenology, we must first clarify what exactly it means to endorse the mind-independence of morality. Blackburn's already given quote presents a helpful starting point in this regard. Thus, let us (re)consider the following two claims:

> [I]t is not my sentiments that make bear-baiting wrong; it is not because we disapprove of it that mindless violence is abominable; it is preferable that the

[44] See Street 2011 for a similar approach.

> world should be a beautiful place even after all consciousness of it ceases (Blackburn, op. cit.).

And:

> The counter-factual "If we had different attitudes it would not be wrong to kick dogs" expresses the moral view that the feature which makes it wrong to kick dogs is our reaction. But this is an *absurd* moral view, and not one to which the projectivist has the least inclination (Blackburn 1984, 217).

According to the standard definition, then, moral mind-independence is the compound of the following two claims:

(1) It is not the case that if I/we think that X is bad then it is bad.

And:

(2) It is not the case that if X is bad then I/we think it is.
(Zangwill 1994, 206; Warenski 2014, 862).

Some (like Blackburn) interpret both (1) and (2) in terms of (dis)approval rather than thoughts or beliefs, but that need not concern us any further here. What matters is to clarify how, given the many different ways in which the feature can be spelled out, MI-theories in metaethical debate commonly understand moral mind-independence. This is even more pressing because there is often severe confusion about the feature itself (cf. Zangwill 1994). One of these misunderstandings revolves around the question of whether to endorse moral mind-independence means to claim that all normative claims are totally independent of agents' *experiences*, for this would render many first-order ethical views deeply problematic:[45]

[45] A related worry may be that critics of moral and normative mind-independence think that moral or normative facts ought to have nothing to do with the agent and her (even subjective) *concerns*. There are,

> [I]t might be objected that in fact mind-independence begs the question against certain substantive moral views. In particular, it might be suggested that mind-independence rules out consequentialist views according to which the moral value of somethings depends on its *effects on people's minds* (Zangwill 1994, 207, my italics).

Hence, what needs further elaboration is, first of all, how exactly MI-theories traditionally interpret the relation between the mind and moral facts or truths to begin with; and second, exactly what status they ascribe to the feature.

Let us begin with the first point. Commonly, MI-theorists in the moral domain interpret the feature in terms of the existential or essential mind-independence, where both characterizations reveal the precise relation between morality and the mind on the account of MI-theories.

Kramer thus provides a helpful definition when he maintains that "[s]omething is existentially mind-independent if and only if its occurrence or continued existence does not presuppose the existence of any mind(s) and the occurrence of mental activity" (Kramer 2009, 25). But we need to be more specific, for to claim that some entity E or fact F is even existentially mind-independent could mean two things: i) that neither E nor F depend on their being *apprehended* by any mind; or ii) that *what makes* it the case that they exist or continue to exist does not hinge on any mind. Accordingly, some E or F can be existentially mind-independent, but that still leaves open the question as to whether either of them is *modally* or *essentially* mind-independent (Jenkins 2005).

While modal mind-independency is mainly about "recognition-transcendence", essential mind-independency is a claim about *what it is* for E or F *to be the case* (ibid, 200). Accordingly, E or F could be modally mind-independent if there is a possible world where either E or F (or both) are the case while our minds are not in the position *to grasp* them

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however, IMR accounts like Peter Railton's ideal observer theory, according to which idealized self (A+) determines true facts about what the actual agent A has (non-moral) reason to do (Railton 1986). Therefore, it can be argued that MI-theories do not lead to agents being alienated from their concerns because mind-independent facts can still be importantly connected and thus related to the concerns of human agents (as Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton argue: moral Platonism, the view that moral truths are totally independent of our self-conceptions, has few defenders nowadays: 1992, 141, n. 41). In fact, one of Railton's main objectives in his paper is to show how IMR can at once endorse moral and normative mind-independence, while still thinking that there is a relation between these independently given facts and normal agents (1986, 172).

(ibid). We can see this by considering a case of aesthetic modal mind-independency, where there is a world in which there is a beautiful sunset, even though there is no (human) mind that thinks of these sunsets as being beautiful (ibid).

The case is different when it comes to essential mind-independence, for here E or F are essentially mind-independent if and only if the (human) mind is not at all part of *what it is* for the sunset *to be* beautiful (ibid).

Now, moral mind-independence theories commonly understand moral facts to be mind-independent in the latter, essential sense. We can see this by turning again to IMR and constructivism. Let us take IMR first. The IMRealist does not merely want to say that there are some facts about moral problems or questions *even though* the human mind may not be in the position to recognize such facts. Rather, she wants to say that the human mind and human mental states, respectively, are *not constitutive* of the moral wrongness of lying. This is also precisely the reason why to endorse morality's independence from the mental does not amount to the claim that moral truths and facts must not make any reference at all to mental states:

> [M]oral value may be "mind-independent" in the sense that the value of action depends on its effects on people's minds. But what is meant by mind-independence, when the moral realism issue is being discussed, is the notion that the moral value of something is independent of the fact that we *judge* that it has a certain moral value (Zangwill 1994, 207).

Therefore, it is quite possible to endorse a consequentialist framework in first-order normative ethics while advocating the mind-independence of morality on a second-order metaethical level. For to think that morality is independent of the mental means *not* to claim that the mind has *nothing at all* to do with morality, but "only" that it is not our judging, thinking, or (dis-)approving of certain events and actions that *makes* these events or actions morally right or wrong.

Consider, by contrast, constructivists, who consider themselves anti-realists not merely because they reject the idea that there could be some moral facts even though we are (for whatever reason) not in the position to grasp them. Instead, their claim is that the whole realm of moral facts only *comes* or *springs into* the exercise via the activity of

the human, rational mind. Therefore, constructivists are deeply opposed to moral mind-independence because they claim that the human mind is the *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of moral truths and facts to begin with.

A second important aspect of moral mind-independence concerns its status as a *conceptual* requirement of *what it means* to be engaged in morality, thereby regulating our dealings with moral matters in general (Zangwill 1994). For instance, Zangwill claims that moral mind-independence cannot be understood merely as some *substantive* moral commitment because such commitments can always be challenged, questioned, and debated (Warenski 2014, 863). According to Zangwill, then, moral mind-independence must be granted a more general status in virtue of regulating our very *competences* of moral reasoning as such (Zangwill 1994, 211). Thereby, the feature is granted the status of a conceptual truth of what it means to be engaged with morality in the first place. Consequently, if someone challenged the mind-independence of morality, this would amount to saying that she has not understood some essential ingredient of what it means to deal with moral requirements and judgments. To be more precise, if the very idea of something being a conceptual truth is that "we attain the knowledge in question by following out the implications of what we must know in order successfully to deploy a concept" (Zangwill 1994, 211–12), then any questioning of the mind-independence of morality must count as a severe failure to have properly understood some central feature of morality, or as being in some sense incompetent or *"conceptually confused"* (ibid, 217, my italics).

Thus, while Zangwill notes that something being a conceptual truth does not mean that it cannot be rejected at all (ibid, 212), there is nevertheless a profound difference between some first-order moral requirement and something being a claim about moral competences as such, because only the latter is about the correctness of one's very *understanding* of morality. No such grave mistake is involved in adopting or advocating some first-order moral statement or principle which – even if false – does not amount to one being *confused* about morality.

Now, arguably, there is some disagreement about whether or not *both* the IM- *and* the quasi-realists share the exact same understanding of the status of moral mind-independence. Hence, while it can be said that IMR grants the feature the status of a

conceptual requirement of moral reasoning as such, it proves difficult to say exactly whether the same holds for quasi-realism too (Zangwill 1994, 211ff.).[46]

However, even though it may be difficult for the quasi-realist to understand moral mind-independence as a conceptual truth concerning what it means to be concerned with morality as such,[47] she nevertheless takes it as a *general feature* regulating how one ought to engage in morality, for, as Blackburn claims, "[t]he 'mind-independence' of such [moral] facts is part of our *ordinary way of looking at things*" (Blackburn 1984, 217, my italics).

Therefore, while Blackburn's quote shows that he, in contrast to Zangwill, does not think that moral mind-independence counts as a conceptual truth about morality, he, as a quasi-realist, nevertheless holds it to be a feature regulating our "ordinary" engagement with morality. So, while there may be differences in how exactly the IM- and quasi-realist understand the status of the feature in detail, they both claim that any agent who is questioning the mind-independence of morality is confused about morality (whether this confusion is conceptual or otherwise). Hence, the important thing to note is that *both* the IM- *and* quasi-realist accord the feature a very general status concerning what it is to engage in morality, and, consequently agree in general about what it means to fail to appreciate the feature. Accordingly, for both positions, a failure to appreciate the feature does not just signal some mistake in the moral domain; rather, it constitutes a significant misunderstanding of, or a deep confusion about, morality *in general*. In the following, then, I will show why it is that this verdict raises important and severe worries against both IMR and quasi-realism.

2.5 Wondering About Relativism

As stated previously, the aim of this chapter is to show why there is good, independent reason to favor metaethical constructivism over many of its rivals on phenomenological grounds. To be more precise, my claim is that the strongest rivals to constructivism face

[46] In fact, Zangwill's argument is that the quasi-realist interpretation of the status of moral mind-independence is problematic because it does not interpret the latter in terms of a conceptual truth.

[47] Sinclair (2008) shows, however, how expressivists in general can grant moral mind-independence the required conceptual status demanded by Zangwill (cf. Warenski 2014, 862). Because quasi-realism entails expressivism (cf. Blackburn 2006), quasi-realists could at least in principle understand the feature in the exact same sense as IMR does.

the same, general difficulty, namely that in virtue of their endorsing the mind-independence of morality, they fare badly in accounting for moral phenomenology.

Thus far, I have argued for the importance of moral phenomenology for metaethical theorizing as such and defined how phenomenological investigation ought to be understood, that is, not just in terms of the first-personal study of how morality appears to agents, but also, just as importantly, as gathering and evaluating those phenomena that we find present in common, everyday moral practice. To this end, in the preceding paragraphs, I have engaged in a more detailed analysis of the very idea of moral mind-independence, which occupies a central space within realist theories in current metaethical debate, that is, traditional IMR or non-cognitivist quasi-realism. So, the point of my argument is to show that these realists, in some respects, are not in accordance with moral phenomenology. Because phenomenological investigation forms a central part of the process of doing metaethics, failing to account for moral phenomena constitutes a major mistake in any attempt to offer a metaethical argument or theory.

The phenomena that MI-theories thus lack the ability to account for relate to how common moral agents in everyday moral practice think about spelling out *moral truth-conditions*. As such, even when granted that moral practice has a truth-stating character that itself is suggested by phenomenological analysis (as shown in 2.3), there still remains the important question of how to cash out the truth-conditions of moral judgments, for there exist basically two mutually exclusive possibilities. Moral truth can thus be interpreted in the sense of

a) Objectivism or universalism

   or

b) Relativism, where this includes subjectivism as well as intersubjectivism (cf. Sayre-McCord 1988, 14–15).

Thus:

> [Moral] [t]ruth-conditions are “subjectivist” if they make essential reference to an individual; “intersubjectivist” if they make essential reference to the capacities, conventions, or practices of groups of people; and “objectivist” if they need make

> no reference at all to people, their capacities, practices, or their conventions (Sayre-McCord 1988, 14–15).

Brandt (2001) argues that moral relativism cannot be interpreted in this way because being a relativist about morality commits one to directly endorsing nihilism or presupposes the falsity of moral realism (cf. Carson, Moser 2001, 3–4). But that objection itself is problematic, for there is no problem at all in arguing for the general possibility that moral truths should be construed as being relative to a given parameter (cf. Scanlon 2001, 142), or to a "system of moral coordinates" (Harman 1996, 13), where one of these parameters or coordinates makes "essential reference" to individuals or collectives, and their mental states, conventions, and practices.

In fact, one can even go a step further and claim that moral relativism counts as a form of *realism* if one argues that the truth-conditions of both subjectivism and intersubjectivism are actually satisfied (Sayre-McCord 1988, 15). A realist can then accommodate relativism by offering "a literal construal of moral claims […] that makes their truth in some sense relative to whatever it is with which the relevant moral convictions vary" (ibid, 169).

It *is* true, however, that the very theory of moral relativism stands in direct opposition to the commitments of MI-theories in general. This is because of the way in which people and their mental states figure in the truth-conditions of moral judgments (Sayre-McCord 1988, 14–15). For as we have seen, subjectivism and intersubjectivism entail that the truth-conditions of moral judgments must make reference to the mental states – such as beliefs, desires, and aims – as well as the attitudes of moral agents or groups of such agents. For this reason, IMR and other MI-theories entail the falsity of relativism because these latter theories argue that "moral judgments or standards are objectively true *independently* of the beliefs and attitudes of human beings (even ideally rational beings) about those judgments or standards" (Carson, Moser 2001, 3, my italics).

Now, the MI-theorist's ruling out the relativistic interpretation of moral truth is far from a coincidence; in fact, it is one of the main aims of the MI-theorist making use of the mind-independence of moral truths to altogether rule out the very possibility of moral relativism in the first place. Thus, consider Warenski's claim that the negation of conditions (1) and (2) that define moral mind-independence directly lead to a *subjectivist*

understanding of morality because it would mean that moral truths and facts would change whenever our attitudes change (Warenski 2014, 862). Or take Shafer-Landau directly contrasting his version of IMR with moral relativism in order to "get a better understanding" of the IMRealist "commitments" (Shafer-Landau 2003, 16). And finally, we should keep in mind that not only IM- but also quasi-realists endorse the mind-independence of morality, for, after all, the aim of the quasi-realist is to mimic full-blown IMR without having to embrace its problematic metaphysical framework. But Blackburn also shares the IMRealist goal of rejecting any relativistic interpretation of morality when he maintains that quasi-realism – which also refers to the feature of moral mind-independence – gives "a complete defense against relativism […]" (Blackburn 1999, 218).

It is important to note, however, that the problem with MI-theories is *not* that they stand merely in opposition to any relativistic understanding of morality. After all, being an objectivist about morality is, as we have seen, a genuine possibility to cash out moral truth-conditions. In addition, there are other metaethical positions that endorse objectivism about morality that reject the moral mind-independence (some versions of constructivism, for example).

The problem with MI-theories then is that they endorse moral mind-independence as a *general* requirement of moral reasoning *as such*. As we have seen, for the MI-theorist, to endorse moral mind-independence means to have correctly understood something very general about the nature of morality, whether that concerns its very concept (as IMR claims) or how to deal with morality in general (as the quasi-realist may want to put it).

One consequence of understanding the independence from the mental as such a general requirement about how to correctly understand morality, however, is that even the mere having of relativistic *intuitions* about moral truth-conditions amounts to a heavy mistake and even *confusion* about morality. For thinking that moral relativism, as outlined above, may be true is at odds with how, according to MI-theories, we want to deal with morality in general. After all, the feature of moral mind-independence readily excludes relativism about morality, for relativism means that the truth-conditions of moral claims and judgments must make "essential reference" to people's mental states and attitudes. In other words, it is a direct rejection of the existential and essential mind-independency of morality.

It follows from this that if the mind-independence of morality is understood as a fundamentally necessary feature of having correctly understood the very nature or concept of moral reasons, requirements, etc., then even wondering about the truth of moral relativism constitutes a deep confusion about morality. It is thus important to note that, for an MI-theorist, someone who just *wonders* whether relativism may be correct, someone who just *considers* its truth, must make not merely *some* mistake in the moral domain, but must be heavily mistaken about morality *as such*. In other words, such agents are not just somewhat wrong, but confused, for they have failed to understood something fundamental about morality.

One wonders, however, whether this diagnosis is true or adequate in the first instance. In fact, there is very good reason to be skeptical about the appropriateness of this verdict. After all, there is a long and ongoing practice of asking about the truth of moral relativism, not only in the form of sophisticated philosophical debate, but also as a common feature of everyday moral practice, e.g. when it comes to children's development and understanding of moral matters (cf. Schmidt, Gonzalez-Cabrera, Tomasello 2017). Besides the genuine debate that persists about the truth of relativism, agents often have (independently of whether or not they find the theory attractive) intelligible reasons for their wondering. For instance, one may simply ask whether moral objectivism is a plausible view to begin with (cf. Harman 2001), or one may try to account for the fact of moral pluralism and diversity, which may lead one to consider whether full-fledged relativism in ethics may not be true after all (Harman 1996; Rachels 2001; Wellman 2001).[48] In this light, it is interesting to note that Blackburn argues, very plausibly, why one might have reason to take relativism seriously:

> [T]here are also cases where travel broadens the mind. We might start off by thinking that our attitude is the only permissible attitude, or our ways are the only permissible ways, and that all others are wrong. But exposure to other people, or other cultures or times can make us change our minds. They do it differently – yet we cannot condemn them, or find it in our hearts to maintain

[48] Cf. Eveling 1965 for thinking that metaethical theories should accommodate the diversity of morality (164).

> the superiority of our ways. So we become a degree more tolerant. And this is often exactly as it should be (Blackburn 1999, 217).

Of course, it is one thing to take moral diversity as the *starting point* of one's wondering about the truth of relativism, and quite another to say that diversity proves its truth. After all, as Rachels argues, one may have good reason for doubting that the supposed diversity of moral beliefs and judgments is as strong as some people have supposed it to be (Rachels 2001). Or one may want to maintain that diversity does not, on further inspection, imply relativism at all (Moody-Adams 2001). And these reasons, in turn, may prompt us to reconsider our reasons for our intuitions about the correctness of relativism. Nevertheless, the important point is that there is an ongoing and genuine debate about these quarrels, and that nothing at all about this debate seems absurd, unintelligible, or just off-track. On the contrary, philosophical, anthropological, and psychological debate (cf. Gabenesch 1990; Schmidt, Gonzalez-Cabrera, Tomasello 2017) about the relativist theory makes clear that relativism ought to be taken seriously in ethics.[49]

According to MI-theories, however, the debate about relativism is hopelessly mistaken from the outset. And the reason, again, is that wondering, let alone debating, about the truth of relativism only appears plausible when it is accepted that mental states play a constitutive role in ethics. But this, as we have seen, for the MI-theorist, reveals and mirrors a general misunderstanding and confusion about morality.[50]

If this argument is correct, then, one can directly see how MI-theories fail to make sense of moral phenomenology. For the relativist position in ethics figures not only prominently in common-sense intuitions about moral truth-conditions, but also in a number of debates about that matter. In addition, as should be clear by now, there seems

[49] For this reason, the quick objection does not hold that my argument commits one to the rather absurd consequence that merely *every* intuition or *every* idea about morality must be taken seriously by metaethical theories insofar as it can be found within common moral practice. For instance, one may say that metaethical positions should, in virtue of their aim to take seriously moral phenomenology, try to account for, say, divine command theories. Agents' wondering about the truth of divine command theory and the truth of relativism, however, are not comparable, for first of all, in current moral practice, the former theory plays no important role at all. But even if it did, the phenomenon lacks the complexity of wondering about the truth of relativism precisely because the latter figures so prominently in a number of different discourses and sciences. Arguably, the same does not hold for divine command theories. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this objection.

[50] All of this is far from saying that mind-dependence views inevitably lead to moral relativism, but, as we have seen, allowing the mind to determine moral truths is a natural starting point from which to allow for it. See 3.2 and 3.3.2 for a more detailed discussion of this point.

to be nothing wrong with those who have intuitions about the correctness of relativism or wonder about its truth. But, as we have also seen, this is exactly the judgment that MI-theorists are committed to make. And precisely because the diagnosis seems hardly justifiable, MI-theories fail to accommodate the phenomena of common moral practice.

So, after having argued in what sense MI-theories fail to account for agents' wondering about relativism, let us now turn to metaethical constructivism. Recall that my argument is not primarily raised against IMR and quasi-realism; rather, it is designed to speak in favor of metaethical constructivism. Therefore, we need to clarify whether constructivism can avoid the problems of MI-theories. This is even more pressing insofar as there are also constructivist objectivists. Hence, does not the argument I have presented against MI-theories also hold against those constructivist objectivist views? After all, the point of my argument was that MI-theories cannot account for agents' intuitions about moral relativism. For this reason, it may then appear that the same problem holds for objectivists on behalf of constructivism too, a fortiori that my argument actually counts *against* constructivism rather than supports it.

In the following, I will show, by contrast, why constructivism indeed has very good means to avoid the shortcomings of the MI-theorists, and therefore fares well in accounting for moral phenomenology after all. The key feature that explains the constructivist's ability to account for agents' wondering about the truth of relativism is given by the very outlines of the constructivist theory, as developed in chapter 1. Thus, recall that I have defined constructivism in metaethics as the view according to which moral truths and facts are not discovered or tracked, but are the output of a reflective procedure on a basis of construction. It is this characterization, then, that explains why there are different versions of constructivist theory that argue either for subjectivism, intersubjectivism, or objectivism. The reason for this is that *before* the constructive procedure is *actually carried out*, there is simply no a priori answer to how exactly those moral truths and facts that are the outcome of the procedure are to be understood, that is, whether they hold only for some people and not for others, whether they only hold for a certain collective of agents, or whether they hold for all agents universally.

In fact, the varying constructivist interpretations of moral truth-conditions (cf. Brink 1989; Shafer-Landau 2003) are not just a theoretical possibility; they actually explain and shape one of the most important debates within constructivist theory itself.

This can be seen by considering the quarrel between constructivist Humeans and Kantians as described by Street in her 2010 article, "What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?" Here, Street rightly describes how one of the central quarrels between constructivist Humeans and Kantians derives from the question of whether objective moral reasons follow from the constructivist analysis of the practical standpoint. Humeans claim that they do not, while Kantians think that they do (Street 2010, 369–70).

The dispute can be explained as follows. Both Humeans and Kantians engage in an inquiry into the practical standpoint (however understood) and then present arguments for or against the view that objective moral reasons are entailed within this attitude. Thus, when it comes to cashing out the practical standpoint in terms of the attitude of valuing, Humeans prefer a relativist interpretation of moral reasons because their analysis of the attitude leads them to the conclusion that if moral reasons are entailed within it, they can only be understood in a subjectivist sense.[51] Kantians, by contrast, reject Humean relativism because their carrying out the constructive procedure leads them to argue in favor of objectivism. That is, for Kantians, to have certain attitudes means to also have a commitment to accept the existence of universal moral reasons as being entailed in the attitude (cf. Dorsey 2018).

To argue which of these conclusions is correct is not my aim in this chapter.[52] What matters at this point is that even when Kantians argue for moral objectivism on the basis of their analysis of the practical standpoint, they certainly *can make sense* of how one may have wondered about the genuine possibility of the truth of moral relativism. After all, for the Kantian to establish the objectivity of moral practice does not come for free; rather, it requires thorough and detailed argumentation. And that in turn explains why moral objectivism for the constructivist objectivist (such as the Kantian) is only the result of an exhaustive, thorough-going engagement in the constructive procedure.

Given this argument, constructivist objectivists such as Kantians will maintain that Humeans have made *some* mistake in their arguing for relativism, but this mistake for the objectivist is neither absurd, nor does it demonstrate the Humean's mere confusion about morality as such. Her endorsing moral relativism is rather the result of not having

[51] In fact, the Humean understands not just moral reasons in the relativist sense but *every* normative reason there is (Street 2008; 2010; cf. Bratman 2012).
[52] See chapter 5 for further discussion.

correctly carried out the constructive procedure or having misinterpreted the results of their analysis. But it is one thing say that they have made some mistake in carrying out the constructive procedure, and another to judge that Humeans in general lack the right understanding of morality.

If my argument is correct, it shows that constructivism fares better in accounting for moral phenomenology because it is not committed to the view that many, or even most, moral agents in common ethical practice are deeply mistaken about morality, lack an adequate understanding of its concept, or are simply incompetent moral reasoners.[53] It is able to do so because its own theory does justice to the phenomenology of common morality by capturing and taking seriously *both* our objectivist *and* relativistic intuitions.[54] Thereby it favors an attitude that Gilbert Harman describes best when he writes:

> It turns out to my surprise that the question whether there is a single true morality is an unresolved issue in moral philosophy. […] Strangely, only a few people seem to be undecided. Almost everyone seems to be firmly on one side or the other, and almost everyone seems to think his or her side is obviously right, the other side representing a kind of ridiculous folly. This is strange since everyone knows, or ought to know, that many intelligent people are on each side of the issue (Harman 2001, 166).

2.6 Two Objections

In the last section, I have shown why constructivism fares better than realist views in accounting for moral phenomenology due to their being able to account for genuine wondering about the truth of moral relativism, a wondering that not only forms a common part of our everyday moral practice, but also figures prominently in

[53] I want to thank Eva-Maria Parisi and Alexander Edlich for pressing me on this point.

[54] Not every constructivist will agree with this, though. For instance, James claims that constructivism offers an alternative to both moral (independence-) realism and skepticism, where the latter also entails the relativist position (James 2013). There are two difficulties with this argument. First, the relativist is commonly understood to not be a skeptic about morality as such; he is only a skeptic with regard to moral objectivity. Moral skepticism, however, is directed toward the whole moral domain (Joyce 2018). Second, James' proposal leaves it totally unclear what to do with the constructivist intersubjectivist and subjectivist positions presented by Copp, Street, Driver and Dorsey. If James is correct, these positions cannot be counted as genuine constructivist views because they endorse a more relativist understanding of morality. This seems inadequate.

sophisticated scientific debate. Given the force and importance of phenomenological investigation for metaethical theorizing as such, my argument provides strong reasons for preferring the constructivist theory ahead of its rivals from the MI-theorist camp.

But there are two objections that could be made against my phenomenological argument. First, one might want to criticize the fact that I have only considered the possibility of the truth of moral relativism on the grounds of explaining it solely in terms of mind-dependence. However, there may actually be other reasons that give rise to agents wondering about the correctness of relativism that are motivated by something other than human mental states.[55] After all, recall the claims of Harman or Scanlon, namely that moral truth-conditions may vary according to *some* parameter. Compatible with this, Sayre-McCord argues that only moral subjectivism must make reference to people's mental states, while intersubjectivism may be explained by pointing to human "*practices* and *conventions*" (Sayre-McCord 1988, 15, my italics). Therefore, one might object that my argument against MI-theories – that is, that they are unable to account for agents' intuitions about the correctness of relativism – is limited at best because while MI-theories may not be able to accommodate *some* forms of moral relativism, they appear to be able to accommodate others. And these other varieties are, of course, those that are not motivated on the grounds of mental states.

I am willing to grant that this objection is valid to some extent. However, there are two problems with it. The first is that one could hold that mental states are a necessary and in fact essential part of these other parameters, such as human conventions and practices, thereby raising doubts as to the possibility of justifying intersubjectivism without any reference to mental states in the first place (cf. James 2013). But even if this response fails, the original objection will backfire. This is because the MI-theorist's rejection of moral relativism is, as I have shown, one of the major aims of MI-theories *in virtue of* their adoption of the feature of moral mind-independence about morality to begin with. If the last objection is correct, however, one has to ask whether the adoption of the feature of moral mind-independence is really such a promising way to argue against relativist interpretations of moral truth-conditions. After all, if there were so many other, different ways in which to justify intuitions concerning the truth of moral relativism

[55] I thank Monika Betzler for pointing this out to me.

that MI-theories *can* account for, why think that moral mind-independence counts against relativism at all? Moreover, MI-theorists then have to explain why the forms of relativism that are motivated by concerns about mental states are more troublesome or repugnant than other versions of relativist theory such as an institution-based relativism. According to my understanding, however, no such arguments have ever been proposed by advocates of MI-theories.

A second objection against my argument concerns the possible strategies for MI-theorists to respond to my worries about not being able to account for moral phenomenology. It thus appears that I have simply left out what appears to be the simplest response to my argument, namely that, according to MI-theories, a lot of agents participating in common, everyday moral practice just are that: heavily mistaken about morality.[56] After all, if it is true that agents can be mistaken about *some* moral matters (which is clearly true), then there is no reason to suppose that they cannot be mistaken about morality *in general*.

But this answer cannot convincingly rebut my charge against MI-theories, for it would be tantamount to maintaining that for MI-theories a plausible option appears to turn themselves into error theorists. Thus, recall that error theory's main claim is that moral practice rests on a very general and profound mistake. If the last reply to my argument is correct, MI-theories would also become error theorists in virtue of their claiming that moral agents have been and remain generally and profoundly mistaken about morality in general. The problem with this reply is not only that error theory appears a less attractive view to adopt in the first place, but also, and more importantly, that it is incoherent and even self-contradictory for MI-theories to endorse such an error theory about morality. After all, both the IMRealist and the quasi-realist, as we have seen, often claim that they are offering theories that are especially designed to best account for moral phenomenology. And, in fact, it is often said that, particularly in the case of traditional IMR, one should adopt it precisely because of its faring so well in accommodating the phenomena of common moral practice, that is, because it accounts for how we speak about moral matters, argue about them, etc. (Brink 1989, 24). If this is

[56] I thank Jan-Christoph Heilinger for this objection.

true, then becoming an error theorist about the very practice that one claims to be in the best position to account for raises many irresolvable tensions.

What my responses to the two central objections thus show is that there should be no problem with my overall argument in this chapter after all and that my presented reasons for preferring metaethical constructivism over its main rivals.

2.7 Conclusion

I want to use this final section to summarize my argument in this chapter and to say something about the strength of my argument in general. I have shown that there is an argument that is well-suited to show the superiority of the constructivist view over many of its rivals on the basis of considerations stemming from moral phenomenology. Thus, after having defined how moral phenomenology should be understood and why it enjoys a rather special status in evaluating the plausibility of any metaethical argument or theory, I have shown what it is that other views are missing that constructivism, by contrast, can make good sense of.

My argument was two-fold. In a first, more provisional, instance I argued that phenomenological investigation favors strong cognitivism, that is, the view that moral judgments are truth-apt, and that at least some of these judgments are true. While this shows why constructivism is a more plausible theory than early non-cognitivist positions such as emotivism, it does not take one very far in demonstrating that constructivism is more plausible than cognitivist IMR or contemporary non-cognitivist views that are themselves willing to grant the existence of moral truths, facts, and the objectivity of ethical practice.

In subsequent sections, I therefore focused on another phenomenon that was well-suited to show why not only IMR, but also non-cognitivist quasi-realism, are at odds with moral phenomenology, namely due to their endorsing the mind-independence of morality. Thus, while constructivists have routinely criticized IMR because of its holding morality to be independent of the human mind, in my further argument I have shown that both IMR and sophisticated non-cognitivist views fail to make sense of moral phenomenology precisely because they both make use of the claim that morality is supposed to be independent of human mental states.

My argument focused on our intuitions as well as the genuine debate about the truth of moral relativism that MI-theories in general have a problem accounting for. Thus, while moral phenomenology entails that agents often wonder about the truth of relativism and even have quite strong reasons in support of them doing so, MI-theories are committed to claiming that such wondering reveals a general mistake and even confusion about morality as such. This commitment is grounded in the MI-theorist's understanding of the feature of mind-independence that she takes as a feature that structures moral reasoning and/or what it means to engage in moral matters as such. To be more precise, for the MI-theorist, thinking that morality could be constituted by mental states or by mental activity means to have not correctly understand what morality just *is*. And it is this interpretation of moral mind-independence that in turn grounds their commitment to understand the intuitions about the truth of moral relativism as a confusion about morality because of the important role that the mind-dependence of morality plays in order to render plausible the idea that moral truths could vary from person to person or from society to society.

To claim that every metaethical theory has reason to account for our common intuitions about the possible truth of relativism in ethics does not mean that I intend to claim that relativism is correct, or that we have reason to adopt it. On the contrary, claiming that any metaethical position should be able to at least make sense of the relativist intuitions in ethics is compatible with the view that relativism is a repugnant view. After all, the whole reason why metaethical theorists should account for agents' wondering about the truth about relativism is not because it is an attractive view, but because this kind of wondering plays a rather important role in common, everyday moral practice. Insofar as every metaethical theorist has strong reason to account for that practice (by accommodating the phenomena of morality), she also has reason to make sense of the relativist intuitions. Making sense of it, however, does not mean ascribing a fundamental error to those who have these intuitions. On the contrary, it entails taking them seriously and not thinking of them as mere confusions.

Now, because I have been showing that metaethical constructivism can generally make sense of the various interpretations of moral truth-conditions, it is only the constructivist, in contrast to the IM- and quasi-realists, who is in a good position to account for agents' wondering about the truth of relativism. Accordingly, considering the

importance of phenomenological investigation for metaethical theories as such, there is good, independent reason to adopt constructivism and even to prefer it over its main rivals.

3

Moral Objectivity I
– Possibility, Promise, and Prospects of Constructivist Objectivism

3.1 Introduction

Let us recap what has been argued so far. In chapters 1 and 2, I introduced and defended metaethical constructivism and showed why there are strong reasons for adopting and preferring it over rival theories. To be more precise, in chapter 1, I described the distinct and unique constructivist contribution to metaethical debate, provided the still missing unified description of the constructivist position, and finally set out why constructivism avoids the difficulties that critics commonly ascribe to it.

In chapter 2, I then provided independent yet strong reasons for adopting the constructivist position and why it is preferable to independence moral realism (IMR) and positions from the non-cognitivist camp, including sophisticated quasi-realism (which I take to present the strongest non-cognitivist alternative to strong cognitivism).

Hence, at the end of chapter 2 it may have seemed that not only can constructivism defend itself against all the prominent charges against it, but that it is an even more plausible view than many other metaethical theories since it can accommodate moral phenomenology much better than most of its rivals. Given the fact that moral phenomenology provides an important criterion for testing the appropriateness of any metaethical theory, the reasons for adopting the constructivist view appear strong.

There is, however, another and rather essential aspect of metaethical theorizing that has yet to be discussed, but which proves to be rather central to the very idea of a constructivist theory, namely the issue of *moral objectivity*.

Of course, there is reason for *every* metaethical theory to present an account of the objectivity of ethics, stemming from the already discussed standards for evaluating the

intelligibility and plausibility of metaethical views and arguments.[57] It is thus widely agreed that one of those criteria states that any metaethical view must account for the objective features of common moral practice and discourse (Hopster 2017, 764). There are certainly different accounts of how to explain these features but being able to account for and make sense of them counts as one of (Miller 2012, 3) if not *the* central topic of metaethics (Timmons 2010, 544; cf. Hopster 2017, 764).

When it comes to metaethical constructivism in particular, however, there is an additional reason why constructivism ought to account for moral objectivity aside from it being a metaethical theory in general. And this reason is grounded in the central aim of the constructivist theory, that is, to present a thoroughgoing and even more attractive alternative to IMR as well as to those theories that, springing from the non-cognitivist camp, mimic realist theories.

Now one crucial aim that constructivists must fulfill in order to demonstrate how they can be understood as offering an alternative to moral realism (or realist theories more broadly understood) is to show that constructivism can account for the objectivity of ethics. There are two reasons why that is the case. First, because it is often assumed that "ordinary" realist views have no problem in providing an objectivist view about morality in the first place (Sayre-McCord 1988; Finlay 2007; Hopster 2017, 764). However, because the realist view is bound to a specific metaphysical framework, constructivists (or at least Kantian constructivists) have, from the very outset, sought to secure ethical objectivity *without* having to adopt such problematic metaphysical realm as one of its main and central aims (Rawls 1974; 1980; cf. Arruda 2016, 32).

Second, as I discuss in section 3.2, the constructivist view, on closer inspection, faces, in its very outlines, the serious challenge of how to account for those features that are ordinarily thought to be necessarily entailed within the concept of moral objectivity. Thus, it is often held that one cannot even make sense of the very idea of ethical objectivity without at the same time adopting an ontological framework, and/or endorsing the mind-independence of morality. Note, however, that constructivism, as defined in chapter 1, rejects the existence of any realm of mind-independent facts about morality to begin with. And for this reason, the question arises as to how constructivism can be in a position to

[57] See 2.2.

adequately account for moral objectivity without having to give up its core commitments as a constructivist view.

For these reasons, then, the very issue of moral objectivity is not and in fact cannot be merely *some* topic for the constructivist; rather, the job of clarifying how to understand and secure the objectivity of common moral practice and discourse must lie at the very heart of its theory.[58]

Because of the central role that securing the objectivity of ethics plays within the constructivists' overall project, in the remainder of my thesis I will focus exclusively on the topic of developing a constructivist account of moral objectivity. To be more precise, in the following chapters I introduce and defend a novel constructivist objectivist approach that provides thorough answers to the two most fundamental questions surrounding the issue of objectivity in ethics: (i) how does constructivist understand the very *concept* of objectivity?; and (ii) *in virtue of what* objectivity is thought to be granted or secured on a constructivist account? While I present in chapter 4 a novel argument on how constructivism can secure the objectivity of ethics, in the following paragraphs I focus on (i), that is, how constructivism cashes out the very idea of moral objectivity.

The account that I develop here is novel because it places itself between Kantianism and recent developments in Humean objectivism. Thus, the relation between all three views is rather complex. On the one hand, as it will become clearer in what follows, my account shares the distinctively Kantian conception of objectivity in terms of universality, while at the same time offering a totally independent approach on how to secure the existence of moral reasons that are objective in this (universal) sense. On the other hand, however, while my account departs from Humean objectivism precisely because it endorses a different conception of objectivity in terms of universality and not in the weaker sense of generality (Driver 2017; Dorsey 2018), it is, at least in general, compatible with the argumentative strategies of Humeanism to secure ethical objectivity. For these reasons, I call my approach the *hybrid account*.

[58] By arguing along these lines, I do not mean to imply that there would not be any other issues that constructivists would have to discuss – such as whether constructivism can explain the existence of moral truth and facts, etc. Therefore, to a large extent, the present question of how constructivism fares in securing the objectivity of ethics inter alia rests on the premise of the correctness of what has been shown in chapter 1 about the constructivist theory in general.

The plan of this chapter runs as follows. In section 3.2, I introduce my novel approach to moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism, argue for its advantages over already established objectivist views coming from both the Kantian and the Humean camps, and argue how this novel, hybrid account spells out the concept of ethical objectivity. In section 3.3, I answer at length the skeptical challenge that a constructivist objectivist position – due to the theoretical commitments of constructivism on the one hand and the concept of moral objectivity on the other – has no genuine possibility in the first place. Section 3.4 then discusses and answers the further charge that the specific degree of strength of the objectivity of ethics that the constructivist, in contrast to the moral realist, is willing to grant may in the end not be strong enough to qualify as presenting a genuine alternative to ordinary realist conceptions. Section 3.5 concludes.

3.2 A Constructivist Understanding of Moral Objectivity

As maintained in 3.1, the issue of moral objectivity plays a central and important role in and for the constructivist theory. This is so for two reasons. First, constructivism, as a *metaethical* theory, must provide an account of how to secure the objective features of common moral discourse and practice. Second, it aims to offer a genuine alternative to the IMRealist and other realistic-seeming views such as quasi-realism. This is why constructivism inter alia is characterized as standing "between" moral realism on the one hand and relativism on the other (O'Neill 1989), or it is said that constructivism "promises an objectivist conception of rational justification that avoids the well-known epistemological as well as ontological difficulties of moral realism" (Bagnoli 2014, 311).

Underlying these arguments or characterizations is the commonly held view that in the end the more realist views are seen to offer plausible and full-fledged accounts of ethical objectivity, and, accordingly, if metaethical constructivism wants to compete with these views, it must itself offer an at least equally plausible view on moral objectivity.

In the following two chapters, I do not just defend the thought that constructivism *can* define and secure the objectivity of ethics; I do so by developing a *novel* constructivist account of moral objectivity. I grant that an immediate question arises about why there should be any need for a novel theory in the first place. After all, there already exist a plurality of both conceptions as well as sophisticated theories about ethical objectivity from

both the Kantian (Rawls 1980; Bagnoli 2014; 2015; 2016) as well as – more recently – the Humean constructivist camps (Driver 2017; Dorsey 2018). It thus appears that constructivists have already dealt with the matter of moral objectivity. So, again, what, if any, reason is there to come up with an additional view?

