MORAL OBJECTIVITY WITHOUT ROBUST REALISM

J. J. Moreso[1]

After so many pilgrimages
through earthquakes, through clouds and through numbers,
in definitive truth was there.
We pierce the ancient limits.
(Pedro Salinas, 'Salvación por el cuerpo',
Razón de amor, 1936, English translation by
R. Katz Crispin, *Memory in My Hands:*
The Love Poetry of Pedro Salinas, 2009)

1. Introduction

David Enoch (2011) has written one of the most powerful and original defences of moral realism. Many things make his book a vital contribution to philosophical reflection on morality and metaethics. In the introduction to his studies of Bentham, H. L. A. Hart (1982: 4) attributes to the father of utilitarianism an extraordinary combination of a fly's eye for detail and an eagle's eye for illuminating generalizations, applicable to broad areas of social life. Well, *mutatis mutandis*, the same can be said of Enoch's book. On the one hand, his attention to detail is exemplary, and the main text, together with his footnotes, is replete with arguments and counterarguments about the most intricate questions of contemporary metaethics. On the other hand, this attention to detail is combined with a broad vision for etching on our philosophical horizon a well-delimited and prominent place for reflection on morality, established in a vigorous defence, and founded on the existence of moral facts and properties which are not natural entities, nor reducible to them, and which ground the truth of moral judgements, independently of the beliefs and attitudes of humans beings.[2]

It is also true that, in the book, Enoch reveals a propensity for more radical philosophical positions, as he himself recognizes: "As you may have noticed, I have the philosophical temperament of an extremist" (2011: 115). However, since I myself do not have such a philosophical temperament, but rather one that is—so to speak—more ecumenical, in this article I shall try to defend what seems to me to be a solid argument for the objectivity of morality, and criticize what seem to me to be inconclusive arguments for non-naturalist moral realism.

But first, a brief presentation of the book. It has ten chapters. The first is an introduction and an explanation of the motives that drove its development. Chapters 2 to 5 develop an argument for robust moral realism. Chapters 6 to 9 provide refined replies to possible objections to the foregoing argument. And chapter 10 concludes the book.

---

[1] Professor of Legal Philosophy. Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona. josejuan.moreso@upf.edu. This contribution derives from a Spanish-language ancestor: Moreso (2015). My work has benefited from two research grants: DER2016-80471-C2-1-R from the Spanish Government, and 2017 SGR 00823 from the Generalitat of Catalonia.

[2] Other recent defences of non-naturalist moral realism, albeit different in many respects from Enoch's, are provided by Shafer-Landau (2003) and Wedgwood (2007).

I won't deal with the second half of the book, dedicated to responding to possible objections to Enoch's position. Chapter 6 contains some very skilled discussions of the acceptability or not of suspicious metaphysical entities. Chapter 7 presents the epistemological objection: the problem of explaining the correlation between our normative beliefs and normative truths, which are independent of our beliefs. Chapter 8 deals with the objection from the persistent presence of moral disagreements. Chapter 9 deals with the problems posed by motivation and the internal or external nature of normative reasons. Enoch concludes with a chapter where he tries to present the advantages of his position, and where he very honestly reveals the points in his argumentation in which he has less confidence, and about which he still harbours doubts.

I shall deal, instead, with the arguments whereby Enoch defends and argues for the constructive part of the book: the fundamental theses that characterize his philosophical approach. That is, with the argument of chapter 2, according to which non-objective conceptions of morality, together with a very plausible normative thesis, which he calls IMPARTIALITY, imply unacceptable moral judgements in cases of disagreements and interpersonal conflicts. And also with the argument of chapter 3, according to which normative truths are indispensable for practical deliberation, which is not optional for us, and such indispensability justifies ontological commitment to non-natural moral facts and properties, as part of our ontological furniture. Chapter 4 says that the two previous theses—the thesis of objectivity and the ontological thesis of the deliberative indispensability of the normative—while not implying robust moral realism, do make it the most plausible metaethical position. Chapter 5 then tries to show that it is not possible to obtain that result with fewer ontological commitments, since more ontologically parsimonious positions cannot ground deliberative indispensability.

I shall proceed as follows. In §2 I present the argument from objectivity. In §3 I try to show the force of this argument, which I find especially perspicuous. In §4 I reconstruct the argument from the deliberative indispensability of the normative. In §5 I express my doubts about the need to embrace such a robust ontological commitment, and in §6 I conclude.

2. Objectivity from the Argument from IMPARTIALITY

The argument is the following. Suppose that one afternoon my friend Pablo and I are in Madrid and we decide to spend the evening together, but he proposes to go to the theatre to see *The House of Bernarda Alba* by Federico García Lorca, while I prefer to go to a concert by the violinist Julia Fischer. Pablo and I have not seen each other for a long time and we want to spend the evening together. There is no reason why either of us should cede to the other's preference (such as it being the last programmed performance of this play, which has superb reviews and will never be performed again, or likewise for the concert). Then we would impose some solution in line with what Enoch (2011: 19) calls IMPARTIALITY, according to which:

> In an interpersonal conflict, we should step back from our mere preferences, or feelings, or attitudes, or some such, and to the extent the conflict is due to those, an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for. Furthermore, each party to the conflict should acknowledge as much: Standing one's ground is, in such cases, morally wrong.

The solution could be to draw lots, or to decide that since we are in Madrid, which is Pablo's city, we shall go to the theatre, and when we meet in my city, Barcelona, it will

be my turn to decide. But whatever the solution, IMPARTIALITY seems to be an unquestionable moral principle: in matters of mere preferences, all preferences are worth the same.

Then, the argument continues, if cases of moral disagreement were of this sort, and the disagreement between Pablo and I arose because Pablo wanted to go to a basketball game and I wanted to go to a bullfight, IMPARTIALITY would also hold, and both sides should be disposed to withdraw our respective preferences. However, suppose that Pablo considers inflicting acute pain on animals to be immoral.[3] And he thinks, therefore, that going to a bullfight to enjoy watching animals suffer is immoral. Then, would Pablo have a reason to withdraw his point of view? It seems not. It seems that, on the contrary, he should stand his ground and, perhaps, try to convince me to abandon my insensitivity until I understand that it is wrong to attend the bullfight. In this case IMPARTIALITY doesn't work, just as it doesn't work if Pablo and I disagree about which is the quickest way to get to Madrid's Teatro Real from Paseo de Recoletos at a certain time of day: by taxi or by public transport. Since there is a right answer about that matter of fact, IMPARTIALITY is of no help here, nor is it *rational* to follow its rule.

The author uses these ideas to argue that positions in metaethics which equate moral judgements with expressions of personal preference are false, and should therefore be rejected. Those positions which hold that the truth of moral judgements depends on the response that we human beings—given our beliefs and attitudes—give when confronted with a moral problem, are clear candidates for such a refutation. Enoch (2011: 27-40) takes care to show that not all views that make moral judgements dependent on humans' reactions are vulnerable to this objection. There are positions, like the view of constructivists who hold that the relevant response is the one which human beings would give in ideal conditions, or some especially sophisticated forms of expressivism which insist that some of our responses are *unique* and permit a convergence of judgement. Given that some of these positions will be discussed in §4, we can now deal with the rejection of openly subjectivist positions, which make morality depend on our actual attitudes and feelings. In order to carry this out, Enoch (2011: 25) formulates a position which is extreme in the sense that (almost) no one would defend it in contemporary metaethics,[4] which he calls *caricaturized subjectivism*:

> Moral judgments report simple preferences, ones that are exactly on a par with a preference for playing tennis or for catching a movie.[5]

And the following is the argument for the refutation, which—as can be seen—is an instance of *reductio ad absurdum* (Enoch 2011: 25-26):

---

[3] Because he is a consequentialist, who takes into account the interests of animals among the relevant consequences, like Bentham (1970: 281) and his contemporary followers, like Singer (1975) or, among others, Mosterín (1998) and de Lora (2003). Or less committedly, because he thinks, like Kant (1997: 212), that cruelty to animals diminishes the moral sensitivity of humans: "He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals."

[4] Although this is true in contemporary analytic metaethics, in my academic environment, in analytic philosophy of law, as conducted in Spanish and Italian, this position is still defended by important authors. See e.g. Bulygin (2015, ch. 19) and Guastini (2012).

[5] These are the examples that Enoch uses to argue his case, and which I have replaced with attending the theatre or a concert.

(1) Caricaturized Subjectivism. (For *Reductio*.)