Granted that this is a rather serious question, I hold that there is good reason to develop and care about such a novel account because both the Humean and the Kantian views, while securing objectivity in the ethical domain, either fail or come with certain theoretical costs that one may want to avoid while "merely" aiming to secure the objectivity of ethics on behalf of constructivism. To see why that is, we need to take a more in-depth look at the Humean and Kantian theories.

I will start with Humean objectivism. In my view, while Humeans offer very interesting arguments on how to secure ethical objectivity on behalf of constructivism, they nevertheless raise a rather major problem in virtue of cashing out the conception of ethical objectivity in terms of *generality*.[59] The motives for embracing such an understanding are diverse. For instance, some, such as Dorsey (2018), are just careful about endorsing stronger conceptions of objectivity as advocated, for instance, by Kantians; others, by contrast, such as Driver (2017), are driven by more profound philosophical concerns about how to account for the contingency of normative claims and principles.

Even though these worries are intelligible and at least some of them deserve proper attention[60], the problem with the Humean conception of moral objectivity that results from these worries is two-fold. A first problem is that the Humean conception of objectivity amounts to the claim that moral reasons, while objective, apply only or for the most part to agents, meaning that there are at least some agents to whom these reasons do not apply in the first place (Driver 2017, 180). Commonly, however, we do not think that moral reasons, understood in this way, are really objective (Sayre-McCord 1988). On the contrary, we hold that moral reasons, if objective, must apply to (literally) *every* agent.

A second and even more serious problem with Humean objectivism is related to the first, namely that, rather than offering a plausible conception of ethical objectivity, it collapses into a relativist conception, if relativism here is understood as intersubjectivism.

[59] I thank Carla Bagnoli for helpful discussion on this point.
[60] I address Driver's arguments in more detail in 3.4. as well as in 5.4.

Thus, recall the distinction already discussed in chapter 2, which differentiates between subjectivism, intersubjectivism, and objectivism in the following way:

> [Moral] [t]ruth-conditions are "subjectivist" if they make essential reference to an individual; "intersubjectivist" if they make essential reference to the capacities, conventions, or practices of groups of people; and "objectivist" if they need make no reference at all to people, their capacities, practices, or their conventions (Sayre-McCord 1988, 14 – 15).

Let's again ignore whether Sayre-McCord's description of moral objectivism is correct[61] and focus instead on his differentiating between the views of objectivism and intersubjectivism. The claim is that intersubjectivism is the view that moral truth-conditions, in order to be valid, must make "essential reference" to a certain class or group of people, while objectivism maintains that moral truth-conditions are valid without or independent of such "reference".

Now while Humean objectivism clearly avoids subjectivism because it rejects the view that moral judgments, in order to be true, must be grounded on the psychological makeup of an *individual* agent (Driver 2017, 176), it nevertheless in the end collapses into ordinary relativism. To see why that is, consider the following claim from Driver:

> My strategy is to argue for a view which is Humean, but from which we can extract norms that are substantive in the sense of not being contingent on some idiosyncratic features of an agent's psychological make-up but nevertheless *are* contingent on the practical point of view of *social creatures* (Driver 2017, 176, first italics removed, second italics added).

I do not wish to go into the details of Driver's argument at this stage. What matters, however, is her idea that moral judgments, in order to be true, must be bound to a specific set of beliefs, intentions, and aims of certain agents (ibid, 180). And, accordingly, if some agent has beliefs and intentions that differ from that set, moral truth-conditions are not in

[61] See 2.6 for further discussion.

place (or realized) so that at least some moral reasons do not apply to her (ibid). It follows from these considerations that Humean objectivism is a brand of moral relativism (understood as intersubjectivism) in virtue of its commitment that, for moral judgments to be true or valid, "essential reference" needs to be made to a distinct class of agents (ibid). Given that this is exactly what the moral relativist claims, there is no reason to suppose that Humeanism is offering the right conception of the objectivity in ethics after all.

It follows from these considerations that, even though Humeans may be concerned with important philosophical concerns (such as the question of how metaethical theories can account for the contingency of moral claims and principles), their objectivist conception faces rather profound worries. It is then for this reason that I reject Humean objectivism and maintain that there is a need to offer an independent view.

The problems with Kantianism, by contrast, are much more subtle insofar as the problem with the Kantian view is not that it cannot account for a plausible sense of objectivity in the first place. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the Kantian view comes with certain theoretical costs in the sense that being a Kantian means to have undergone certain theoretical commitments that constructivists in general, in order to secure the objectivity of ethics, may want to avoid and sometimes have good reason to do so.

To see why that is the case, one needs to understand the outlines of the Kantian view. My aim here is not to define the Kantian position, which would be a rather difficult project to begin with. That said, it is agreed, at least to some extent, in the current literature that Kantian constructivism accounts for the objectivity and the authority of moral obligation "by elucidating the requirements of *practical reason*" (Bagnoli 2013a, 3).[62] So, even though I want to leave open the question of what exactly it means to be a Kantian constructivist, there nevertheless is at least one defining feature of this view, namely its distinct view on the nature and functioning of *practical reason* (ibid, 5ff.; 2013b, 158–9). As Korsgaard argues:

[62] By referring to Kantianism in this sense I adopt a more "robust" understanding of the view. "Robust" here means that I reject the rather oversimplified understanding of Kantian constructivism merely in terms of its universalism about moral reasons (cf. Dorsey 2018, 576). After all, moral universalism is by far not the only chacteristic feature of the Kantian theory as it will get clear in the rest of the paragraph. In addition, note, that my own hybrid account also endorses universalism but doesn't count as a brand of Kantianism.

> [T]he Kantian approach frees us from assessing the rationality of a choice by means of the apparently *ontological* task of assessing the thing chosen […] Thus the goodness of rationally chosen ends is a matter of the demands of practical reason rather than a matter on *ontology* (Korsgaard 1983, 183, in: Bagnoli 2013b, 159, my italics).

Given the complexity of the Kantian view, it proves hard to pinpoint exactly what Kantians have in mind with this interpretation. Careful analysis of Kantian arguments, however, shows that advocates of the position, while adopting a specific view about the nature and functioning of practical reason, consider there to be an intimate and strong connection between reason's autonomy, its normativity and its efficaciousness (cf. Bagnoli 2013b; 2014; 2016a; 2016b; 2017).[63]

Delving into all the details of this tripartite relation would require a work in its own right. As such, I can only roughly sketch it here. According to my own understanding, the relation can be best understood by considering first the connection between the notion of "practical reason" and "autonomy". In referring to the practical function of reason, Kantians intend to distance themselves from the IMRealist view according to which reason discovers or tracks normative facts (Korsgaard 1996; 2009; Bagnoli 2013a, 5; 2013b, 158, 166, 167). Now a very similar thought holds with regard to the Kantian understanding of the "autonomy" of reason, which endorses the view that reason is not heteronomous in the sense that there would be objects *prior to* and *independent of* the activities of reason (Korsgaard 2009, 111; Bagnoli 2013b, 158, 167).

Given the relation between the Kantian understanding of practical reason and reason's autonomy, the further relation between "practical reason", "normativity" and "efficaciousness" can be sketched. In short, the idea is that, according to Kantianism, normativity is established only when normative truths or facts are the product of reason, understood as autonomous, because "[i]f reason finds its objects already identified, it is shown to *lack sovereignty*" (Bagnoli 2013b, 159, my italics; cf. 2016, 1230; 2017; Engstrom 2013, 140). However, because normativity, on the Kantian as well as constructivist reading in general, is established only after agents have engaged in rational reflection (cf. Korsgaard

[63] I am indebted to Carla Bagnoli for better understanding this point.

1996; Bagnoli 2013b, 160; 2016, 1233f.), the conception of "normativity" is strongly related to that of "autonomy". And this is because normativity can be established only when the activity of reason was carried out autonomously.

The last argument then is helpful for elucidating the final notion of "efficaciousness". The Kantian claim that reason is "efficacious" refers to both the epistemic role of reason as well as its accounting for the practicality of normative judgments. Thus, the idea that reason must be "efficacious" means that it must not be understood as the faculty that discovers already normative facts on the one hand, nor that, in order for agents to act in accordance with its deliverances, reason needs external "support" on the other (Engstrom 2013, 140; Bagnoli 2016b).

This rather rough sketch of the complicated core ideas of Kantianism in addition to the even more complicated connection between all of them makes it clear that while Kantianism arguably has certain advantages[64], it also carries with it certain theoretical commitments that some constructivists may want to resist. According to my own understanding, there are at least three aspects that could give one at least prima facie reason to refrain from adopting Kantianism when "only" trying to secure the objectivity of ethics on behalf of constructivism.

The first is obvious, for even though Kantian constructivism is not identical to the philosophy of Kant, it nevertheless is committed to Kant's own framework, which holds, as I have shown, especially for Kant's conception of practical reason. Not every constructivist, however, may be willing to endorse or even accept the broader framework of the historical Kant to which Kantian constructivism, at least to some decisive level, is committed.

Second, while there is a plurality of different attempts within the Kantian constructivist camp, it is agreed that Kantianism in general endorses a rather specific conception of the practical standpoint, that is, the basis of construction. Take again the constructivist position in general. As we have seen, constructivism is the view that rational reflection or deliberation is applied to some proper input in terms of the practical standpoint. As I have argued in Chapter 1, constructivism can allow for both specific and

[64] This concerns the quite obvious point that Kantianism combines the "autonomy" of reason with its "efficaciousness" so that moral judgments become motivating insofar as they are the output of rational reflection. One could then not only account for how agents determine moral truths, but at the same time would be able to explain the motivational force of moral judgments. In other words, Kantianism, if correct, offers an explanation of two of the most important metaethical issues – the existence of moral truth and the question of how agents are motivated by moral reasons – by relying only on one and the same explanans.

rather general conceptions and notions to be considered as the starting point of construction. Hence, one can, at least in principle, construct on the basis of certain emotions what one has reason to do, but likewise one can reflect on very general conceptions of *what we are*.[65]

Now the Kantian advocates a specific understanding of the practical standpoint insofar as she quite narrowly conceives of it in terms of "free and equal" agents (Rawls 1980; Bagnoli 2002, 131; 2014, 313; 2016, 1235). Of course, there is no a priori problem with cashing out the practical standpoint in this way. One may wonder, however, why constructivist reflection should be limited to this rather particular interpretation of the basis of construction. Arguably not every constructivist wants to understand the concept of *what we are* in these specific terms, and certainly not every constructivist does so as one can easily see when it comes to Humean constructivism which interprets us in terms of valuing creatures (Street 2008; 2010; cf. Driver 2017).[66]

Adopting an independent account, then, has the rather important advantage over Kantian views inasmuch as it allows for more flexibility and freedom in spelling out the basis of construction. This is an advantage because it also puts one in a better position to react to those constructivist views that one may find problematic such as Humean constructivism. After all, because Humeanism endorses a different understanding of the basis of construction than Kantianism, it is in the end not entirely clear how Kantians can object to Humean subjectivism. Embracing a novel and, more importantly, independent approach allows me to sidestep the Kantian problems and thus to show exactly where Humeanism has gone wrong.[67]

The third, and final, element within the Kantian theory with which some may take issue is given by the rather special role it grants to rational agency in its overall theory (Korsgaard 1996; 2009; Engstrom 2009; Bagnoli 2013, 8f.; Dorsey 2018, 576). Again, there is a plurality of attempts within the Kantian camp, and each may want to argue for specific claims on the basis of their focus on agency. One of the most prominent claims, however, in contemporary Kantian theory, is presented by the thought that there are constitutive

[65] See 1.3 for further discussion.
[66] Another case is presented by Bagnoli's original introduction of the Humean constructivist view, which understands human agents first and foremost in terms of their sensibility (Bagnoli 2002, 131).
[67] See chapter 5.

principles of reason that connect the agent directly to the moral domain (Korsgaard 1996; 2009; Ferrero 2010; 2018; Bagnoli 2013a, 2; 9).

True, the specifically constitutivist arguments that often, albeit not necessarily (Bagnoli 2013a, 7), result from the Kantian analysis of agency, present, if successful, forceful arguments in favor of the authority of obligation because they would establish that every agent, qua exercising her very basic capacities of agency, is *already committed* to morality (Korsgaard 1996). It follows from such arguments that refusing to consider moral reasons means giving up one's very status as an agent (ibid; Ferrero 2009).[68]

But, like the worries around the second point, one may be skeptical as to whether this kind of argument can work (Enoch 2006). I will not enter into this debate, but will simply highlight that offering an independent approach allows one not only to adopt a broader range of options and possibilities for arguing in favor of moral objectivism, but also, and more importantly, to sidestep the worries that certain Kantian views raise in virtue of their claim that there are constitutive features of agency in the first place and that these features provide the necessary grounds for establishing the authority of moral obligation.

As should be clear by now, a novel and independent account, by contrast to Kantianism, can avoid these problems, as well as hard questions, since it offers an *independent* account from the outset. It is then independent in the sense that, in order to establish objectivity, it is not premised on any background conditions of a rather specific theoretical framework which not everyone may be ready to accept in light of seeking to secure or "merely" define the objectivity of ethics.

It follows from these considerations that the main advantage of my own, novel account over Kantianism lies *not* in the idea that it would endorse a better understanding of moral objectivity than the Kantian view, or that it necessarily does a better job of accounting for the existence of these reasons. True, while the novel account does better than Humean objectivism for the aforementioned reasons, its main advantage over Kantianism lies in the fact that it offers an independent and, contra Kantianism, parsimonious account.

Nevertheless, while the theory I am offering and defending here is novel, its relation to the already established objectivist positions, from both the Kantian and the Humean

[68] Some make the argument even stronger by claiming that opting out of agency is not even possible to begin with (Ferrero 2009).

camps, remains complex. Thus, while on the one hand it shares the Kantian understanding of moral objectivity, it does not collapse into full-blown Kantian constructivism. On the other, while my position rejects the Humean interpretation of the conception of ethical objectivity, its strategy to secure the existence of objective moral reasons is, as it will get clear in chapter 4, crucially similar to recent Humean attempts in virtue of its referring to human nature (Driver 2017; Dorsey 2018). For this reason, I call my account the *hybrid account* because while it shares both Kantian and Humean elements, it nevertheless remains distinct from both of these views.

The hybrid account, as I show in the following, aims to answer the two most central questions about moral objectivity, which concern: (i) how constructivists understand the very concept of ethical objectivity; and (ii) in virtue of what objectivity, on the constructivist account, is thought to be secured. In this chapter I focus solely on the first question, while in the next chapter I will respond to the second.

Now, as I have said before, the question about how constructivism cashes out the very concept of ethical objectivity is most importantly due to the constructivist aim to present an alternative to traditional IMR as well as those views that try to "mimic" IMR such as quasi-realism.

In light of this aim, immediate questions arise in respect of how a constructivist alternative to realist conceptions would look like in more detail. So, let us take IMR, which understands the objectivity in ethics along the lines of two interrelated concepts, namely as an ontological issue on the one hand, and in terms of mind-independence on the other. When it comes to the former part, the specifically IMRealist claim is that *because* the world itself (i.e. certain events or states of affairs) contains certain facts about morality, there is objectivity in the ethical domain (Rosen 1994; Skorupski 1999; 2002). Therefore, the issue of objectivity is "to be understood as a question about whether properties like goodness and rightness are features of the *objective world* which in most favourable cases we *discover* […]" (Rosen 1994, 287, my italics). Thus, as Bagnoli correctly argues: "For the [IM]realist, moral claims strike us as objective in the same way ordinary objects and properties do. We see that rape is wrong like we see that the cliff is dangerous" (2014, 33).

The ontological grounds of what is supposed to secure the objectivity of ethics at the same time shows why there is an intimate connection between the ontological claim and the thesis about moral mind-independence. After all, *because* it is, at least on the

IMRealist account, *the world* that is supposed to secure the objectivity of ethics, the human mind plays no constitutive role whatsoever in determining objective moral reasons or claims.

For the constructivist, then, the question is what to make of both features that the IMRealist utilizes in order to cash out moral objectivity, i.e. moral mind-independence and the idea that objectivity in the end is an ontological matter. The question is pressing because, as I will show later, it is not just the IMRealist that endorses these features; indeed, it is widely accepted in current metaethical debate that *any* objectivist account must make use of at least one of them. This is far from saying that both features are correct, but it at least raises the question of how a genuinely constructivist *alternative* to these predominant features would look like and whether such an alternative is even possible in the first place.

In addition, it is at least a point of further debate as to whether constructivism can really do without the two features, or whether constructivists, at some point, must themselves rely on them while attempting to cash out (and then also secure) ethical objectivity. This holds especially in virtue of constructivism as a mind-*dependence* theory. To see why that is, consider Bagnoli's short description of how constructivism cashes out moral objectivity:

> [E]thical judgments are objective because they enjoy a special kind of authority: they importantly make claims on the kinds of agents we are, and because of this they are *inescapable* (Bagnoli 2002, 131, my italics).

Bagnoli's overall argument makes clear that she is offering an alternative account to IMR (as well as quasi-realism). On closer inspection, however, it becomes difficult to make sense of the feature of inescapability without at the same time making use of the feature of mind-independence. This is because of how moral inescapability is spelled out. Thus, common intuitions about morality suggest that when it comes to determining moral obligation, the contingent constitution of an agent cannot and in fact does not matter, and this importantly includes a person's beliefs or attitudes about whether or not she *cares* about morality. As Joyce argues, "[w]hen we morally condemn a criminal, we do so with a force that implies '*regardless* of whether it suits you'" (2001, 32, my italics). True, while personal psychological constitution can sometimes mitigate the *strength* of our blame, it does not

follow from this that we refrain from believing that moral claims apply to an agent *even though* his beliefs and actions may or may not follow from his personal makeup, for "[w]e think that a person is bound by those [moral] rules *whether he accepts them or not* – that the rules are, in some sense, his rules whether he accepts them or not" (ibid, 34, my italics, original italics removed). And this is exactly what it means for morality to be inescapable.

The problem then is that it is prima facie hard to see how moral mind-dependence views – such as constructivism – can make sense of moral inescapabilty. After all, as we have seen before, it is, according to those views, exactly the personal constitution of an agent's psychological makeup that determines whether or not there exists moral truth or obligation in the first place. Thus, take Humean constructivism (HC). Humeanism is the view that (because IMR and Kantianism are false), morality is constituted by each agent's particular evaluative starting points (plus the requirement of coherence) (Street 2008; 2010). It is therefore hard to see how Humeans, endorsing moral mind-dependence, can explain the inescapability of moral obligation because the fact of whether or not an agent cares about morality largely determines whether or not she is bound by any obligation. Consequently, mind-dependence views *do* seem to allow that at least some moral obligation *is* escapable for agents (depending on their set of beliefs, judgments, etc.).

It follows from this argument that arguing for moral inescapability while being committed to moral mind-dependence is at least prima facie problematic, and that, consequently, the best way to account for the former is to adopt the feature of moral mind-*independence*. After all, a person's psychological makeup on these views does not matter at all when it comes to determining moral truths and claims because, for mind-independence theories, morality simply is not constituted by psychological states to begin with. Therefore, mind-independence theories do not have any difficulty in explaining how agents are bound by obligation independently of whether or not they care about morality. A fortiori, it appears that the inescapability of moral reasons and obligations is best secured on a theory that endorses the mind-independence of morality.

So, given these difficulties, how can a constructivist understanding of the concept of moral objectivity be spelled out in more detail? A helpful starting point is presented by Sharon Street's discussion of the dispute between Humean and Kantian constructivists and John Rawls' comments on moral objectivity. Let us first consider Street:

> These two kinds of view [i.e. Kantianism and Humeanism] agree that the truth of a normative claim consists in its being entailed from within the practical point of view, where the practical point of view is given a formal characterization. Where they disagree is over whether *moral* conclusions follow from within the practical point of view given a formal characterization. According to *Kantian* versions of metaethical constructivism, moral conclusions *do* follow: in other words, we may start with a purely formal understanding of the attitude of valuing, and demonstrate that recognizably moral values are entailed from within the standpoint of any valuer as such […]. *Humean* versions of metaethical constructivism, in contrast, deny that substantive moral conclusions are entailed from within the standpoint of normative judgment as such. Instead, these views claim that, the substantive content of a given agent's reason is a function of his or her particular, contingently given, evaluative starting points (Street 2010, 369–70).

Let's put aside the issue around valuing and the relation between valuing and morality, and instead focus on what the dispute between Kantians and Humeans tells us about the constructivist understanding of moral objectivity. The argument states that Kantians think that moral objectivity is secured if one can show that every (valuing) agent, no matter her more particular practical standpoint, is forced to accept certain moral conclusions or values. The point that the Kantian is pressing is that because valuers *as such* must acknowledge these conclusions or values, these conclusions or values hold for *everyone*. The Humean, by contrast, claims that morality ultimately depends on what *each* agent's *particular* standpoint entails and therefore is a form of moral subjectivism (Street 2008; 2010, 370f.; cf. Driver 2017; Hilbrich 2017; Hopster 2017; Dorsey 2018.). HC is a brand of subjectivism because it allows that while moral judgments are truth-apt, it maintains that what makes moral judgments true essentially depends on a particular person's subjective psychological constitution (cf. Sayre-McCord 1988, 14–15; Shiffrin 1999, 775). And, of course, it is the Humean's endorsing of subjectivism that in turn explains why, according to HC, the ideally coherent Caligula has no reason to refrain from torturing others for fun (Street 2010, 371; cf. Street 2009, 292ff.).

The discussion reveals that objectivists within the constructivist camp must be those who maintain two interrelated claims: first, that the truth-conditions for moral judgments

are objective if and only if they hold for *every* agent; and second, that moral truths are independent of the subjective standpoint, that is, independent from the idiosyncrasies of a person's psychological makeup.

The two claims are interrelated because one can only maintain that moral truth-conditions hold for everyone *if* they abstract from a personal point of view. Otherwise one arrives at moral truths that can only be subjective because, as we have seen in the last chapter, they only hold for an individual person.

It is then precisely this insight to which Rawls refers when he defines the constructivist sense of moral objectivity in the following way:

> In this sense we look at our society and our place in it objectively: we share a common standpoint along with others and do *not* make our judgments from a *personal slant*. Thus our moral principles and convictions are objective to the extent that they have been arrived and tested by assuming this general standpoint […] (Rawls 1999, 453).

Rawls therefore supports the sketched constructivist view on objectivity insofar as he claims that objectivity in moral practice and discourse is secured when certain moral principles ought to be accepted by persons independently of their more particular commitments, desires, or aims (cf. de Maagt 2017, 448). Moral principles must hence not be formed from a "personal slant" but rather from a *general point of view*.

Note, however, that I have considered Street's as well as Rawls' discussion of the objectivity of ethics only as a *starting point* for further discussion. This is because, given both their arguments, one notices, on closer inspection, that there is an important flaw in their distinction between objective and non-objective moral reasons or claims. The flaw emerges from their thinking that any abstracting from the personal standpoint already suffices to establish objectivity in the moral domain. After all, they both maintain that as long as moral judgments are not formed from a *personal* perspective, they must be objective.

Arguably, however, the conception rests on a mistake because, as we have seen in section 2.5 and in this paragraph while discussing Humean objectivism, abstracting from a

personal standpoint may in fact grant only that moral truth-conditions hold relative to a (given) *collective* of agents.

Hence, while both Street and Rawls claim that objectivity in ethics is secured when moral judgments are not formed from a "personal slant", their so-called objectivist conception grants in the end only a *relativist* conception of moral truth-conditions.

For this reason, I reject the conception of a "general" standpoint and introduce the idea of a *universal* standpoint in order to adequately capture the distinctive feature of objectivity of objective moral reasons, claims, and norms.

At the same time, then, the conception of a universal standpoint suffices to delineate my attempt to cash out the concept of moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism from recent attempts arising from the Humean camp. For, as we have seen, the Humean objectivists conception of the generality of objective moral reasons itself grants only a relativist conception of the objectivity of ethics because for these reasons to hold, they must make "essential reference" (to use Sayre-McCord's expression) to a certain collective of agents in order to be true. And this understanding, as I have shown, grants only a relativist, but not an objectivist, conception of moral reasons.

Given the starting point of Street's and Rawls' argument in combination with the further and rather important differentiation between subjectivism, intersubjectivism, and objectivism to which both had failed to pay sufficient attention, a more plausible characterization of the constructivist understanding of the very idea or concept of objectivity can be given. This constructivist conception of objectivity (CMO) maintains that

(CMO) The truth-conditions of moral judgments, in order to be objective, hold universally.

In the first instance, CMO (just) includes:

i. The insight that moral objectivity is more than the mere assigning of moral truth-conditions;

And

ii. A non-relativistic conception of moral truth-conditions.

Why is it important to highlight the first aspect? Because it readily and plausibly rules out a reductionist view about objectivity according to which the very conception of moral objectivity includes nothing more than to say that moral truth is instantiated. As Wiggins claims: "A subject matter is objective […] if and only if there are questions about it […] that admit of answers that are substantially true – simply and plainly true, that is" (1995, 243). What are the reasons for taking up such a view? I will not go into the details of Wiggins' own arguments, but instead will consider two independent assumptions.

Thus, a first reason would be to accept the IMRealist conception of morality. The idea here is that moral truth is instantiated due to there being certain truthmakers that render moral judgments true. Now, because truthmakers always rest on ontological grounds, moral truth is instantiated because the world itself makes moral judgments true.[69] One could then argue that moral objectivity is nothing over and above moral truth because the conception of truthmakers already has objectivist implications. And these implications arise precisely from its being assumed that moral objectivity must be cashed out in ontological terms.

It follows from these considerations that on the account of IMR, because both moral truth and moral objectivity are secured by relying on the exact same argumentative element, i.e. truthmakers, the instantiation of moral truth would already suffice to establish objectivity. A fortiori, IMR would explain why someone may want to argue that moral objectivity is nothing over and above the instantiation of moral truth.

There is a second reason for holding that objectivity in ethics means nothing more than that there is truth in the moral domain. Thus, some may think that it just sounds odd to say that truth is instantiated in the moral domain but that something additional is needed in order to make morality objective. After all, it appears that if someone is making use of the term "truth", she is already making at least some reference to objectivity. Other considerations support this assumption. For instance, many think that to allow for mistakes in the moral domain is an important ingredient in the concept of moral objectivity (cf. de Maagt 2017, 449). However, to introduce truth in moral discourse entails inter alia making conceptual space for moral errors because one can only err about some matter M in a certain domain D if judgments in D are at least in principle truth-apt and D does not rest on

[69] See 1.2 for further discussion.

global error. Therefore, so the thought may go, there must be some important connection between the concepts of truth and objectivity due to the connection between the concepts of error and objectivity. After all, because allowing for error is related to securing some level of objectivity, but granting the possibility of error only rests on the mere possibility of reaching truth in a certain domain, all we may need in order to secure objectivity in that domain is the possibility of truth.

Despite these intuitions, the reductionist view is flawed so that the constructivist rejection of it is plausible. This can be seen by appreciating that both of the named intuitions that are thought to support the reductionist position rest on false premises since they either do not consider other theories of moral truth, or do not take moral relativism appropriately into account.

Thus, there are many different theories of truth in the metaethical debate such as deflationism, coherence theories of truth, pragmatism (Suikkanen 2017), or theories that rely on a mathematical model of truth (Scanlon 2014). Consequently, even if on the IMRealist account, moral truth and objectivity are settled on the same grounds, the very idea of truth in the moral domain has so many different connotations that IMR is just *one* attempt *among many others*. In addition, and more importantly, clearly not all of these other theories about moral truth have objectivist implications. For instance, consider pragmatism. According to some version of pragmatism, some judgment J is true if and only if the J leads to beneficial consequences for the person P who forms J (Suikkanen 2017, 204). Formulated in this way, pragmatism directly leads to relativism because whether J leads to beneficial consequences for P arguably depends on certain circumstances but also, and even more importantly, on the aims of *P* (ibid). Therefore, pragmatism can have non-objectivist implications because its truth-conditions may make crucial reference to the person who forms the judgment.

This argument is at least partly apt to also refute the second problematic assumption, according to which it is assumed that objectivity and truth are identical because the *mere idea* of truth already has objectivist implications. There are two reasons why the thought is mistaken. The first, as we have seen, is that it is simply not true that every theory of (moral) truth has objectivist implications, meaning that it is just wrong to presuppose that the *mere idea* of truth already entails or leads to objectivism. On the

contrary, think again about the case of pragmatism, which, while accepted as a theory of truth, clearly has relativist implications.

Second, someone who argues that to establish moral truth means to already introduce objectivism about morality fails to do justice to the view of moral relativism, including moral subjectivism and intersubjectivism. As we have seen in chapter 2, both the moral subjectivist and the intersubjectivist can be understood as endorsing what I have called strong cognitivism, i.e. the view that moral judgments and statements are truth-apt, and that some of these judgments and statements are literally true. At the same time, however, they argue that moral truths hold only due to a *special relation* either to single individuals or groups of such individuals. Hence, moral relativism argues that there is truth instantiated in moral practice and discourse, but at the same time rejects objectivism about morality. This shows, again, that to argue for moral truth does *not* all by itself settle the question about objectivity.

A similar argument then holds for the criterion of moral error. Thus, while some think that to allow for moral error has objectivist implications, one can, by contrast, very well allow that there exists the genuine possibility of making moral mistakes and yet endorse moral relativism (only). One of the best examples comes from the constructivist debate itself in the form of HC. Humeanism, as we have seen, is a form of moral subjectivism because it claims that whether or not moral truth exists depends on the particular standpoint of a concrete agent. However, despite the Humean's endorsement of moral subjectivism, she thereby does not claim that "anything goes" in the domain of practical normativity; on the contrary, she genuinely allows for agents to make mistakes in the process of forming moral judgments (Street 2008; 2010; cf. Hopster 2017, 770–1). The Humean does so in virtue of holding that all normative truths must be determined due to whether or not a normative judgment "withstands scrutiny" from all the other judgments an agent holds (Street 2008; 2010; cf. Hopster 2017, 770; Dorsey 2018, 577). Therefore, even though HC allows for the amoralist sadist Caligula to have reason to torture others for fun, it also allows that, at least in principle, he may in fact be mistaken in his judgment

because he may have erred in correctly determining what does or does not follow from his practical standpoint[70].

However, granting the possibility of making mistakes in the process of one's (moral) reasoning arguably does not make the Humean position objectivist. On the contrary, even though agents can err about the correctness of their moral judgments, moral truth is still a matter of what follows from the individual and therefore *subjective* standpoint of each particular agent. In other words, moral relativism is perfectly compatible with granting error in the moral domain because to allow for errors does not grant objectivity. It follows that even though the conception of moral error may correctly be related to the conception of moral truth, the same does not hold for the connection between error and objectivity.

Considering the second element of CMO, we can now appreciate the additional element that is missing from the view that moral objectivity is nothing over and above the instantiation of truth, namely that moral truth-conditions hold universally, that is, for everyone. As we have seen in the last chapter, there are two ways in which to spell out the truth-conditions of moral judgment: they are either relativist[71] or objectivist. As we have further seen, moral relativism is the view that moral truth-conditions must hold always *in relation* to either individuals or collectives, so that there only exists a *certain class* of persons *to whom* moral truths apply or to whom they are valid. Endorsing objectivity in the moral domain, by contrast, means that moral truths in principle hold *not only* for a restricted class of persons but that they are "*equally* valid for *all* of us" (Lafont 2004, 29, my italics). The idea is therefore not that moral judgments, in order to be valid, must not make reference to any individual or collective standpoint. Rather, objectivity in the moral domain is understood as *transcending* not only conventions and practices (cf. Sayre-McCord 1988) but also the standpoints of particular individuals as well as those of collectives (cf. Rescher 2008, 393), insofar as it maintains that moral reasons and claims are valid for everyone.

CMO captures this idea by maintaining that moral truth-conditions hold strictly *universally* and thus are *not* restricted to any class of people at all. It is then precisely this aspect that accounts for the additional element of objectivity in the concept of ethics over

[70] In fact, Street claims that a real-life Caligula most likely is *not* ideally coherent in his judging that it is okay to torture others because most real-life persons *do* hold at least some moral feelings that render amoralist actions or judgments incoherent (Street 2009, 194; cf. Dorsey 2018, 579–80).
[71] Understood here as including both subjectivism and intersubjectivism.

and above the instantiation of truth. Hence, if there is objectivity in ethics, then this must not be understood as claiming that there is moral truth; rather, it must be understood as the claim that certain moral reasons and claims apply (strictly) to all of us.

3.3 The Possibility of Constructivist Objectivism

3.3.1 Objectivity and Ontology

After having defined a plausible conception of moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism in terms of CMO, in this section I will respond to an important and central concern, namely that constructivists are not in a good position to offer a conception of moral objectivity in the first place. This skeptical thesis about the very possibility of a constructivist conception of objectivity comes primarily though not exclusively from the moral realist camp, broadly construed, including both IMR and non-cognitivist quasi-realism.

To see why this is the case, consider first IMR and the two claims about morality that lie at the heart of its account of moral objectivity: (i) that morality rests on an ontological foundation; and (ii) that the moral realm is mind-independent. Both (i) and (ii) are interrelated because the IMRealist thinks that morality is mind-independent *because* it is the world itself, i.e. states of affairs, that makes moral judgments true and accounts for the objectivity in the ethical domain.

It is then argued that IMR or those positions that crucially resemble IMR are especially plausible theories when it comes to offering a moral objectivist view precisely because it is assumed that the adoption of (i), (ii), or both (i) and (ii) *must* be endorsed in order to successfully make sense of the very concept of the objectivity of ethics. For instance, when it comes to the ontological issue, it is often agreed that "[t]o validate moral objectivity, it must be shown that [a] […] *matter of fact* […] is at issue[72]" (Rescher 2008, 393). Others more directly argue that *any* ethical objectivist "*must* embrace ontological objectivism" (Pettit 2001, 242, my italics).[73]

[72] One may wonder whether the term "matter of fact" already includes a claim about ontology. My reasons for identifying both are due to the IMRealist view whereby both are neatly connected with one another: Skorupski 1999; 2002. See also 3.2.

[73] Some even go a step further and maintain that the whole domain of morality must rest on an ontological realm (Ferraris 2015, 66).

But there is also element (ii) which, on the IMRealist view, is intimately linked to the ontological interpretation (i), on other realist accounts is embraced independently. Thus, recall that, as we saw in chapter 2, not only IM- but also other realist theories – such as non-cognitivist quasi-realists – agree that moral mind-independence is a necessary feature in spelling out the objectivity in ethics.

As such, it is the feature of moral mind-independence that presents a particular problem for constructivist objectivism because, as I show in section 3.3.2 in more detail, it is indeed necessary in order to spell out the very idea of objectivity in ethics.

Importantly, then, and in order to create a genuine challenge for constructivist objectivists, it is not only or primarily positions stemming from the (broader) realist camp that share these crucial beliefs about the relation between the issue of moral objectivity and the features of either (i), (ii), or both (i) and (ii). For instance, there are some error theorists who, while very skeptical about the correctness of IMR, share the IMRealist view that the issue of the objectivity of ethics ultimately rests on ontological issues (Mackie 1973)[74]. And when it comes to (ii), it is not only, or even primarily, IMRealists or quasi-realists who share the idea that the mind-independence of morality is a necessary feature in spelling out ethical objectivity (Warenski 2014).

Given these considerations, then, constructivist objectivists appear to face a rather serious problem, insofar as spelling out the very concept of moral objectivity seems to require a realist framework that constructivists simply cannot accept without having to give up their core commitments *as* constructivists. After all, as we have seen especially in chapter 1, the beating heart of the constructivist theory is conveyed in the claim that morality (or normativity, more broadly) is constituted not by a mind-independent realm of moral facts, but rather by the human mind (including human mental states). If this is true, then how can any constructivist endorse either the ontological conception of moral objectivity or the mind-*independence* of morality?

To put things more adequately, constructivists, when trying to account for moral objectivity, appear to face a dilemma. On the first horn, they can only try to accommodate moral objectivity by collapsing into a realist view, while on the second, they can only remain

[74] See discussion below.

constructivists by giving up any aspirations to offer a genuinely constructivist view on moral objectivity.

If the dilemma were true, it would follow that constructivists in metaethics cannot adequately cope with the bare concept of moral objectivity and consequently that constructivism must simply be considered as the wrong view to tackle the subject of moral objectivity in the first place. As I have mentioned before, the critique is especially troublesome for constructivism because it would show not only that constructivism is poorly suited to offer an alternative to realist views, but also that the "very big idea" of constructivism is mistaken.

In the following, I argue against this rather heavy skepticism about the very possibility of constructivist objectivism, and establish that constructivism is indeed in a good position to offer an objectivist account. My answer to the dilemma is two-fold. First, I reject the claim that moral objectivity must be cashed out in ontological terms. Second, while granting that *any* objectivist account must encompass the feature of moral mind-independence, I argue how constructivism can accommodate this thought. While I focus in the rest of this section on refuting the ontological conception of objectivity, I tackle the issue of mind-independence in 3.3.2.

There are many arguments for the claim that moral objectivity hinges on ontological questions. The best-known argument, however, can be found in John Mackie's introduction of his error theory (Pettit 2001, 240ff.). Mackie's objection was already discussed at length in chapter 2. In short, Mackie maintains that common morality (or common moral practice) rests on a mistake due to its presupposing the existence of objective values that in turn would require the adoption of a problematic metaphysical framework. One of the crucial points in Mackie's argument thus is that the issue of objectivity in ethics cannot be settled on mere conceptual or analytical grounds, but in the end crucially hinges on ontological issues (cf. Svavarsdóttir 2009, 149):

> But there are also ontological, as contrasted with linguistic or conceptual, questions about the nature and status of goodness or rightness or whatever it is that first order statements are distinctively about. These are questions of factual rather than conceptual analysis: the problem of what goodness is *cannot* be settled conclusively or exhaustively by finding out what the word "good" means, or what it is

conventionally used to say or do (Mackie 1977, 19; cf. Svavarsdóttir 2009, 148, my italics).

Mackie's view is mirrored in how error theories are commonly motivated because all error theorists engage, first, in a conceptual analysis about what ordinary moral practice presupposes, and then envisage a metaphysical investigation in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the nature and the preconditions of that practice (Joyce 2001; 2008, 32). However, because Mackie is not an advocate of IMR at all, but rather a critic of the position, the idea to cash out objectivity in ontological terms even holds quite independently of any realist commitments.

Mackie's argument, however, is not without its own difficulties. The main drawback derives from its problematic premise since, on closer inspection, any conceptual analysis of moral objectivity *can* certainly be kept neatly separate from ontological investigation in the first instance. There are two reasons why this is so. First, let us for the sake of argument suppose that Mackie's premise for developing his error theory is correct. It would follow that all anti-IMRealist positions – such as constructivism, response-dependence views, as well as non-cognitivist theories – must *inevitably* fail to even make sense of the very concept of moral objectivity because they all reject the idea that objectivity is settled on ontological grounds. But that cannot be correct because we certainly can understand and thus *make intelligible* how all these theories attempt to argue for ethical objectivity *even though*, as anti-IMRealist views, they refuse to make any ontological claims. It is then exactly the very comprehensibility of all these accounts and arguments that suggest *not* that constructivism, non-cognitivism, etc. rest on a radical error, but rather that the ontological explanation of objectivity is *just one among many other* explanations and thus does *not* exhaust the ways in which we can think and speak about it after all (cf. James 2006, 590; Street 2010, 369).