(2) If Caricaturized Subjectivism is true, then interpersonal conflicts due to moral disagreements are really just interpersonal conflicts due to differences in mere preferences. (From the content of Caricaturized Subjectivism.)

(3) Therefore, interpersonal conflicts due to moral disagreements are just interpersonal conflicts due to differences in mere preferences. (From 1 and 2.)

(4) IMPARTIALITY, that is, roughly: when an interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) is a matter merely of preferences, then an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for, and it is wrong to just stand one's ground.

(5) Therefore, in cases of interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) due to moral disagreement, an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for, and it is wrong to just stand one's ground. (From 3 and 4.)

(6) However, in cases of interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) due to moral disagreement often an impartial solution is *not* called for, and it is permissible, and even required, to stand one's ground. (From previous section.)

(7) Therefore, Caricaturized Subjectivism is false. (From 1, 5, and 6, by *Reductio*.)

A metaethical premise, caricaturized subjectivism, and a premise of normative ethics, IMPARTIALITY, together imply a consequence that contradicts (6), the plausible premise that in cases of moral conflicts it is correct to stand one's ground, and so, by *reductio*, we may conclude that non-objectivist positions in ethics are false.

3. Vindicating Objectivity

In my opinion, Enoch's argument is a good and conclusive one. It suffices that some of our interpersonal conflicts should be resolved by something like IMPARTIALITY, and that IMPARTIALITY never helps in our moral conflicts. If that is so, then non-objectivist metaethical views should be rejected because they fail to account for this feature of our morality.

As should become clear, objections to Enoch's argument try to cast doubt on the distinction between interpersonal conflicts concerning mere preferences and interpersonal conflicts for moral reasons. Moreover, they try to show that there are cases of non-moral interpersonal conflicts where IMPARTIALITY should not be applied, while there are cases of moral interpersonal conflicts where IMPARTIALITY should be applied.[6]

Let us look at two examples from Wedgwood that try to show that Enoch's distinction is inadequate in this way. First, a case of a non-moral disagreement in which it is not reasonable to abandon one's position (Wedgwood 2013: 390): "Suppose that you are on a committee that awards a certain art prize, and you have a deep disagreement with the other committee members". This is a disagreement whose origin is not moral but rather aesthetic. But it would not be morally wrong to stand your ground and publicly express your disagreement.

[6] Manne and Solbel (2014) criticize Enoch with these arguments and propose an alternative strategy, which consists in holding that we should stand our ground when the conflict is sufficiently important, independently of whether its nature is of mere preferences or moral. I think, for the reasons given by Enoch (2014) in his reply, that this strategy does not work.

Clearly Wedgwood is right about this. But it is not clear why this argument tells against Enoch. For one thing, Enoch takes great care to say that there are many cases of interpersonal conflicts in which IMPARTIALITY does not prevail: this principle prevails only in conflicts that concern mere preferences and when there are certain circumstances of the context that do not lead to another solution. For another, in the case of the art prize, either there are principles of aesthetic value—as I myself am inclined to accept—and so there are no reasons to abandon what we believe to be correct, or else there are not, in which case this conflict may be about mere preferences, and hence should be decided by IMPARTIALITY.

The second example—a case of a conflict with a moral origin where it makes sense to renounce one's position—is, I think, of greater interest (Wedgwood 2013: 391):

> Enoch's example of an interpersonal conflict due to moral disagreement involves the moral importance of avoiding cruelty to dogs (p. 23). But suppose you are involved in a disagreement about an issue of this kind—say, about whether fox hunting should be banned by law. If there is no prospect of either side's persuading the other to change their view, it seems right for everyone to agree to settle the conflict by means of a democratic procedure, even though everyone agrees that there is a high chance that the outcome of this democratic procedure may be morally suboptimal.

Here again Wedgwood is right insofar as it seems correct to defer to the democratic majority on the case's solution. But, again, this does not tell against Enoch. We can accept that the fox hunting case is a case of disagreement with a moral origin, yet no one—not even after the democratic decision—has any reason to abandon their moral position. On the contrary, we expect the abolitionists to stand their ground in the hope of convincing everyone else. Democratic procedures are not, I think, implementations of IMPARTIALITY. They are ways of taking decisions in cases of disagreement that are equally respectful of everyone's autonomy, trusting that the deliberation of all will often lead us to the right results, and giving legitimacy to that solution. But that in no way means that those who remain in the minority abandon their position. This is precisely one of the central problems of political philosophy: how can the political legitimacy of mistaken decisions be reconciled with morality? Further, for many, democratic procedures are founded precisely on the epistemic value they enjoy—when they operate in optimal conditions—for achieving morally fair results (see e.g. Nino 1996, Martí 2006, Estlund 2009).

However, Enoch himself (2011: 36 n. 18) recognizes that on non-objectivist conceptions of ethics it is harder to justify standing one's ground in cases of moral conflict, and he states this point in the following terms:

> It is sometimes suggested—though more often in the classroom than in philosophical texts—that realist metaethical views will lead to intolerance, and that this gives reason to reject them. I believe this line of thought is confused in several ways (so there's good reason why it is not common in serious philosophical texts). But I also believe that there is something right about it, something captured by the argument in the text: on non-objectivist views of morality, it is harder to justify standing one's moral ground in the face of both disagreement and conflict. But, of course, I think of this as an *advantage* of objectivist views.

In my immediate academic environment, as pointed out in footnote 4—i.e. that of legal philosophy in Spain, Latin America and Italy—such a position is passionately defended, not only in the classroom but also in various seminars and conferences. Sometimes it is also advocated in serious philosophical texts. Ferrajoli (2011: 31)

argues, for example, that ethical cognitivism and objectivism inevitably lead to moral absolutism, and consequently to the intolerance of dissenting opinions; and he even adds: "From this point of view, the most coherent forms of moral objectivism and cognitivism are, without a doubt, those expressed by Catholic morality."[7]

Meanwhile, Guastini (2012: 140-1)[8] accepts that no metaethical premise can logically establish conclusions of normative ethics; yet in his opinion, a liberal ethics (of tolerance) can constitute a good pragmatic reason to adopt a non-cognitivist and non-objectivist metaethics, and vice versa.

The reasons offered by Guastini in support of this thesis are the following: he plausibly argues that normative ethical views will provide some norm of conduct concerning what one's attitude to other normative ethical views should be. And he adds that liberal ethical views will assume one of the following two meta-norms:

(N1) Any other normative ethical view (different from this one) should be tolerated.

(N2) Only some normative ethical views (different from this one) should be tolerated.

while intolerant ethical views, and therefore non-liberal ones, will assume a meta-norm like the following:

(N3) No normative ethical view other than this one should be tolerated.

As can be seen, these arguments take the liberalism of tolerance and democracy to fit better with non-objectivist metaethical views; perhaps because they assume for moral preferences a postulate like IMPARTIALITY. However, I think that this is a bad argument. It is true that sometimes democratic decisions must take sides between morally indifferent preferences and, then, respecting everyone's opinion makes majority rule the salient solution. There are some clear examples of this: a few years ago in my city—Barcelona, as I already said—the city council proposed a referendum to decide whether Avinguda Diagonal, one of the main arteries of the city, which they wanted to convert into a more pedestrian-friendly avenue, should be developed into a *rambla* (with a wide passage for pedestrians in the middle) or as a *boulevard* (with a passage for pedestrians on each side of the road, and the roadway in the middle).[9] It is obvious that in cases like this, something like IMPARTIALITY should be imposed, and it also seems obvious that this demands—in a wide range of cases of disagreement—a decision by majority rule: the only way to equally respect everyone's preferences. It is a controversial matter how many political decisions fall into this range, but it seems obvious that some do: the ordering of priorities and the distribution of resources between health and education, for instance. Given the satisfaction of a certain threshold, the question, for instance, of whether to first finance the construction of a new school or a new health centre, may be a question of preferences that is not resolvable through moral arguments.

[7] Although he would perhaps now be inclined to moderate that extreme position (see Ferrajoli 2012, and Ferrajoli and Ruiz Manero 2012, often as a consequence of his dialogue with Ruiz Manero). I have dealt with this in Moreso 2012, 2013b.

[8] I criticize these ideas in Moreso 2013a.

[9] The political circumstances of the consultation, which are no longer of any interest, led to a third proposal being imposed, which consisted in leaving the avenue as it was.