The second reason for keeping conceptual and ontological inquiries about ethical objectivity separate rests on a more concrete analysis of whether and how descriptions of ethical objectivity such as CMO directly entail or give rise to any ontological questions in order to be understandable. At least in the case of CMO, it can be easily seen that this is not the case. This is because I have argued that for constructivists, moral objectivity means that the truth-conditions of moral judgments hold universally. Now, if Mackie (and others)

were correct in claiming that the concept of objectivity cannot be discussed without engaging in ontological investigation, the universality of some moral reasons could not be made plausible without at the same time discussing ontological questions. But, in fact, it is hard to see why that is the case. After all, to say that moral reasons are universal only means to say that these reasons apply to (literally) all agents. It remains rather mysterious why there should be any reason at all for thinking that this claim in itself is in need of any ontological basis in order to be understandable (cf. James 2006, 586). On the contrary, to think that this claim is in such need readily neglects the basic possibility that views other than IMR could come up with alternative explanations of rendering the feature of universality plausible (cf. ibid). But this is an immature supposition that does not do justice to (current) metaethical debate.

In other cases, however, matters appear to be more complicated. Take the mind-independence of morality. At this point it is not clear that it must be part of the very concept of moral objectivity, but let's, for the sake of argument, propose that it is. When it comes to moral mind-independence, it *does* seem plausible to think that the feature, at least at some point, crucially leads to ontological claims. After all, one expects that morality is either constituted by the human mind or it is not, and if the latter, it must be the world that so constitutes it. And at least in the case of IMR we have seen that both the ontological and the independence from the mental claim indeed are crucially interrelated, for the IMRealist idea is that because the world itself contains moral facts, the human mind is not constitutive of them. Hence, it appears that if any theorist – whether she endorses IMR, quasi-realism, or constructivism – talks about moral mind-independence, she *must* at some point make claims about ontology.

Nevertheless, the thought that any moral objectivist, in virtue of her referring to the mind-independence of morality, must make ontological claims either misunderstands or underestimates the many ways in which the concept of mind-independence can be made plausible. Thus, take quasi-realism. The quasi-realist, just like the IMRealist, endorses morality's independence from the mental. On the account of IMR, morality is mind-independent because it is part of the fabric of the world. The quasi-realist, however, refuses to make any ontological claims and instead argues for an "internal reading" of moral mind-independence (Blackburn 1984, 217ff.; Zangwill 1994, 208ff.):

> [The projectivist] approves of a moral disposition which, given this belief as an input, yields the reaction of disapproval as an output; he does not approve of one which needs belief about our attitudes as an input in order to yield the same output, and this is all that gets expression in the counterfactual (Blackburn 1984, 217–18).

The argument makes use of the already mentioned meta- or second-order sensibilities.[75] Thus, think again about Blackburn's interpretation of moral judgments by using the operators "Hooray" "H!" and "Boo" "B!". In our already discussed example, someone who claims that it is wrong to get little brother to lie expresses her disapproval of the approval of getting little brothers to lie:

"H!([B!(lying)]; [B!(getting little brother to lie)]"

Now the quasi-realist uses exactly this idea in order to account for the mind-independence of moral truths insofar as she interprets the feature in terms of such meta-sensibility. Accordingly, the mind-independence of morality, on the quasi-realist account, means to disapprove of the approval that it is (ultimately) our attitudes (or thoughts) that determine what is morally right or wrong (Zangwill 1994, 208). And this explains why, for the quasi-realist, "[m]ind-independence and mind-dependence are both interpreted as second-order moral attitudes to a disposition to form moral attitudes in a certain way" (ibid).

While Blackburn's solution is often attacked by those who think that only the IMRealist can make sense of the feature at hand (Zangwill 1994; Jenkins 2005), the important point is that his argument shows how one can at least try to make sense of it without at the same time embracing an ontological framework.

Something similar holds, as I set out in the following paragraphs, for the constructivist account. The important point here, however, is that attempts to cash out the moral mind-independence can proceed in terms besides the ontological. Accordingly, there is good reason to expect that conceptions of moral objectivity that encompass the feature of moral mind-independence must not necessarily hinge on ontological assumptions that only IMR can accept.

[75] See 2.3 for a more detailed discussion on quasi-realism.

3.3.2 Constructivism, Objectivity, and Mind-Independence

My argument in 3.3.1 has shown, in a first step, why constructivism can, at least in principle and contrary to severe skepticism, secure a conception of moral objectivity because the very idea or concept of objectivity in ethics does not necessarily hinge on ontological issues. But there is also the second feature (ii), which figures rather prominently in recent metaethical discussion about the objectivity of ethics, namely the mind-independence of morality. This feature also fuels skepticism about the possibility of constructivist objectivism, and, as we have seen, in this case too there is no reason to suppose that only IMRealist or realist-adjacent theories want to spell out moral objectivity in terms of the independence from the mental, meaning that it is often assumed that there is an important connection between the issue of objectivity and moral mind-independence.

As I show in the following, in contrast to the first claim according to which objectivity in ethics must refer to ontological claims, the thought that moral mind-independence is a necessary part of spelling out the very concept of moral objectivity is indeed, in some crucial sense, plausible.[76] If this is true, the immediate question arises of how constructivism, as a mind-*dependence* theory, can account for moral objectivity after all if

[76] Sometimes theorists argue that there is an additional concept to that of moral mind-independence, namely *moral invariance*. However, both mind-independence and invariance basically refer to the same key thought and therefore must not be kept strictly separate as some suggest. Thus, one example of an account of invariance, which is introduced as an alternative to mind- or attitude-independence, is Jeroen Hopster's theory of standpoint-invariance that he explicitly develops on behalf of a Humean constructivist conception of moral objectivity (Hopster 2017). He starts by arguing that Humeanism leaves room for the possibility of making mistakes in the process of forming normative evaluative judgments (ibid, 770ff.). It follows from the Humean's granting normative errors that there may exist some normative truth(s) that follow(s) from one's own practical standpoint even though the person herself does not realize this (ibid, 773). Now, Hopster amplifies this thought by claiming that the Humean can at least in principle even grant that there exist some normative and moral truths that are standpoint-invariant in the sense that they may be entailed within *all* the particular standpoints of agents: "[T]he idea is that however these standpoints may differ, the truth of *X* will still follow from it. […] On the antirealist account, if a moral judgment purports to be objective, it purports to withstand scrutiny from a diverse set of evaluative standpoints. A fully objective moral purports to be fully standpoint-invariant: no matter how the standpoint of a moral agent varies, the truth of *X* should follow from it" (ibid). The important thing to note about the concept of invariance is that it captures the idea that morality is objective insofar as it cannot be altered by how people *think* and *feel* about moral matters. Thus, when Hopster argues for standpoint-invariance, he argues for the possibility that there exist some moral truths that are entailed within every agent's standpoint *whatever* attitudes or thought the agents may or may not hold towards morality. One can then see that the account of moral invariance in the end does *not* offer a thoroughgoing *alternative* to the conception of *attitude-* or *mind-independence* as Hopster himself claims (ibid, 779) since, after all, the standpoint-invariance means inter alia that at least some moral truths (may) hold *independently* of an agent's *mental states*. This is exactly what it means to endorse the mind-independence of morality.

the very concept of objectivity encompasses a crucial commitment to the mind-independence of morality, a commitment that appears to run contrary to the beating heart of the constructivist theory in metaethics.

Let me begin by first showing why there is an important relation between endorsing the objectivity of ethics and undergoing a commitment to embracing moral mind-independence. The best illustration is to acknowledge that it is at least prima facie hard to see how mind-*dependence* views (such as constructivism) can grant moral reasons to be objective. There are three key reasons for this. Recall that moral mind-dependence theories, in a nutshell, claim that morality is constituted by (human) mental states. Now a first problem is given by the fact that mental states – including attitudes, preferences, desires, etc. – often express only the particular and *contingent* (de Maagt 2017, 449) psychological makeup of individuals, and for this reason they tend to vary heavily from person to person. Second, mental states can be and often are misinformed, irrational, or otherwise distorted. Given that we think that the objectivity in ethics is expressed in terms of universality, it is then difficult to see how the existence of objective moral reasons and claims can be secured if they hinge not only on a person's very specific and peculiar psychology, but even on mistaken and/or irrational mental states. Third, as we have already seen in 3.2, it appears that if moral mind-dependence theories granted that *any* mental state constituted moral reasons, they would face the problem of not being able to accommodate the "inescapability" of moral reasons and claims (Foot 1972, 308; Joyce 2001, 30ff.), which is crucially associated with the concept of ethical objectivity. Let me spell out these concerns in more detail.

I start with the first two reasons. Recall that moral mind-dependence theories claim that mental states are a *constitutive* part of moral reasons. It follows from this, as Blackburn correctly argued, that mind-dependence views must claim that whenever agents' attitudes (or thoughts) change, so do moral reasons (Blackburn 1984, 217–18). This is in many cases problematic. So, let's say that Caligula believes that it is perfectly okay to torture others for his own pleasure (Gibbard 1999, 145; Street 2009; 2010). There could be two possible reasons for this. First, his belief that torturing others is okay simply expresses Caligula's psychological makeup. Perhaps he just has a very strong desire to do so, and because his desire does not conflict with (all) his other judgments and beliefs, he feels justified in maintaining that there is no problem at all with causing others pain for no other reason

than to gain pleasure. Another possibility would be that Caligula judges it okay to torture others while not realizing that his judgment is mistaken because, say, it *does* conflict with (all) his other judgments, or because it is simply distorted due to what Skorupski calls "interference", i.e. influences such as exhaustion, inattention, and so on (Skorupski 1999, 439).

Given the commitments of mind-dependence views, prima facie it follows that, at least under certain circumstances, such as in Caligula's case, an agent can have reason to torture other people for her own pleasure. Depending on the details of the particular theory, mind-dependence views would then allow that it is perfectly okay to torture others in virtue of the psychological makeup of the person who is making a moral judgment. In addition, they can, at least in principle, allow that the moral permissibility of torture is granted *even* when the mental states of the person who judges it true are irrational, eccentric, biased, or held under conditions of exhaustion, etc. For this reason, Blackburn's diagnosis that mind-dependence views have problematic implications is quite comprehensible (Blackburn 1984, 217–18).

Now, two things are important to note here. The first is that some may want to object that the discussed case of Caligula just renders *some* versions of moral mind-dependence views problematic while others may still be plausible. This objection maintains that one ought to differentiate between different mental states, and on the basis of that differentiation, it claims that the independence from the mental, first and foremost, includes mental states such as preferences, desires, and aims. But that does not rule out the possibility that an agent's *cognitive* states such as beliefs may still determine what is morally true and false.[77] While the latter views seem to rule out the intelligibility of the case of Caligula, it nevertheless makes plausible the idea that what moral reasons an agent has crucially depends on (her) mental states insofar as these states are understood as beliefs.

However, it is commonly acknowledged that moral mind-independence abstracts not only from non-cognitive but also from *all* cognitive states. And, in fact, not only in the first but also in the latter case there looms the danger of ending up with moral subjectivism, rather than objectivism. To see why, consider again a more sophisticated version of

[77] I thank Monika Platz for this point.

subjectivism as presented by HC. Humeans grant that morality as such must be spelled out in subjective terms because both the very existence and the content of moral reasons depend on an individual's states of mind. However, Humeans highlight that these states are different from desires. Thus, take Street's claim:

> Humean versions of metaethical constructivism are crucially different from standard Humean views […] in that they take an understanding of the nature of the attitude of valuing or normative judgment – in contrast to that of mere desire – to be essential to understand how standards of correctness get generated in the normative domain (Street 2010, 370, italics removed).

Therefore, the Humean's justification of the possibility of an ideally coherent Caligula having good reasons to torture others must not necessarily rest on the assumption that Caligula's reason follows only from his *desire* to torture others. On the contrary, the Humean can (and does) maintain that Caligula's reason follows from his overall set of beliefs and normative judgments, i.e. *cognitive* mental states. Therefore, HC suggests that the feature of moral mind-independence must not only eliminate *some* class of mental states like desires and preferences, but equally important cognitive states such as beliefs, from constituting moral reason(s). And for this reason, it comes as no surprise that IMR commonly argues that morality must be independent also from either our beliefs (Brink 1984; 1989).

The second important point is that the objection against mind-dependence views does not just hold in the case of moral subjectivism. For it is often said that granting the independence from mental states is most crucial so as to rule out only subjectivism because other relativist views such as intersubjectivism make no reference to mental states, but instead refer to notions such as "social practices or conventions" (Sayre-McCord 1988, 15). A similar characterization of moral subjectivism maintains that according to the *subjectivist* "moral propositions are true only in virtue of an agent's positive *mental attitudes* toward their content" (Shiffrin 1999, 775, my italics). But one wonders why that is so. It is a plain fact that not just individuals but *whole groups* of people hold different beliefs and attitudes about morality (cf. James 2006, 583). Thus, let us return to the case of Caligula. As Street describes it, Caligula is a moral eccentric because he in particular holds certain moral beliefs

that any of us would reject (Street 2009, 273). But now let's construe the case somewhat differently so that while Caligula judges it okay to torture others, he does so *because* he is a member of an amoralist cult that generally does not believe in the normative force of moral claims, or, using Shiffrin's description, does not hold positive attitudes towards their content. In this case it is not only the individual *Caligula* who holds odd moral beliefs and attitudes; rather, his individual psychological makeup expresses or mirrors the beliefs and attitudes of a group. It is thus certainly possible that intersubjectivist views too can make the truth of moral judgments dependent not only on social practices and conventions, but also on mental states, therefore claiming that the truth of moral judgments depends on the beliefs and attitudes of collectives. If this is true, then mind-dependence theories of morality cannot only allow for moral subjectivism, but for relativism in general.[78]

Finally, there is the third point about the moral "inescapability" that moral mind-dependence views seem to have great difficulties accommodating, as we have seen earlier. Consider Caligula again. Street characterizes him not only as a sadist but also, and more importantly, as an amoralist. Caligula's rejection of moral claims and obligations plays a major role in the Humean's argument that moral reasons do not necessarily apply to every person because there may exist persons who endorse amoralism and who are totally coherent with themselves in doing so. The Humean account therefore tells us something important about how agents can sidestep moral obligation on at least some moral mind-dependence views because they may (and sometimes do) allow that it suffices for persons like Caligula not to hold any positive beliefs or attitudes about morality in order to avoid being under any moral obligation.

It is then at least prima facie hard to see how moral mind-dependence views can make sense of the inescapability of moral reasons, because on these views it is exactly the psychological constitution of agents that determines whether or not there exist moral reasons in the first place.

Now the interesting point about the problems of mind-dependence views with the issue of ethical objectivity is that they reveal a very general fact about how to conceive of objectivity in ethics, namely that in order for some moral reason to be objective it must be free from *any* kind psychological *idiosyncrasies* (whether they pertain to the mental states

[78] One could even go a step further and adopt my previous argument that one cannot even talk of such notions as "practices" and "conventions" without at some point introducing mental states (see 2.6).

of individuals *or* of collectives) (Driver 2017, 179; Dorsey 2018, 600). It follows from this that the feature of mind-independence thus is a necessary part of spelling out what it means to endorse the objectivity of ethical reasons after all.[79]

Now if these considerations are correct, an immediate worry arises for the constructivist account of objectivity, for we have seen that every objectivist position in ethics must make use of the feature of mind-independence, but the point is that constructivism, at its very core, is a mind-dependence view, i.e. a view that holds that mental states are *constitutive* of the moral realm. Consequently, it appears rather mysterious how constructivism can account for the concept of moral objectivity after all if moral mind-independence must be part of that very concept.

I argue that the difficulty of seeing how constructivism, as a mind-dependence theory, can make sense of moral objectivity, including a commitment to mind-independence, can be resolved by acknowledging the seldom discussed point that the very concept of (moral) mind-independence allows for *degrees*. In fact, it is precisely because theorists from both the realist and the anti-realist camps have altogether missed this thought that they failed to consider the possibility of mind-dependence views such as constructivism providing a conception of ethical objectivity without having to give up their core commitments.

To see why that is the case, consider the standard description of moral realism and anti-realism in terms of mind-(in)dependence or attitude-(in)dependence theories, as presented by Street:

> According to attitude-dependent[80] conceptions […] there are no facts about how an agent has most normative reason to live that hold independently of *that* agent's evaluative attitudes and what follows from within the standpoint constituted by

[79] The term "idiosyncrasies" is not exclusive to the field of ethics; it also features in other areas of philosophical dispute – such as the debates around how to capture scientific objectivity. Thus, consider the phrase "*aperspectival objectivity*" which figured prominently in the 18th and 19th century's scientific understanding of the term "objectivity", but also appears in its contemporary understanding (Daston 1992): "Indeed, it is difficult for us to talk about objectivity without enlisting the metaphor of perspective or variants such as 'point of view', 'centreless', 'stepping back' […]" (ibid, 599). What is meant then by the term "aperspectival" is that in order for some judgment or reason to be objective, the individual or subjective viewpoint has to be transcended (ibid, 607), such that the "peculiarities" of the individual's position are "subdued" (ibid, 604). Daston therefore argues that aperspectival objectivity stands in direct contrast to the term "subjectivity" as consisting in an "individual's *idiosyncrasies"* (ibid, 607, my italics).

[80] In the following, I neglect the distinction between attitude- and mind-independence theories.

> them; instead, an agent's normative reasons are always ultimately a function of *that* agent's *own* evaluative attitudes […] (Street 2009, 274, my italics).

And:

> According to the anti-realist, if an agent has normative reason to X, then this conclusion must somehow follow from within *her own* practical point of view: if the conclusion that she has reason to X is not entailed from within the standpoint constituted by *her own* set of evaluative attitudes, then she does not have that reason (Street 2016, 3, my italics).

Street's distinction suggests that *either* moral (or normative) reasons are determined by an *individual's* mental states or attitudes, or they are *completely* and *absolutely* independent of *any* kind of mental state. This view is supported by her further claim that realist attitude-independence views hold that at least some normative truths about reasons "hold independently of *all* our evaluative attitudes" (ibid, my italics). Other constructivists also understand IMR in this sense when they, like Rawls, claim that, according to IMR, there is "an independent order of moral values [which] does not depend on […] the activity of *any* actual (human) mind, including the activity of reason" (Rawls 1993, 91, my italics).

In addition, Street's characterization certainly is in accordance with the standard description of realism and anti-realism in current metaethical debate. Hence, similar accounts can be found within the IMRealist and quasi-realist camps where it is maintained that realism understands morality to be independent of the mental insofar as it is independent of what *anyone* happens to think about moral matters (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003, 15; Blackburn 2006, 154). This description thus supports Street's characterization according to which endorsing moral mind-independence means claiming that morality is totally mind-independent, that is, independent of *all* mental states. It follows from this that mind-*dependence* views, by contrast, must hold that *all* mental states determine the truth about judgments concerning what moral reasons an agent either does or does not have.

On closer inspection, however, the differentiation is misleading because it does not acknowledge the *full range* of possible views on how mental states can or cannot be part of what determines moral reasons to begin with. Thus, as I have shown in chapter 2, to

advocate moral mind-independence means, in a nutshell, to maintain that mental states are not a constitutive part of moral reasons. However, there is an important distinction that concerns the differentiation between *strong* and *weak* mind-independence (Kramer 2009). Kramer thus provides a helpful starting point when he describes the stronger form in the following lines:

(1) "The occurrence or continued existence of something is not dependent on the mental functioning of *any* members of any group individually or collectively" (Kramer 2009, 26).

When it comes to the weaker version, he claims that it holds that:

(2) "The occurrence or continued existence of something is not dependent on the mental activity of any *particular* individual" (ibid).

The distinction is a step in the right direction, but it requires further elaboration because Kramer says little more about it. Moreover, on further consideration it seems misleading and even false.

Kramer's description says that there is a difference between claiming that the truth about a reason judgment holds independently of an *individual* agent's mental states and of the mental states of a *collective* or group. Under closer inspection, however, there arises the problem that Kramer really does not capture the "traditional" mind-independence theories such as IMR or the quasi-realist view. Arguably, their views *entail* the claim about independence from the mental states not only of individuals but also of collectives; the important thing, however, is that both go even further and maintain that moral reasons are independent of what *anyone* happens to think about morality. Therefore, morality, on these views, is independent not only from collectives but also from any mental activity *at all*. Consequently, the strong mind-independence should mean:

(1') The occurrence or continued existence of something is not dependent on the mental functioning of *any* conscious being.

As we have seen, the revised version (1') is in accordance with both Street's description of the distinction between realism and anti-realism, *and* how mind-independence theorists (MI-theorists) characterize their own view. Consequently, the weaker version of moral mind-independence should be taken to mean that:

> (2') The occurrence or continued existence of something is neither dependent on the mental functioning of any particular individual nor on the mental functioning of any group or collective.

Finally, both (1') and (2') allow to differentiate between strong and weak versions of mind-*dependence*. Accordingly, strong mind-dependence holds that:

> (3) The occurrence or continued existence of something is dependent on the mental activity of any individual.

While the weaker form encompasses the following claim:

> (4) The occurrence or continued existence of something is dependent on the mental functioning of any group or collective.

The revised differentiation between weak and strong mind-independence in the lines of (1') and (2') reveals then the possibility of how constructivists, while claiming that mental states determine moral reasons, are thereby not committed to claiming that merely *any* mental state (including attitudes) of *any* possible agent does so. On the contrary, the differentiation shows that constructivists rather make the perfectly legitimate claim that even though strong mind-independence is false, at least some mental states can still determine moral reasons (cf. Tropman 2017) in the sense that MI-theorists commonly reject.

Consequently, the revised distinction renders plausible the constructivist balancing act of trying to account for moral objectivity on the one hand, while endorsing the claim that morality essentially depends on us, i.e. our thoughts and attitudes, on the other. After all, what guides the constructivist objectivist is the claim that the standard MI-theorist's

understanding of mind-independence is wrong, while at the same time maintaining that this should not mean that literally *every* mental state and attitude determines moral reasons. The constructivist thereby does justice to the rather plain fact that people can and do hold problematic, eccentric, or simply irrational judgments, beliefs, and attitudes, and that mental states can in general be distorted by biases, prejudices, misinformation, exhaustion, etc. For it certainly is quite hard to see how objectivity in ethics can be secured if mental states *without further qualification* determine moral reasons.

Now the constructivist position is far from granting that merely any mental state or attitude constitutes moral reasons and therefore is more in accordance with (2'). It does so in virtue of its doing justice to the fact that persons may hold mistaken or irrational mental states (cf. James 2013) and that therefore only a restricted class of mental states can determine reason in the moral domain (James 2012).

In fact, one can even quite easily see that constructivism is not committed to either (3) or (4) but has all the resources to argue for (2')[81] due to considering the general outlines of the constructivist position in metaethical debate. Constructivism, as defined in chapter 1, is the view according to which moral truths are not discovered or tracked, but rather are the output of a certain procedure. There are two claims entailed within this characterization, one positive and one negative. The negative claim neglects the IMRealist idea that moral truths are entailed within the world and thus rest on an ontological foundation. The second, and more positive, claim says that while mental states determine moral truths, they do so only *after* undergoing a reflective process *in order* to be true. Hence, on the constructivist account, it does not suffice to merely hold some attitude or belief about what is morally right or wrong in order to determine moral truth. On the contrary, *only some* attitudes and beliefs constitute truth, and they do so if and only if they have survived an evaluative process in terms of critical reflection and deliberation (cf. Copp 2013, 110).

Therefore, if my argument is correct, constructivism can, even while accepting that human mental states ultimately constitute morality, endorse the view of weak mind-

[81] This raises, of course, serious questions about how weak mind-independence according to description (2') is established. For if moral truths are not constituted by the mental states of individuals or of collectives, and yet are still a product of mental activity, then one has to say what kinds of mental states are then supposed to constitute these truths. I answer this question shortly and also discuss it at length in chapter 4 (especially 4.2), where the question is what it is that secures ethical objectivity on the constructivist theory.

independence (or invariance). A fortiori, constructivism is in a very good position to secure a conception of moral objectivity that includes the commitment to a certain level of mind-independence, while not having to refute or give up its core commitments as a genuinely constructivist view.[82]

To conclude, the arguments I have presented in both 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 show that and why the (mainly) realist critique of the very possibility of a constructivist conception is in fact misplaced for two reasons. First, because the very concept of moral objectivity does not at all commit one to any claims about ontology. Second, because, while there indeed exists a crucial relation between the objectivity of ethics and a commitment to the mind-independence of morality, constructivism is in fact in a very good position to grant at least some important degree of moral mind-independence that is necessary for securing objectivity.

It follows from these results that there is no general reason to suspect that there cannot be a constructivist conception of moral objectivity or that constructivism simply is the wrong view to adopt when one wants to tackle the objectivity in ethics to begin with. On the contrary, as I have shown here, constructivism is in fact in a very good position not just to quarrel with the issue of moral objectivity, but also to find concrete answers to it.

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[82] Considering what has been argued with regard to the distinction between mind-independence and -dependence allows also for further, more subtle differentiation, in the case of the *invariance* of morality. I have thus argued that in the former case one cannot only distinguish between some moral truth being *either* independent from mental states *or* not, but also that there are more ways to argue for the independence or dependence of moral truths on mental states. The same possibility is then granted in the case of the conception of moral invariance. Therefore, we can distinguish between strong and weak versions of invariance:

(5) Moral truths are invariant to *any* attitudes, standpoints, etc.

And:

(6) Moral truths are invariant to the attitudes, standpoints etc. of some particular individuals and to the attitudes, standpoints, etc. of collectives.

IMR as well as quasi-realism arguably entail (5) because, on their views, neither human attitudes nor standpoints have an impact on the nature and/or the content of moral truths. But there is also description (6), according to which moral truths are not strongly but only weakly invariant. I have already mentioned a view that is in accordance with the latter characterization, namely Hopster's account of standpoint-invariance. Hopster's claim was that moral truths are invariant in the sense that they are entailed within the standpoint of every human agent. Therefore, moral truths are invariant only to the changes of *particular* standpoints, not to *all* standpoints in general: "Crucially, on this account of objectivity, the truth or falsity of the moral judgment that X is not independent of the standpoint of *moral agents*. Instead, the idea is that however these standpoints may differ, the truth of X will still follow from it. In other words, the truth of X invariably follows from *different* evaluative standpoints" (Hopster 2017, 773, original italics removed, italics added). In general, the constructivist view appears as a plausible candidate to endorse (6) for the already mentioned reasons regarding the moral mind-independence. I won't discuss this any further.

3.4 Constructivist Objectivism – Robust Enough?

In the last section, I have defended the genuine possibility of metaethical constructivism offering a conception of moral objectivity. As I have shown, the possibility is granted because answers can be given to both of the underlying features of the general skepticism toward a constructivist position on moral objectivity. Thus, constructivist objectivism is possible because, first of all, nothing forces one to cash out the objectivity of ethics in ontological terms, and second, constructivists can accommodate at least some decisive level of mind-independence that is needed for securing objectivity despite their commitment as a mind-dependence view.

In this section, I want to respond to another objection against constructivist objectivism. This time, however, it does not concern the mere possibility of a constructivist spelling out the conception of objectivity in general; rather, it is raised against the strength of that conception. To be more precise, the objection maintains that the constructivist conception CMO doesn't grant "enough" objectivity in order to compete with an ordinary realist conception of ethical objectivity. And this is so because CMO it misses something important that the realist account on objectivity is able to capture.

If the suspicion were correct, it would mean that there are still doubts about the plausibility of the claim that constructivist objectivism offers a *genuine* alternative to ordinary views about objectivity, stemming first and foremost from the IM- as well as quasi-realist camp. Hence, if these realist views granted a more robust, that is, stronger level of objectivity, and if this stronger level could capture some essential and necessary aspect of the objectivity of ethics, then these views would offer more plausible views on the objectivity of ethics than the constructivist. Consequently, constructivism in the end would not be in a good position to provide an alternative to IMR and/or realist views after all.

But what is it that motivates the suspicion that constructivism in the end can only offer a less robust[83] conception than, say, IMR? A good starting point for this skepticism is presented by Julia Driver's valuable comments on the strength of her own constructivist account of moral reasons in comparison to IMR. Thus, in her 2017 "Contingency and Constructivism" she develops a distinctively Humean theory of moral reasons that aims to

[83] When adopting the term "robust" I use it synonymously with the term "strong" (see above).

generate objective moral reasons on the one hand, while preserving some level of contingency on the other:

> My strategy is to argue for a view which is Humean, but from which we can extract norms that are substantive in the sense of not being contingent on some idiosyncratic features of an agent's psychological make-up but nevertheless *are* contingent on the practical point of view of *social creatures* (Driver 2017, 176, first italics removed, second italics added).

Driver's aim in the end is to show that contingency is not tantamount to any ("vicious") arbitrariness and therefore does not raise the heavy problems of Street's "original" Humeanism (ibid, 173; cf. Kirchin 2017, 8; cf. Dorsey 2018, 577ff.). The argument that is supposed to show why Driver's account does better than Street's makes reference to the social nature of human beings that is apt to ground moral reasons that, while in some sense contingent, are far from arbitrary (Driver 2017, 176ff.). But there is a caveat:

> As social beings communicating with each other on moral matters we have a strong interest in being intelligible to each other. But there is no appeal, here, to creatures with no real interest in mutual intelligibility. Moral reasons do not bind such creatures. For this reason, the view fails to capture the moral phenomenology that helps us see why [the] realist view is so attractive: if it is true that torturing kittens for fun is wrong, it is of necessity wrong – this means that not only is it wrong in all possible worlds, but for all possible intelligent beings it is universally wrong (ibid, 180).

Later on, in chapter 5, I will return to the view that the social nature of human evaluative beings only holds contingently, which, according to my own view, is false. At this point, however, I want to bring to mind two things that are entailed within Driver's argument and that prove to be pertinent to the present discussion. The first is that Driver appears to take very seriously the thought that especially IMR gives us not only more than other accounts with regard to securing a very robust sense of objectivity, but also that by doing so it is in the end IMR that captures moral phenomenology. To be more precise, for Driver,

it is precisely the strong IMRealist sense of (robust) objectivity, according to which moral reasons hold in any possible world, that is entailed within moral phenomenology.

The second thing entailed in Driver's argument is that, obviously, some important element must be missing in the constructivist conception of the objectivity in ethics, for if the realist view is advantageous over constructivism in virtue of presenting a stronger sense of objectivity, a sense that is entailed by moral phenomenology, then constructivism must lack some aspect that proves rather crucial for capturing the conception of ethical objectivity.

So, what is this crucial aspect? As we have seen in Driver's argument, it is the constructivist conception of objectivity that excludes that moral reasons are true in all possible worlds by the theory's preserving a certain level or degree of *contingency* that it allows to enter the content of moral reasons and that prevents the constructivist objectivist from offering the same robust conception of objectivity that ordinary realists allow for. In what follows, I do not wish to go into the detail of Driver's argument, but one way in which her argument certainly appears correct is due to the constructivist endorsement of the weak mind-independence view. To see why this is so, consider what has been said about the relation between constructivist objectivism and the more ordinary realist views such as IMR and quasi-realism. As we have seen, one of the central differences between the three views is that while the former two argue that morality must be independent from what *anyone* happens to think or feel about moral matters, the latter claims that it is only independent from what *some* (may) think about these matters.

Now as we also have seen before, whenever it is allowed that human mental states are part of what it is that determines the truth of moral judgments, some level of contingency enters the truth-conditions of these judgments. After all, even a very abstract human practical standpoint is still the standpoint of a human being, thus containing beliefs, judgments, feelings, aims, desires, and so on, which mirror its standpoint *as* a human being. It follows from this that moral judgments that are determined by human mental states are modally less stringent than they are on the accounts of IMR or quasi-realism, for moral reasons that are determined by human mental states may hold in some (i.e. our) world but not in any other possible world. In this way, it can be explained why – given the commitments of constructivist objectivism as mind-dependence theory – it allows some level of contingency to enter the content of objective moral reasons and why, a fortiori, its

level of objectivity is less strong or robust than on the accounts of the more ordinary realist accounts.

Despite the correctness of the claim that some level of contingency is indeed part of the constructivist conception of moral objectivity[84], I argue that Driver's conclusion – namely that for this reason one may want to prefer IMR – still does not necessarily follow. I demonstrate this by providing two more specific answers to Driver's argument. While the first answer is less central to my overall argument, it is nevertheless important for correctly understanding the importance of Driver's thought.

Thus, consider again the starting point of this section which looked at the assumption that IMR offers a more robust conception of the objectivity of ethics than constructivism. And the question therefore was whether for that reason we should prefer IMRealism over constructivism. Now, Driver's comments seemed to answer the question in the affirmative, insofar as she claims that securing the strong IMRealist level of objectivity is indeed a good reason to adopt the realist view. But one must be careful at this point, for Driver focuses especially on *Parfit's* (realist) view (ibid, 172ff.). However, it remains an open question whether Parfit's version of moral realism, which is supposed to grant the strong robustness of moral objectivity, is in accordance with IMRealism in general, or, to be more precise, whether IMR necessarily grants the strong conception Parfit endorses. For instance, take David Brink's view, according to which a promising realist account of morality could state that moral properties are those that promote cooperation between agents whose nature is deeply social (1984). Here it is the distinctively *human* social nature that provides them with reasons to cooperate with others. Importantly, then, while Brink is a full-blown IMRealist, he nevertheless justifies moral reasons by referring to facts about *human* nature (ibid). It follows from Brink's account that moral reasons that arise from that nature cannot be objective in the strongest sense that Parfit endorses since they are essentially bound to facts about human beings.

Another view that proceeds in a similar way is Katja Vogt's Measure Realism, according to which judgments about goodness are determined with essential reference to what we are as human beings. Therefore, the kinds of reasons, norms, and values that

[84] Note, however, that I am not claiming that contingency enters or is part of the constructivist account only or exclusively due to constructivism endorsing the mind-dependence of morality. There may be additional reasons. See, for example, my human nature argument as part of the hybrid account's securing ethical objectivity (section 4.4).

can be justified by Vogt's account do not hold for every possible creature but only and crucially *for us*, i.e. human beings (Vogt 2017, 92ff.).

It follows from these accounts that one needs to distinguish between some IMRealist views that *do* grant the strong sense of robustness of the conception of objectivity in ethics that Driver thinks attractive, and those that do not. Accordingly, it is not correct to assume that IMR *as such* is well-suited to grant this conception of moral objectivity that is supposed to be convincing, because only some do so.

True, in neither Brink's nor Vogt's case the contingency that enters the content of those moral reasons that result from their account is due to the mind-dependence of these reasons.[85] Note, however, that Driver's argument was that an advantage of the IMRealist view over others is that on the IMRealist account the content of moral reasons is free from *any* kind of contingency. For this reason, it should not matter for Driver's argument how the contingency of moral reasons enters their content, or what kind of contingency it is that does so.

My second answer to Driver's comment dwells on the deeper philosophical question about whether it is indeed true or at least convincing that the strong robustness of the conception of moral objectivity associated with IMR really is *desirable* after all. So, while Driver thinks that there is good reason to endorse the IMRealist understanding of ethical objectivity, the question is whether that is really the case. According to my further argument, the answer to this question runs rather contrary to Driver's own view.

To see why that is, consider a case in the domain of practical normativity more broadly understood, concerning reasons that rest on the badness of pain. It is generally agreed that it is bad to be in pain. In fact, the example of the badness of pain is often taken to render the IMRealist account about moral or value realism plausible in the first place (Street 2006, 144; Parfit 2013) because the universal badness of pain is taken to support the view that there are objective (moral or non-moral) reasons.

The question I now want to tackle is whether this kind of realist account captures something important about our ordinary understanding about the badness of pain that other positions (such as constructivism) miss, but that is *necessary* in order to account for the objectivity of those reasons. To be more precise, the question is whether, in order to

[85] See 4.6 for further discussion of this point.

account for how we ordinarily understand objective reasons, their objectivity must be understood in the maximally robust sense of objectivity that IMRealists endorse, that is, in all possible worlds.

In contrast to Driver's own assumptions, it appears that, in general, there is no problem at all with claiming that reasons relying on the badness of pain *do not* carry with them the strong level of necessity that Driver claims to be desirable. And this holds *even though* under normal conditions we think that being in pain, *objectively* speaking, *is* a bad thing. That is, even though we can all agree that being in pain is *objectively* bad in the sense that its badness is not due to a mere subjective psychological constitution, that does *not* necessarily mean that pain is bad in all possible worlds.

The explanation that underlies this insight is that being in pain is bad only for those who have a distinct physiological as well as psychological constitution that allows them to evaluate states of their mind and body in a specific way. As Street correctly argues, "there are two elements involved in the experience of pain: a sensation plus an unreflective evaluative reaction to that sensation" (Street 2006, 147; cf. Parfit 2013, 54 f.). Therefore, for someone to experience pain, she has to have what is commonly called C-fibers, and she must interpret the signals of her C-fibers in a specific way. It is, however, not of strict necessity that every conscious creature must interpret the signal of C-fibers in the way we (normally) do. On the contrary, it is at least imaginable that there exist conscious creatures that either have learnt to or just function in the way that they do not interpret the signals of their C-fibers in the way we (ordinarily) do. In other words, there is a crucial element of contingency involved in the badness of pain because the crucial and distinctive way of our experiencing pain in the way we normally do is in no way necessary. On the contrary, it is due to our contingent nature as the kind of beings that have C-fibers, experience them in such and such a way, etc.

The question then is whether these considerations about the contingency of the badness of pain in any way undermine the objectivity of those reasons that refer to it. If Driver is correct, then there should indeed be a problem with the contingency entailed within the badness of pain in the sense that it cannot render reasons to be objective that are about pain. But the contrary is correct, so that the above considerations about the contingency of what is involved in order for a creature to be in the position to experience pain in the way we do, in no way undermine the objective character of those reasons that

are about pain. On the contrary, they leave all its objectivity intact. For, say that it is acknowledged that putting others into pain is a bad thing. Given what has been shown before, the objective character of the reasons that refer to the badness of pain is in no way undermined or even diminished when taking into account the fact that being in pain may only be bad for *some* kinds of creatures in *some* world(s). Thus, there is no problem at all with maintaining that being in pain is "just" bad *for us* as the kinds of creatures that we are while still being objectively a bad thing. And this is due to the fact that just because being in pain is bad for us does not make being in pain any less a bad thing for all those who share our human constitution.

Now, as we have seen, a great part of what explains the badness of the action of putting someone in pain is due to the constitution of the person who is put into pain, that is, that she has C-fibers, that they function in a specific way, and that she interprets the signals of the C-fibers by disliking them. A consequence of this argument then, as Driver correctly claims, is that it may in fact not be morally wrong to intentionally put in "pain" a creature that interprets the signals of its C-fibers differently. By doing so, we have allowed some decisive level of contingency to enter the considerations of what accounts for the badness of putting another person into pain, for a central condition for ascribing badness to the action was due to the constitution of the kind of being who is affected by the action. This is a condition, however, that is far from necessity, for there is no reason to suppose that every being necessarily interprets the signal of their C-fibers in the specific way as *we* commonly *do*. After all, not only is the very having of C-fibers an *empirical* fact, but so too is our distinctive interpretation of it (cf. Street 2006).

Yet, again, the important point is that if we think about the impact of these considerations on our actually held reasons concerning the badness of putting another person in pain, it appears that the objective character of these reasons is in no way undermined by them. Quite the opposite, for when thinking about the contingent elements that have entered those reasons, it seems that we just are reflecting on the factors that are constitutive of its content. After all, the constitution of human beings as the creatures that are such and such inter alia is constitutive for what accounts for the moral badness of putting people in pain. And precisely for this reason it is very hard to see how these considerations could stand in the way of allowing for the view that it is *objectively* wrong to put another person in pain.

What this argument shows is three things. First, that once we acknowledge that the pain-example is unproblematic, there should be no problem at all with allowing for at least some level of contingency to enter moral reasons *without* pressing any worries about the *objectivity* of these reasons. Therefore, there should be no problem at all with the level of the contingency that enters the content of objective moral reasons on the theory of constructivist objectivism.

The second proven aspect is that given that the pain-example is unproblematic, common normative practice *already* allows for at least some level of contingency to enter and thus form part of normative reasons that are granted to hold objectively. Third, and finally, the example shows that the IMRealist strongest version of the robustness of the conception of objectivity adds some rather superfluous element to our ordinary understanding of objectivity in the normative as well as moral domain. The element is superfluous because, at least in our commonly used way, moral as well as normative reasons in general are allowed to be objective while still entailing some decisive level of contingency. The case of the badness of pain – the case of the moral badness of putting others in pain – is a perfect example for that ordinary use. After all, what the example shows is that it is most commonly agreed that being in pain is a bad thing while at the same time holding that the badness of pain is essentially due to a contingent constitution of those creatures who are put in pain. If this is correct, then it is simply not clear what the strongest level of objectivity that the IMRealist such as Parfit endorses is supposed to add to the level of objectivity that the constructivist objectivist is willing to secure. On the contrary, it appears that the IMRealist aims to capture something that does not matter at all in the ordinary understanding of (objective) moral reasons. If this is true, then it follows that the strongest or most robust sense of objectivity is, in fact, not in accordance with moral phenomenology after all. For if it were entailed in the phenomenology of morality, common moral agents would make use of it. As we have seen, however, they do not do so.

Given the correctness of these considerations, the claim that the IMRealist robust conception of objectivity in the moral domain captures something important and valuable is wrong because of two reasons: first, because it mistakenly holds that the realist conception is in accordance with moral phenomenology; and second, because it maintains that the realist conception is valuable. What follows from my argument then is that not

only should there be no problem at all with the constructivist objectivist conception CMO, but also that any further strengthening of the robustness entailed within CMO is not helpful to begin with because it would be at odds with how we commonly judge and think about moral matters in the first place.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have carried out the first step of my aim of providing a new, hybrid account of constructivist objectivism by answering the first of two central questions surrounding this account, namely how constructivists understand the very concept of ethical objectivity.

To this end, in section 3.2, I have described how the hybrid account understands the notion of moral objectivity in terms of universality before then, in section 3.3, defending why there is, against rather considerable skeptical concerns, no problem at all with constructivists coming up with a conception of ethical objectivity to begin with.

Finally, I have answered the objection that because CMO refuses to secure a maximally robust conception of moral objectivity, it is missing something important, something that, as Julia Driver suggests, is entailed by moral phenomenology and captured by moral realism. As we have seen, however, this assumption is not correct after all, for phenomenology does in fact *not* require that strongest kind of robustness, so that the IMRealist aims to capture something that does *not* play any important part in the ordinary use and understanding of the objectivity of ethics .

If these arguments are correct, then a first important step within my overall aim to provide a new account of moral objectivity on behalf of metaethical constructivism is secured, for it has been established that constructivism can make good sense of the very concept of the objectivity in ethics (and that this concept is in no way inferior to any realist description). Note, however, that despite the importance of this result, it does not already establish that my introduction and defense of a constructivist objectivist account is successful, for it still lacks an answer to the second question concerning the constructivist objectivist theory, namely in virtue of what objectivity is secured. Answering this question will be the principal focus of the next chapter. Only if this second question is answered too will my arguments in favor of establishing a novel objectivist account be rendered successful.

4

Moral Objectivity II
– The Normativity of Human Nature

4.1 Introduction

In chapter 3 I have argued why quarrelling with the objectivity of ethics is, for the constructivist, one of the most important aims in rendering her overall project successful. I argued that this is not only because any metaethical theory must account for the objective features of common moral practice and discourse, but also, more importantly, because the constructivist intends to provide an even more plausible alternative to realist views within metaethical debate, such as independence moral realism (IMR) or those views from the non-cognitivist camp that "mimic" IMR such as quasi-realism.

Now, since defining and securing the objectivity of common moral practice and discourse is understood as an important project for any metaethical theory, we expect constructivists to make sense of ethical objectivity too. As we have seen, in order to render plausible the constructivist account on moral objectivity, two fundamental questions surrounding the issue of objectivity must be answered: first, how constructivism understands the very concept of objectivity in moral practice and discourse; and second, in virtue of what is objectivity supposed to be granted or secured.

While In chapter 3 I started to develop my novel, hybrid account on behalf of constructivist objectivism by focusing on the first question concerning the constructivist way of defining the concept of ethical objectivity, this chapter is dedicated to the second question, that is, how constructivism attempts to *secure* the objectivity of ethical discourse and practice. Why is answering the second question so important in the first place? That is to say, why is the constructivist account of moral objectivity not already rendered plausible after having answered the first question? After all, the result of chapter 3 has been that constructivism can account for a robust conception of ethical objectivity, so why is there a need to dwell on this second point?

In fact, it is not very difficult to see why constructivists have to answer both questions, for it is one thing to show that a theory has the *theoretical* resources or means to account for the *concept* of objectivity, and quite another to demonstrate that it can in fact *establish* objectivity. To see why that is the case, consider Street's version of Humean constructivism (HC). I hold that a very promising interpretation of HC understands it as a kind of error theory about moral objectivity. Recall that error theories proceed in two steps: first, they envisage the concept of a given matter such as, say, moral obligation, that is, they analyze how the term is commonly understood and used, and then, in a second step, they make the substantive claim that there is something that corresponds to this concept.[86]

Now HC makes a very similar move with respect to moral objectivity. To be more precise, it does so with respect to the conception of objectivity that I have developed in chapter 3 (and that also Kantians endorse).[87] Hence, take Street's characterization of the quarrel between Kantianism and Humeanism. Street describes HC as the theory that denies that *there is* or ever can be objectivity in moral practice (Street 2010; 2008). Accordingly, she states that HC follows from the "untenability of realism plus the failure of Kantian versions of metaethical constructivism" (Street 2010, 370). What HC does not reject, however, is the Kantian *understanding* of objectivity. It rather claims that there is *nothing that corresponds* to this conception of objectivity because Kantianism ultimately fails to show that every agent is forced to accept moral conclusions, reasons, or values (Street 2008; 2010).

Given that my hybrid account shares the Kantian understanding of the very concept of ethical objectivity, HC's error theory about moral objectivity also applies to my view. After all, because both my and the Kantian theory cash out moral objectivity in terms of

[86] See 1.2. and 3.3.1.

[87] In fact, the question whether or not Humeanism is a brand of an error theory of moral objectivity is more complex because it depends on how the concept of ethical objectivity is cashed out on the one hand, and who advocates HC on the other. Take the first point and recall current constructions of an objectivist account on behalf of Humeanism. It is not true to claim that Humean objectivists such as Driver or Dorsey are error theorists about moral objectivity *as such*. They are, however, error theorists about ethical objectivity if objective moral reasons or claims are supposed to hold universally (cf. Driver 2017, 176; Dorsey 2018, 575) as both Kantianism and indeed my own hybrid account maintain. When it comes to the second point, then, there is Sharon Street's version of HC, where it is not so clear that Street "only" endorses an error theory about moral objectivity in the stronger but also in the Humean objectivist sense. After all, Street's version of HC claims that moral reasons are only due to an agent's *individual* set of "evaluative starting points" (Street 2010, 370). Hence, it appears that Street, in virtue of her embracing moral subjectivism is committed to maintain that there cannot be any kind of objectivity in the moral domain. To avoid confusion in this regard, note that when I understand HC as an error theory about moral objectivity, I refer to Street's version.

universality, but HC maintains that there are no moral reasons that apply universally to everyone, HC must be considered as an error theory not only in respect of Kantianism, but also in relation to the hybrid account.

It follows that even though my argument has established that constructivists can grant a plausible *conception* of ethical objectivity, considering HC's error theory, I have yet to show how constructivism proceeds in order to *grant* or *secure* the objectivity of ethics. This is what I aim to do in the present chapter.

The claim that I defend here is two-fold. First, I hold that constructivism secures the objectivity of ethics in virtue of the two interrelated elements that also capture the very core of the constructivist theory in metaethics, namely (i) the constructive procedure; and (ii) the basis of construction, or practical standpoint. In this way, then, the constructivist theory of moral objectivity is *continuous* with its explanation of the existence of moral truth. Second, I argue that while the constructivist core elements (i) and (ii) are the crucial features that grant objectivity, they need to be interpreted in a *distinct* way so that objectivity is secured due to moral judgments undergoing a process of *idealization* on the one hand, and their being formed on the basis of a *universal point of view* understood in terms of *human nature* on the other.

The plan of this chapter is as follows. In section 4.2, I explore the general outlines of the constructivist objectivist theory as I defend it here. Section 4.3 then considers and answers two crucial objections against idealizing strategies that are not only supposed to be problematic in themselves, but also seem incompatible with the constructivist anti-realist commitments. In section 4.4, I develop what I hold to be an attractive interpretation of the universal standpoint, namely in terms of *human nature*. My argument states that constructivist objectivists, while coming up with a plausible understanding of the universal point of view, can draw inspiration from Aristotle's human functioning argument as developed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7. In sections 4.5 and 4.6, I answer some common objections against the normative authority of human nature in general and then discuss whether the account that I defend is in accordance with the overall constructivist theory. Section 4.7 concludes.

4.2 Securing Moral Objectivity: Constructive Procedure and the Practical Standpoint

In this section, I develop the outlines of a new constructivist way of securing the objectivity of ethics. I argue that this constructivist account secures moral objectivity in virtue of the two features that lie at the heart of the constructivist theory in general. Thus, recall my definition of the constructivist position according to what I have called *Sophisticated Constructivism* (SC):

> Constructivism is the view that moral truths and facts are not discovered or tracked, but that they are the output of a hypothetical procedure that is applied to some proper input in terms of the basis of construction, or practical standpoint[88].[89]

SC shows that two elements are essential for spelling out the constructivist position in metaethics: first, the (hypothetical) *procedure*; and second, the *basis of construction* or *practical standpoint*. Accordingly, constructivism holds that truth in moral practice comes into existence or is granted when agents are engaging in a constructive procedure, that is, when they are reflecting on the practical standpoint.

Now, as the characterization of SC makes clear, the procedure and the practical standpoint first and foremost are taken to explain the constructivist account on moral *truth*. Therefore, when my claim is that both features as well as their interplay are well-suited to explain and justify *objectivity* in moral practice, this requires further argumentation, for (as we have seen in chapter 3) the constructivist (plausibly) conceives of moral objectivity in a non-reductive way, that is, as something over and above the (mere) instantiation of moral truth.[90] However, if it were now established that the constructivist explanation of moral truth already suffices to justify the objectivity of ethics, then it appears that constructivism endorses a reductionist view about ethical objectivity after all.[91]

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[88] I use the phrases "basis of construction" and "practical standpoint" interchangeably. For further argumentation on this point see 1.3.
[89] In 1.3 I specify some more what counts as the basis of construction.
[90] See 3.2.
[91] An additional reason for avoiding this result is due to my argument in chapter 2 where I showed that a great explanatory advantage of constructivism over other theories such as IMR and quasi-realism is that it accounts for the genuine possibility of moral relativism. My argument was that metaethical theorists have reason to account for the very possibility of the relativist position, since in common moral practice not only do people have sincere intuitions about the truth of relativism but there also is an ongoing and sophisticated

A good way to see how constructivist objectivism, despite this prima facie difficulty, can be continuous with its explanation of the existence of moral truth, let me go into more detail concerning the nature and functioning of both elements which, I hold, not only define the constructivist view, but also are supposed to lead to objectivity in ethics.

To begin with, consider the basis of construction, which has two functions. First, it provides the starting point of construction. Because the constructivist process of construction does not start from nowhere or "nothing" (Bagnoli 2002, 131; cf. Bagnoli 2014, 317), it needs some proper starting point. This is given precisely in terms of the basis of construction, or practical standpoint (cf. Bagnoli 2014, 318). Second, the basis entails the necessary "constraints" of construction that guide and regulate the deliberative or reflexive activity, i.e. the procedure (Bagnoli 2002, 133; cf. Bagnoli 2014, 320). These constraints themselves are not constructed; rather, they are entailed within the concepts of *what we are* that the constructivist is reflecting on (Bagnoli 2002, 132–3; 2014, 318). For instance, when we are reflecting on, say, rational agency, certain facts about agency have to be taken into account that can be determined through ordinary conceptual investigation of *what it is to be* an agent. We may thus come to understand, through such investigation, agents as finite or limited beings (Bagnoli 2002, 133), find out that agency has a temporal dimension, etc. These constraints then inform and frame (ibid) the constructive procedure by providing the "*materials*" of construction (O'Neill 2002, 7; cf. Bagnoli 2014, 314).

Second, there is the constructive procedure that is applied to the basis. The procedure encompasses and is thus guided by certain *standards of correctness* that are given by the practical standpoint and that determine *what it is* for persons engaging in that kind of inquiry (James 2012). As Bagnoli argues: "[C]onstruction is an activity that is regulated and governed by principles. There are methods for construction and *constraints* that bear on construction" (2002, 132). These constraints are granted by what is entailed in the practical standpoint and then importantly bear on and guide the constructive procedure (ibid).

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philosophical debate about it. Constructivism, as I have shown, by contrast to IMR and quasi-realism, can account or this possibility. However, if my argument in this chapter was that SC already entailed objectivism about morality, then the constructivist position (at least understood in terms of SC) could not account for the possibility of moral relativism after all. A fortiori, my argument in favor of the attractiveness of metaethical constructivism in chapter 2 would fail.

Note, however, that my argument of how constructivism can secure objectivity in ethics does not just refer to the two considered features but, in addition, holds two additional claims: first, that in order to grant objectivity, both the basis of construction and the procedure have to be *interrelated*; and second, that objectivity can be secured only if a *specific*, that is, refined, interpretation of both elements is adopted.

Let me start with the former point by clarifying why, on the constructivist account, both elements (i) and (ii) must be interrelated with one another so that objectivity cannot be secured by one element alone, but rather by both of them working together.

A very general explanation for this is that it is hard to see otherwise how my constructivist objectivist argument can be congruent with SC and therefore be considered as a *constructivist* theory to begin with. After all, constructivism in metaethics just is the view that normativity comes into existence when rational reflection is applied to a certain basis. Therefore, both elements must be interrelated in order to remain an expression of the overall constructivist theory.

Independently of the worries about the compatibility of my argument with SC, however, there are good reasons to think of both the reflective process and the basis of construction as interconnected with one another, namely because it is otherwise difficult to see how objectivity can be secured in the first place. To see why that is so, consider two alternative proposals. While the first maintains that rational reflection is enough to secure objectivity, the second maintains that one merely needs to introduce a general (or universal) point of view.

The first proposal fails because it is only compatible with securing moral subjectivism (only). After all, there already exists a constructivist position that proceeds in very similar terms, namely HC. Humeanism is the view that agents, in order to determine normative truth, ought to engage in a deliberative process on their individual practical standpoint. Therefore, the Humean view grants that there are certain standards of correctness for accurate deliberation and that agents can be mistaken in their reasoning (Street 2008; 2010; cf. Hopster 2017, 770–1). It does so in virtue of holding that all normative truths must be determined due to whether or not a normative judgment "withstands scrutiny" from all the other judgments an agent holds (Street 2008; 2010; cf. Hopster 2017, 770; Dorsey 2018, 577). The latter qualification, however, does not by itself establish that the reflective process, understood in this way, leads to objectivism in the

normative or moral domain. On the contrary, since an agent, on the Humean view, determines only what follows from her *individual* standpoint, the reasons that follow from that standpoint are not objective in the first place.

The second alternative also fails, according to which one would merely analyze what follows from a general or universal point of view without referring to the additional element of rational reflection.[92] The problem here is that it is simply not clear in which way judgments from the standpoint are supposed to follow. Most importantly, without making reference to a proper method of carrying out the analysis of the standpoint, it cannot be ruled out that the moral reasons that are the output of this reflective process are either distorted by interference, i.e. biases, exhaustion, inattention[93], or simply inaccurate.

After all, when agents are biased in their deliberation or overtired, their formed judgments cannot be objective, for they are only the expression of an idiosyncratic method. The same holds when there are no standards at all involved that determine when a certain reflective or deliberative process is carried out correctly, and when it is not. Standards of rationality then do exactly that; that is, they provide rules that determine when a reflective process is carried out correctly or adequately (cf. James 2012).

Now, my aim here is not to give a detailed description of these standards of correctness; after all, what these standards are remains a matter of ongoing debate. For instance, while it is often agreed that certain rules of logic are at least central for reasoning correctly, there are likewise heavy objections against this view (Harman 1986). But despite these difficulties, one can nevertheless take the point seriously that the procedure (inter alia) can secure objectivity in ethics by spelling out how the inquiry is carried out correctly, for the procedure that is supposed to yield objective moral reasons cannot, for the aforementioned reasons, just be carried out in *some* way or other; rather, it can only be conducted in the *proper* way.

[92] The difficulties with this account again start with its incompatibility with metaethical constructivism in general. Thus, while it appears as a plausible candidate for an IMRealist account, it is not well-suited to be understood as a *constructivist* theory on objectivity. As we have seen while discussing what is wrong with Street's practical standpoint characterization of metaethical constructivism in 1.3, the constructivist theory (against Street) holds that normativity is reached by a genuine constructive *process* and thus is not simply laid out. Claiming, however, that some normative truth merely *follows* from a general standpoint does not appropriately account for this process as constructivists normally understand it.

[93] The term "interference" has been introduced in 3.4.

So, thus far, I have dwelled on the first aspect of my account by spelling out what elements it utilizes and why these elements have to be interrelated to one another in order to grant objectivity. I have also maintained, however, that the hybrid account makes a claim concerning the need for a *specific interpretation* of both elements, that is, the constructive procedure on the one hand, and the practical standpoint on the other. After all, I have claimed that while the hybrid view makes use of the two features that (also) lie at the heart of the constructivist theory, in order to grant objectivity in the moral domain they call for further, more specific qualification.

So, let us start with the former element: the procedure. SC's introduction of the constructive procedure does not say very much about how that procedure ought to be understood. I argue that a promising ingredient within the procedure that is supposed to lead to objective moral reasons is the introduction of *idealizing conditions*.[94] The constructivist objectivist would thereby grant what is commonly called "methodological objectivity" (Rosen 1994, 283), which is understood as a feature that regulates inquiries on the one hand, and those who engage in the inquiry on the other:

> To a first approximation, we call an inquiry "objective" when its trajectory is unaffected in relevant ways by the peculiar biases, preferences, ideological commitments, prejudices, personal loyalties, ambitions, and the like of the people who conduct it (Rosen 1994, 283).[95]

Let me explain. SC, in general, holds that making use of a constructive procedure is a necessary part of the overall constructivist theory in metaethics. Introducing merely *some* procedure, however, does not suffice to secure objective moral reasons, because it may allow that a person's idiosyncratic evaluative judgments, biases, desires, and so on, may actually be part of that procedure.

Introducing idealizing conditions is a (first) promising step for securing objectivity insofar as it can eliminate precisely those peculiar idiosyncratic elements that lead only to

[94] I thank Carla Bagnoli for bringing me to this.

[95] It is often objected that methodological objectivity cannot be correct because "it is far from clear that an inquiry with no substantial starting point and substantial constraints apart from the formal constraints of rationality makes sense at all […]" (Rosen 1994, 284). The constructivist can sidestep this problem because she does make use of some "substantial starting point" in terms of the basis of construction, or the practical standpoint.

idiosyncratic and distorted judgments. In virtue of making use of these conditions, constructivist objectivists do justice to the fact that human reasoners often are, when engaging in reasoning, biased, that they have subjective preferences, that they form normative judgments under exhaustion or stress, that there simply is not enough time or information available in order to deliberate most adequately, etc. All these factors are part of our common, everyday practice of reasoning and deliberation, and certainly apply to the moral domain, too.[96]

But there is also the second element, namely the practical standpoint. I have argued that this standpoint, to which the constructive procedure is applied, also needs important qualification. To see why that is the case, take both Street's and Rawls' characterization of the practical standpoint. Street's Humean constructivism aptly shows why it cannot be merely some standpoint that leads to moral objectivity because HC conceives of the practical standpoint in terms of the subjective standpoint of a given individual. Reflecting what follows from the idiosyncratic outlook of a particular agent, however, does not lead to establishing objectivity in the moral or the normative domain in general.

Something of a similar worry applies to Rawls' introduction of the general standpoint, too. As I argued in the third chapter, I object that Rawls (like Street) construes the general standpoint as the standpoint that abstracts from the sets of beliefs and judgments from individual agents. In other words, Rawls appears to think that objectivity is granted as long as moral reasons are not determined on the grounds of a "personal slant"

[96] For instance, take the case of Ruth from Jodi Picoult's novel *Small Great Things* (2016). There, Ruth, an experienced labor and delivery nurse, is forbidden by her supervisor from taking care of a newborn child. One morning, while Ruth and the baby are in the same room, the baby suddenly needs CPR. Because Ruth remembers that she is forbidden to touch the child, she reacts too late and the baby, unfortunately, dies. While under normal conditions it should be clear that one stands under the moral obligation to provide CPR to the helpless child (even more so for a nurse), there are at least three factors that distort Ruth's clear-headed judgment. First, there is the order of her supervisor not to touch the child; second, there is not much time for her to react adequately because the baby is under cardiac distress; and third, Ruth herself is under conditions of anger and insecurity because the only reason why she is forbidden to touch the baby is because its parents are white supremacists who do not want Ruth, a person of color, to touch their newborn. Hence, Ruth is angry at the parents and her supervisors who appear to respect the clearly racist reasons of the parents to keep Ruth away from the child. If we were considering Ruth under ideal conditions of deliberation, by contrast, where all these factors are missing, she surely would have formed a better judgment and thus would have saved the baby. Note, however, that the case is not simply one of weakness of will, as one may want to object, for, as Ruth later admits, she did *not want* to rescue the child. Therefore, it is not that she has formed a judgment about what is the right thing for her to do and simply failed to act in accordance with it. It was rather her judgment that was distorted by the above-mentioned conditions.

(op. cit). But, as we have seen, this is not true, for abstracting from subjective standpoints is compatible with granting relativist intersubjectivism only.[97]

In order to avoid this problematic result, I have argued that moral objectivity should be understood in the sense that moral reasons are objective if and only if they hold universally. Consequently, I have maintained that the general standpoint should be reinterpreted in terms of a universal standpoint. Accordingly, after this rather important qualification, it follows that on the hybrid account the existence of objective moral reasons is secured when rational deliberation (under ideal conditions) is applied to a *universal* standpoint.

Putting things together, then, the constructivist can, according to my proposal, grant objectivity in the following way. When we are concerned with determining objective moral reasons, agents ought to be engaging in an ideal process of rational reflection applied to a proper input in terms of a universal standpoint. This standpoint is *universal* because what we want to determine is neither what is morally right or wrong for me, DK, or for you, XY, nor for a given collective or group, but rather which moral reasons hold (literally) for everyone. At the same time, the procedure of rational reflection must encompass idealized conditions or else it cannot be granted that moral judgments – even though formed on the basis of a universal standpoint – are the idiosyncratic interpretation of that standpoint or just false. Since no idiosyncratic interpretation or mistaken reasoning can lead to objective results, the introduction of idealizing strategies is a convincing theoretical element in the constructivist objectivist view.

So, can we give an example of how this account is supposed to work more concretely? According to my own understanding of the constructivist objectivist theory, it indeed works very intuitively. Thus, say that an agent aims to determine what is morally right to do and wants to do so in distinctively objectivist terms. Given how the concept of moral objectivity was spelled out before, the agent thus aims to determine moral reasons that hold universally, that is, for everyone.

On the IMRealist theory, in order to determine such judgments, one has to mirror a totally mind-independent realm of moral facts.[98] On the constructivist view that I defend here, by contrast, the agent engages in a reflective process on a universal standpoint. At

[97] 3.2.
[98] See 3.2.

this point of my argument it is not clear how such a standpoint must be understood in greater detail. Nevertheless, it is possible to give a more precise description of what the agent who engages in such reflective process is supposed to do.

Thus, first of all, she needs to make sure that those moral reasons that result from her reflection are not the output of a flawed and/or idiosyncratic method. Rather, the formed judgments must stand up to the criteria of what it is to correctly or adequately carry out the procedure.

Second, the agent is not supposed to reflect on her own subjective standpoint (as HC maintains). After all, because such a reflective process only determines what is entailed or what follows from the standpoint of a single agent, it cannot secure objectivity. Things are different, however, when the agent reflects on more general concepts of the practical standpoint. Thus, as I argue in 4.4, a promising interpretation of the universal standpoint is to cash it out in terms of human nature. It follows from the proposal that, in order to determine objective moral reasons, agents are supposed to (correctly) reflect on their nature as human beings.

Finally, then, the outlines and details of the hybrid account that I defend here also show how my proposed version of constructivist objectivism can be congruent with the general constructivist explanation of the existence of moral truth as captured by SC. Thus, recall that at the start of this section I raised the worry that it is difficult to see how any objectivist theory on behalf of metaethical constructivism can make use of only those two features that constructivism refers to in order to justify truth in the moral domain. Given what has been argued, however, it becomes clear that there is no problem with my position after all because whether or not SC is tantamount to constructivist objectivism altogether depends on how both the basis of construction and the procedure are spelled out in detail.

This can best be seen by comparing SC with my objectivist account concerning the differences in the varying interpretations of the practical standpoint and the constructive procedure. Because SC "merely" claims that rational reflection must be applied to the practical standpoint in order to justify moral truth, it is in general compatible with a great number of very different interpretations of this standpoint. Thus, as I argued in the first chapter, constructivism can reflect on the standpoint in terms of very general conceptions of *what we are*, but it can also, as in the case of HC, reflect on the practical standpoint of individuals. Because I have claimed that HC is compatible with SC, it allows that HC counts

as a genuine and plausible interpretation of the constructivist view in metaethics. Nevertheless, what distinguishes HC from my proposed account of objectivism is that both accounts spell out the practical standpoint differently, namely in terms of an *individual* standpoint in the case of HC and in terms of a *universal* standpoint in the case of the (objectivist) hybrid account.

It follows from these considerations that the hybrid view is congruent with SC without making SC itself objectivist because there are crucial differences between both views on account of their different interpretations of the practical standpoint.

But there is also the second element within SC, the procedure. Like in the case of the basis of construction, the continuity of objectivism as presented here is granted by the objectivist specification of the procedure. Thus, note that the constructivist procedure must not necessarily be designed as an *ideal* but only as a hypothetical procedure in the first place (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003, 14; 39)[99]. But the constructivist objectivist, understood as endorsing the hybrid account, utilizes not only *some* procedure (as indicated by SC) but a procedure that encompasses exactly those *ideal* conditions that (inter alia) are necessary to secure objectivity.

In addition, note that even if the general description of SC already entailed ideal conditions, the sense in which these conditions really can grant objectivity depends on the *degree* of idealization and the number of idealizing conditions introduced. To see why this is so, consider HC once again, which may also include some conditions of idealization. For instance, Humeans may argue that the truth of a normative judgment depends on an idealized process of reasoning understood in terms of full coherence. Arguably, however, the granted degree of idealization in this case is, nevertheless, quite minimal since it is compatible with the view that agents may be biased in the first place, that they are not well-informed or experienced, and so on. Thus, considering Rawls' claim that objective moral reasons should not be determined on the basis of a "personal slant", the idealized condition of full coherence on the view of HC cannot rule out that moral judgments just are the expression of personal preferences, beliefs, and so on, after all.

These considerations show that introducing merely *some* level or degree of idealizing conditions may not suffice to secure moral objectivity. Consequently, they show

[99] See 1.3.

that my constructivist objectivist argument can be congruent with SC even if SC were already entailing idealizing conditions in its explanation of the existence of moral truth on the constructivist theory.

Now despite my defense of the very outlines of the constructivist objectivist theory that I am advocating here, many other questions and worries still loom on the horizon. As such, I will have to answer these too in order to render the account plausible. For instance, while I thus far have only argued why there is need to conceive of the practical standpoint in universal terms, it remains unclear that there is such a standpoint in the first place and, if it can be found, how it should be understood in greater detail.

Second, even though I have argued that the constructivist use of idealizing conditions is plausible, there are objections against these strategies that need to be taken seriously, especially for constructivists. Thus, one heavy objection against idealizing conditions – such as idealized reasoning in general – is that agents will be *alienated* by the outcome of their reasoning process (cf. Rosati 1995). An even more pressing objection for constructivism comes from David Enoch who argues that certain metaethical positions lack a plausible rationale for making use of idealizing strategies in the first place (Enoch 2005). While these worries have been discussed primarily in the debate about subjectivism about welfare (cf. Rosati 1995; Sobel 2009; Dorsey 2017), Enoch's critique first and foremost is directed against certain *metaethical* theories, to be more precise against anti-realist theories such as response-dependence theories and metaethical constructivism (even though the latter is not directly mentioned by Enoch).

I postpone any clarificatory remarks about the universal point of view until section 4.4 and focus in the following section on a constructivist defense of her making use of idealizing strategies.

4.3 Two Objections against Idealizing Strategies

Idealizing strategies are a well-known element within first-order ethical (Firth 1951) as well as metaethical views (Railton 1986), theories about reasons (Williams 1981), well-being (Sidgwick 1981; Sobel 2009; Dorsey 2017), valuing (Lewis 1989), and so on.[100] Thus, when

[100] For a very good overview see Enoch 2005, 159f.

it comes to normative ethics, Roderick Firth claims that ethical truths are determined by the choice of ideal observers (Firth 1952). In metaethical discourse, there is Peter Railton's well-known moral realist account, according to which the good for a person is constituted by an agent's ideal self (Railton 1986). And finally, in a similar spirit, subjective theories about well-being claim that the good for an agent A must not be presented by what A in fact desires but what she *would* desire under ideal conditions of full information, experience, etc. (Dorsey 2017, 196), for it is assumed that "[o]nly *idealized* pro-attitudes maintain *evaluative authority*: authority to determine the good" (ibid).

However, even though these strategies figure prominently in the aforementioned debates, and even though they are widely known within the philosophical discourse, they are also subject to major objections. I cannot answer them all here, but instead focus on two worries that, according to my understanding, provide the strongest arguments against idealization strategies in general as well as against the constructivist use of them in particular. These worries raise objections from two different angles: first, there is Connie Rosati's argument that draws out the problematic effects of idealization in theories about well-being; and second, there is David Enoch's argument that highlights the problems from a metaethical perspective.[101]

Let us start with Rosati. As I have said, there are many different ways in which idealized conditions enter into debates about very different subjects, and it does so in many different forms. For instance, one form of idealization is that, as Railton claims, ideal agents should be fully informed, or fully experienced; others, such as Brandt, suggest that pro-attitudes have to pass the test of psychotherapy in order to correctly determine the good (Brandt 1979; Dorsey 2017, 197), and so on. Rosati's critique against idealizing strategies is concerned with the first form, i.e. the condition of full information. She thus raises the worry that this condition, if taken seriously, will lead to a severe form of alienation of the actual person P who is asking what is good for herself on the one hand, and the person under the conditions of full information who has determined the good:

> Given the changes that a person must undergo to become fully informed, Ideal Advisor views do not guarantee that we are the persons who occupy the ideal

[101] For another discussion of both Rosati's and Enoch's arguments see Dorsey 2017, 198ff.

> standpoint. A person might thus plausibly contend that the fully informed person would *not really be her*, just as we now often contend that the person who would result from a procedure that changes us in ways we regard as *alien* would not be us (Rosati 1995, 311, my italics).

The argument states that theories about the good that make use of the idealization feature of full information lead to P being so "distorted" from her actual situation that it appears problematic to suppose that the good really is a good *for P* (Dorsey 2017, 198). Rosati's objection therefore is a problem for the constructivist objectivist because her criticism against idealizing strategies applies to two very crucial premises of the constructivist position in general. Thus, the first premise is presented by metaethical constructivists holding that normative claims in the practical domain ultimately are claims *for us* (cf. Rawls 1980, 524; James 2013; Hopster 2017, 770). The second premise, as I have argued in chapter 1, is due to constructivists thinking that *any* ordinary agent can engage in the constructive procedure that inter alia plays a crucial part in securing objectivity in the ethical domain. Considering both premises, it seems that Rosati's objection decisively weakens the constructivist objectivist account as I have introduced it, because it raises doubts as to whether the objective moral reasons that are the output of the constructive procedure can still hold *for us*, that is, whether "normal" agents can accept these judgments as applying *to them* (and not for a different kind of being such as an ideally rational observer).

A second skeptical argument against idealization, introduced by David Enoch, comes from a more metaethical angle and maintains that those metaethical views that predominantly make use of idealization strategies are not justified in doing so (Enoch 2005). This argument needs more detailed and careful elaboration. Enoch claims that certain metaethical views face a dilemma when making use of idealization strategies (cf. Sobel 2009, 339): on the first horn, these views cannot adopt the most convincing or most natural rationale for making use of idealization, while on the second horn, all the other rationales that they could utilize appear *ad hoc* (Enoch 2005, 760–5).

Consider the first horn of the dilemma. Why does Enoch think that only some views can adopt idealizing strategies while others cannot? The views targeted by his objection are anti-realist response-dependence theories, that is, views that argue that normative

truth is determined by agents' idealized responses. The problem with response-dependence views making use of idealizing strategies then is that they lack the most natural rationale for using such conditions which, according to Enoch, is "to claim that the relevantly ideal conditions are the conditions needed for a reliable *tracking* of the relevant facts" (ibid, 761–2, my italics).

Enoch gives an example of why the tracking-account is the most natural rationale for idealization strategies by considering the case of wanting to know the time. Thus, when someone wants to know the time, looking at a watch is only a good idea if the watch is functioning well. However, an even better option is to have a watch that works ideally well. Why is an ideally functioning watch better than a watch that only functions somewhat well?

> In these cases, some […] idealization is called for because otherwise an epistemic procedure – a way of forming beliefs – may well lead us astray. It the watch is not reasonably accurate […], the epistemic procedure [or reading the time] will fail; it will not be a reliable indicator of the relevant fact [i.e. the time]. And this, of course, is one good rationale for idealization: idealization […] is called for whenever an actual procedure is fallible in ways (partly) *corrected by idealization* (ibid, 762, my italics).

Hence, in the case of reading off the time, assuming an idealized watch is a useful device because it corrects badly functioning watches that can lead astray those who want to know the time. An important premise of this argument, however, is that there indeed are *facts* about the time that the watch is supposed to *track* (ibid, 764). Thus, it is not that the time is 9:43 because this is what the watch indicates, but rather it is 9:43 because it is 9:43. Therefore, what Enoch has in mind when he is referring to facts are arguably not those kinds of facts that, say, constructivists can secure in metaethics, but conceives of them clearly in a realist manner, for it is the realist who claims that normative facts are not determined by procedures but rather are (already) given. This also explains why, according to Enoch, the example shows that the most natural or most plausible rationale for construing an ideal watch is because an ideal watch is best-suited to *track* the time, a term that, as we have seen, is strongly related to IMRealist views in metaethical debate.

The same thought can be applied to metaethics. In the watch case, Enoch claimed that only those theories have a rationale for adopting idealizing strategies that are assuming agents to *track* some facts about the time. When it comes to metaethics, then, the only theories that have a rationale for adopting conditions of idealizations are those which hold that agents are supposed to track normative (or moral) facts. And these theories, of course, are all brands of IMR that makes perfect sense of the tracking-account.[102] After all, IMR holds that there is a realm of normative facts that are not constituted by the human mind and part of the world and must therefore be discovered or tracked. Anti-realist positions, by contrast – such as response-dependence views as well as constructivism – do not claim that agents are supposed to track facts; rather, such views contend that agents' responses or judgments *constitute* these facts. Accordingly, they cannot help themselves to the best rationale for idealization:

> Had the time depended on the reading of my watch, had the reading of my watch made certain time-facts true, there would have been *no reason* (not this reason, anyway) to "idealize" my watch […] (ibid, my italics).

Now, when Enoch applies the example of the watch to metaethical theories such as constructivism, the first horn of the dilemma states that when these anti-realist views hold that idealized judgments or responses determine normativity, they are getting the very premises of using idealization strategies wrong because idealizing makes sense if and only if you are a realist about normativity to begin with: more specifically, if you are an IMRealist who believes in the existence of normative facts that are to be discovered or tracked.

On the second horn of the dilemma, Enoch argues that even if anti-realist views did not endorse the most natural rationale for adopting idealizing conditions, the alternative rationales all appear *ad hoc* (ibid, 765ff.). I will not consider all the alternatives that Enoch discusses; instead, I will focus on what I take to be the most promising suggestion. This alternative rationale is motivated by extensional adequacy (ibid, 766ff.). Here the thought is that at least most of the anti-realist views within metaethical debate are interested in

[102] Here it becomes even clearer that Enoch understands "facts" in a realist manner. For, after all, his whole argument against non-realist views making use of idealizing strategies could not even get off the ground if he allowed that one could understand facts in a non-realistic way.

accounting for the relation between an agent's mental states, judgments, etc. on the one hand, and normative truth on the other. Thus, take response-dependence views. Clearly, these theories' advocates will want to claim that normative truth about, say, what is morally right, or what an agent has reason to do, can indeed be captured by our responses. A quite similar move was made in chapter 3 on behalf of constructivism where I argued that not all mental states, no matter how distorted they might be, are reasonable candidates for securing the objectivity in ethics. The underlying reason for this restriction is precisely that these states very likely will not establish what is, objectively speaking, the right thing to do.

Enoch considers exactly that kind of argument on behalf of (anti-realist) response-dependence theories and states that advocates of this theory may want to claim that extensional adequacy can be established if and only if at least some level of idealization is granted. However:

> The problem with this line of thought is that extensional adequacy can be had for cheap. Whenever one puts forward a theory that is found to be extensionally inadequate, one can […] patch it up and achieve extensional adequacy […]. But such a way of achieving extensional adequacy will be objectionably ad hoc, a case of cheating, really (ibid, 166–7).

What Enoch means is that there must be some reason or rationale for establishing extensional adequacy *other than* merely establishing it *for its own sake* (ibid, 767). For in this case, it remains simply mysterious why we would want to establish it in the first place, and this is what Enoch means when he calls the anti-realist rationales "ad hoc". In addition, the missing (additional) rationale is then, of course, presented by the IMRealist view on normativity, for in that case extensional adequacy ought to be granted because only then are our judgments really *tracking* normative truth. Therefore, so the argument goes, not only is the IMRealist rationale *not* ad hoc and thus a genuine rationale for making use of idealizing strategies. In addition, it follows that anti-realist views must fail because, as *anti*-realist views, they just cannot adopt this genuine rationale that IMR utilizes on principled grounds.

As in the case of Rosati's objection, constructivist objectivism must take Enoch's proposed dilemma very seriously because as an anti-realist view[103] that makes use of idealization, it falls exactly into the category of those views that are the primary target of the objection. Thus, if it turned out that objectivists within the constructivist camp a) have no other rationale for introducing idealizing conditions than that only under these conditions is the tracking of objective moral facts possible, or b) only provide "ad hoc" rationales for idealizing, then this would suffice to show that constructivism and idealization cannot be brought together. A fortiori, the theory of objectivism on behalf of constructivism that I have introduced would fail.

I claim that despite the strength of both Rosati's and Enoch's objections, constructivist objectivists are, notwithstanding their anti-realist commitments, in a good position to sidestep these worries. To see why, let us reconsider Rosati's position. Her critique, in a nutshell, was that at least some idealizing strategies lead to alienation, for the actual agent, who enters the idealized procedure, according to Rosati, very likely has radically different conceptions of what is good for her than what the procedure yields as its output. Now, one quick objection against this argument is that constructivists, in order to grant objectivity in ethics, must not rely on exactly those forms of idealization that Rosati criticizes, namely full information. After all, it is not clear why just any kind of idealized condition must lead to the kind of alienation that Rosati has in mind. For instance, let's say that on the constructivist theory agents ought to be ideally rational, or that they are supposed to stand under ideal conditions of deliberation. Thus, one could say that agents should be ideally coherent as well as totally free from biases, exhaustion, etc. It is prima facie hard to see how someone could adopt Rosati's argument and claim that these conditions (i.e. of ideal rationality or agents standing under ideal conditions of deliberation) are likely to lead to alienation. True, ordinary agents certainly are neither ideally coherent with themselves nor (totally) free from biases, perfectly clear-headed, etc. And they certainly do not stand under the conditions of ideal deliberation. So much, at least, seems

[103] Again, it is important to be clear about how to understand the term "anti-realism" here. As I showed in chapter 1, there are many different connotations of what is meant by being a realist or anti-realist about morality or normativity. In 1.2 I have argued that constructivism is a realist view in virtue of its securing the existence of moral/normative truths, but that it is anti-realist due to its rejecting any ontological foundation for the very existence of those truths. And it is in this sense that I here refer to constructivism as an anti-realist view.

true in the case of ordinary moral agents.[104] But it is one thing to say that such conditions are (however) hard to meet, and quite another to make the objection that they lead to alienation and therefore are in themselves troublesome.