However, the fact that the equal consideration of all is a central element of democratic liberalism in no way implies that it is the *only* element. When we argue about including the death penalty in our system of legal sanctions, women's right to vote, universal access to education and healthcare, and also, I believe, the authorization of fox hunting, we argue about moral questions, and in such cases IMPARTIALTY does not help to settle the issue. If we accept that democracy can resolve these issues, then this is not *only* because we believe that equal consideration and respect for everyone's will is crucial, but *also* because we think that democratic procedures, including genuine deliberation that takes into account the opinions of all, increase our capacity to discover morally right answers, because democracy—as argued above—has *epistemic* value.[10] In this sense, the notion of democratic legitimacy presupposes ethical objectivism.[11] It presupposes that, in cases of moral conflict, we have no moral reasons to renounce our own position, and that views that conceive of moral judgements as mere expressions of personal preference are inadequate.

4. The Deliberative Indispensability of the Normative

So-called indispensability arguments come from philosophy of mathematics and were first developed by Quine and Putnam (see e.g. Quine 1980, Putnam, 1979). The following formulation of the argument (from Colyvan 2015) can be taken as a starting point:

> (P1) We ought to have ontological commitment to all and only the entities that are indispensable to our best scientific theories.
>
> (P2) Mathematical entities are indispensable to our best scientific theories.
>
> (C) We ought to have ontological commitment to mathematical entities.

Similarly, in philosophy of science, the existence of so-called theoretical entities (e.g. electrons and black holes) is accepted because the best explanation of reality offered by physics presupposes this: the existence of these entities, presupposed by our scientific theories, has to be accepted.[12] In general, an indispensability argument is an argument that guarantees the truth of a certain proposition on the basis of the

---

[10] Obviously there remains to be resolved the controversial question of whether, to achieve that result, it is better to previously entrench some elements, established as preconditions, such as basic rights, and subtract them from the ordinary political agenda. The vexed question of the justification of judicial review has, as will be obvious, much to do with this. Unfortunately this is not the place to say any more about this problem. But see Marmor 2015 for a defence of something like IMPARTIALITY, i.e. drawing lots, for decisions on the constitutionality of laws, as a superior alternative to court decisions.

[11] See Martí 2012 for a perspicuous argument along these lines.

[12] This is a different argument from what is known as the *Moorean* argument, which establishes—for instance—that the inference from "There are natural numbers greater than 100" to "There are natural numbers" is legitimate. Similarly, from "Torturing babies for fun is morally wrong" we can infer "It is a moral fact that it is wrong to torture babies for fun", and thus "There are moral facts". Thus we have reason to reject error theories in both mathematics and morality. As will be clear, this argument is in debt to Moore's (1939) argument against scepticism about the existence of the external world. See also e.g. Fine 2001. Enoch (2011: 117-121) uses this argument against error theories in metaethics, but not as a foundation of his defence of robust normative realism. Accordingly, its plausibility will not be analysed here.

indispensability of that proposition for some established purpose. If the goal, as with the previous argument, is *explanation*, then we can say that it is an explanatory indispensability argument.

In the literature, moreover, it is recognized (including by Enoch, 2011: 55) that arguments to the best explanation—such as arguing for the existence of protons from the fact that our best theories quantify over protons and we are confident in their truth—are really indispensability arguments. However, Enoch (2011: 56-67) is aware that the explanatory indispensability of normative entities is controversial: they are not part of what our best scientific theories presuppose. What he wants to show is the *deliberative* indispensability of the normative. That is to say, when I deliberate, for instance, about which school I should enrol my daughter in, I thereby involve myself in a task that presupposes that there is a right answer to that question, and that this answer does not depend on me, but rather that there is some normative truth that makes it right for me to enrol her in one school rather than another. Otherwise, what sense would there be in my deliberating? On the other hand, argues Enoch, deliberation is not optional for agents like us who confront such practical questions. Moreover, deliberating is different from *choosing* (a card from a deck, or a bottle of water in the supermarket from a row of bottles of the same brand and size): when we deliberate we commit to our decision; we believe it to be the best decision we could take; we eliminate arbitrariness by discovering reasons for our decision.

And in this sense, for Enoch, there is room for arguments from forms of indispensability other than explanatory indispensability: among them, deliberative indispensability. With these ideas in mind, Enoch (2011: 83) sets out the following argument:

(1) If something is instrumentally indispensable to an intrinsically indispensable project, then we are (epistemically) justified (for that very reason) in believing that that thing exists.

(2) The deliberative project is intrinsically indispensable.