However, even if the quick objection failed, there is a second and even more plausible answer to the proposed objection. This strategy rests on a more careful consideration of the premises of Rosati's argument. After all, it is especially concerned with and thus raised against certain theories of well-being. To be more precise, it is raised against *subjectivist* accounts that make use of idealizing strategies (Rosati 1995). The whole force of her critique against idealization strategies then crucially rests on the fact that it is raised against subjectivist theories about well-being for the following reasons. As Dorsey shows, subjectivism about well-being rests on "the deeply plausible thought" that both underlies and motivates subjectivism, namely that an agent, and what is supposed to be good for her, must fit together (Dorsey 2017, 198–9). After all, subjectivist theories of well-being maintain that the truth of an individual's good is grounded in her pro-attitudes (Sobel 2009, 336). Hence, if one's pro-attitudes make claims about one's well-being true, then the idealized pro-attitudes are likely to be very different from the actual attitudes that an agent has. This is the crucial underlying premise of the force of Rosati's argument.

It is then exactly this premise of the critique that offers a way out for the constructivist objectivist. For, arguably, the metaethical constructivist who is aiming to grant objectivity in moral practice is not at all committed to "the deeply plausible thought" on which subjectivism about an agent's good rests. Thus, even if Rosati is correct, and for the sake of argument I will grant that it is, and idealizing strategies are problematic for subjectivist theories of well-being, the moral objectivist is just involved in a totally different investigation. The constructivist objectivist is trying to secure the existence of objective moral reasons and it is difficult to see why there should be any connection at all between these conditions of objectivity and an agent's current pro-attitudes. On the contrary, as I have discussed in chapter 3, a very basic and common intuition that is associated with moral objectivity is the *inescapability* of moral reasons and claims, that is, the claim that moral claims, reasons, and norms are thought to have force for the agent whether or not they are in accordance with her desires, aims, or intentions. On the contrary, to say that

[104] Think again about the case of Ruth mentioned in 4.2.

moral claims are inescapable means that they hold independently of whether morality "suits you" (Joyce 2001, 32). Accordingly, the inescapability of morality states the exact opposite of "the deeply plausible thought", namely that there must be *no* "fit" between an agent's desires, aims, or preferences and what is the objectively right thing to do. It follows from this argument that alienation in the case of securing moral objectivity should be no problem at all.

What about Enoch's argument then? In that case it is not that Enoch's critique just holds for a very different domain of philosophical investigation. On the contrary, we are in the midst of ordinary metaethical argumentation (even though, as said before, Enoch's objection is mostly discussed in the context of subjectivism about well-being). Thus, recall that his argument was that anti-realist views face a dilemma when trying to give a rationale for adopting idealizing strategies. However, on further analysis, it is not clear that anti-realism is really facing a dilemma after all, for both horns of the "dilemma" are false.

Take the first horn. Enoch's claim was that the best, most promising, or most natural rationale for introducing forms of idealization is that an idealized epistemic procedure most successfully *tracks* certain facts about a given matter. But is that true? It appears not. Thus, consider counter-arguments against the claim. Both Sobel and Dorsey have offered rationales for idealization on behalf of subjectivism about well-being that explicitly do *not* rest on the tracking view. For instance, Dorsey argues that when it comes to valuing, there is a need to introduce the constraint of coherence (Dorsey 2017, 203ff.). But this is not because ideally coherent valuers, under these conditions, are in a good or better position to *track* facts about values, but "only" because otherwise it is hard to see what someone *values* in the first place (ibid, 204). Dorsey's argument rests on considerations of the following kind. Consider the case where I hold that exercising more regularly would be good for me, while at the same time I think that it would be a bad thing for me. Dorsey then maintains that it is hard to see what I value because I am holding two contradictory judgments about what is good for me. In this sense it becomes hard to see for me (as well as for anyone else) to understand what I *value*, that is, exercising or not exercising. Now the important point is that introducing the constraint of coherence, according to Dorsey, can help the agent to (better) understand what she values insofar as the cases of self-contradiction in one's value judgments are ruled out. Of course, this must not necessarily

mean that the constraint of coherence is the only idealizing strategy that helps an agent to understand what she values, but it may be *one* strategy that (successfully) does so.

Sobel, in a similar spirit, claims that the most appropriate rationale for adopting idealization on behalf of subjectivism is, again, not to grant the successful tracking of normative facts, but to allow that the agent, who is considering some good, is provided with "a more accurate understanding of what the option is she is considering" through adequate knowledge of what the option "would really be like" (Sobel 2009, 343).[105] Consider my desire for ice-cream. It appears that when I have such a desire, idealizing the conditions under which I have it seems appropriate because full knowledge about the phenomenological aspect of its taste are certainly helpful in order to determine whether my desire is fulfilled. So, say that I do not merely have a desire for ice-cream but for a specific sort that has some appeal for me. Perhaps it just looks especially tasty and its color allures me. However, it might well be the case that I really do not like the taste of the alluring ice-cream after all, and my ideally informed and experienced self could have made an adequate forecast of my disappointment (cf. ibid, 343–4), thereby silencing my desire to begin with. Therefore, Sobel concludes:

> The idealization is driven by the attempt to capture this. It is important for my purposes that the notions of facts here include an accurate phenomenological impression of what an option would be like for one. But thinking of this as a preexisting fact does not justify the thought that either this procedure is tracking desire-independent facts about what the taster likes best or the idealization has no rationale (ibid, 344).

Of course, neither Dorsey's nor Sobel's attempts to save the strategies of idealization are helpful for the metaethical constructivist, for they are premised on subjectivism about well-being. Nevertheless, they show that Enoch's claim that the best rationale for idealizing certainly is false. For while Enoch claims that the most plausible rationale for introducing realizing strategies is to track independent facts about normativity, Dorsey's and Sobel's

[105] This rationale crucially rests on Sidgwick's argument about idealization: "It would seem then, that if we interpret the notion 'good' in relation to 'desire', we must identify it not with the actually desired, but rather with the desirable […]" (Sidgwick 1981, 110; cf. Sobel 2009, 344).

discussion shows that no reference at all to the tracking rationale must be made in order to render plausible why one wants to introduce idealizing strategies in the first place.

Nevertheless, when it comes to making use of those strategies in the *moral* domain, there is in fact for every theory, whether realist or anti-realist, a very plausible rationale to idealize in virtue of trying to secure the *objectivity* of ethical practice and discourse. Importantly, then, this rationale to idealize holds even *without* holding that there exist moral facts that must be tracked. This rationale, at least in the case of the constructivist objectivist (I ignore other anti-realist views here), can be made plausible in the following way. The constructivist, as we have seen before, does not believe in the existence of independent facts about morality. Her commitment therefore makes it inappropriate for her to adopt what Enoch assumes to be the most natural rationale for her using idealizing strategies. There is, however, a much more reasonable rationale available to her in the first place which is given by the *practice* or *project* in which she engages. Thus, the constructivist objectivist is engaging in a certain kind of project, namely to *secure objectivity* in the ethical domain. Following the results of the previous chapter, objectivity in ethics means that moral truth-conditions are general or universal, i.e. that they apply to every agent.

Suppose further that we are trying to come up with an attempt to secure the universality of moral truth-conditions on behalf of metaethical anti-realism. It is a very plausible argument to maintain that one must refer to idealizing conditions in the process of determining moral reasons because otherwise objectivity cannot be granted in the first place. And this is because without making use of idealization, an agent's responses or judgments that are thought to determine moral reasons on the anti-realist theory will merely be the expression of a person's subjective psychological constitution or faulty reasoning.

To see why that is so, consider a form of brute mind-dependence theory. This theory holds that moral reasons are determined by an agent's individual and particular judgments about moral rightness and wrongness *tout court*, that is, however distorted, irrational, or biased those judgments may be. Consequently, this theory will not lead to objectivity in ethics because it is hard to see how objectivity can be established if moral judgments are constituted by the psychological idiosyncrasies and mistaken deliberation of individual agents. For, again, to endorse the objectivity of ethics means to assume that moral reasons are general or universal. However, if the deliberative process that determines reasons in

the moral domain is the expression of psychological idiosyncrasies, no such reason will ever be objective on mere conceptual grounds. The same, of course, holds in the case of mistaken deliberation, for only a reasoning process that has been formed under conditions of shared standards can determine results that hold generally or even universally.

This explanation shows that the tracking explanation is in fact *not* the best rationale for adopting conditions of idealization after all, for objectivists within the anti-realist camp can help themselves to a proper rationale that holds independently of the assumption of any normative or moral "facts". On the contrary, the constructivist objectivist can argue that the rationale follows quite naturally from the project or pursuit in which she is engaging, namely to grant objectivity in moral discourse.

At the same time, this argument proves why the second horn of Enoch's dilemma is false, too. For the claim here was that in the absence of the "best" rationale (which is, as we now see, not the best after all), the anti-realist adoption of idealization appears ad hoc. This verdict is also false because anti-realism, including constructivism, that aims at grounding objectivity in the moral domain, can hold that this is just what the project of securing objectivity requires. For if it is true that moral objectivity means granting the existence of universal moral reasons, and if it is true that anti-realism cannot do so without making use of idealizing strategies, then this rationale appears not to be ad hoc after all. And again, the anti-realist argument for this rationale crucially does not rest on the view that moral epistemology is first and foremost about tracking moral facts. Consequently, the dilemma is not a dilemma for anti-realism after all and Enoch's objection against anti-realism making use of idealizing strategies fails. If this argument is correct, then there can be no problem at all with constructivists making use of idealizing strategies in order to secure the objectivity of moral practice.

4.4 Human Nature and the Universal Standpoint

4.4.1 The Aristotelian Move

At this point it is helpful to quickly recap what has been argued so far. The starting point of this chapter was presented by the question of how constructivism is able to secure or grant objectivity in ethics. In section 4.2, I argued that there are two elements that importantly figure in the constructivist objectivist account that I defend here: first, the adoption of an

ideal procedure of rational reflection or reasoning; and second, a specific interpretation of the practical standpoint in terms of a universal point of view. The hybrid account of constructivist objectivism that I endorse thus claims that moral reasons are rendered objective insofar as agents reason under ideal conditions about what follows from the universal standpoint. In sections 4.2 and 4.3, I gave a more detailed account and defense of the first element, i.e. the conditions of idealization as built into the constructive procedure.

But there is also the second element, that is, the basis of construction that needs further elaboration. In the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on this matter and argue for a promising way for constructivist objectivists to cash out the universal standpoint. Thus, recall the difficulties noted with regard to the general standpoint advocated by both Rawls and some Humean constructivists such as Driver. While the general standpoint arguably transcends the merely subjective point of view, an immediate difficulty with this proposal is that it ultimately leads to moral relativism (understood as intersubjectivism) only.

In the following I argue for an attractive interpretation of what I have called the universal standpoint that proceeds in terms of *human nature*. This solution is plausible because the standpoint of human beings is not only more general than the standpoint of individual agents, but also it is more general than the standpoint of any collective such as a given group, society or culture. After all, not only are individuals at their most basic level human beings and thus share a common nature, but so too do collectives of such individuals. Following this thought, moral reasons that are determined from a human standpoint are not merely *general* in the Rawlsian or the Humean objectivist sense; they are strictly *universal*.[106] Since to endorse moral objectivism amounts to holding that moral reasons are supposed to hold universally, the proposed theory prima facie looks promising.

When it comes to recent constructivist debate, arguments that explicitly rely on human nature, in order to ground moral objectivity, are not entirely new. They are most prominently put forward and discussed with reference to David Hume's moral theory (cf. Korsgaard 1996; 1999; Driver 2017) or his position on aesthetics (Dorsey 2018). I argue, by contrast, that *Aristotle's* argument in NE I.7 is much better-suited to providing a helpful starting point for a plausible constructivist objectivist's understanding of the practical

[106] Again, I thank Carla Bagnoli for making me better understand this point.

standpoint. To be more precise, my proposal is that for the constructivist objectivist project, it is fruitful to *draw inspiration* from Aristotle's human nature argument. This means to claim that there are *some* aspects of Aristotle's argument that are very promising for constructivist objectivism, while others certainly are not.

So, before I say more about how exactly to understand the relation between constructivist objectivism and Aristotle's account of human nature, let me give a quick description of Aristotle's functioning argument as developed in NE I.7. Aristotle's overall project in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to answer the question of what the ultimate final good is supposed to be (Urmson 1988, 17; Lawrence 2006, 41). This question is motivated by Aristotle's teleological conception of the good, according to which the good always is a good *for the sake of* X (NE 1097a1–15; cf. Lawrence 2006, 39). Thus, if we are analyzing common human action, according to Aristotle, we are always pursuing some good *because* we want to attain another good, and so on (cf. Vogt 2017, 133). For instance, say that you are learning for a test. According to Aristotle's teleological conception, we do so because we want to earn a diploma. And the reason why we want to earn a diploma is because we want to have a good job, etc.[107] The important point then is that Aristotle thinks that at some point this "chain for the sake of relations" (Vogt 2017, 133) must come to an end (NE 1094a21), and that this final end is thought to be a good life, or *eudaimonia* (NE 1097a35).

However, even though eudaimonia is commonly acknowledged to provide the final end, it is not at all clear in what it is supposed to consist (NE 1097b21). Aristotle's solution to the proposed problem is to consider human nature or functioning (NE 1097b22ff.; 1106a15ff.):

> Now this object may be easily attained, when we have discovered what is *the work of man*; for as in the case of flute-player, statuary, artisan of any kind, or, more generally, all who have any work or course of action, their Chief Good and Excellence is thought to reside in their work, so it would seem to be with man, if there is any work belonging to him (NE 1097b22–8, my italics).

[107] The example is drawn from Rapp 2001, 23.

This argument rests on three premises that need to be clarified in order to better understand the point of Aristotle's claim. The first premise is given by a specific understanding of the very term "good", namely in an *attributive* sense in contrast to a predicative sense (cf. Brüllmann 2013, 102ff; Foot 2001, 2–3; Thomson 2008, 3ff.), where the attributive sense means that the judgment that some X is good means that it is good *relative to a certain kind* (Brüllmann 2013, 102). So, consider the judgment that some X is red in contrast to the judgment that some X is small (Foot 2001, 2–3). The difference between both judgments is that in the latter case, the standards of smallness crucially hinge on the object X while this is not true in the case of redness (Brüllmann 2013, 103). After all, the standards of smallness will *vary* with respect to *the object* that is judged to be small. For instance, the standards of smallness in the case of elephants are arguably very different from the standards of smallness of mice. The same does not hold, however, when determining standards of redness, for what is red does not depend on the object that is judged to be red.

Second, Aristotle claims that judgments about what is good hold relative to the function of a certain X (cf. McDowell 1995, 207; Lawrence 2006, 52). Therefore, if we know what the function of, say, a knife is, we also know what a good knife is (Brüllmann 2013, 103). For a knife is designed as having a proper function or purpose, namely to cut. Accordingly, to claim that a knife is good means that the knife fulfills its function well, that is, that it cuts well. In this sense, the attributive sense of "good" grounds the functional, teleological perspective of determining the good (ibid, 104).

Third, Aristotle supposes that determining the good in the case of living things such as human beings is *continuous* with the evaluation of knives and other artefacts in terms of "good" and "bad" (ibid, 104f.). For as we have seen in the first and second premise, he is assuming that judgments about the good *in general* must be formed in relation to an X's function or purpose. Accordingly, when Aristotle argues that the highest good for humans must be determined in relation to their *function*, he is assuming that judgments about the good of human beings work in the same way as judgments about the goodness of, say, knives.

Now, there are two important points about Aristotle's human nature argument that need to be emphasized in order to better understand in which sense the constructivist objectivist account that I defend here draws inspiration from it and in which sense it does

not. The first important point is that Aristotle's argument is a brand of so-called *perfectionist* arguments, while secondly, it captures human nature in *essentialist* terms. Because both aspects are crucial for my further argument, let me say a bit more about them.

Let us start with the former. Perfectionist arguments in general provide a distinct and unified explanation of the good in virtue of identifying the good as what fulfills the nature of the species to which one belongs (Brink 2008; Bradford 2016). So, while, say, objective list theories just give a mere list of what is supposed to be good for agents, perfectionist accounts give a distinct and unifying rationale for why these goods are supposed to be good in the first place and why they are connected to one another (Brink 2008). This rationale proposes that the good for an x is "identified by the core account of *what it means to be an x*, by the core account of x-hood" (Dorsey 2010, 61, my italics). Thus, in the case of determining the good for human beings, the perfectionist claim is that the good is determined by "what it means *to be human*" (ibid, my italics).

Perfectionism thereby involves three moves: first, the claim that the good is determined by what it means to be an X; second, the presentation of the "core capacities" that crucially are part of or constitute X; and third, the identification of certain activities that are expressive of those capacities (ibid, 62). The perfectionist theory, at its very core, then makes a very peculiar normative claim insofar as it maintains not only that the good life is determined by human nature, but in addition that agents *should develop* their human capacities so as to live such a good life (Bradford 2016, 124–5). Thus, when it comes to Aristotle, he identifies the core capacity of human beings with exercising the rational part of the soul (NE 1098a7–8; cf. Dorsey 2010, 63) and then makes the characteristically perfectionist claim that individuals ought to promote these capacities (NE 1098a16; cf. Bradford 2016, 124). Hence, as Richard Kraut writes:

> [T]he ultimate aim of human life, and the proper function of human beings, is to use reason well, and this goal can be reached in either of two ways: ideally, by leading a philosophical life and making contemplation one's highest aim; but if that option cannot be taken, then we do best by fully developing the practical virtues and exercising them on a grand scale, in the political area (Kraut 1989, 7, in: Dorsey 2010, 63).

In a nutshell, then, Aristotle's perfectionist argument maintains that because the good consists in exercising one's most distinct capacities as a human being, and because these capacities are understood as using one's reason well, agents ought to exercise their reasoning capacities in order to reach the good (Bradford 2016, 124).

Secondly, Aristotle's understanding of human nature proceeds in *essentialist* terms (Machery 2008, 232). According to this description, human nature "is the set properties that are separately necessary and jointly sufficient for being a human" (ibid, 131). In addition, according to the essentialist sense, these properties are thought to be possessed only by and thus unique to human beings (ibid). Considering what has been said about Aristotle before, it becomes clear that he clearly endorses the essentialist understanding of our nature in virtue of his attempt to define the nature of human beings in such a way that this description, first of all, holds for human beings only, and secondly, is thought to be sufficient to mark out a human being. And, of course, there then exists a crucial relation between Aristotle's essentialist and perfectionist accounts, for recall that according to the perfectionist argument, there is reason for every agent to develop her capacities that are distinct for her *as a human being* and that thus distinguishes her from any other animal (cf. Bradford 2016, 124).

In the next section, on the basis of the analysis presented thus far, I explore why and in what sense Aristotle's human nature argument is promising for the constructivist objectivist (and in which sense it is not). As I show in the following, while there are arguably many problematic aspects to be found in this argument, its distinct rationale for making use of the very notion and concept of "human nature" provides an especially interesting argumentative strategy for the constructivist who aims to secure objectivity in moral practice and discourse.

4.4.2 Aristotle and Constructivist Objectivism

In the last section, I have given a more detailed description of Aristotle's human nature argument. Now, I hold that even though there exist crucial differences (to be discussed later)[108] between Aristotle's argument and the constructivist objectivist account that takes

[108] One very general difference between Aristotle's account and my constructivist objectivist account that I want to mention right away concerns the interpretation of the term "human *functioning*". Take the second

it as a starting point, it is nevertheless fruitful for the constructivist to draw on Aristotle for two main reasons. The first, and most important, reason is that both Aristotle and constructivist objectivism share the same *bi-partite rationale* for referring to human nature in the first place, where the specific structure of this rationale is driven by two concerns that lie at the very heart of both Aristotle's and the constructivist objectivist's concern: (i) to construe the truth of normative judgments with essential reference *to us* as human beings; and (ii) to establish objectivity in the normative (or moral) domain.

To see why this is the case, let us turn first to Aristotle. His starting point of the *ergon* argument is that he wants to determine what is "good *for man*" (McDowell 1995, 208; Vogt 2017, 93), and it is precisely for this reason that he provides an analysis about what a human being *is* (NE 1097b22ff.; Vogt 2017, 92–3). At the same time, however, he is driven by the concern of establishing *objectivity* in determining what is supposed to be good. Aristotle argues that while it is commonly agreed that the good life is the appropriate final good toward which all humans aim, there is deep disagreement about what the good life is supposed to consist in because there are so many varying opinions about it (NE 1095a20). It is human nature, then, that gives us exactly the kind of objective basis from which judgments about the good life can be derived due to the first and second premises of the human function argument. The first premise was that the attribute "good" is interpreted in an attributive sense so that an object's goodness depends on the nature of the object in question. The second premise was that judgments about the good crucially hinge on the function or purpose of some X. Thus, if we want to know what, say, a good knife is, we need to be clear about the function or purpose of a knife. Both premises lead to objectivity in the practice of making judgments about goodness because the criteria for, say, the goodness of knives are not simply chosen or constituted by our mere feelings or opinions; instead, they are determined by the very *concept* or *nature* of, in this instance, knives (Brüllmann 2013, 103):

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and third premises of Aristotle's argument. These were given by the idea that the good must be spelled out with reference to an X's nature or function, and that judgments about human functioning are congruent with judgments about the functioning of artefacts and objects. It is first and foremost the latter thought that raises some problems since it is not at all clear – at least for the purpose of my argument – that humans *have* a function in the exact same sense that a knife has such a function. Therefore, while it is problematic to identify the term "functioning" with "nature", I take the former just to designate the "characteristic activity" of human beings (cf. Dorsey 2010, 66). But for the sake of clarity, from now on I will use only the term "human nature".

> The basic idea is that using the words "a good knife" correctly implies using them in conjunction with those criteria that "*really* are" the criteria for good knives, that is, in conjunction with *objective* standards (ibid, 104).

I argue that constructivist objectivism shares exactly the same kind of rationale for referring to human nature because (i) as a *constructivist* view, it wants to determine what is morally true *for us*, while (ii) as an objectivist theory, it aims at establishing objectivity in moral practice. So, let us take (i) first. Here, constructivist objectivism has two reasons for referring to human nature in virtue of being a constructivist theory. The first is due to constructivism in general holding that there are no independent moral facts in the world that agents ought to discover or track. Therefore, because there is no such independent realm of facts, constructivists start their metaethical inquiry with the claim that normative notions such as "reason", "obligation", "value", etc. must always be interpreted in relation *to us*, for it is in the end we that are at once the target and the source of these notions.[109] To put it more metaphorically, while IMRealists in particular, in order to ground morality, turn their attention to what lies outside of us, i.e. the world, constructivists focus on the "inside", that is, ourselves.

Second, recall that for the constructivist the whole phenomenon and problem of (practical) normativity arises first and foremost *because* of *what we are* (Korsgaard 1996, 50). Thus, as Korsgaard has argued, "the problem of normativity" arises because of "our reflective nature" (1996, 49). This is because agents, by contrast to non-human animals, are able to distance themselves from their desires and demand *reasons* for doing or believing such and such (cf. Bagnoli 2007, 19). This problem is even more pressing in the case of moral demands (Korsgaard 1996, 8ff.):

> [F]or the day will come, for most of us, when what morality commands, obliges, or recommends is *hard*: that we share decisions with people whose intelligence or integrity don't inspire our confidence; that we assume grave responsibilities to which we feel inadequate; that we sacrifice our lives […]. And then the question – *why*? – will press, and rightly so. Why should I be moral? […] We are asking what

[109] See my earlier arguments in chapter 1; see also Korsgaard 1996, 50.

justifies the claims that morality makes on us. This is what I am calling "the normative question" (ibid, 9f.).

Now, Korsgaard claims that a "clear statement of the problem is also a statement of the *solution*" (ibid, 49, my italics), and then engages in a deeper analysis of our nature as reflective creatures (ibid, 49ff.). Therefore, the rationale why one has reason to consider human nature as a starting point for providing the proper foundation of normativity is, at least on the constructivist reading, because it is *due to human nature* that questions about the force and authority of normativity in general and morality in particular arise in the first place.

But note that I have maintained that the constructivist objectivist shares with Aristotle a *bi*-partite rationale for referring to human nature. So after having argued what the first aspect consists in, clarification is needed with regard to aspect (ii) which, according to my understanding, is due to Aristotle's and the constructivist objectivist's aim to establish *objectivity* in the moral (or normative) domain. Making reference to human nature is promising in this regard since human nature provides an *objective basis* from which objective judgments about moral right- and wrongness can be derived. This, again, is for two reasons. The first is due to the second premise of Aristotle's human functioning argument where it is said that the standards of goodness, or of a good life, are determined not by mere opinions and preferences of individuals, but by the very *concept* of *what it is* to be a human being.

Now, constructivist objectivism can make use of this idea by arguing that if objective moral reasons are to be determined, these reasons arguably must be free from individual opinion, preferences, biases, etc. Human nature can provide such a basis because in order to correctly grasp what it is to be a human being, what is needed is *conceptual* analysis of that kind of being, i.e. an analysis that is qua its very nature free from individual biases and preferences, mere opinions and subjective outlooks.

The second reason why the appeal to human nature is promising for establishing objectivity in the moral domain is because human nature can provide us with a *corrective* of our more *individual* opinions, beliefs, and judgments about ethical matters. To see why that is, consider Vogt's "Measure Realism" (Vogt 2017, 92ff.). Vogt's aim in the fourth chapter of her *Desiring the Good* is to argue for a kind of realist theory about values, i.e.

"Measure Realism", that assumes human nature as the appropriate standard of what is of value: "Measure Realism considers human beings […] as the primary relatum of good-for" (ibid, 104). Therefore, Measure Realism seeks to determine how the world is for us *as human beings* (ibid, 105). By doing so, it inter alia introduces an *evaluative standard* that can *improve* as well as *correct* our actually held beliefs and judgments (ibid, 105ff.): "[Measure Realism] defends a work-in-progress attitude for everyone: in order to get evaluative matters right, a sustained ongoing effort is needed" (ibid, 105). In this respect, then, Measure Realism, according to Vogt, has the "ability to reject certain seemings" (ibid, 106).

The underlying idea of conceiving of human nature as a corrective thus is the following. Whenever we determine normative or moral judgments about what to do, we can do so exclusively on the basis of what constructivists call our own "standpoint", i.e. the whole set of our more particular evaluative judgments, beliefs, desires, or (to use Vogt's expression) "seemings". The problem with this theory is that it makes it hard to see how objectivity in the domain of normativity could be established, for what is missing is a general or even universal standpoint that can correct the more particular and individual standpoints of each particular agent. After all, if normative truth is determined by the individual standpoint, it can only be that very same individual standpoint that can correct judgments (think about Humeanism within constructivist debate). Things differ when there is a general or universal standpoint like the standpoint of human nature that provides a non-subjective and even non-relativist basis from which to construe normative principles. This general/universal standpoint can correct the individual standpoints because it does not encompass the *particular* beliefs, judgments, "seemings", etc. of a *particular* agent in the first place. Because the general/universal standpoint *transcends* the subjective set of judgments and beliefs, it can provide an objective criterion that is apt to correct individual judgments or even individual standpoints as a whole.[110] And, of course, this is the underlying idea behind introducing a general or universal standpoint in the first place, as we saw in our discussion of Rawls' theory of moral objectivity in chapter 3 and at the

[110] One might thus say that in ordinary cases, agents make normative mistakes in forming some normative judgment about, say, what is the morally right thing to do. In these cases one therefore must not maintain that an agent's whole standpoint is mistaken or just off-track. In other cases, however, it is exactly an agent's standpoint that, in general, is flawed. This is clearly true when it comes to the "ideally coherent" Caligula as considered by Street (2009; 2010) and Gibbard (1999, 145).

beginning of this chapter. For because the general standpoint does not consist of judgments being formed from a "personal slant", it is in its very concept independent of the subjective and idiosyncratic outlooks of individuals.

The only additional qualification that is needed in the case of my hybrid account is that the distinctively universal standpoint it utilizes has the ability to provide a corrective not just to any individual standpoint, but to any collective standpoint such as the standpoint of people living in the Western hemisphere or in the 21st century. For recall that what motivated me to neglect both Rawls' and Driver's general standpoint and prompted me to introduce the universal point of view was that the former does not grant universality in the moral domain, that is, reasons that literally hold for everyone.

While I have argued that the specific bi-partite rationale, which both Aristotle and constructivist objectivists (as I conceive them) share, provides the most important reason for objectivists to draw inspiration from Aristotle's functioning argument in the first instance, there is an additional, independent, reason for the constructivist to rely on or make use of the notion and concept of "human nature". This is due to its presenting a promising answer to a challenge against metaethical constructivism in general that was already introduced and discussed in chapter 1.[111] Thus, recall Shafer-Landau arguing that it will be difficult for the constructivist to show that the practical standpoint, on which constructivists reflect, does not entail any moral considerations and values in the first place. For in that case constructivists arguably cannot account for how morality is the *result* of a *process of construction* after all, for they presumed the realm of morality that they wanted to justify through relying on that process.

The Aristotelian move is helpful for constructivists in order to answer that worry insofar as human nature provides a neutral and independent basis for the construction of moral principles (cf. Brüllmann 2013; 99f.). It is both neutral and independent in respect of morality because it is not at all obvious why the mere concept of human beings should relate to any kind of moral reason or value, or why it should give rise to any kind of moral obligation. In other words, it is not clear that humans, merely in virtue of their being human, are forced to acknowledge any kind of moral reasons or norms merely on the grounds that they belong to the human species. On the contrary, precisely because the relation between

[111] See 1.5.

our nature and moral principles is a genuinely open question, it requires a thoroughgoing reflective process to establish it. Constructivism does justice to this thought by understanding (objective) moral reasons exactly as the output of such a reflective process on human nature. Therefore, any set of (objective) moral reasons that follows from that reflective process is a result of genuine construction.

So, then, what would an Aristotle-inspired[112] interpretation or analysis of the practical standpoint look like in detail? The starting point of constructivist objectivism is to explain and justify the existence of objective moral reasons. According to my hybrid view, in order to do so, an ideal procedure should be applied to a universal standpoint. Cashing out this universal standpoint in terms of our human nature is helpful because the hybrid view (i) is a brand of constructivism, and (ii) embraces ethical objectivism. Hence, as a constructivist theory it rejects the existence of strongly mind-independent facts about morality. Rather, it maintains that morality (as normativity in general) gains its normative force in relation to us. However, because it is also an objectivist account about morality, it aims to determine moral reasons that hold for everyone. Making reference to human nature then looks promising not only because it is consistent with (i), i.e. its constructivist commitment, but also because of (ii), i.e. because human nature proves to be a plausible candidate for establishing a *universal point of view*. This is because human nature underlies all our more particular practical standpoints, not only entailing our more subjective commitments, beliefs, evaluative judgments, and so on, but also underlying our more general standpoints. After all, we *all* are on a most general level humans, and our existence as a human is more fundamental to our being than is our status as, say, students of

[112] By calling the analysis "Aristotle-inspired" I intend to delineate my argument from both Aristotle's original *ergon* argument as well as from *Aristotelian constructivism*. While I discuss the relation of my own argument to Aristotle in some more detail in 4.5, note that I do not consider myself an Aristotelian constructivist. I do not want to go into the details of that view, but suffice it to acknowledge that Aristotelian constructivists, while considering themselves cognitivists about morality, claim that what renders our ethical judgments true are substantive judgments about what determines *a good life* (LeBar 2004; 2008; cf. Bagnoli 2016b). This is clearly not in accordance with my own claim which inter alia consists in maintaining that objective moral reasons can be (on a constructivist theory) determined by a reflective process on *human nature*. Therefore, there are at least three differences between my Aristotle-inspired analysis of the practical standpoint and Aristotelian constructivism. The first is that the former makes use of the notion of human nature while the later uses the concept of a good life. The second difference concerns what both accounts aim to accomplish. While my hybrid view uses human nature in order to secure moral objectivity, Aristotelian constructivism aims to grant the existence of moral truth. Finally, note that in the case of the hybrid view, the reference to Aristotle is only made in order to cash out *one* element of the constructive process, namely basis of construction. This is far from making the whole hybrid account an Aristotelian theory as in the case of Aristotelian constructivism.

philosophy, citizens of a specific country, or people living in a distinct society that endorses a certain set of values, accepts certain beliefs as true, etc.

Following the above argument, human nature therefore has two functions within the objectivist argument: (i) it provides a critical standard or measure for evaluating the more particular judgments about reasons that each agent holds or accepts; and (ii) it *explains* and *justifies* the normative force of those reasons that are thought to be *universal*. How both functions then play a crucial role in grounding the objectivity in ethical practice and discourse can be seen in two ways. First, by comparing it to subjectivist HC, and second, by applying the hybrid view, including the crucial reference to human nature, to concrete cases of agents forming judgments about moral reasons.

Recall HC as the view that moral truth is determined by the contingent and subjective standpoint of each particular agent. As we have seen, an immediate problem for HC is that it not only is compatible with but in fact leads to moral subjectivism. Considering the Aristotelian move, as described here, the constructivist objectivist – given her carrying out the constructive procedure is successful – can prevent the constructivist account from leading to subjectivism in virtue of providing an evaluative standard or criterion that is apt to correct the individual judgments about what there is (moral) reason to do. It does so by determining not what follows from a particular agent's standpoint, but what follows from the standpoint of human beings *as such*. Thereby objective moral reasons are determined because these reasons are not (merely) the expression of an agent's *own* standpoint; instead, they reflect the standpoint of *all* human beings (as such).

Second, let us think about more concrete cases of agents forming judgments about moral reasons. So, say that Caligula forms the judgment that he has reason to torture others. As HC describes the case, Caligula's judgment follows from his subjective standpoint. The hybrid view has the right philosophical means to correct Caligula's judgment by arguing that moral judgments ought to be determined by what follows from reflection not on *Caligula's* own, subjective standpoint but from the standpoint of humans *as such*. If the constructive process is successful, the objectivist can correct Caligula's subjective judgment and thus avoid problematic cases of moral subjectivism. And this is again because the hybrid account has introduced a universal standpoint that *transcends* the more subjective judgments, commitments, and beliefs of single agents.

For already mentioned reasons, then, the hybrid theory is able not only to correct a single agent's judgment(s) about what she has reason to do, but also to correct those reason judgments that result from a *general* standpoint. For because the general standpoint "only" entails what a given collective has reason to do, the universal standpoint is able to determine those reasons that every human being as such is considered to have. Insofar as the universal standpoint of human beings is more general than the standpoint of a given collective, the former standpoint can also correct the latter.

4.5. The Normativity of Human Nature

Let me quickly recapitulate what has been argued so far. My overall aim in this chapter is to show that and how constructivists can account for the objectivity in ethics by relying on two elements: an ideal constructive procedure; and a universal standpoint to which the procedure is applied. While in sections 4.2 and 4.3, I argued and defended the first feature, i.e. the ideal procedure, and said more about its nature and function, in the last section I introduced a plausible way to spell out the universal standpoint in more detail, namely in terms of human nature.

To be more precise, I argued for an Aristotle-inspired interpretation of the practical standpoint that relies on the specific bi-partite rationale that motivates Aristotle's human function argument as introduced in NE I.7 and that constructivist objectivists, at least according to my understanding, share. Thus, I argued that the notion of "human nature" is promising in the attempt to capture the universal standpoint since it does justice to two commitments of constructivist objectivism, namely its commitment to constructivism on the one hand, and to objectivism on the other. It does justice to the former because it accounts for the idea that all normative notions are basically notions for us as humans, and it does justice to the latter in virtue of the idea that the standpoint of human beings is objective.

Nevertheless, I expect at this point of my argument some questions and objections to arise precisely because of its crucial reference to the very notion and concept of "human nature". Thus, while the hybrid view, as we have seen, is certainly not the first theory to assume human nature to provide the proper basis for construing moral principles, there nevertheless exists a general skepticism about whether human nature carries the necessary

kind of authority to legitimate this move in the first place (cf. Lawrence 2006, 54f.; Brüllmann 2013, 97; Dorsey 2018, 595ff.).

This skepticism comes in different forms. For instance, it is sometimes objected that such a thing as human functioning is incompatible with the natural sciences (Brüllmann 2013, 97), or with modern (evolutionary) biology[113] (Hull 1986; Sober 1980; Ghiselin 1997, 1; Machery 2008, 321; cf. Heilinger, Müller 2008, 191)[114]. Another equally serious worry is that the very notion of "human nature" "contributes to the justification of suppressive social norms" [115] on the basis that it has the tendency to support the exclusion of minorities[116].[117]

Underlying these worries is the already mentioned more general skepticism concerning the authority of human nature as providing a (proper) basis for construing normative principles in the first place. One of the best reasons for coming up with this general skeptical thesis is, at least according to my understanding, presented by Hurka's "wrong-properties" objection (Hurka 1993; cf. Dorsey 2010, 65ff.; 2018, 595f.). This objection is motivated by the genuine possibility that any human functioning argument may end up justifying normative principles that we find repugnant, unsavory, or trivial (Dorsey 2010, 65; 2018, 595f.; Bradford 2016, 130). Thus, consider Bernard Williams arguing along the following lines:

> If one approached without preconceptions the question of finding characteristics which differentiate men from other animals, one could as well, on these principles, end up with a morality which exhorted men to spend as much time as possible in making fire; or developing particularly human physical characteristics; or having sexual intercourse without regard to season, or despoiling the environment

[113] Some authors who quarrel with philosophical anthropology maintain that every question about how to understand human nature must include other sciences such as biology, sociology, etc. (Gerhard 2008, 10; Heilinger 2009, 407).
[114] See Antweiler 2008 for an attempt to identify the distinctively human features from a physical perspective (and in comparison to the features of other animals). Bauer 2008 shows what marks out human beings from the perspective of neurobiology.
[115] See Lawrence 2006, 54ff.; Dorsey 2010; Beck 2013, 37f.; 172ff. for further objections.
[116] Think about ultraconservatives often making use of the anti-homosexual argument that homosexuality is against our nature. Even if no suppressive norms follow from this, there is discrimination involved, and this discrimination arguably is a worrisome factor in itself.
[117] Also independently of all these reasons there are some who just deeply mistrust the very notion 'human nature' (Cerutti 2008).

and upsetting the balance of nature; or killing things for fun (Williams 1972, 59, in: Dorsey 2018, 596).

But the wrong-properties objection states not only that there is a general danger with grounding normative claims and principles on features of human nature because these features might either be trivial or unsavory. Its real normative force is that if one were to start to account for the need to correct the features that are considered to be appropriate for grounding normative claims and thus attempted to *restrict* the features of human nature in order to *avoid* grounding normative principles on trivial or unsavory features, the human nature argument altogether would lose its force (Dorsey 2010, 65; cf. Bradford 2016, 130). This is so because the restriction of these features can only be due to a standard *different* from human nature and what is entailed in it. For if certain features of human nature are considered as inappropriate candidates for grounding normative principles, then the basis for thinking so cannot be human nature itself. After all, it is human nature in the first place that entails the problematic features (Dorsey 2010, 65–7); accordingly, it cannot be that very nature that considers its own features inappropriate for justifying normative principles and claims. In this way, the human nature argument is said to altogether lose its "independent […] compellingness" (Bradford 2016, 130).