(3) Irreducibly normative truths are instrumentally indispensable to the deliberative project.

(4) Therefore, we are epistemically justified in believing that there are irreducibly normative truths.

In chapter 4 Enoch combines the arguments of the two previous chapters to defend *robust moral realism*. He does not argue that the rejection of non-objectivist metaethics and the thesis of the deliberative indispensability of the normative together imply robust moral realism, but that they make it very plausible.[13]

And in chapter 5 he rejects other positions that promise to deliver the same that robust moral realism offers, but with greater philosophical parsimony: naturalism, fictionalism, error theories and what he calls *quietism*, wherein he situates all those positions that consider metanormative discourse either to be unintelligible (partly) because normative practice does not need any external justification, or else to be first-order normative discourse in disguise. At the end of chapter 2 (2011: 27-38), he had already rejected, for not accounting for the objectivity of moral discourse, some constitutive forms of constructivism, and also expressivism.

[13] Although a sophisticated constructivism about the normative can be combined with an error theory about morality (see Joyce 2014: 846): a possibility that Enoch notes but does not discuss (2011: 97 n. 16).

With these arguments, the overall argument of the book can be summarized as follows, as elegantly put by Faraci (2012: 263):

(1) Moral beliefs concern something objective.

(2) If Robust normative facts are indispensable for deliberation, we have some reason to believe in them, and thus to accept Robust Metanormative Realism.

(3) Insofar as we have reason to accept Robust Metanormative Realism, we have reason to accept Robust Metaethical Realism.

(4) Robust normative facts are indispensable for deliberation because alternatives to Robust Realism that are consistent with (1) and with normativity's role in deliberation fail.

(5) None of the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic or psychological objections to Robust Realism are significantly damaging.

(6) Therefore, we have most reason to accept Robust Realism in both metaethics and metanormative theory.

As Faraci argues (2012), almost all philosophers nowadays accept (1). Only those metaethical views that do not account for objectivity remain excluded: eliminativist positions, caricaturized subjectivism, and crude emotivism.[14] I believe that most philosophers would also accept (2): notice that this is a conditional premise, true if its antecedent is false. And a large majority would accept (3), although some (this is part of Mackie's 1977 argument) might accept normative reasons, yet reject robust moral reasons due to the characteristics of those reasons, such as their being categorical, intrinsically linked to motivation despite being external, and so on (see Joyce 2012, 2013). My doubts concern the plausibility of premises (4) and (5), as will be obvious, and I shall deal with these in the next section.

5. Parsimony: *Entia Non Sunt Multiplicanda Praeter Necessitatem*

Enoch (2011: 53-54) accepts a version of the principle of parsimony: classes of entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily, redundancy should be avoided: a version of Ockham's famed razor. This is a minimal version, since Enoch accepts that only those entities that are indispensable should be accepted, but not only those that are *explanatorily* indispensable, as a stronger version of the principle requires.

The question, then, is whether we need to accept normative truths that commit us to the existence of non-natural facts and properties; that is, whether normative truths (e.g. that babies should not be tortured for fun) presuppose the genuine existence of moral facts and properties among our ontological furniture.

In the literature there have been many attempts to preserve normative truths while rejecting this ontological commitment. Quasi-realist expressivism (Blackburn 1993) and the distinction between properties and concepts (drawn by another expressivist, Gibbard 2003: 29-37) are two approaches that promise to deliver moral truths without any corresponding ontological commitment. On the other hand, naturalist moral realism in

[14] In Moreso 2003, 2008 I try to show why these approaches are not capable of capturing the platitudes that underlie the practice of morality.

its various forms tries to show how moral truths are possible, while moral properties are somehow reducible to natural properties (see Schroeder 2005).[15]

Nonetheless, suppose we are persuaded by Enoch's criticisms of these approaches, and that we therefore accept that there such things as *irreducible* moral truths. Does this position ontologically commit us? Must we then accept robust moral realism? In truth, I think we do not have decisive reasons to do so. To illustrate what I mean here, I shall discuss Enoch's objections to two different approaches: constitutive constructivism and quietism; and I shall argue that his reasons for rejecting these positions are not decisive. Meanwhile, I shall set aside his objections to error theory and fictionalism, although all these metaethical approaches overlap each other, to be sure.[16]