Now clearly, the wrong-properties objection, which lies at the heart of the more general skepticism about the normative authority of human nature, seems to apply to my hybrid account as well, insofar as the reference to human nature plays a crucial part in it. Nevertheless, as I show in the following, my objectivist account can sidestep the objection, and therefore in the end is also in a good position to answer the general skeptical thesis about the normative force and authority of human nature.

My argument against the wrong-properties objection thus is that it does not figure as an objection against the specific use of human nature that the hybrid view employs because its force depends crucially on how exactly human nature is understood and spelled out in detail. The argument proceeds in two steps: firstly, I show why exactly some versions of the functioning argument *do* raise the objection; and secondly, I demonstrate why these problematic elements are *not* part of constructivist objectivism as defended here.

Let's start with the first step in order to explore why some versions of the functioning argument *do* motivate the wrong-properties objection. For the sake of

argument, let's remain within the constructivist debate in particular and consider so-called Humean Perfectionist constructivism (HPC) that Dale Dorsey has recently introduced on behalf of Humean constructivism (Dorsey 2018). HPC is inspired by Hume's essay "On the Standard of Taste" (ibid, 587ff.), in which Hume faces the problem of radical contingency in the aesthetic domain (ibid, 582) and argues for a solution that proceeds in the following way:

> All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself […]. A thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. […] Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty (Hume 1985, 229-30, in: Dorsey 2018, 582).

Hume therefore aims to solve the problem of contingency by developing certain standards of taste that are thought to be "uniform in human nature". Because one of the central premises of Hume's theory about ethics as well as aesthetics rests on the claim that both kinds of judgments ultimately rest on sentiments (Korsgaard 1999), he argues that the standards of taste are determined by the *sentiments of human nature* (Dorsey 2018, 584). Intuitively, then, the picture that Hume draws is that while each of us may have varying sentiments about the value of, say, "My Funny Valentine", there still exists a general standard about the correctness of these sentiments by those "that adequately reflect the evaluative standard of human nature" (ibid).

Hume's solution is to establish an objective evaluative criterion in terms of human nature that is at once "widely shared" (ibid, 587) *and* provides a standard against which the more particular aesthetic sentiments can be tested (ibid).[118] Now, Dorsey applies exactly this idea to the ethical domain and claims that Humean Perfectionism establishes an objective evaluative criterion against which our more particular sentiments about moral matters can be tested:

[118] In this respect Hume shares one of my above given reasons for referring to human nature: see 4.4.

> It may be that some particular person, say, doesn't take a valuing attitude toward her children's well-being. PHC [Perfectionist Humean Constructivism] has the power to declare that she nevertheless has reason to care for her children. Surely it's true that part of human nature […] is to value the welfare of one's own children. Hence, given PHC, anyone has reason […] to care for their children. This is not because there are mind-independent reasons, but rather because her lack of a valuing attitude toward the well-being of her children will not withstand the scrutiny of humanity's evaluative nature (ibid).

Despite Dorsey's claim that HPC can sidestep the wrong-properties objection (ibid, 596f.), the contrary appears more correct, such that HPC *does* fall short of avoiding it. To see why that is, it is important to note that for HPC human nature is ultimately cashed out in terms of *sentiments* (ibid).[119] Now the general problem with understanding human nature in this sense is especially raised by some Kantian constructivists who have maintained, contra similar accounts, that sentiments lack the necessary authority for grounding normative principles and claims in general (Bagnoli 2002). After all, why should we think that just because our nature encompasses certain sentiments about, say, how to raise our children, that these sentiments give us any reason at all to correct our own feelings and judgments about what is the right thing to do? And, in fact, one can see why Kantians are in this respect on the right track, for their considerations are also important in order to see why HPC so understood raises the "wrong-properties" objection all over again.

Recall that the objection states that human nature may justify reasons for action which, on closer inspection, may turn out to be morally repugnant or unsavory. HPC will very likely give rise to the objection because human evaluative nature, understood in terms of sentiments, may encompass very widely shared sentiments that are morally problematic. For instance, think about the long practice of humanity's settling conflicts by way of violence. Clearly, humans very often have sentiments counting in favor of violent solutions to conflict. But even if these sentiments *are* agreed to be a common part of our nature, this does *not* make it the case that we think to have any reason at all to conceive of violence as

[119] I thank Carla Bagnoli for bringing this to my attention.

being justified or morally acceptable, or that we ought to solve conflicts by means of violence.

Now, in light of this worry Dorsey will want to object that HPC can sidestep this version of the wrong-properties objection in virtue of HPC making an important qualification. Thus, while the objection raises the problem that normative claims may be grounded on trivial or even repugnant features of human nature (cashed out in terms of sentiments), HPC avoids this danger because while it understands human evaluative nature in terms of human sentiments, it takes only those sentiments that are in a "sound state" to characterize our nature (ibid, 587). Therefore:

> It would be quite surprising to discover that racist and prejudiced attitudes are the product of "near-universal" agreement among those who have had experience with it, have engaged with, or otherwise have knowledge of the relevant "outsiders". Indeed, we have every reason to believe exactly the opposite (ibid, 596–7).

HPC's answer to the wrong-properties objection hence is that just because human nature is grounded in sentiments, this does *not* mean that *every* sentiment is apt to determine human evaluative nature. Rather, the latter can only be so determined by those sentiments held by persons who are experienced and in the right state of mind.

However, even though HPC makes use of this argument in order to sidestep the objection, on closer inspection, this is precisely the reason why it falls short in its attempt to answer it. Recall that the real normative force of the wrong-properties objection is that whenever one attempts to restrict the features of human nature that ought to determine normative principles, the human functioning altogether loses its force. This is because *human nature* is supposed to ground normative claims with crucial reference to its own features. However, if certain features of that very nature are understood to be problematic because, say, of their being unsavory or trivial, then the *standards* for rejecting those features must be presented by something *other* than human nature itself.

The objection, then, also applies to HPC because it is on this view not simply the sentiments of human beings *tout court* that are taken to present human evaluative nature, but only those that are taken to be appropriate in virtue of standing up to the criteria of *rationality* and *full experience*. Accordingly, it is on the grounds of these latter criteria that

certain sentiments are ruled out as providing the appropriate candidates for grounding normative claims because of their being trivial or unsavory. Hence, what determines human evaluative nature on the HPC view is, in the end, not human nature after all, but rather the standards of *rationality* and *experience*. And for this reason, HPC falls short of answering the wrong-properties objection, for the whole theory could be construed without making *any* reference to human nature at all while trying to ground objective normative principles. HPC could simply maintain that objective normative principles are determined by those sentiments that have undergone a process of idealization. While this description does without even mentioning human nature, it nevertheless adequately expresses HPS's principal aim, namely to explain how Humean constructivism can make sense of the objectivity of normative practice.

While arguing why HPC falls short of answering or avoiding the wrong-properties objection I have only carried out the first step of my argument as to why the objection does not necessarily hold against every theory that utilizes the notion of human nature. What is now needed in order to render the whole argument plausible is some further argument to show that my developed Aristotle-inspired argument does *not* fall short of answering the wrong-properties objection. This is what I want to argue for next. In fact, I show not only that the hybrid account, while including crucial reference to human nature, has all the means to sidestep the objection, but also that it avoids all the most pressing worries concerning the very notion of "human nature".

There are two basic reasons why the hybrid account can avoid all these objections due to its interpretation of the very *understanding* of the notion of "human nature" on the one hand, and the *function* that this nature plays within my overall account on the other. To be more precise, the hybrid account makes use of human nature only as the *basis on which* to construct objective normative principles, norms, claims, and reasons. In this way, it has a very different understanding of the function of human nature than that of the problematic perfectionist account. Second, my hybrid theory endorses a concept of human nature that importantly differs from perfectionist accounts insofar as it advocates not an essentialist but rather a *nomological* interpretation of human nature. Both points need further explanation.

Let us take the first point. There is a specific reason why critics raise the wrong-properties objection, namely because human nature is part of a perfectionist theory

according to which it is held that agents ought to develop, live and act in accordance with those capacities and capabilities that are expressive of their nature as human beings. This explains why someone would worry that there may exist features of human nature that are repugnant or unsavory (such as killing things for fun), or simply trivial (such as our four-dimensionality). Underlying this worry is the thought that there is a problem with grounding normative claims about what to do on features that are unsavory or just trivial, for we could, at least in principle, actually end up with a perfectionist theory that tells us to kill things for fun or pleasure (cf. Bradford 2016, 130).

Note, however, that the hybrid view involves no such argumentative move, i.e. the grounding of normative claims on features of human nature, because it does not endorse perfectionism to begin with. Rather, when the hybrid view introduces the notion of human nature, it does so only because it draws inspiration from the specific bi-partite *rationale* of Aristotle's use of human nature in his *ergon* argument, that is, securing objectivity in the normative (or moral) domain while (still) holding that all normative claims gain their normative force ultimately in relation to *us*. Therefore, while on perfectionist accounts human nature figures as *directly grounding* normative claims about what to do (Dorsey 2018, 596), on my constructivist objectivist view its function is much more modest, for all that human nature does here is to serve as a basis *on which* to *construct* objective normative principles. Therefore, no direct claim about what there is reason to do is involved.

One can thus see where the differences lie between perfectionist accounts and my version of constructivist objectivism on the grounds of considering the different understandings of the *function* of human nature within these accounts. On the former, perfectionist theories, as in Aristotle's case, it is argued that one should act in accordance with those capacities that define one's nature as a human being. On the constructivist objectivist argument that I defend, by contrast, one refers to human nature only in order to make moral principles objective without severing their relation to us. So, the question could be, for instance, for constructivist objectivism: "What follows from a reflective process on human nature understood in sentimental terms?"[120] That does *not* mean that one (already) has any reason at all to *promote* one's sentimental nature.

[120] As in the case of what Bagnoli has originally called "Humean constructivism": Bagnoli 2002, 131.

In addition, recall that the argument I am defending here is a genuinely constructivist argument in the sense that it tries to account for the genuine process of *constructing* normative principles. It follows that even if one *were* understanding human nature in sentimental terms, this nature only serves as a basis on which to *construct* normative reasons and claims. Consequently, according to the hybrid view, again, it is not that there is already reason to live and act in accordance with our nature thus understood. Rather, reasons that stem from one's sentimental nature have to undergo a process of construction in order to gain their normative force in the first place.

Nevertheless, even though my argument is not perfectionist, there may be other reasons for thinking it problematic due to its reference to the mere notion or concept of human nature. Thus, recall the noted set of objections which are raised against arguments that make use of that notion or concept. So what of the hybrid view and its ability to sidestep the worry that the term "human nature" is dangerous since it can lead to oppressive social norms? Or how is it that the theory avoids supporting social exclusion on the grounds of determining who belongs to the human species and who does not? After all, the objection here seems not to be tied to any specific function of human nature in an argument such as the perfectionist argument, but rather is due to the very *term* or *concept* of a human nature.

In addition, in chapter 1, I argued that constructivism seeks to offer an account of normativity and morality that wants to be congruent with a naturalist description of the world. But does this not mean that referring to a so-called "human nature" is an incoherent move because scientists – primarily (evolutionary) biologists – have tremendously objected against the existence of such a nature (see above)?

While these are all legitimate worries, they rest on and thus are motivated by one rather specific understanding of human nature. To be more precise, they result from, as Edouard Machery shows, the *essentialist* interpretation of human nature that, ultimately, is responsible for raising these worries (2008, 321).[121] The essentialist interpretation maintains two things: (i) that human nature consists in a set of "separately necessary and jointly sufficient" properties (ibid); and (ii) that these properties mark out the distinctiveness of our nature in contrast to other beings (ibid, 322).

[121] I thank Katja Vogt for bringing my attention to this.

However, this is not the only way in which we can understand the term "human nature", for there is another interpretation of our nature in nomological terms (ibid, 323), whereby according to this notion, "human nature is the set of properties that humans tend to possess as a result of the evolution of their species" (ibid).

Aristotle's original human functioning argument clearly makes use of the essentialist rather than the nomological notion, because Aristotle wants to determine what is unique to human beings in contrast to other creatures:

> [S]o Man […] has some work of his own? What then can this be? Not mere life, because that plainly is shared with him even by vegetables, and we want what is peculiar to him. We must separate off then the life of mere nourishment and growth, and next will come the life of sensation: but this again manifestly is common to horses, oxen, and every animal. There remains then a kind of life of Rational Nature […] (NE 1097b28–1098a5).

It is, then, the rational nature of humans to which Aristotle refers when developing his perfectionist argument. And, as I have noted previously, there also is on the Aristotelian account a rather strong relation between both the essentialist understanding of human nature and the perfectionist move to (directly) ground normative principles on that nature. As Bradford maintains: "Because our good is shaped by our nature, perfectionism must provide a descriptive account of the relevant aspects of human nature, and it must specify precisely what our characteristically human capacities are" (2016, 125).

Now, as I have said, it is not only the wrong-properties objection which is raised against accounts that crucially rely on human nature; the latter accounts are also challenged in respect of the (in)compatibility of human nature with modern evolutionary biology, or on the basis that the concept of human nature has a tendency or at least bears the danger of excluding minorities and even of justifying socially oppressive norms on the grounds of such exclusion.

In all three cases, it is quite easy to understand the reasons that motivate these objections. Thus, in the first case, the essentialist notion raises worries from the evolutionary biological perspective because the very view that human nature consists of a certain set of properties that mark out its distinctiveness over any other kind of species is

incompatible with evolutionary biology. Or to take the second and third worries about social exclusion and the justification of the oppression of minorities, here one can say that every theory that aims to *define* human beings carries the risk of excluding certain individuals or even groups of people and thus of depriving them of their very status as a human. After all, because to define the nature of human beings arguably consists in presenting some features that are entailed within that nature, and because the most plausible candidates for these features are those that are widely shared, there is always the threat of exclusion since some people may not actually have these features.

Moreover, certainly on that basis not only is there a risk of excluding certain people or groups from counting as human beings, but it is not hard to see how such exclusion may then lead to justifying norms that count in favor of oppressing such people or groups precisely because it is argued that they do not possess the relevant properties that identify them as human beings but which are necessary to qualify them as deserving of a certain form of, say, respectful treatment. Accordingly, so the reasoning goes (and history provides several examples of such reasoning),[122] because these individuals or groups do not qualify as humans, they do not deserve treatment proper to human beings.

While I agree that this kind of understanding of human nature is dangerous on account of such reasons, the constructivist objectivist argument that I have been developing in this chapter is very far from being committed to the problematic essentialist notion. On the constructivist theory, as I understand and defend it, it is thus perfectly intelligible to maintain that humans have developed as the kind of creature they are now, and that, as such, there are no features that are jointly sufficient for defining that nature.

In addition, and even more importantly, because of the function that the very concept of human nature plays in my constructivist objectivist account, the latter endorses the nomological rather than the essentialist understanding, for, again, the constructivist objectivist makes reference to our nature only as the *basis on which* to construct objective normative principles.

So, recall the congruity between my constructivist objectivist argument and my description of sophisticated constructivism SC, where in both cases engaging in a constructive procedure means to apply rational reflection to a given input in terms of the

[122] Think for instance of Nazi ideology regarding Jews.

basis of construction. Hence, in the case of constructivist objectivism, human nature is considered as the basis that gets the reflective, constructive process started. The question that guides this process therefore is: *what*, if anything, *follows* from human nature understood in the terms of X, Y, Z? Therefore, no claim whatsoever is involved about what it is that defines us or that makes us different from any other kind of creature in the universe.[123]

If this is correct, and the constructivist objectivist thus is not at all concerned with *defining* human nature and/or *distinguishing* it from other beings, it becomes immediately clear that she can avoid all three problems as spelled out above. Hence, the hybrid account does not raise worries about the compatibility with constructivism and evolutionary biology, because while referring to human nature it does not embrace the problematic essentialist notion that makes the human nature account incompatible with the results of biological inquiry. Thus, because the constructivist notion of human nature is not at all committed to defining that nature, there is no problem with holding that, from the constructivist perspective, human nature has developed in such and such a way, or that there may exist other creatures in the universe crucially similar to us.

Something very similar then holds for the worries about exclusion and oppression. As I have said, I admit that everyone who aims to define human nature bears the danger of excluding minorities, and that some may take this exclusion to justify oppression. However, again, because the hybrid account is not at all committed to defining our nature, it bears no danger at all of excluding certain social groups or even of justifying their oppression on the grounds of their exclusion.

For these reasons, the constructivist objectivist account does not in any way give rise to the worries that have most commonly been raised against those theories or arguments that make use of human nature or that crucially refer to it. If this is correct, then constructivist objectivism, as I have developed and defended it here, looks all the more promising.

[123] I thank Carla Bagnoli for helpful discussion on this point.

4.6 Is the Hybrid View Constructivist?

Even if the objections against the hybrid view, due to its crucial reference to human nature, are successfully answered, there still looms an important objection, namely whether the account in the end is compatible with metaethical constructivism itself. Of course, the objection presents a great threat to the plausibility of my objectivist account which is designed as a *constructivist* account of the objectivity in ethics. Therefore, if there were good reasons for doubting its compatibility with constructivism, my overall argument of developing a *constructivist* objectivist view would be in great danger.

Now, what could the reason be that motivates such concerns about the compatibility of my argument with metaethical constructivism as such? As far as I see it, these concerns result from the fact that making reference to human nature, in order to justify normative principles or the objectivity of ethical practice, in general seems compatible with a whole range of very different metaethical theories, such that one needs to know in more detail what is specifically constructivist about that reference. The underlying worry here is that if it were not possible to show what is truly constructivist about how the hybrid view refers to human nature, it may turn out that the hybrid view collapses into a realist view. This worry is then fueled by the very serious thought that human nature is best conceived in a more realist fashion, which is at odds with the constructivist theory.

Let me start by turning to the first part of the worry, which claims that there arguably exists a whole set of theories that can and do refer to human nature. For instance, recall Vogt's Measure Realism that not only makes use of the concept of human nature, but at the same time is a brand of moral realism. In addition, there is David Brink's proposal on behalf on moral realism, according to which it is human social nature that grounds reasons for behaving morally (Brink 1984).

In addition, one could also think of a non-cognitivist functioning argument. Here, one could start with the distinctively non-cognitivist premise that moral judgments serve to express sentiments and proceed by arguing that objectivity in ethics is established by determining the overall set of those sentiments that is expressive of our nature. Thus, let's think about what a quasi-realist account would look like that is built around the notion of human nature. This theory arguably starts with the naturalist commitment of non-

cognitivist expressivism, for as Blackburn argues: "Naturalism is a broad church, and expressivism itself aspires to being a naturalist story about human propensities to evaluate and forbid and require things" (2006, 159). Recall, however, that while quasi-realism shares the expressivist premise that moral judgments are taken to express non-cognitive sentiments, there is the possibility of "*improving*" our sentiments in order to finally *earn the right* to think about moral discourse and practice in terms of truth and falsehood and even objectivity.[124]

As we have seen, quasi-realism explains the process of improvement by assuming the existence of an ideal, best possible set of attitudes M*. Taking the idea of M* seriously for the present context, then, one could, from the quasi-realist perspective, maintain that M* is the best possible set of attitudes *insofar* as it encompasses those sentiments that are expressive of ourselves *as human beings*.

Now, if the skeptical thesis about the compatibility with the hybrid view and constructivism in general is merely raised on the basis that there could be or that there even are other metaethical theories that make use of the concept of human nature, it would not really present a serious objection. After all, it would be possible to respond that these other theories do not show that there is nothing genuinely constructivist about the hybrid account. However, the real worry here is that it may be possible that, in the end, the hybrid view may actually collapse into such a theory because it appears that any argument that refers to human nature is best conceived in a non-constructivist spirit.

To see why this is so, consider that one potentially promising strategy to ground (objective) moral principles or reasons on behalf of realism is to claim that there exist (strongly) mind-independent facts about human nature. This strategy is promising for both moral realism and for cashing out the human functioning argument itself. When it comes to the realist theory, note that the human nature argument is attractive because it may give the realist a promising answer to one of the most prominent objections against realism, namely the alienation objections as presented by David Wiggins (1988; cf. Bagnoli 2002). Thus, in his "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life", Wiggins objects against moral realism that it alienates an agent from her own evaluative perspective. He does so by considering the case of Sisyphus who faces the harsh and eternal punishment of being

[124] See 2.3 for a more detailed discussion on this point and on quasi-realism in general.

forced to roll a heavy rock up a hill where it will inevitably fall down on the other side. Wiggins maintains that a realist will be disposed to claim that there nevertheless can be meaning and value in Sisyphus' life because the realist in general understands questions of value not to be settled by human mental states. By doing so, however, it plays no role whatsoever in how Sisyphus himself experiences his situation. Consequently, Sisyphus, when determining the value of his life, becomes alienated from his own perspective because, on the IMRealist account, it simply does not matter at all in settling the question.

But the realist approach can also be understood as a plausible interpretation of the human functioning argument itself. After all, a very plausible way to carry out the human nature argument is to say that there just exist certain facts about our nature that determine what there is reason to do.[125] Insofar as these facts are merely given and if realism is the view that reasons are determined by already given facts, the realist interpretation of the functioning argument appears to be quite attractive. But the problem then is that a realist conception of human nature is, of course, at odds with a *constructivist* account that refers to that nature.

Precisely because of the latter worry, it is unconvincing to answer the skeptical argument by maintaining that just because other theories such as moral realism or a non-cognitivist view such as quasi-realism make or could make use of the concept of human nature, it is thereby not at all clear that the reference to human nature itself is not compatible with constructivism. The reply then is not a proper answer to the worry because if it turned out that any human nature argument is ultimately best understood in anti-constructivist terms, my constructivist objectivist argument that makes use of human nature would fail as a genuinely constructivist view.

Note, however, that, as in the case of the wrong-properties objection discussed in section 4.5, the correctness of the worry about the compatibility of the hybrid view with the constructivist agenda in general crucially depends on how it understands and refers to the notion of "human nature". To be more precise, the question is whether both the hybrid view's understanding and reference to human nature marks out something distinctive in contrast to other theories such as IMR and non-cognitivism, and whether that distinctive element is genuinely constructivist.

[125] Note that this is precisely what Vogt's Measure Realism maintains: 2017.

To that end, let's go into more detail concerning the differences between the notion and use of human nature in the constructivist sense (as endorsed by the hybrid view) compared with IMR on the one hand and non-cognitivism on the other.

When it comes to the IMRealist making use of human nature, there are two crucial aspects of the realist account that constructivists will generally not share and that, accordingly, are also not part of the hybrid view. Both aspects can be found within Vogt's Measure Realism, so I focus only on her arguments in order to delineate my own view from IMR, and in particular its reference to human nature.

In terms of the first aspect, consider Vogt again arguing that Measure Realism is a kind of realism because the good is "discerned rather than determined" (2017, 105). Thereby, Vogt refers to the feature of mind-independence, so that Measure Realism holds that there are facts about human nature that are normative independently of any constitutive relation to the human mind (ibid).

The argument then reveals a second important aspect of the realist argument that is worth highlighting. This concerns the way in which sense facts about human nature figure in the overall realist argument:

> As a kind of realism, Measure Realism recaptures the notion of truth. We can get it right in finding out what is good for us, and in this sense there are true statements about how the world is for us. Insofar as these statements are true about how the world is for us, they are true for us (ibid).

The argument states that not only are there normative facts about human nature out there in the world, that is, independent from our minds, but that normativity is *already established* by the mere existence of these facts.

Both argumentative elements are worth mentioning because both of them are important in order to see how the (constructivist) hybrid view differs from IMRealist accounts on human nature such as Measure Realism. Thus, recall that according to my constructivist objectivist argument, human nature is only *one* important part within the overall attempt to explain and justify the existence of objective moral reasons and claims. And this is so because the argument maintains that the relation that holds between human nature and morality ultimately is a matter of a *process of construction*. In this process,

however, objective moral reasons come into existence *not* because they *mirror* facts about human nature, but because they are the *output* of ideal reflection on our nature as human beings.

One can thereby see the differences between how the hybrid account makes use of human nature in comparison to an IMRealist theory that refers to that concept or notion. Thus, when it comes to the first aspect, on my account the human mind does not serve the function of "discovering" or "finding out" (ibid) normative facts about morality or normativity by discerning facts about human nature. Rather, because it is ideal reflection *on* that nature that ultimately grounds objective moral reasons, the human mind plays a *constitutive* rather than passive role in *determining* these reasons.

Something very similar holds for the second aspect. Thus, because human nature is only one of two elements that determine objective moral reasons, it is, according to my constructivist objectivist account, not some metaphysical fact about our nature that (already) establishes the normativity of objective moral reasons. Rather, it is a *process of construction* that does so and in which facts about that nature figure "only" as the starting point as well as the background condition of a constructive process. Hence, even though my hybrid view assumes that there are facts about human nature, crucially these facts do *not* already entail all the normativity that is needed in order to ground objective moral reasons.

Both points show that my constructivist argument does not collapse into IMRealist views insofar as it refers to human nature in order to ground objective moral reasons. On the contrary, as long as my account can show that objective moral reasons are not merely mirroring an independent moral order, but instead are the outcome of a (genuine) process of construction, then my objectivist account adopts a truly constructivist understanding and use of human nature.

Similar results also hold when comparing the hybrid view with a *non-cognitivist* theory – such as quasi-realism – that refers to human nature. Again, there are two crucial differences between the two views. The first concerns how human nature is understood. Because the basic idea of non-cognitivism is to maintain that normative judgments are expressive of human sentiments (such as approval and disapproval), theories such as quasi-realism establish moral truth and objectivity in the end only with reference to such

sentiments. In the case of quasi-realism, we have seen that it assumes the existence of an ideally improved set of sentiments M* that can correct individual normative judgments.

It follows from this that any non-cognitivist theory that may want to establish objectivity by referring to human nature must understand that nature (only) in the terms of sentiments, i.e. those sentiments that we, as the kinds of beings that we are, share.

This, then, is one of the two key differences between my constructivist objectivist argument and a non-cognitivist position that refers to human nature. For, after all, my constructivist theory takes seriously the idea that there are *facts* about our nature. Facts that, while non-normative, are different from mere sentiments.

Parallel to the case of the IMRealist use of human nature, the second, even more crucial, difference concerns how non-cognitivists use human nature in their overall argument. Thus, at least when it comes to the quasi-realist theory, it was said that human nature figures as the set M* that provides the set of attitudes entailed within human nature. The idea would then be that truth and objectivity in the moral (or normative) domain is established by whether or not individual moral/normative judgments are part of M*.

But that is, again, not the way in which the hybrid view makes use of human nature as I have presented it here. After all, it does not say that human nature already is normatively laden; it only says that facts about that nature provide the proper starting point and the background conditions for rational reflection and deliberation. Quasi-realism, by contrast, does not refer to human nature in terms of a starting point or a background condition of reflection. Rather, it maintains that there is a set M*, consisting of all human attitudes, which is *already normative*. It is in this respect, then, that quasi-realism resembles the IMRealist theory of human nature such as Measure Realism insofar as it supposes the existence of facts about human nature that are already normative. And precisely for this reason, the constructivist objectivist reference to human nature crucially differs from non-cognitivist quasi-realism in the same way that it differs to IMR, for in contrast to both IMR and quasi-realism, normativity, on my account of constructivist objectivism, comes into existence only after a constructive process. Consequently, it does not suppose that the notion and concept of human nature itself is normative, that is, independent of its being part of a genuine process of construction.

It follows from these arguments that there should be no problem at all with thinking that my constructivist objectivist account may not present a full-fledged constructivist

theory, or a theory that is not clearly in the spirit of metaethical constructivism in virtue of its crucial reference to the concept and notion of human nature. On the contrary, at least in the way human nature figures in my constructivist objectivist argument, there is no element to be found within that argument which does not proceed in a genuinely constructivist sense.

4.7 Conclusion

In the last two chapters, I have developed a new and independent constructivist theory of moral objectivity that I have called the hybrid view. After having clarified in chapter 3 how the hybrid account understands the concept of moral objectivity, in this chapter I have argued how the account secures the existence of objective moral reasons. My claim was that constructivist objectivism, understood along the lines of the hybrid account, does so by making reference to two elements: first, an ideal procedure of rational reflection and/or deliberation; and second, a specific understanding of the basis of construction in terms of human nature. I have called the latter element an Aristotle-inspired interpretation or analysis of the universal standpoint. According to my objectivist account, then, constructivism can grant objectivity in ethics on the basis of agents engaging in an ideal process of rational reflection on their nature as human beings.

Having outlined this novel constructivist account, I went on to demonstrate that and how constructivist objectivism can sidestep those problems commonly associated with the two crucial features that it utilizes: the idealizing conditions as built into the constructive procedure on the one hand, and the interpretation of the practical standpoint in terms of human nature on the other. I thus answered two heavy objections against idealizing strategies and also argued against doubts about the appropriateness of human nature grounding normative principles in general.

Finally, in the last section, I showed why the hybrid view, while referring to human nature, can be understood as a genuinely constructivist account, meaning that there is nothing genuinely anti-constructivist about that reference.

According to my understanding, then, three things follow from my argument as developed in chapters 3 and 4. First, not only can metaethical constructivism, contrary to prior skepticism, present a sound interpretation of the very concept of the objectivity of

ethics; but also, second, it is able to secure the existence of the moral reasons that are objective in this sense. Finally, it follows that there is a new objectivist account on behalf of constructivism that proceeds independently of the already established objectivist theories stemming from both the Kantian and the Humean camps. Given what has been argued with regard to the importance of securing moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism in general, as well as in light of the respective weaknesses and disadvantages of both the Kantian and Humean theories in particular, the hybrid view developed herein presents an important result that is worth pursuing further.

5

Valuing and Morality:
Refuting Humean Constructivism

5.1 Introduction

In chapters 3 and 4, I have developed a new and independent constructivist account on moral objectivity. This account answered two fundamental questions about objectivity in ethics: first, how constructivists understand the very concept of moral objectivity; and second, in virtue of what they think objectivity is granted.

After focusing on the first question in chapter 3, in the previous chapter I argued that constructivism can secure ethical objectivity in virtue of agents engaging in rational reflection (under ideal conditions) on the basis of construction understood in terms of *human nature*.

In this chapter, I apply the constructivist objectivist account developed herein to the theory of *Humean constructivism* (HC), to be more precise, to Sharon Street's version of Humeanism. Not only does (Street's) HC figure as one of the most prominent accounts in current constructivist and metaethical debates in general, but, as we have seen, it also endorses an error theory about the existence of objective moral reasons and claims on behalf of the constructivist theory. To be more precise, it endorses an error theory concerning one specific understanding of objectivity in terms of the *universality* of moral reasons.

As an error theory, the Humean maintains that she agrees with the constructivist objectivist understanding of the very term or *concept* of moral objectivity, that is, what objective moral reasons *would* look like *if* they existed. However, according to her further argument, *there are no* objective, that is, universal, moral reasons because the moral reasons that agents have ultimately and only depend on the "particular and contingent evaluative starting points" of a concrete agent (Street, 2010, 370). On these grounds, Humeans advocate two claims that lie at the heart of their theory: (i) that constructivist

objectivism fails; and (ii) that metaethical constructivism is best understood as a subjectivist theory.[126]

In this respect, HC is worth worrying about for two reasons. First, because it presents a serious danger to my objectivist argument as developed throughout chapters 3 and 4 since HC claims that this form of constructivist objectivism is wrong. Second, HC, if correct, would render unsuccessful the ambitions of metaethical constructivism in general to offer a full-fledged alternative to moral realist views such as independence moral realism (IMR). For, after all, whether or not constructivism is in a position to offer this alternative hinges on, inter alia, the question of whether it can offer an objectivist theory about morality.[127]

For these two reasons, then, I have from the very beginning of this dissertation suggested that we take HC seriously, *despite* the general difficulties of interpreting Humeanism in terms of a genuinely constructivist theory.[128]

While, thus far, current discourse has been content to develop somewhat more sophisticated accounts on behalf of Humeanism (Driver 2017; Dorsey 2018), my aim in this chapter is to show that HC, as developed by Street, is simply wrong.[129] To be more precise, I argue that my developed constructivist account is well-suited to altogether refute Humeanism in virtue of disproving both its central claims: namely that constructivist objectivism fails; and that metaethical constructivism is best understood in subjectivist terms.

At the core of my argument stands the *attitude of valuing*, for recall that the Humean claim is that constructivist objectivism is wrong *because* there exists no relation at all between exercising the attitude of valuing *as such*, that is, independent from the

[126] What remains unclear, however, is how to correctly understand the relation between (i) and (ii). For often the Humean argumentation appears to claim that because of (i), (ii) follows. But that is not correct, for, as I have said before, the Humean error theory about objectivity only holds for one conception of objectivism that endorses the *universality* of moral reasons. Hence, it would be a mistake to claim that (ii) follows from (i) because one could hold that while this specific conception of objectivity (in terms of universality) may fail, there are other conceptions of objectivity (e.g. in terms of generality: Driver 2017; Dorsey 2018; see 3.2). Note, then, that the last argument explains the force of current Humean objectivist attempts as discussed in 3.2 (see Driver 2017; Dorsey 2018).

[127] As mentioned before, it is not only the constructivist resources to secure moral objectivity that make it an alternative to other realist theories. Other issues need to be clarified such as whether constructivists can account for the existence of moral truth(s), etc. For a thorough-going defense of the constructivist position in metaethics, see chapter 1.

[128] See 1.3.

[129] For this reason I also ignore Lenman's version of Humean constructivism (2010).

more particular values an agent does or does not accept, and agents' having reasons to behave morally. Accordingly, because it is this negative argument about the missing connection between valuing and morality that ultimately accounts for the Humean error theory about objective moral reasons, constructivist objectivists need to show where exactly the Humean analysis of what it means to value is mistaken, and, a fortiori, why there *is* a relation between valuing and morality after all. This is what I aim to show in this chapter.

However, before proceeding with my main argument in favor of this conclusion, I need to make two preliminary clarifications about that argument in general. The first concerns the rather complex relation between my constructivist objectivist account on the one hand, and the Kantian position on the other. For while in general I share the Kantian conception of objectivity in ethics, my argument that is supposed to lead to this conclusion can only be partly identified with the Kantian theory. This is mainly because my argument for revealing the (still missing)[130] connection between valuing and morality crucially rests on an understanding of valuers as *social* beings so that valuers qua valuing something, anything at all, are already standing in various social relations to one another. In this respect, my account in some way departs from the Kantian theory of human beings as commonly understood (O'Neill 1989, 9; 1999, 7), while in another way it is clearly in accordance with some prominent Kantian constructivist theories (O'Neill 1989; 1999, 16; Bagnoli 2016a, 1231; 1235).

Second, throughout my argument it may often seem that my primary aim consists in showing that there exists a relation between valuing and moral reasons *tout court*. This may seem irritating because my aim in the end is to defend constructivist *objectivism* against Humeanism. This argumentative aim therefore raises questions about the connection between both aims, that is, between showing how valuing leads to moral reasons on the one hand, and how objectivity in moral practice is secured on the other.

The connection is, however, once again due to HC. Humeanism is an error theory about moral objectivity precisely *because* it rejects the claim that valuing *as such* relates

[130] The stronger claim that the relation has not been revealed thus far hinges, of course, on how we think about the attractiveness and strength of Kantian constructivism. As we have seen, there are serious doubts that Kantians have succeeded in revealing the connection between valuing and morality (Geuss 1996; Bratman 1998; Gibbard 1999; Street 2008; 2010; Stern 2012), and for this reason one may say that the connection has *not* been proven after all.

or gives rise to moral reasons. Accordingly, HC claims that it is false to think that *every* valuer – merely due to the fact that she is a valuing creature – has reason to be moral. It follows from these considerations that the proof of the existence of a connection between valuing and morality is also a proof of the existence of objective moral reasons, for to show that valuing *as such* gives rise to moral reasons establishes that *there are* universal moral reasons, that is, moral reasons that apply to and hold for everyone.

The plan of this chapter runs as follows. In section 5.2, I provide an analysis of the attitude of valuing by discussing its formal features or constituents. In 5.3, I then argue why exercising the attitude of valuing, respectively the nature of valuers, necessarily includes a social dimension. In 5.4, I show how acknowledging especially this social dimension of valuing provides the missing argument for establishing the connection between valuing and morality. In 5.5, I argue what follows from the presented argument for the case of the ideally coherent Caligula and, a fortiori, for the plausibility of Humean constructivism itself. To be more precise, I show exactly where and in what respect Caligula, understood as the amoralist sadist, commits a mistake in exercising the valuing attitude while at the same time refusing to consider moral reasons. Finally, I argue in more detail why, given the correctness of my arguments in this chapter, there is a decisive reason to reject HC as it is currently advocated and defended by Street. Section 5.6 discusses two objections, section 5.7 concludes the chapter.

5.2 The Attitude of Valuing: Its Features and Constituents

We all bear a deep familiarity with what it is to value due the various evaluative stances we have taken and still take towards so many things, people and events. That is, we have all ascribed some value or disvalue towards various things, persons, relationships, and so on, and we continue to do so every day.

Despite our familiarity with what it is to value something, I think that many of us would be surprised to find out that by valuing something, anything at all, one already has reason to be moral or to accept some moral claim or value. In order to better understand this connection between valuing and morality, it is necessary to engage in deeper, philosophical analysis of two things: (i) what it is that we are doing whenever we engage in valuing, that is, whenever we exercise the valuing attitude; and (ii) what it means to be

a valuer, i.e. a creature who exercises the attitude. In the following two sections, I exclusively focus on (i) and postpone discussion of (ii) until section 5.4.

When it comes to describing the valuing attitude, David Lewis' characterization provides a helpful starting point when he argues that valuing "is some sort of mental state, directed toward that which is valued. It might be a feeling, or a belief, or a desire (or a combination of these; or something that is two or three of them at once; or some fourth thing)" (Lewis 1989, 114). Thus, in the first instance, we can understand valuing as a two-place relation between a valuer who exercises the attitude on the one hand, and the object which is valued on the other. To be more precise, it is a relation of intentionality, for valuing is always *about* or *directed* towards an object that is valued.

Lewis' description, though helpful, proves unable to sufficiently capture the nature of the attitude because several questions are left unanswered. In the following I aim to fully capture this nature by characterizing valuing in terms of four features that mark out valuing as a "complex" of different attitudes (Scheffler 2013, 132; Betzler 2014), including:

1. A belief that the valued object positively matters or is important;
2. A disposition to experience a rather wide range of different emotions with regard to the nature of the object that is valued;
3. A disposition to have reasons for action or at least for certain forms of behavior due to 1 and 2.

In addition, valuing encompasses

4. Vulnerability: that is, valuers are vulnerable to risk and loss due to valuing something.

Now, before I start to elaborate the features themselves, let me first argue why valuing must be understand as a complex of attitudes in the first place. After all, is it not possible that one could embrace a reductive view about valuing so that valuing is reduced to the state of having some positive attitude that one employs towards some things while refraining from employing it towards others?

Considering the relation between the valuer and the valued object, it *is,* indeed, very reasonable to think that valuing inter alia *is* to have a positive attitude towards the

object that is valued. In fact, it is paradoxical to claim that one values something while either being totally indifferent about the valued object or thinking (or feeling) badly about it.

From this, however, the correctness of the reductivist view does not follow. On the contrary, any attempt to altogether *reduce* valuing to the mere having of some positive attitude is problematic as can be seen best by comparing valuing with two other positive attitudes that agents can have towards objects: hedonic likes, and desires.[131] If the reductionist understanding were correct, one could quite plausibly maintain that valuing is sufficiently captured by employing either one of these two attitudes. However, as we will see, the reductionist view fails exactly because it is always possible to maintain a positive attitude towards an object while *not valuing* it, whether in the case of likes or desires.

To see why that is so, let's start with the former. According to Parfit's helpful description, hedonic (dis)likes are mental states that are "directed towards certain actual present sensations that make our having these sensations pleasant, painful, or in other ways unpleasant, or in which their pleasantness or unpleasantness partly consists" (Parfit 2013, 53).

The problem with reducing valuing to the mere having of a hedonic like then fails because it is often true that agents like some object, even quite strongly, while refusing to ascribe any value to it, or even hold that the liked object is of disvalue. For instance, consider the case of a smoker who may actually like the sensation of smoking. However, liking to smoke certainly differs from valuing smoking because a smoker can like the sensation while actually trying to quit smoking. In this case, the smoker has a like towards smoking either without thinking that smoking is valuable, or while even thinking that smoking is of disvalue.

The same considerations hold in the case of desires. Here, again, it is plausible to allow for cases where someone has a desire for something but does not actually value the object or even considers it to be of disvalue. Think again about the smoker who may have a desire to smoke a cigarette while not valuing smoking at all. The smoker thereby is not committing any kind of incoherence or self-contradiction, for her attitude can be

[131] In considering these two attitudes, I ignore the discussion about whether valuing can be reduced to a mere *urge* for doing something (Watson 1982), for this view very obviously is false (cf. ibid.).

explained in terms of her addiction. Therefore, when the smoker is desiring a cigarette, she does so because her body craves nicotine. And it is then precisely the smoker's addiction that can explain why she ascribes no value at all to smoking, for, after all, she may hold that being an addict is not valuable. But that must not automatically change her desire to smoke.

The example of the addict thus neatly illustrates not just why valuing must be distinguished from both merely liking something and desiring (Frankfurt 1971) something, but also that valuing is a much more complex attitude[132].[133]

At the same time, however, a closer investigation of the above five features of the valuing attitude help to make plausible *why* there is a difference between the three introduced attitudes. Thus, take the first feature of the valuing attitude, i.e. the value-belief or -judgment, entailing that the valued X *matters* or is *important* (cf. Scheffler 2010, 22), and that it not only matters in some way, but that it matters *positively*.

What we merely like or desire need not be (very) important to us. On the contrary, having a like or a desire towards some X is compatible with holding it to be radically unimportant. Valuing, on the other hand, may very well capture this sense of importance, as we can see by considering some objects that are more adequately described as objects of the valuing attitude than the attitude of, say, a like, such as friendship, parenthood, marriage, philosophy, a virtuous life, and so on. Of course, the importance we concede to something still allows for degrees and as such there is no reason to fear that the account of valuing that I propose here will become overly intellectualistic in the sense that we can only value friendship or virtue.[134] Hence, the previous argument about the importance of valued objects is compatible with claiming that proper objects of valuing could be to go for a run on regular basis or to genuinely value a hot cup of tea.

The variety of these different objects can be explained by allowing that, in general, what is valued can come in varying degrees or levels of importance. Thus, while a hot cup of tea in the morning arguably does not have the same degree of importance for an agent

[132] This is no trivial result because there are accounts according to which valuing just means to have a desire towards something (Harman 2000; cf. Scheffler 2010, 16ff.).
[133] By this I do not want to commit myself to the view that the only difference between desires or likes and the attitude of valuing is that of their varying degrees of complexity. It is, however, one decisive difference between the three. The same would then apply to the question whether valuing can be reduced to an urge.
[134] I thank Monika Betzler for pressing me on this point.

as her relationship to her child, there is no problem at all with claiming that both having a cup of tea and the relationship to one's own children can be genuine objects of valuing.

But a qualification is needed, for it appears that often things can be important for an agent while it would be somewhat odd to say that the agent values them. For instance, say that I am keen on running in the evenings. Because I only like to run outside, the weather matters to me. But while the weather is important for me, this surely does not suffice to think that I *value* the prospects of the weather in the evening. Nevertheless, it will genuinely matter to me that it is not raining or that there is no thunderstorm. Other examples work in an analogous way. For instance, because I have to drive to work every morning, the traffic situation will matter to me. But this surely is not equivalent to saying that I value the traffic situation. And finally, the effectiveness of the police will matter deeply to the Mafioso. However, it would be absurd to claim that the Mafioso values effective police work. If anything, he will disvalue it.

Thinking, however, that valuing not only entails that the valued object matters, but that it *positively* matters helps to make sense of the relation between these cases and what it means to value. Thus, what is missing in the examples I have just presented is that the agents either do not positively think or feel about some object, or that they even have negative thoughts or feelings about it. So, it is one thing to say that something matters to me, but it is another thing to say that for this reason I would have to think positively about it. Hence, while the weather may be important to me because I want to do my exercise outside, the weather itself is not an object of my positive thoughts or feelings at all. And the Mafioso, of course, does not think positively about the work of the police. Again, if anything, he is likely to look upon them rather negatively.

Contrast these cases with valuing friendship or being a parent, where we are strongly disposed to think and feel positively about one's parenthood or friendship, that is, one is not indifferent to these objects nor does one hold negative emotions towards them. In fact, it sounds deeply paradoxical to say that one can value some X while at the same time being repulsed by it. That does not mean that valuing only involves the having of positive feelings. As we will shortly see, valuing gives rise to a whole range of quite different – both positive *and* negative – emotions. But this does not alter the fact that the valued *object* itself must be considered by the valuer in a positive light.

These last thoughts quite naturally lead to the second feature of the valuing attitude, concerning a valuer's disposition to experience emotions of a great and sometimes extremely complex range due to the nature of the object and the circumstances a valuer faces (Scheffler 2010, 22f.; Betzler 2014). Consider Scheffler's example of a person valuing the relationship towards her own brother:

> If my relationship with my brother matters to me, then I may feel pleased at the prospect of spending time with him, saddened if we rarely have occasions to see one another, eager to help if he is in need, distressed if a serious conflict develops between us or if we become estranged, and shocked and betrayed if he harms me or abuses my trust (Scheffler 2010, 22–3).

What the argument shows is that, first of all, many kinds of emotions can be involved in valuing something, both of a positive and negative kind, and second, that all these emotions can greatly vary in degree or strength. Valuing thus encompasses such different emotions as pleasure through to strong feelings of betrayal or love.

A similar degree of variety holds for the third feature of the valuing attitude, thus concerning the range of reasons to which valuing gives rise (Scheffler 2010, 27ff.; Betzler 2014). It is often said that these reasons are reasons for action (Betzler 2014); sometimes, however, one can value some X without immediately having reasons for *doing* something in the strict sense. For instance, consider the case where a person intensely listens to the music she loves. Of course, many who do so, depending on the music, have reasons for action, e.g. by dancing. On other occasions, however, one may simply have reasons for "awe" while listening to, say, the *Desert Sessions*.[135]

Nevertheless, in the standard cases of valuing, valuers have direct reasons for action due to their aim to *realize* what they value. Think about a person valuing her own health. Under normal circumstances, this person has at least pro-tanto reason to act in ways that lead to her either staying or becoming healthy. This also includes the person's having pro-tanto reason to refrain from behaving in ways that lead to her being unhealthy. In fact, it seems paradoxical for valuers to hold that they value some X but refrain from

[135] I thank Monika Betzler for bringing my attention to this.

taking the means to make that value real. That does not mean, of course, that valuing some X necessarily gives one all-things-considered or sufficient reason to act in accordance with *X*. For we should do justice to the fact that often enough our reason R_1 that is motivated by our valuing some *X* can and sometimes even should be outweighed by another reason R_2. So, say that while agent A values her health, understood here as bodily integrity, A normally has no reason at all to enter a burning building.[136] However, this reason can be outweighed by the fact that her own child is trapped inside that building. Thus, while A knows that entering the building will cause her severe pain and will ruin her bodily integrity, she nevertheless has reason to enter it in order to rescue her child. And this reason may not just count as *some* reason to enter the building, but rather presents, all-things-considered, what A has *most* reason to do.

However, even if A's reason to enter the building is outweighed by her reason to save her child, this does not mean that she would (suddenly) have no reason at all not to enter it. A's reasons for not entering the building that are motivated by her valuing her health still apply to her; it is just that her considerations that count in favor of not entering the building lose their strength in the face of other reasons such as the fact that one's own child is trapped inside. As such, it does not change the fact that what we value gives us reasons for acting in accordance with it. Hence, to return to our example, the fact that A values her health will provide her with both pro-tanto *or* all-things-considered reason (depending on the circumstances) to act in order to pursue her health. Equally, then, A's valuing her child gives her both pro-tanto *or* all-things-considered reason (depending on the circumstances) to care for the well-being of her child, spending time with it, etc.

The discussion of these three features – namely the belief in the value of the valued X, a valuer's emotional "investment" in X (Scheffler 2013, 138), and a valuer's having reasons for action due to X – lead to two further features of the valuing attitude: first, the emotional *vulnerability* (cf. Scheffler 2010, 23ff.) that is inherent to the valuing attitude, and, second, the resulting disposition to *protect* what one values.

[136] The example is inspired by Portmore (2003, 314ff.).

The exact outlines of this "value-dependent vulnerability" (Scheffler 2010, 23)[137] depend on three things, where the first factor is presented by the nature of the valued objects (ibid, 23):

> [I]f what I value is my privacy or some old family photographs, then I do not make myself vulnerable […] to feelings of betrayal. Neither my privacy nor the old photographs can betray me; only a person can do that. So the contours of one's emotional vulnerability depend on the nature of what one values (Scheffler 2010, 23–4).

A second factor is then given by the circumstances or context (Kolodny 2003, 150–2), while the third, and final, factor is due to the ascribed importance of the valued object for the valuing agent. Therefore, if one values the relationship to one's own brother, and feels betrayed because the brother has abused one's trust, then the strength of the emotion of betrayal depends on not only the context of what it is that the brother has done, but also the level of importance that the betrayed agent ascribes to the relationship with their brother in the first place.

However, even though the arguments show that qualifications regarding a valuer's vulnerability need to be made, the mere fact that there is a connection between valuing and vulnerability reveals an important *conceptual* truth about valuing (Scheffler 2013, 136). This concerns the point that every valuer is vulnerable due to how the X that she values fares (Betzler 2014). The connection is purely conceptual because it is not even imaginable that someone could sincerely claim to hold something to be important while at the same time remaining totally indifferent to how the (important) object fares (cf. Betzler 2012).

Scheffler's thesis about the "conservatism", or, to be more precise, the "conservative dimension", as rightly built into the attitude of valuing (Scheffler 2013, 137; 136; cf. Scheffler 2007; 2010), is helpful in this regard:

> In general, we want the people and things we care about to flourish; we are not indifferent to the destruction of that which matters most to us. Indeed, there is

[137] Similar arguments that have been presented in favour of the connection between valuing and vulnerability come from Anderson (1993); Kolodny (2003); Frankfurt (1988; 1998; 2004); cf. Scheffler 2010.

> something approaching a conceptual connection between valuing something and wanting it to be sustained or preserved. During our lifetimes, this translates into a similar close connection between valuing something and seeing reasons to act so as to preserve or sustain it ourselves (ibid, 136).

As one can see, Scheffler argues that the connection between valuing and conservatism is purely conceptual. And this in turn explains why it is also a conceptual truth that valuers are vulnerable with regard to how their valued object or person fares, because the conservative thesis shows that it is part of what it means to value anything at all that valuers want their valued object to sustain or to be preserved. Again, the argument for these conceptual connections is that it is just paradoxical for valuers to claim that while they value something, they at the same time are radically unconcerned about what happens to the objects that they value, that is, whether these objects flourish or are destroyed.

Another way to appreciate the connection between valuing and vulnerability becomes apparent when considering a valuer's emotional disposition with regard to the valued object. We have already seen why this is the case by way of Scheffler's example of the brother. So, say that someone has a brother who she deeply loves and cares about. In this case, it is plausible to say that the person values her relationship to her brother. Now, because her valuing includes the disposition to experience a wide range of both positive *and* negative emotions with regard to how the relationship with her brother fares, her brother's betrayal will cause her to experience heavily negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and grief. And, of course, these emotions – in both their nature and their strength – will depend on the already mentioned factors, such as the importance of the valuer's relationship to her brother, and so on. Therefore, depending on the nature and strength of a valuer's emotional investment in the valued X, how X fares has a significant impact on a valuer because it might cause her to experience emotions that may be quite painful.

Finally, because valuing in general is connected to reasons for action or behaving in certain ways, there is always the threat of vulnerability because a valuer can quite easily be frustrated due to being prevented or hindered from acting on those reasons. For instance, if A values running, she will at some point be quite frustrated if she has so much

work to do that she cannot find the time to go out for a run. Or, say that A values gardening, but cannot go outside because it is raining all the time. In both cases it is quite natural to expect that A is not indifferent about these obstacles. On the contrary, we would expect her to be angry, upset and frustrated because she cannot act on the reasons that her valued object gives rise to.

Taking together all the reasons why valuing includes the risk of loss, frustration, and other negative, even devastating, emotions, explains why valuers, in turn, have reason to protect what they value. Thus, one has reason to prepare one's valued garden for the winter so that flowers and trees will not be damaged. Or one has reason to take care of one's health in order to be able to go running in the first place. Surely, these reasons are entailed within the broader range of reasons for action that valuers have due to their exercising the valuing attitude in general. At the same time, however, they reveal a crucial aspect about valuing, namely that vulnerability as well as the disposition to protect one's valued objects are an inseparable part of what it means to value anything at all.

5.3 The Nature of Valuers

As I said at the beginning of the chapter, my argument, which is supposed to refute HC by revealing the connection between valuing and morality, crucially rests on an analysis of the nature of those who exercise the attitude, that is, of valuers. In order to carry out that analysis, it was first necessary to better understand the attitude itself, i.e. its formal features or constituents. While this former part has often been undertaken, the nature of valuers figures less prominently in current debate. Where it has been discussed, however, only a distinctive account or description of valuing beings has been adopted. This can best be seen by considering constructivist debate. While constructivists, most prominently Korsgaard (1996) or Street (2006; 2008; 2010), have discussed, at least in some respects, what it means to be a valuer, they have done so in a particular way, that is, in a way that crucially (i.e. independent of the correctness of the analysis in itself) has prevented both Kantians and Humeans from grasping the relation between valuing and morality.

To be more precise, it is *one* distinct interpretation of the nature of valuing creatures that goes back to what is commonly understood to be a Kantian interpretation

of agency (cf. O'Neill 1989, 9). Agents, on this account, are first and foremost understood as single (ibid, 7; 9) and *autonomous* creatures (cf. Bagnoli 2013) that are radically disentangled from one another because they do not stand in any relation at all to those others in virtue of their exercising their rational capacities or their attitudes such as valuing.

Now, on the basis of that understanding, Kantians try to show why agents are committed to accept some values, norms, or reasons that underlie or are constitutive of their agency, and at the same time relate to distinctly moral considerations.[138] Take Korsgaard's prominent argument in *The Sources of Normativity*, where she argues that human rational agents are committed to the so-called "value of humanity", i.e. the value of their rational capacities, that at the same time puts them into the moral domain insofar as agents are supposed to respect the rational capacities of *other* agents too (1996, 121).[139]

Critics of the strategy have often complained that the argument is not well-equipped to bridge the gap between caring about oneself and other agents, respectively the gap between ascribing value to *one's* own rational capacities and to the capacities of *others* (cf. Geuss 1996; Bratman 1998).[140] In the following, I intend neither to defend nor to criticize *this* particular Kantian move as advocated by Korsgaard; rather I want to propose an altogether different argument in order to reveal the connection between exercising the valuing attitude, or between the nature of valuing beings, and morality. This argument crucially rests on the *social* conditions of the valuing attitude, that is, the *social nature* of those creatures who exercise the attitude.

In this respect, however, i.e. by highlighting the social dimension of valuing, it is not that there would be no relation at all between my own argument and the Kantian view. On the contrary, the relation is rather complex because of the following reasons. On the one hand, my argument clearly is a form of Kantianism insofar as it shares the Kantian conclusion that reflection on human attitudes can ground objective moral reasons and norms (cf. Street 2008; 2010; Dorsey 2018). In addition, and as I have previously shown, my account shares the exact same understanding of how the term "objective" is

[138] See my earlier discussion on Kantianism in 3.2.
[139] For a quite similar argument independent from Kantian constructivism see Gewirth 1986.
[140] Another prominent objection states that Korsgaard's account thus collapses into a brand of realism (Stern 2013). I won't discuss that objection further. For a critical discussion see Bagnoli (2014).

understood, for Kantians like myself cash out the objectivity of morality in terms of universality (cf. Street 2010; Dorsey 2018, 576).[141]

However, even though I share the Kantian understanding of what it means for moral reasons to be objective, and while I share its endorsement of the relation between human attitudes and objective moral reasons, my own argumentative strategy that is supposed to prove the relation between valuing and the existence of objective (i.e. universal) moral reasons departs from the *most prominent* version of Kantianism as spelled out above. This is because it assumes that valuers essentially and necessarily are social beings, and secondly, that it is this social dimension that ultimately accounts for the existence of objective moral reasons and norms. As I said before, this argument can be understood as a brand of Kantianism (O'Neill 1989; 1999; Bagnoli 2016a), but it is a version that is seldom associated with the historical Kant or with arguments put forward by contemporary Kantian constructivism where agents are understood as autonomous and isolated creatures. Hence, to adequately capture this relation, I propose that my argument, while not counting as a full-fledged Kantian view, does proceed in some Kantian spirit and that, for this reason, it is at least compatible with some versions of Kantianism.

So, let us consider in more detail why there is reason to assume that valuing crucially and necessarily involves a social dimension and what this dimension looks like.[142]

I maintain that valuing involves a social dimension in virtue of the fact that exercising the attitude inter alia means to constantly rely and depend on others, to need and to directly *interact* with them.[143] It is exactly in this way, then, that I understand and thus cash out the term "social". Accordingly, I propose that the claim about the social

[141] See 3.2.

[142] Valuing is not the only attitude or capacity that involves a social dimension. Thus, consider Anthony Laden's view of the sociality of *reasoning*. Laden argues that reasoning cannot be understood merely as a problem-solving device or a means to discover the truth (Bagnoli 2016c, 603) precisely in virtue of its being a social phenomenon in which reasoners *interact* with one another: "According to this picture, the central components of the activity of reasoning include proposing, engaging, conversing, and other activities of mutual attunement, rather than calculating, deducing, problem-solving, and judging. The activity of reasoning pictured here brings into view possibilities for living together that are often hard to see clearly from within our standards ways of picturing and talking about reason" (Laden 2012, 8).

[143] The tendency to underestimate these constant interactions is not limited to the more common constructivist analysis of the attitude of valuing, but rather, as MacIntyre argues, mirrors a quite general tendency of philosophical understanding of human agents as such (MacIntyre 1999, 81). I thank Eva Maria Parisi for drawing my attention to this.

dimension of valuing means that valuing is not and indeed cannot be exercised only by individuals; rather it involves undergoing a rather complex set of relations to others.[144]

The complex combination of relations of valuers towards one another can be seen by considering two crucial aspects of valuers: (i) that they start their lives *as children* and thus (must) first of all *develop into* full-blown valuers; and (ii) that even as such full-blown valuers, their attitude is still exercised in constant relation to as well as interaction with others. In the following I discuss both (i) and (ii) in more detail.

Let's start with (i) and consider again the very nature of the valuing attitude. According to the description set out above, it is the attitude that someone employs who judges that something is important or worth achieving, connects emotionally to it and is presented with reasons for φing. Given this description, as Betzler in particular shows, it is plausible to assume that especially (young) children do not employ or exercise the attitude in exactly this (more) sophisticated sense inter alia because as children they do not hold fully formulated evaluative beliefs about the value of an object in the first place (Betzler 2014). Nevertheless, children, starting at the age of 2, employ a proto-attitude of valuing, i.e. the attitude of *caring* (ibid), and "[t]he question that therefore needs to be answered is how children develop the attitude of valuing on the basis of their capacity for caring" (ibid).

Betzler's further arguments then do not just demonstrate that *there is* a contrast between a child's and an adult's evaluative attitude and that it is thus not true to assume that people just come into existence as full-blown valuers. They also show in what sense children (constantly) need others and rely on them in order to develop into ordinary and genuine valuers. Betzler highlights the role of the parents in particular when she argues that it is the parents' duty to support the child's development[145], where

> [t]his involves taking an interest in what children care about, encourage them in pursuing what they care about, empathizing with them if what they care about gives rise to frustration, giving them critical feedback if what they care about is imprudent, immoral, or otherwise of disvalue, and helping them understand when

[144] I thank Monika Betzler for pressing me on this point.

[145] Of course, that does not mean that it is only the parents who shape a child's attitude and thus influence its development, for there is also the child's broader family, schoolteachers, and so on.

> their emotions are appropriate and their caring directed to something valuable (ibid).

The argument shows how parents are important and even constitutive not only in the child's developing *judgments* about value, but also in developing the *attitude as a whole*.

Let's start with the first element, i.e. the value judgments. As children, we are growing up in a value-laden environment, that is, an environment in which some things are considered to be valuable while others are not, where some things are openly endorsed as valuable while others are understood as being of disvalue, etc. Such an environment crucially shapes not only our set of value judgments that we develop as *children*, but arguably also the set of judgments that we *come to* endorse when we are undergoing puberty and thus develop into *adults*. Therefore, while as children we may tend to merely take over the values that, say, our parents or broader family endorse, in puberty we often distance ourselves from the values that we have grown up with and endorse their opposite. It follows from this that even in the case where valuers have consciously rejected those values with which they are familiar, it is not true to assume that they have become completely independent from the values they have grown up with. On the contrary, the values that they have grown up with still and crucially shape what they will endorse (or reject) as adults. As Mackie has maintained:

> Each individual is linked not only to his biological ancestors but also to traditions of activity and information and thought and belief and value; nearly all of what anyone most distinctively and independently is he owes to many others (Mackie 1977, 172).

However, it is not just a child's judgment concerning value that is shaped by others, i.e. the child's parents, broader family, teachers, etc.; so too is their *very attitude* insofar as this attitude itself has to undergo a certain kind of development, wherein, again, a child's interaction with others is a constitutive factor for that development. Thus, not only are other people, such as parents, important for telling the child what is and what is not valuable, but, as Betzler also shows, they are important for teaching the child how to *value* in the first place, that is, how to react appropriately to value, how to give and evaluate

reasons for or against some X being valuable, how to connect emotionally to the value of some X, and so on.

Importantly, however, considering (ii), it is neither exclusively nor primarily young valuers who need and constantly interact with others, for *adult* valuers do so too, and they do so merely in virtue of exercising their attitude. To be more precise, they do so in virtue of participating in what I call the *valuing practice* which is the practice whereby valuers are exchanging opinions with one another about value, give and take reasons for or against some X being valuable, and criticize or encourage one another to value X, Y, or Z depending on what they already value, disvalue or still miss to value.[146] In fact, when it comes to the valuing practice and its role within the lives of valuers, I grant it a special status in my argument in favor of the social nature of valuers insofar as the valuing practice is supposed to show that valuing in the end not merely commonly or ordinarily involves a social dimension but *necessarily* does so, therefore counting in favor of the view that valuing is necessarily a social attitude.[147]

Now, at first it appears that exactly for this reason I am granting the valuing practice too prominent a role in what it is to be a valuer, insofar as I take the practice to support my claim that valuing is not only for the most part but necessarily a social attitude. The skepticism against this claim may be fueled by the thought that it at least appears genuinely possible that valuers engage solitarily in valuing. To be more concrete, it seems that one can value tea without engaging in any debate about whether or not tea is valuable, or that one can value watching horror movies without entering into a dispute about the value of horror movies. This thought then qualifies as an objection against my claim about the necessarily social nature of valuers insofar as it appears to show that there can be rather ordinary valuers who are not in constant interaction with others merely due to their valuing. If, however, valuing without participation in the valuing practice is not just possible but an ordinary phenomenon, then valuing is not necessarily but only on some occasions a social attitude. Thus, valuing may be social in cases where a valuer consciously or intentionally *decides* to participate in the valuing practice. But this is far from saying that valuing *necessarily* is a social phenomenon, or that those who exercise

[146] As far as I see things, Scheffler is the only one who has thus far acknowledged valuing as taking place within a practice (Scheffler 2013, 164).
[147] I thank Katja Vogt for her helpful discussion on this point and for making me better understand my claim.

the attitude necessarily are social beings. On the contrary, it would prove that the social aspect is only a contingent aspect of valuing insofar as the nature of valuers only as a matter of contingency is a social nature.

However plausible at first sight, the skepticism about the nature and role of the valuing practice for the lives and nature of valuers is misguided. In fact, in what follows I focus primarily on the valuing practice in order to make plausible my claims that valuing is a necessarily social attitude and that because of this nature there exists a relation between valuing and morality.

So, to see why this skepticism is misguided, let's think again about the nature of the valuing attitude as elaborated in section 5.2. There, I have highlighted that valuing is neither similar nor reducible to merely liking or desiring something. One of the reasons that explained this thought was that there is crucial difference between the evaluative attitudes of hedonic likes, desires and valuing (inter alia) in virtue of the fact that only in the case of valuing is a *judgment* about value formed.

The existence of the judgment about value then marks an important difference between all three evaluative attitudes because it presents *the* central reason why in the case of valuing a valuer *transcends* her own perspective due to her forming such a value judgment. In fact, as I shall argue, this is a purely conceptual aspect of valuing.[148] Take, by contrast, the case of hedonic likes again. In this case, whether or not one likes the sensation of, say, chocolate, one merely describes one's own psychological constitution, that is, whether or not one is a person who likes chocolate. That is also the reason why there are no reasons for liking or disliking something other than, again, whether one is a person who just *likes* or dislikes some X (Parfit 2013, 53).

When it comes to desiring, the case may appear more complicated because there are some who claim that desiring some X inter alia is to judge that X is good (Schroeder 2015). But that seems odd, for, as we have seen before, having a desire is compatible with believing or judging that one's desire is directed toward or about something that is of no particular value or even not valuable at all. For instance, a person who tries to quit smoking can have a desire for a cigarette without believing or judging that there is any

[148] Kubala argues that valuing can be exercised without forming a value judgment (2017). Appreciating that the connection between valuing and the forming of an evaluative judgment about the value of the valued X is a conceptual one helps to see what is wrong with that view.

value in smoking cigarettes. In fact, as discussed in 5.2, the case of the addict is the standard case for showing how desiring some X can arise without having any belief about X's value or even with the belief about the disvalue of X.

The case is different when it comes to valuing, for, as we have seen, it is incoherent to claim to value some X without at the same time believing or judging that X is valuable or even believing or judging that X has no value. If this is true, then one can see how, in virtue of forming a judgment about the goodness or value of X, a valuer not merely *describes* a fact about his own psychological constitution but, on the contrary, makes a *normative* claim (cf. Thomson 2008, 1–2[149])[150]. As Lewis claims:

> In making a judgment of value, one makes many claims at once, some stronger than others, some less confidently than others, and waits to see which can be made to stick. I say X is a value; I mean that all mankind are disposed to value X; or anyway all nowadays are; or anyway all nowadays are except maybe some peculiar people on distant islands, or anyway… […] How much am I claiming? – as much as I can get away with. If my stronger claims were proven false… I still mean to stand by the weaker ones. So long as I am not challenged, there's no need to back down in advance; and there's no need to decide how far I'd back down if pressed (Lewis 2000, 85).

Lewis' argument is helpful for understanding the normative dimension involved in valuing because, at least according to my understanding, it correctly describes what is involved in formulating judgments or holding beliefs about value. Thus, while Lewis allows that the claim(s) about value that are involved in forming value judgments can come in different degrees or strengths, the important point is that these claims must stand up to being "challenged" by evaluative criticism pressed by others.[151]

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[149] Thomson calls these claims about goodness "evaluatives" (Thomson 2008, 2).

[150] I thank Carla Bagnoli for pressing me on this.

[151] In this sense, then, my own social account of valuing shares, as I have said before, a distinctively Kantian idea, namely the idea that normative claims are invitations for rational criticism. Hence, take Kant claiming that "Reason must in all its undertakings subject itself to criticism; should it limit freedom of criticism by any prohibitions, it must harm itself, drawing upon itself a damaging suspicion" (Kant, A738/B766, in Laden 2012, 14). It is also this Kantian claim that is essential to Laden's aforementioned view of the social nature of reasoning, insofar as Kant claims that reasoning involves an "openness to criticism" (Laden 2012, 15). This openness, however, requires that agents interact with others, e.g. by listening to them (ibid, 8–9).

Again, the difference between valuing and liking, or desiring, helps to appreciate this point. Where a smoker has a desire for a cigarette, the having of a desire is compatible with not believing that smoking is valuable at all. And the reason why there is no problem involved with a person having a desire for smoking while refusing to ascribe value to smoking, is due to the thought that desiring in itself does not involve any claim about goodness, whether that concerns a claim about goodness simpliciter, or relative goodness, i.e. goodness *for* the smoker (him- or herself).[152]

In the case of valuing, things are different, because even where someone does *not* judge that X is valuable simpliciter, but "only" that X is good *for her*, there is still a normative claim involved that must stand up to critical evaluation.[153] This explains why there is no normative problem involved in the case where a smoker has a desire for smoking, while such a problem is involved in the case where the smoker *values* smoking, for (only) in the latter case is a judgment about goodness formed, and it is exactly this judgment that (regardless of whether it is about value *simpliciter* or value for X) puts the valuer under the pressure of critical evaluation.

But how exactly do these considerations account for the social dimension of valuing, and, in addition, for my claim that valuing *necessarily* is a social phenomenon? To be more precise, in what sense do these thoughts corroborate my claim that the forming of a normative, evaluative judgment about the value of some X necessarily is a social phenomenon? Let me start with the first, weaker point regarding the thought that the normative dimension of valuing accounts for its *social* character. Thus, recall two things. First, that the place where valuing, and correspondingly value judgments, are evaluated critically (by being discussed and criticized) is what I have called the valuing practice. Second, that I have defined the notion of "social" in the "social dimension" of valuing in terms of agents interacting and depending on one another. It follows from these considerations, then, that the normative aspect built into the attitude accounts for the

[152] I thus understand the notion of relative value in the sense elaborated by Smith in his 2003 "Neutral and Relative Value after Moore".

[153] It is important to mention the distinction between relational and non-relational value because my argument may wrongly suggest that valuing always involves making *objective* claims about value. One may think this because if valuing inter alia means formulating a judgment about what is *of value*, and if these judgments do not merely report an agent's psychological constitution, then it appears to follow that valuing can only come with endorsing value objectivism. But this is not true, since even if one thinks that the value judgments involved in valuing are about subjective value, there is still a normative claim involved. And, again, it is this normative claim that needs to stand up to critical evaluation.

social dimension of valuing because it relates to the valuing practice in which valuers are interacting with one another. After all, critical evaluation, dispute and argumentation cannot be undertaken alone; rather they must involve others with whom one can exchange reasons and arguments. Now, insofar as exchanging, debating and arguing with one another are all forms of agents interacting with one another, and since I have defined "social" in terms of interaction, the valuing practice is a genuinely social phenomenon.

But there still is a caveat, for even if it does follow from my argument thus far that valuing involves a social dimension, there still needs to be given further argumentation in favor of the conclusion that valuers not only *ordinarily* or *normally* stand in social relation to others, but that they *necessarily* do so. For only this result will prove the claim that valuing as such – that is, independently of the more particular object(s) that the attitude is directed toward – is a social attitude.

Now, arguably the claim that valuing necessarily is a social attitude is a strong one, and to some it may appear too strong. Thus, take again the Humean account that Julia Driver presented in her paper on "Contingency and Constructivism".[154] There, she argues that, ultimately, the social nature of valuers may itself be understood only as a *contingent* fact about humanity's evaluative nature. Thus, Driver claims:

> My strategy is to argue for a view which is Humean, but from which we can extract norms that are substantive in the sense of not being contingent on some idiosyncratic features of an agent's psychological make-up but nevertheless *are* contingent on the practical point of view of *social creatures* (Driver 2017, 176, first italics removed, second italics added).

Driver's suggestion thus is that the social dimension of valuing must be understood not as a necessary factor, but rather as a contingent one (cf. Dorsey 2018, 591).[155] This skepticism may then fuel worries about the contingent, i.e. non-necessary, participation

[154] See 3.2 for the earlier discussion of Driver's position.

[155] If Driver were correct, it would follow that there is also some level of contingency involved in those moral reasons, norms, and values that follow from the reflective process on valuing. And, as we have seen, this is exactly what Driver herself believes.

in the valuing practice[156].[157] I think that one could give two reasons as to why a valuer's participation in the valuing practice is in fact not necessary. First, this may be because there can be cases where it turns out to be difficult to have one's value judgments evaluated by others because there are (as yet) no considerable standards for such values. A second reason is presented by the skeptical concern that not every valuer may actually seek for her value judgments to be judged and thus evaluated by others in the first place.[158]

Now, I hold that my former arguments presented in this section in fact already have the resources to meet these worries because they showed that valuing, as a matter of *conceptual truth*, includes forming a judgment about value. Therefore, the necessity of valuing being accompanied by the valuing practice is grounded on the idea that one *cannot* engage in the valuing attitude as we know it without at the same time participating in that practice. In addition, I argued that because this value judgment makes a normative claim about goodness, it must stand up to critical evaluation. This is also a purely conceptual consideration. For other than in the case of merely describing one's psychological constitution, valuing an object inter alia means to claim that the object *is good* or worth achieving. Insofar as this judgment is entailed, however, it is already open to be challenged, discussed, and even corrected. Doing so, however, just cannot be done merely by the agent herself; rather other agents *must* be part of this evaluative process. And it is exactly in this sense, then, that valuing is not just mostly but necessarily a social phenomenon. After all, because I defined the social dimension in terms of interaction, and because the process of critical evaluation, discussion and argumentation is a genuine form of dependence and interaction, *and* because the normative aspect of valuing just *cannot* be undertaken without dependence on and interaction with others, it is exactly the normative aspect of valuing that accounts for its necessarily social nature.

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[156] I thank Monika Betzler for this point.

[157] Consider also Scheffler on this point, who is very careful about the strength of his claim that valuers are social creatures and therefore maintains that his conclusions about the social aspect of valuing may in fact not be "universally shared" (Scheffler 2013, 133). Although he does not say more on this point, Scheffler's modesty in respect of the strength of his claim might be because some may want to maintain that a valuer's dependence on others (which Scheffler reveals during his argument) only mirrors a contingent fact of valuing insofar as it holds only for a restricted class of valued object such as finding a cure for cancer, for example. My own discussion, by contrast, shows that valuing *as such* is a social attitude, i.e. independently of the nature of the valued objects. It therefore shows that Scheffler's caution regarding the strength of his arguments is misplaced.

[158] Again, I owe these points to helpful discussion with Monika Betzler.

Given the correctness of the argument, it is then exactly these considerations that show how both former skeptical arguments against the valuing practice necessarily accompanying the valuing attitude can be answered. Let us take the former point first. The reasoning here is that the very possibility of evaluating one another's value judgment (as well as valuing) in the valuing practice seems to presuppose that there (already) exist clear and well-formulated criteria of evaluation for such evaluation to make sense. However, there arguably do exist some domains of valuing that are either so novel or so specialized that such standards are (still) missing. One may think, for instance, of a highly specialized kind of art or music that is so particular that evaluating this art or music in light of the already established standards of that domain becomes difficult or even impossible.

Given what has been argued, two answers can be given to this case. First, examples of this kind are in fact quite numerous and thus very common to human evaluative history such as the development of abstract art, or Rock and Roll. However, in both cases, it was not impossible to evaluate pieces of abstract art or Rock and Roll music. On the contrary, we feel nowadays quite confident in ascribing value to the guitar playing of Jimi Hendrix or the paintings of Jackson Pollock.

In addition, what these examples of abstract art or Rock and Roll show is that even in the face of radically new or very particular developments in certain domains of art or music, valuers have not refused to evaluate these pieces of art or music; on the contrary, insofar as these developments occurred, standards were established with which evaluation became possible.

What about the second reason to worry, then, which derives from the thought that valuers may in fact refuse to participate in the valuing practice? One example that appears to press this point comes, again, from history, namely from National Socialism. The argument concerning this point proceeds in the following way. Without doubt, the ideology of National Socialism was so distorted that it appears difficult to maintain that its advocates were prepared let alone sought to be evaluated by those who did not share their beliefs. On the contrary, the Nazis clearly suppressed every other opinion that did not count in favor of their ideology. So, what shall we make of the thesis that valuers necessarily are social beings insofar as they necessarily participate in the valuing practice, if the (historical) example of National Socialism clearly seems to count against such a view?

While I admit that it sounds somewhat odd to imagine the Nazis participating in the valuing practice where they aimed to allow their beliefs and ideas to be discussed, historical analysis does indeed show that something like a valuing practice might not have sounded so strange to National Socialists as one might have initially thought. I cannot go into the details of such analysis here, but merely want to mention in particular Herlinde Pauer-Studer's recent discussion on the distorted normativity with regard to Nazi ideology and the problem that this ideology poses for current views on law.

Thus, in her 2012 paper "Law and Morality under Evil Conditions", Pauer-Studer focuses on the problem of how one can adequately reject the Nazi law "while granting 'validity' to any legal system whatsoever" (ibid, 368). In the course of her argument, she shows that one quite plausible idea must be rejected, namely to maintain that the National Socialist law could not withstand the standards of morality (ibid). The idea here would be to argue that the connection between law and morality in general must be tightened, so that on the basis of that connection one could evaluate the "validity" of any legal systems in light of moral rules and norms.

The problem with that approach, however, according to Pauer-Studer, is that morality already figured rather prominently in the "Third Reich's" legal system (ibid, 369):

> The program of the Nazi lawyers was to call for the unification of law and morality (Sittlichkeit) – a requirement which post-war anti-positivists favour as well. Leading political and legal theorists like Reinhard Höhn, Otto Koellreutter, Karl Larenz and Ernst Forthoff considered eliminating the distinction between law and morality as crucial for attaining a National Socialist form of law. The idea was that an appropriate conception of law should in addition to positive legal norms also embrace a "higher law" […] reflecting the idea of "the right and the just". Ethical principles should be embedded in law (ibid, 370–1).

What matters for my current argument is not so much the – rather hard to believe – fact that the Nazis were (seriously) considering moral values. Rather what I want to highlight is that Pauer-Studer's further discussion shows that while the Nazis had a "deeply perverted conception of justice and morality" (ibid, 372), they nevertheless not only *had* such conceptions like the SS's ethos of "honour and decency" (ibid, 376; 385), but also

were obviously ready to engage in *normative evaluation* of as well as *deliberation* about these conceptions.

The point becomes especially visible in the case of the SS judge Konrad Morgen, which Pauer-Studer analyzes in much detail.[159] Her case study reveals not only that Morgen constantly weighed between pre-Nazi and Nazi law (ibid, 384), but also that "morality plays a crucial role in Morgen's ambiguity [between both laws]", where "Morgen displayed a highly moralized self-understanding, drawing on a seamless web of moral notions, blending justice, virtue, decency of character and principle-based outlook […]" (ibid, 387).

Nazi law in general and Morgen's case in particular reveal that the Nazis were obviously not only capable but also motivated and ready to engage in critical argument and discourse. While they did so in a "blurred" way (ibid), the important point is that even such a highly distorted ideology, which appears so beyond the pale to most of us, is in fact built on quite ordinary discourse, debate, and evaluation.

Given these arguments it should become clear that the previously considered objections against the merely contingent participation of valuers in the valuing practice turn out to be false. For the examples of abstract art, Rock and Roll and Nazi ideology show that even in cases where it appears difficult to see how one can participate in the valuing practice, history provides perfect counter-examples to this skepticism. In fact, one can even go a step further and maintain that not only do the presented examples answer the aforementioned skepticism against the necessarily social aspect of valuing, but that it is precisely this necessarily social aspect of valuing that renders plausible why and how valuers developed new evaluative standards for evaluating modern art, or how it could be that advocates of such a distorted ideology as National Socialism could sincerely engage in evaluative debate in the first place. In either way, the case studies rather than undermining definitively count in favor of my claim that the very attitude of valuing is a social attitude, and that the nature of those who exercise the attitude necessarily is social.