One of Enoch's central arguments against constitutivism is that the rational agency of moral subjects is optional, so this view does not help to ground our moral practice. However, it is not clear why rational agency is optional, while deliberation is indispensable and non-optional, which is an essential premise of Enoch's argument for deliberative indispensability. That is, for Enoch, deliberation is rationally non-optional, and he has presented, as we have seen, good arguments for this; so it is hard to understand why, in contrast, his criticism of constitutive metaethical constructivism is that rational agency is optional, and so we need an answer for why we must be rational agents after all.[17]

While I sympathize with the plausibility of a constructivist approach in metaethics,[18] these approaches have been subjected to a repeated and detailed critique by Enoch (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009), and for that reason its detailed analysis will have to wait for another occasion. Here I just want to suggest that if, as a premise of the indispensability argument, it can be established that rational deliberation is non-optional, then perhaps there is also a way to consider rational agency to be non-optional, as a premise for ascertaining precisely what we should do, and derive from its constitutive elements the right moral judgements.[19] And, if that were possible, then we could account for the objectivity of morality without committing to the existence of moral facts and properties, in the robust sense postulated by Enoch.

An alternative way to defend the irreducibility of moral truths without assuming a platonist ontology has been developed in the ambit of what Enoch calls *quietism*.[20] As we know, this position holds that ontological claims are internal to their own domain, and insofar as they do not conflict with other domains—especially with the domain of empirical science—their internal validity suffices for their truth, without the need to

---

[15] Enoch himself (2011: 109 n. 29, 270) admits his doubts concerning his objections to naturalist reductionism, and leaves open the possibility that some metaethical analogue to anomalous monism in philosophy of mind could turn out to be defensible.

[16] Thus positions can be contemplated, for instance, that seek an intermediate position between platonist realism and anti-realism (McDowell 1985), or that assume a *metaethical ambivalence* between naturalism and scepticism (Joyce 2012).

[17] See Faraci 2012, who criticizes this aspect specifically, Lenman 2014 on the presuppositions of indispensability and, in general, Ferrero 2009.

[18] See e.g. Moreso 2008. An approach that, as is obvious, has its origin in Kantian practical philosophy, and has in modern times been developed by authors like Rawls 1982, Habermas 1985, Nino 1989, Korsgaard 1996, and Scanlon 1998. See Bagnoli 2015 for a perspicuous overview.

[19] The possibility of this has recently been defended, with special reference to Enoch's criticisms, by Street 2010, and Smith 2013.

[20] A term that is disliked by the authors to whom it is applied. Enoch (2011: 121 n. 70) humorously recounts that Thomas Nagel and Ronald Dworkin affectionately threatened to label proponents of robust moral realism as "loudists" or "shoutists".

externally postulate the existence of anything and thus commit oneself ontologically.[21] Enoch (2011: 123) argues that in this way—a position close to fictionalism—we can affirm that numbers exist, meaning only that mathematical discourse quantifies over them, given the absence of any conflict between these affirmations and the truths of empirical science. Similarly we accept the truth of "Sherlock Holmes lives in London", understood as a truth internal to Conan Doyle's fiction, akin to: "In Doyle's fiction, Sherlock Holmes lives in London." There is not just one notion of existence, but rather various notions of existence. There are ways to exist that do not have any causal implications or require the occupation of any spatiotemporal location.

Enoch's criticism (2011: 124-125) of such a view is that it does not supply us with an adequate notion of moral truth. We could imagine a process different from deliberation—counter-deliberation—that considers, for instance, causing pain to always be a reason to perform an action, and so on; and this process would generate a space of internal reasons which do not conflict with the truths of science, hence we would not be able to deny their existence.

Well, recently Parfit (2011: 464-487) has elaborated a set of arguments for distinguishing between various kinds of existence, where there is room for mathematical and moral truths without ontological commitment.

He starts with an extremely restrictive position (Parfit 2011: 466):

> *Fundamentalism*: All that exists are the ultimate constituents of reality.

On this view, only subatomic particles exist, and there are no atoms, stars or chairs. As Parfit argues, this is a very implausible view. The fact that many physical objects are *composite*, in the sense that they are made of smaller elements, is consistent with the existence of those objects, which do not exist *separately* from their components.

Another view, less restrictive than the previous one, is (Parfit 2011: 467):

> *Actualism*: To be, or to exist, is to be actual, so there cannot be anything that is merely possible.