[159] See also Pauer-Studer, Velleman (2017).

5.4 Valuing and Morality

Before continuing, allow me to briefly restate what is at stake in this chapter, what has been established thus far, and what remains to be shown. At the start of the chapter, I claimed that my argument is supposed to refute Humean constructivism by revealing the missing link between valuing and morality. I further maintained that the argument I present here does so by referring to the distinctly and necessarily social nature of valuers.

In the last section, I then carried out an analysis of the constituents of the valuing attitude and gave a description of the nature of valuers, that is, what it is like to exercise the attitude. I have been seeking, especially in the last section, to reveal the social nature of valuers by showing that valuers, qua valuing something, anything at all, constantly and necessarily rely on, need, and interact with one another.

In this section, my aim is to demonstrate how it is on the basis of that social nature of valuers that constructivist objectivism can explain and justify the existence of objective moral reasons as the outcome of a process of rational reflection on valuing. Accordingly, I will endeavor to show that and how exactly the constructivist argument I defend here is well placed to answer two questions that are important in order to render HC wrong: (i) how exactly exercising the attitude of valuing, and correspondingly the nature of valuing creatures, gives rise to moral reasons, norms, and values; and (ii) why there is reason to conceive of these reasons and norms in objective rather than subjective terms.

So, let's start with (i) and see how constructivism can explain the relation between valuing and morality *tout court*. The result crucially rests on valuers' participation and engagement in the valuing practice. Thus, consider again the nature of the valuing practice by recalling what exactly is involved in formulating judgments about value. As we have seen, formulating and holding a judgment about value means to stand up to critical evaluation, and that to be critically evaluated holds independently of whether one has formulated a judgment about relative value or value simpliciter. As I further argued, then, critical evaluation is not – and in fact cannot be – undertaken by a single valuer alone, but rather requires interaction with others who are capable of providing argumentation, criticism and debate about what an agent values and thus holds to be valuable. And it was precisely this kind of practice of valuers interacting with one another over questions of value that I have called the valuing practice.

By understanding and acknowledging the valuing practice as (necessarily) accompanying the attitude of valuing, it is possible to provide an initial explanation of how moral reasons are crucially related to what it means to engage in valuing. This is so for the following reason. It was shown that by valuing something, anything at all, valuers open themselves up to critical evaluation and criticism with regard to what they value. The same holds, of course, when others are valuing something, whether that concerns the same object or something entirely different. Thus, in each case, valuers claim that some X or other is valuable, and by doing so they are subject to evaluative criticism.

Now, because the kind of evaluative criticism that is at stake here is a criticism concerning the *normativity* of the valued objects, the practice of evaluating one another is only compatible with acting in some ways and not in others. For instance, behavior that seeks not to promote genuine exchange about questions of value but rather to undermine the debate by "putting one's fist down" clearly is not in accordance with what the valuing practice requires. After all, what we are doing by valuing something inter alia is to make normative claims that, qua being such claims, call for critical evaluation. However, whether or not those normative claims, a fortiori an agent's valuing, are appropriate hinges on the correctness or reasonableness of those claims only. "Putting one's fist down", by contrast, is a misguided form of behavior because it is in no way an appropriate form of evaluating the correctness of a normative judgment. Accordingly, "putting one's fist down" is not in accordance with what the valuing practice actually requires.

In general, then, I do not mean to imply that the valuing practice only gives rise to distinctively moral reasons, for there are also and clearly non-moral reasons and values to which the valuing practice gives rise, such as reasons for listening to one another. Why are these reasons in accordance with the valuing practice? In that practice valuers are, as we have seen, exchanging with one another about questions of value and are evaluating one another's judgment about value. Such evaluative activities are only possible, however, if one genuinely and really *listens* to what others think as valuable, or how they evaluate one's own beliefs and judgments about value, whether they deem our reasons for valuing some X adequate to begin with, and so on (cf. Laden 2012, 8–9). Without listening, that is, without genuinely hearing what other valuers have to say about value, no such activities can be carried out in the first place.

It is then precisely these kinds of considerations that count in favor of the relation between valuing and moral reasons too. Thus, imagine a valuing practice in which anyone had reason to readily interfere with other valuers' valuing for no other reason than because it is fun to do so. Or imagine a practice in which anyone had reason to destroy or to behave disrespectfully towards what other valuers value simply because it is fun to do so. In all these cases, agents would behave in ways that are not in accordance with the nature of the valuing practice. Merely undermining other valuers' valuing, or merely destroying what they value, is in no way adequate or appropriate for settling this matter. On the contrary, it is as if one wants to conduct a math contest and then seeks to determine the winner by letting the participants engage in a fist fight.

The argument can be supported by considering the arguments of Samuel Scheffler in his 2013 "The Afterlife". Here Scheffler considers a so-called "doomsday" scenario in which all life on earth will be annihilated within the next 30 days, and he explores the consequences of the scenario on our present lives *as valuers*. Scheffler thereby refers to the term "afterlife" in a non-conventional sense due to its referring not to a life after death (as associated with certain religious theories) but to the life of those people who will (continue to) live after our own life has ended (ibid, 131). So, with respect to the afterlife understood in this sense, Scheffler claims that:

> It is my contention that the […] afterlife […] matters greatly to us. It matters to us in its own right, and it matters to us because our confidence in the existence of an afterlife is a condition of many other things that we care about continuing to matter to us. […] [T]he importance […] of the afterlife can help to illuminate what, more generally, is involved in […] our *valuing* (ibid, my italics).

The doomsday scenario shows in what respect a person's present valuing of something heavily depends on other people, since it reveals how the fate of those who come after us has a significant impact on how one is able to exercise one's own valuing, or how one's attitude flourishes. I will not go into the details of Scheffler's argument here. What matters for my own argument is that his main aim is to show that the doomsday scenario reveals how far we, as valuers, depend on future generations and that from this specific dependence on others, moral reasons are supposed to follow.

Thus, Scheffler argues that presently existing valuers have reason to provide future generations with the necessary resources for *them* to be able to value because these generations inter alia determine how well or badly a valuer's attitude *now* is flourishing. In this way, the afterlife scenario shows why there is reason for valuers to care about one another. The difference between Scheffler's argument and my own, then, is that Scheffler is only concerned with reasons for caring about *future* generations[160], while I hold that my own argument supports the existence of moral reasons that are *not* limited to any particular generation of valuers, meaning that they hold for all valuers at all times.

To be more precise, rather than holding that there is only reason to care about valuers existing at time t_x, my argument supports the view that we have reason to behave morally towards *all* valuers, independently of whether they live in the past, present, or future. Again, this is due to the fact that valuers are embedded in a social net of relations that connects valuers to one another across time. Therefore, there are moral reasons for valuers to take into account not only those who live in the present – as shown above – or in the future – as proven by Scheffler – but also those who have lived in the *past*.

Thus, think again about Scheffler's original argument in which he maintained that there is reason to care about future generations because these generations inter alia determine how good or bad the present valuers' attitudes are flourishing. Given what has been shown in section 5.3 about the various ways in which valuers rely and depend on and interact with one another, an even stronger conclusion can be reached insofar as Scheffler's original argument also goes in the other direction. This is because whether or not future generations are able to value anything at all inter alia is decided on the grounds of whether or not past valuers have provided the necessary resources for them to do so. Because of that very reason, future valuers have at least prima facie reason to behave respectfully towards what has been established as valuable because these established values are at least in part the necessary conditions for them being able to value what they value. After all, past values are necessary conditions for a present generations' valuing some set of objects because what has been valued in the past greatly influences, structures, and fuels the present generation's valuing.

[160] See also Scheffler (2018).

Having reasons to behave respectfully towards what others have valued, of course, does not mean that everything that has been valued in the past cannot be rejected as valuable after all. However, it is one thing to genuinely consider whether the values that have been endorsed in the past are worthy of being endorsed, and quite another to disregard them merely because they have been valued in the past.

Now, if my argument thus far is correct, then it establishes that *there is* a relation between valuing and morality, and that valuers therefore have reason to behave morally towards one another. In addition, I also argued how the content of these reasons should be spelled out in more detail. I thus maintained that the moral reasons to which valuing gives rise are those that count in favor of withdrawing from undermining one another's valuing attitude and to behave respectfully towards valued objects.

But still, even though this is an important result, something is missing, for recall that one of the main aims of this chapter is not just to show that there exists a relation between valuing and moral reasons *tout court*, but also that these reasons must be spelled out in *objective* terms. Hence, in order to fulfill this purpose, we need to understand why the moral reasons and norms that are due to valuing and the nature of valuers must be understood in a distinctly objective sense.

On closer inspection, however, my argument already has all the theoretical means at its disposal to prove that those reasons that are the outcome of the reflective process on valuing and the nature of valuers are objective after all. To see why that is, one needs to consider again the description of the constructivist understanding of the objectivity of morality (CMO) as developed in chapter 3, where I argued that, according to CMO, moral reasons are objective if and only if they hold universally, that is, for (literally) everyone.

Now, given what has been said in this section about the nature of those moral reasons that arise out of the reflective process on valuing (and the nature of valuers), the argument does count more in favor of an objective rather than any relativist conception. The reason for this is that none of those reasons, which according to my argument are entailed within the attitude of valuing, are grounded either in any subjective or intersubjective standpoint; rather they emerge from an analysis about what is involved in valuing *as such*, and what it means to be a valuer *in general*.

Accordingly, the standpoint from which these reasons are justified is the already introduced *universal point of view*, that is, neither "the point of view that abstracts away

from an *individual's* idiosyncratic responses, or idiosyncratic features of the agent's psychology" (Driver 2017, 179, my italics), nor the point of view that abstracts away from the standpoint of valuers living in a given *society* or *culture*. This standpoint, in contrast to both the individual and/or the general standpoint, is universal precisely because it refers to facts or features concerning us as human beings (ibid). In the case of my argument, then, it is the universal point of view understood in terms of our human nature as valuing creatures.

It follows from these thoughts that the moral reasons that my argument has revealed to be related to valuing are grounded not in the subjective or the general evaluative outlook of valuers, but rather in valuers' *nature* as valuers. And it is in this respect that the moral reasons and claims for which I have been arguing not only hold independently of each agent's subjective and idiosyncratic constitution, but also hold independently of the constitution of any specific group or collective of agents endorsing a certain set of beliefs, desires, and aims. Thus, because my proof of the existence of a certain class of moral reasons rests on the insight that human evaluative nature gives rise to these reasons, and because this nature underlies all our subjective and intersubjective standpoints, they hold for everyone, i.e. universally for every human being. And by doing so, they qualify precisely as objective moral reasons as defined by the constructivist conception of moral objectivity CMO.

Accordingly, given the correctness of my argument, it follows that reflection on the attitude of valuing, and the nature of valuers, can and does justify the existence of objective moral reasons, norms, and claims.

The next interesting question that follows from this result, then, pertains to the claims and theory of HC itself, that is, the theory that holds that there is no relation at all between valuing and morality, and thus that constructivist objectivism rests on a mistake. The next section will explore these findings and implications further.

5.5 Caligula's Mistake and the Prospects of Humean Constructivism

The primary target of my argument is Humean constructivism (HC) understood as an error theory about the possibility of a constructivist account on moral objectivity. Hence, I have maintained that HC makes two crucial claims that threaten my objectivist account, as

developed in chapters 3 and 4: first, that constructivist objectivism fails; and second, that metaethical constructivism is best understood as a subjectivist view about morality (and practical normativity in general).

As we have seen, underlying the Humean error theory is the argument or insight that constructivist objectivism, most prominently defended by Kantianism, rests on a failure (Street 2010, 370), where this "mistake" lies in assuming that valuing as such, or just being a valuer, commits one to adopt moral reasons and values. It is in the end exactly this claim that grounds the Humean idea that metaethical constructivism cannot be understood in objectivist but rather in subjectivist terms, for the kinds of reasons (including moral reasons) any valuer has are thought to be dependent not on her constitution as a valuer, but solely on her subjective outlook.

Now, in the previous sections, I have engaged more thoroughly in an analysis of the nature of the valuing attitude and what it is to be a valuer. On the basis of that analysis I have shown in more detail that and in what respect the constructivist argument developed in chapter 4 can and indeed *does* account for the existence of objective moral reasons arising from our nature as evaluative or valuing creatures.

As one can easily see, then, the results of my argument in section 5.4 have a rather decisive impact on the very fundamentals of the Humean view, in respect of both its core claims as spelled out before, namely that constructivist objectivism is false, and that metaethical constructivism is at best a subjectivist view. To be more precise, I consider two things in more detail: first, what follows from my argument for the Humean interpretation of the case of the ideally coherent amoralist Caligula; and second, what follows from my argument in terms of the plausibility of Humean constructivism itself.

In fact, the case of Caligula does not just depict some aspect of the Humean theory; rather it accounts for the plausibility and correctness of Humeanism itself. To see why that is, recall that Humeanism is the view that, ultimately, all reasons an agent has, including moral reasons, are the result of the particular and contingent elements of an agent's subjective practical point of view.

The subjectivist account explains exactly why Humeanism allows for the plausibility of Caligula's case, for the explanation of why Caligula has a perfectly legitimate reason to torture others for fun is that his reason for doing so just follows from his

practical standpoint. To be more precise, the Humean argument proceeds in the following way:

(i) Truths about reasons are constituted by an agent's particular practical point of view, that is, whether they "withstand scrutiny" from (all) the other judgments an agent holds;

(ii) independent from the practical standpoint there simply are no moral (or normative) truths;

(iii) Caligula does not hold any positive attitudes towards morality at all;

(iv) his judgment that torturing others is acceptable therefore withstands scrutiny from the other judgments he holds;

(v) hence Caligula's practical standpoint entails that it is morally right to torture others.

From premises (i)–(v) it follows for the Humean that:

(vi) It is not true that for Caligula torturing others is morally wrong.

Given the interrelatedness of the case of Caligula and Humeanism as a whole, it follows that if one were in the position to show that Caligula *does* have reason to refrain from torturing others, the very theory of Humeanism would be under attack. This is because it would have been shown that the very core of the Humean theory is false, namely that constructivist objectivism rests on a mistake and that all the reasons an agent has (therefore) only depend on and are due to the agent's specific idiosyncratic psychological constitution.

So, how does the constructivist objectivist account that I have elaborated in the last two chapters fare in responding to Caligula, and, ultimately, to Humeanism? I hold that my developed arguments in this chapter are well-suited to present the strongest possible case against Caligula (and thus against HC) because it directly shows that an ideally coherent Caligula *cannot* exist *at all*. More specifically, the argument shows that on the basis of my presented results of the analysis on valuing and the nature of valuers, there cannot be a valuer who is a sadist amoralist who at the same time is totally coherent

with him- or herself. And this is exactly because my argument supports the view that no valuer can be ideally coherent with him- or herself on the one hand, while refusing to consider moral reasons on the other. This argument, given what has been said about HC, therefore aims to strike at the very heart of the Humean view.

Thus, take again Street's own arguments in her 2009 "In Defense of Future Tuesday Indifference" in which she claims that while, according to attitude-dependence views, an ideally coherent Caligula is possible, this is far from saying that there could be *real-life* Caligula[161]:

> When it comes to real-life people, those of us deeply committed to morality should always err in the direction of assuming that an alleged amoralist is making a mistake, for in real life such a person is in all likelihood inconsistent, wrong about many of the non-normative facts, and self-deceived. Most real-life human beings have moral feelings that can be tapped into, and in talking to them and others about their normative reasons we can appeal to that (Street 2009, 293–4, my italics).

The argument shows that Street herself is skeptical about the existence of a real-life Caligula. At the same time, however, Street allows that there *could*, at least in principle, exist an ideally coherent but amoralist Caligula. In what follows, I argue why Street's assumption is mistaken.

Let us once again consider the case of Caligula. According to my argument, Caligula is making a mistake due to a misconception of what it means to value in the first place. After all, when it comes to exercising the attitude, it is not about merely realizing what one values, but to make *normative claims* about value, whether they concern personal value or value *tout court*. In every case, valuing involves the forming of a judgment about goodness that must stand up to critical evaluation in the valuing practice. Caligula's intentions, however, are clearly not in accordance with what participating in that practice requires; on the contrary, he is only seeking to realize his wish to torture others *regardless*

[161] 3.2.

of whether or not this wish is conceived to be valuable or not, that is, whether or not it is apt to survive critical evaluation.

In this way, one can indeed say that Caligula *has* made a real mistake because he has simply but fundamentally misunderstood what valuing is about. Caligula understood valuing not as the attitude that involved the forming of normative claims, but rather thought that the attitude would serve a simple expressive function, that is, the expression of one's own subjective constitution. And it is exactly this mistake, then, that explains why even the amoralist sadist Caligula *must* endorse moral reasons, for once he acknowledges the correct understanding of valuing as including the forming of normative claims that have to stand up to critical evaluation, he also has the correct understanding of what the valuing practice actually requires of him. Once he has done so, however, there is reason for him to relate to others in radically different ways from what he – as a sadist amoralist – deems acceptable.

To begin with, as we have seen, the valuing practice requires valuers to refrain from undermining one another's valuing attitude. Given that there is no doubt that those who Caligula considers his victims are valuing their health and their being free from pain, their attitude would clearly be undermined. Thus, because Caligula's valuing is not at all in accordance with the nature of the valuing practice and what it requires from its participants, there is decisive reason for him to refrain from torturing others.

Now, on the basis of what has been said about the case of Caligula, the next question can also be answered, namely where all of this leaves Humean constructivism. Given the crucial relation between the genuine possibility of an ideally coherent Caligula and the plausibility of Humeanism constructivism itself, my argument in the end is well-equipped to refute Humeanism altogether. After all, the core claims of HC – namely that constructivist objectivism fails, and that constructivism must be understood in subjectivist terms – are grounded in the Humean argument that there is no relation at all between exercising the attitude of valuing as such and being committed to acknowledging moral reasons. But my own argument has shown that there *does* exist a connection between valuing and morality, and that this connection holds independently of any particular and subjective commitments of singular agents; rather the connection results from the nature of valuing beings in general. And it was this argument, in turn, that allowed me to show

that and where exactly Caligula has gone wrong so that one can see that even the villain Caligula stands under the commitment to accept moral reasons.

Therefore, if what I have been arguing thus far is correct, then three essential things are proven to be wrong with the Humean theory. First, there are its two central claims, lying at the heart of its position. The first crucial Humean claim is proven to be false, i.e. that there is no connection at all between valuing and morality, for I have shown that *there is* such a connection. But the second claim, according to which all the reasons an agent has depend only on her "particular and contingent evaluative starting points" (Street, op. cit.), is also wrong because, at least in the case of moral reasons, there *are* reasons that *do* transcend these subjective starting points. Finally, it has proven to be wrong to think that there can be valuers such as Caligula who at once are ideally coherent with themselves *and* sadist amoralists, where this claim, as shown above, follows from the two prior claims.

To summarize, then, the argument that I have been developing in the last three chapters shows not only why constructivist objectivism is a plausible view, but also that and in what respects Humean constructivism – the theory that has put so much pressure on the possibility of an objectivist view on behalf of constructivism – itself fails.

5.6 Two Objections

Given that my argument in this chapter is successful, it has a tremendous impact not only on the Humean constructivist view as discussed in section 5.5, but also for the prospects of constructivist objectivism in general. After all, it proves that the constructivist objectivist argument – against Humean error theory about a constructivist objectivist account – is successful.

Nevertheless, I expect at least two objections to be raised against my argument. The first objection, while accepting the correctness of the argument itself, worries about its scope by maintaining that the argument does not seem to account for the *whole range* of different moral reasons, norms, and claims that we indeed find present in common moral practice.[162] This objection is based on the fact that my account has, if successful,

[162] I thank Monika Betzler for the objection.

"only" proven the existence of *some* (objective) moral reasons, such as reasons for behaving respectfully towards one another by refraining from undermining other valuers' attitudes, etc. But, arguably, reasons for behaving respectfully are just *one* kind of reason within the moral realm, that is, one kind among many others. In this way, the objection appears to rest on a legitimate question about what we are supposed to do with moral reasons that, say, arise from special relationships such as reasons for taking (special) care of our children, and which are not reducible to behaving respectfully. The problem with my argument then is that not only can these reasons not be reduced to reasons for behaving respectfully, but that we commonly think they are genuine moral reasons that metaethical theories should account for.

I hold that there is more than one way to respond to this charge. For instance, constructivists could respond by objecting that it is an open question whether the same charge could not also be raised against many other theories coming from different metaethical camps. After all, in order to put the *constructivist* objectivist account under pressure it must be shown that, say, realist objectivist accounts *can* or even *do* account for the whole range of different moral reasons that my account is not able to cover.

There is, however, a more direct and, I think, better answer to the charge, which draws on exactly what has been my aim in this chapter. Thus, note that what I have been claiming is that there is a plausible account on behalf of constructivist objectivism that inter alia is capable to explain the relation between valuing on the one hand and objective moral reasons on the other. To be more precise, I argued that my developed account of constructivist objectivism, when reflecting on the nature of human evaluative beings, can demonstrate two things: first, that this account can reveal why there is a relation between *valuing* and moral reasons; and second, that these reasons must be understood in *objective* terms.

Accordingly, what I did *not* claim is that the account I am presenting here is well-equipped to cover *every* kind of moral reasons and norms there are. That is, it has never been my direct aim to show in this chapter how the *whole* spectrum of the moral reasons and norms can be justified by carrying out the constructive procedure on the attitude of valuing and the nature of valuers. Rather my aim was to reveal that my constructivist objectivist account, when applied to human evaluative nature, is able to ground the existence of objective moral reasons. And that for this reason my account is strong enough

to refute Humean constructivism, which denies this relation. Therefore, what I have been arguing in this chapter neither excludes that there could be other kinds of moral reasons such as those that arise from close relationships. However, that these reasons cannot be justified by reflection on human evaluative nature does not render my whole argument problematic or implausible because, again, it has never been my aim to ground the whole realm of moral reasons. On the contrary, I have sought to reflect on human evaluative nature in order to disprove the Humean claim that there is *no* connection *at all* between valuing and objective moral reasons.

The same point can be appreciated from a slightly different angle. Thus, recall my criticism of Street's practical standpoint characterization of constructivism in 1.3, where I argued that at least one reason to be skeptical about the correctness of the description is that it is too restricted or narrow. This worry was motivated by the thought that the practical standpoint is understood in terms of the attitude of valuing. Therefore, the problem with Street's description is that it leads to the view that, in the end, metaethical constructivism is only the theory about what follows from the attitude of valuing.

The example from Street shows that indeed there is a kind of constructivist theory that *does* lead to the problem of deriving only a very small range of moral reasons because it reflects *only* on the attitude of valuing. Recall, however, that my own view is not identical to Street's theory because, first of all, it is not committed to the practical standpoint description of the constructivist theory in general, and secondly, it does not ground its objectivist argument on the attitude of valuing (alone).

Thus, when it comes to the first point, in chapter 1 I argued that metaethical constructivism should be understood along the lines of Sophisticated Constructivism (SC), which is the view that *combines* the proceduralist with the practical standpoint characterization. Secondly, I developed my own constructivist objectivist account as a theory that is congruent with SC, insofar as objective moral reasons are supposed to be grounded by rational reflection on the universal standpoint. In addition, I have never argued that the attitude of valuing (alone) could justify the existence of objective moral reasons because I have cashed out the universal standpoint in terms of *human nature*. Accordingly, my account is not restricted to the analysis of valuing; rather valuing, and

accordingly the nature of valuers, is just one among many other aspects of our human nature on which constructivists can reflect.[163]

Now, a second and equally worrisome objection maintains that my argument in the end leaves it unclear what ultimately accounts for the existence of those objective reasons and norms that are the output of the constructivist reflection on the practical standpoint understood in terms of valuing. The objection rests on the insight that there are essentially two ways in which the ultimate normative authority of these reasons can be understood: either as the outcome of the insight of reason, or as what is entailed in or given by the nature of human beings (understood as evaluative creatures).[164]

Why has one reason to be, in the end, unsure about what it is that grounds the objective moral reasons that I have introduced in this chapter? Take the first option, according to which it is said that it is the insight of reason that ultimately accounts for the existence of these reasons. Here, the argument could, for example, refer to those reasons that are related to the valuing practice such as the reason not to undermine other valuers' attitudes. It can then be maintained that one plausible reading of the ultimate source of this reason is the rational insight that other forms of behavior are incompatible with what the valuing practice requires. This is not only in accordance with how I have indeed argued for the moral reasons as being related to valuing; it is also compatible with the view that it is the *insight of reason* that accounts for the normative force of this kind of reason. For, after all, on this reading it is the rational understanding that certain forms of behavior are *conflating* or *incompatible* with what the valuing practice requires. Here, then, it is reason that grasps a *formal tension* or even *contradiction* and requires this tension or contradiction to be solved.

On the other hand, however, I have introduced and defended my argument as carrying out an analysis of *what follows from the nature* of valuers. Accordingly, when it comes to the second possible reading, it can be said that it is not reason that ultimately accounts for the existence of the reasons of, say, not undermining others' valuing attitude, but their *being entailed* within or given by human (evaluative) nature.

Now, siding exclusively with either option appears implausible, for in both ways they clash with my overall argument. Thus, as I have said, a central move of my

[163] See also my arguments in chapter 4 regarding the constructivist understanding of human nature.
[164] I owe this question to Carla Bagnoli.

constructivist objectivist argument consists in making use of the notion of "human nature" so as to determine what follows from it. But at the same time, I have said that one has reason to behave morally in virtue of participating in the valuing practice because otherwise one acts in ways that are *incompatible* with what that practice requires. In other words, *both* argumentative strands are present in and form an important part of my argument. As such, it would be problematic to claim that it ultimately is only *one* of the two strands that accounts for the existence of those moral reasons that are grounded in valuing.

This is a difficult problem and deserves proper attention because, after all, it is not limited to my own argument as spelled out in these last two chapters; it also applies to metaethical constructivism *as such*. Let me explain. At the beginning of chapter 4, I maintained that my objectivist argument on behalf of constructivism is congruent with the constructivist explanation of moral truth in general.

Thus, recall that, according to my description of the constructivist position in metaethics, moral truth is the outcome of a certain procedure applied to the practical standpoint or basis of construction. This was also the reason why I have named my characterization "sophisticated", for it bridges the gap between the proceduralist characterization on the one hand, and the practical standpoint description on the other.

However, it is then precisely because constructivism in general too makes use of *two* elements in order to explain the existence of moral truth, i.e. the procedure *and* the practical standpoint, that it may in the end not be totally clear what accounts for those normative/moral truths that are the outcome of the whole process of construction.

Despite this connection between constructivism in general and constructivist objectivism as developed here, in my response to this worry I focus only on my own constructivist objectivist argument. But given what has been said about the parallels between both my objectivist argument and the constructivist account in general, it applies to the latter too. So, the worry that is pressed against my argument is that it is unclear what it is that ultimately accounts for the existence of those reasons that are the outcome of the reflection on the practical standpoint, understood in terms of human evaluative nature.

My response to this worry is that I am in the end not sure that it qualifies as a real *objection against* the argument. For, after all, I have maintained from the very beginning

that my argument not only comprises two elements, but also that these elements must be *interrelated*[165] so that there is not just reflection under ideal conditions, *and* human nature, but that rational reflection must be *applied to* that nature. Therefore, in the end there may be no problem at all in admitting that it remains unclear what element ultimately explains the existence of objective moral reasons precisely because the argument consists of two elements, which, *by interacting* with one another, create moral reasons. In fact, it appears that one can even go a step further and say that it is a mistake to ask what element it is that ultimately grounds objective moral reasons on this account. For if both elements are, again, interrelated and only *thereby* bring moral reasons into existence, then one simply *cannot* reduce the ultimate source of moral reasons to either of the two elements.

In fact, this thought quite naturally follows from my discussion of constructivism in general, as well as from my constructivist objectivist account. Thus, it was said that constructivism must include both elements, for two reasons. First, because the *procedure*, without the basis of construction, could not even commence, for its starting point and background conditions that crucially inform the procedure itself would be absent. On the other hand, however, merely determining what follows from the practical standpoint does not adequately account for the *process* of construction that the constructivist highlights.[166]

Similar arguments were given in favor of constructivist objectivism making use of both the reflection under ideal conditions *and* a universal point of view. Here it was said that ideal reflection without a general/universal point of view is compatible with moral subjectivism/intersubjectivism, *and* that merely determining what follows from the general/universal standpoint cannot rule out that the results that follow from the standpoint are biased, irrational, or just distorted.

What both considerations show, then, is that on the constructivist theory, both elements – procedure *and* practical standpoint – are needed, and that moral truth as well as objectivity are granted *only as the result* of both elements *interacting* with one another. It is then precisely for this reason that one cannot ask, after all, which element it is that ultimately grounds moral truth or secures objectivity. If constructivism is the theory

[165] 4.2.
[166] Again, think about the difficulties with Street's practical standpoint description: see 1.3.

according to which truth and objectivity are secured if and only if two elements are interrelated and interacting, then it is ultimately not one element but both elements *together* that account for the truth and objectivity in ethics.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to demonstrate that the constructivist objectivist argument that I developed throughout chapters 3 and 4 is well-equipped to altogether refute Humean constructivism (HC). HC was the target of my argument because, first of all, it endorses an error theory about constructivism objectivism, understood as claiming that there exist universal moral reasons, and secondly, it holds that constructivism in metaethics generally is only compatible with subjectivism. Therefore, in order to defend my constructivist objectivist argument against the Humean error theory, I needed to show what is wrong with HC.

Against Humeanism I have developed an argument that proved two things that are sufficient to put the plausibility of HC itself in question: first, that reflection on the attitude of valuing *can* ground objective moral reasons and claims; and second, that it is therefore incorrect to assume that constructivism in the end is compatible only with subjectivism.

In order to show why that is the case, I carried out a reflective process on the attitude of valuing, and the nature of valuers, revealing that for every valuer there are reasons to behave morally in virtue of the essentially social nature of valuers. Such reasons include reasons to behave respectfully towards valuers and the objects of value.

Because the normative force of these reasons ultimately holds because of the nature of valuers *as such* – that is, independently of the particular and subjective evaluative commitments of singular agents or collectives of such agents – the reasons that result from this reflective process hold universally, that is, for everyone. In this sense, the moral reasons that result from the valuing attitude are objective in the exact sense as set out in my constructivist conception developed in chapter 3.

From my argument it follows that the Humean error theory about my constructivist account on moral objectivity is wrong, but also (and perhaps even more interestingly) that Humeanism in general is flawed since both of its core claims are false. Thus, it is false to assume that reflection on valuing cannot ground objective moral

reasons, and it is false that metaethical constructivism is best conceived of as a subjectivist theory (about morality and normativity in general). After all, not only have I proven that objective moral reasons *are* entailed within valuing, but it follows rather logically from this argument that constructivism cannot be understood as a mere subjectivist theory if it can account for the existence of objective reasons (whether or not these reasons are moral).

These results do not change the fact that Humeanism is a very challenging view insofar as it forces the constructivist objectivist to show *all the way down why* her account can be true or plausible. But it is one thing to be a challenging view, and another to be true. This chapter has shown why Humeanism only succeeds in the former respect, and fails in the latter.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of my thesis was to make plausible, strengthen, and defend the constructivist theory and showcase its original contribution to contemporary metaethics. While in principle there may be many ways in which such a project can be carried out, I focused particularly on the issue of objectivity and developed throughout my overall argument a novel constructivist account on moral objectivity, which sought to answer two of the most fundamental questions surrounding the issue: (i) how the very concept of moral objectivity is understood in a constructivist theory; and (ii) how constructivism secures or grants the existence of moral reasons that are objective in the sense that the answer to (i) specifies.

I have argued that adequately addressing the issue of moral objectivity on behalf of constructivism importantly contributes to making plausible and strengthening the constructivist position in metaethics for two main reasons. The first is due to the very status of constructivism as a metaethical theory in general, for it is widely agreed that every metaethical theory must make sense of the objective features of moral practice and discourse. The second reason, by contrast, is due to the distinctive nature and outlines of the constructivist theory in particular insofar as (i) constructivism wants to provide an alternative to the realist views in metaethics (including both cognitivist and non-cognitivist versions); and (ii) the theoretical commitments of the constructivist theory seem to prevent it from providing a (plausible) objectivist account in the first place.

Thus, when it comes to (i), it is often agreed that realist views are in a good position to secure ethical objectivity, while (ii) is premised on the often shared assumption(s) that the very concept of moral objectivity rests on ontological grounds and/or requires the absolute mind-independence of morality. Insofar as constructivism rejects the existence of a mind-independent realm of moral facts in general, it is prima facie hard to see how constructivism can account for moral objectivity in the first instance.

Against these skeptical concerns regarding the very possibility and plausibility of a constructivist position on the objectivity of ethics, I have introduced and defended a novel objectivist account on behalf of constructivism that provides a plausible conception of moral objectivity and offered a new way of securing the existence of objective moral reasons. Thus,

objective reasons, on my novel account, are understood in terms of universality and are grounded in rational reflection under idealized conditions on a universal standpoint spelled out in terms of human nature.

While this account presents a novel and independent approach, it nevertheless shares some important insights and is compatible with at least some of the strategies of other objectivist theories within the constructivist camp such as Kantianism and Humean objectivism. For this reason, I have called my approach the hybrid account. Thus, while the hybrid account shares the Kantian understanding of objectivity in terms of universality, it is compatible with contemporary approaches within the Humean objectivist camp insofar as it crucially refers to and makes use of the concept of human nature.

At the same time, however, the hybrid account understands itself in at least some respects as a more plausible or better objectivist approach than the alternative theories stemming from both the Kantian and the Humean camps. Thus, while it fares better in providing a more plausible conception of ethical objectivity than Humeanism, it has the advantage over Kantianism that it offers a theory that comes without the many theoretical – and often problematic commitments – of the Kantian theory.

Despite the advantages of my hybrid view over alternative constructivist approaches, the account importantly contributes to the project of making plausible and strengthening the constructivist idea and theory *in general* for the reasons outlined above. First, because it shows that the constructivist view is as plausible as other metaethical views insofar as it accounts for the objective features of common moral practice. Second, because the hybrid account helps in understanding metaethical constructivism as a plausible alternative to realist theories within current metaethical discussion, since it shows that it is able to provide an alternative objectivist view and that as such the realist view is not the only view out there that can (adequately) cope with the subject of objectivity.

The same results are secured in virtue of my rejection of Humean constructivism as developed and defended by Sharon Street. While Street has maintained that constructivist objectivism fails and that constructivism (thus) leads to moral as well as normative subjectivism, I have shown, against that conclusion, that Humeanism itself rests on a mistake. If Street were correct, it would raise considerable skeptical concerns about the plausibility of the constructivist theory in general and its ambition to compete with moral realist views. However, my arguments against the Humean view are well-suited to refute these concerns.

Now I think that when it comes to evaluating the results of what my dissertation has been able to establish, one can even go a step further than maintaining that constructivism merely counts as an alternative to realist views. This is because it is possible to hold that given the correctness of my arguments regarding the issue of moral objectivity (including the rejection of Humeanism), *in addition* to my arguments aiming to show why constructivism fares better than its main rivals in accounting for moral phenomenology, constructivism is shown to be not just *some* alternative to (especially) realist views. More than this, in at least some important respects, it is shown to be an even *better* alternative. Thus, as I have argued in chapter 2, constructivism fares much better than realist views in accounting for what is going on in common moral practice, at least when it comes to accommodating our everyday intuitions about how to spell out moral truth-conditions, that is, in a relativist or objectivist fashion. Given the importance of phenomenological analysis for any metaethical argument and theory, constructivism has some major advantages over many other theories against which it is competing.

Given the correctness of what I have been setting out in my thesis, I thus hold that my arguments regarding the plausibility of constructivism in general and the hybrid account in particular present strong and interesting results. After all, I have demonstrated why constructivism in general is a plausible and in some respects more plausible view than realist theories, and that, when it comes to the issue of moral objectivity in particular, my hybrid account fares better, at least in some respects, than its rivals from both the Humean and the Kantian camps.

Note, however, that these results are not meant to indicate that I would have answered all possible questions concerning either the issue of objectivity or the constructivist theory. On the contrary, regarding both views, there arise further questions that I could not adequately address in this thesis, but which nevertheless are interesting to ask.

Thus, take the hybrid account first and recall that I have argued that it is, in some respects, more attractive than rival theories within the constructivist theory since it secures a plausible conception of moral objectivity and grants the existence of objective moral reasons on a much more parsimonious framework than Kantianism. At the same time, however, it is precisely the complexity of the Kantian view that in turn offers some important advantage over the hybrid account concerning other, related metaethical issues. This concerns primarily

moral motivation.[167] Recall that, in my short summary of the Kantian position in 3.2, I showed why Kantianism has the advantage of being able to *at once* secure ethical objectivity *and* moral motivation. This counts heavily in favor of Kantianism insofar as it shows how the Kantian view manages to simultaneously accommodate two central features that metaethical theorists aim to explain: the objectivity *and* the motivational force of moral reasons and claims (Smith 1994; Bagnoli 2002; Stahl 2013).

I thus grant that Kantianism is a very interesting theory when it (inter alia) comes to the point of accounting for the objectivity and the "practicality" (Smith 1994) of morality. And while the hybrid account is first and foremost designed as a theory that defines and secures ethical objectivity only, it is an important question to ask how it grants that agents can also be motivated to act in accordance with those reasons that it determines. Due to the overall focus of my work on the subject of objectivity, I have not answered this question, but I grant that it is worthy of further inquiry.

But there is also the constructivist theory in general. As in the case of the hybrid account, I do not intend to claim that the arguments presented herein suffice to *altogether* settle any dispute over the constructivist position. This is so for two reasons. As noted in chapter 1, first of all, there are other issues that metaethical constructivism (still) has to address even if the subject of moral objectivity *were* sufficiently settled. As we have seen, this chiefly concerns the issue of moral semantics, but other questions also call out for answers. Take, for instance, the important role that rational reflection and/or reasoning play for the constructivist. More can be said about what a genuinely constructivist theory of reasoning or reflection looks like, or how it is supposed to work. Hence, even if my arguments succeed in strengthening the constructivist position when it comes to its ability to cope with moral objectivity, other issues still loom large on behalf of constructivism that call for clarification.

The second and I think even more important reason is given by the scope of my argument for the plausibility and attractiveness of the constructivist position over other, rival theories. Thus, I hold that my arguments are indeed heavily counting in favor of the constructivist theory *and* help to mark it out as the more plausible view when compared to its main rivals from both the cognitivist and non-cognitivist camps, especially where this concerns realist theories (broadly understood to include moral realism and quasi-realism). At the same

[167] I thank Carla Bagnoli for helpful discussion on this point.

time, however, I am well-aware that these considered rivals do not exhaust all metaethical theories out there. On the contrary, and as I noted in chapter 2, my arguments that prove the advantage of constructivism over other theories are limited to those views that are taken as the *standard* or *main* rivals to the constructivist theory. And these rivals are presented exactly by the moral realist view on the one hand and non-cognitivist theories on the other. Given this limitation of my argument, it would indeed be a very interesting question to consider how constructivism fares in comparison with, say, alternative forms of realism (cf. McDowell 1998).

Given then the restrictions concerning the scope and strength of my arguments here, note that my primary aim, given the correctness of what I have been showing, has nevertheless been carried out successfully, namely to demonstrate that the constructivist idea and theory within contemporary metaethics is worthy of serious consideration. In fact, when it comes to the current debate, constructivism is still far from being granted the proper attention that it deserves. I hope that the arguments that I have presented in favor of the constructivist position – whether it is the defense of the very possibility of the constructivist position, its ability to adequately cope with moral phenomenology, or its capacity to account for the objectivity of ethics – help to rectify this oversight. Hence, if my work has been able to make plausible and keep alive the constructivist idea and its original contribution to metaethics, then all my hopes of what I wanted to achieve with this dissertation will have been fulfilled.

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