But then, Parfit continues, we would not be able to choose between various possible acts, nor would we have reasons to regret what we have not done, for instance. Since actualism is not plausible either, we must adopt something like (Parfit 2011: 467):

> *Possibilism*: There are some things that are never actual, but are merely possible. There are some things that might happen but never actually happen, and some things that might exist but never actually exist.

Hence Parfit (2011: 469) denies that the expressions "there is" and "exist" must always be used in the same unique sense, and he adopts a pluralist view according to which there is a restricted sense of "exist", according to which the things that exist are parts of the spatiotemporal world, while there is also another, broader sense in which there are merely possible acts and things.

The existence of possible worlds is obviously a highly controversial issue in philosophy, and I bring it up here only to show how Parfit argues that there are other

[21] Perhaps Ronald Dworkin (1996, 2011) is the author who has most insisted on the impossibility of adopting that external perspective, the Archimedean point of view, in these affairs.

candidates for existence—like numbers, propositions, logical truths and normative reasons—that do not exist in any of the previous senses.

Let us start with numbers and mathematical truths. According to Parfit (2011: 479-480):

> Some examples, I suggest, are mathematical truths. Nothing could be truer than the truths that 2 is greater than 1, that 2 + 2 = 4, and that there are prime numbers greater than 100. Not even God could make these claims false. For such claims to be true, there must be a sense in which there are numbers, or in which numbers exist. But in deciding which mathematical claims are true, we don't need to answer the question whether numbers really exist in an ontological sense, though not in space or time. Similar remarks apply to some other abstract entities, such as logical truths and valid arguments. In deciding whether certain claims state such truths or arguments, we don't need to ask whether these truths or arguments exist in an ontological sense.

And this is also the kind of existence that is had by normative facts and reasons that lack ontological status (Parfit 2011: 486):

> There are some claims that are irreducibly normative in the reason-involving sense, and are in the strongest sense true. But these truths have no ontological implications. For such claims to be true, these reason-involving properties need not exist either as natural properties in the spatio-temporal world, or in some non-spatio-temporal part of reality.

This is a position that rejects naturalism, a position that is cognitivist and rationalist, but not a metaphysically committed position. It is what Parfit calls *non-metaphysical non-naturalist normative cognitivism*.

If this is an ontologically plausible view,[22] then there are irreducible normative truths without any commitment to robust realism, and without any ontological commitment. Obviously, to show this to be an ontologically plausible view, it has to be shown that moral practice produces objective judgements on which rational and reasonable agents would converge. And to do that, we would need a detailed analysis of Parfit's impressive contribution, in debate with other great contributions to the foundations of ethics: something that is beyond the purpose of the present contribution. Here it suffices to say that there are approaches, like that of Parfit, which leave room for irreducible normative truths without *robust* normative facts, and that there is room for moral objectivity without *platonism*, just as there is room for the objectivity of mathematics without platonism.

6. Conclusion: Objectivity and the Principle of Tolerance

Enoch's important contribution, in my opinion, offers us good reasons to reject metaethical views that fail to account for the *objectivity* of moral practice. I know no rational person who holds that it is right to torture babies for fun, and this is a good reason to believe in the objective truth of the opposing claim: a truth that does not depend on our beliefs and present desires.

However, that his arguments in defence of that objectivity must be founded on robust moral realism, on the existence of non-natural facts and properties, seems more questionable to me. After all, mathematical practice and its objectivity do not seem at

[22] This has been denied, for instance, by Enoch (2011: 121-133), McPherson (2011), McGrath (2014), and Wodak (2017).

all threatened by the fact that philosophers of mathematics continue to debate whether the ontological foundations of that practice commit us to platonism, or whether some kind of constructivist or fictionalist approach may suffice. Similarly, in metaethics we can keep arguing about the best ontological foundations for morality, because if we guarantee the objectivity of that practice, then our debates in normative ethics can be subject to rationality. We can practice, ecumenically, what Carnap (1963:18)—in reference to philosophy of mathematics—once called the *principle of tolerance*:

> This neutral attitude toward the various philosophical forms of language, based on the principle that everyone is free to use the language most suited to his purpose, has remained the same throughout my life. It was formulated as "principle of tolerance" in *Logical Syntax* and I still hold it today, e.g., with respect to the contemporary controversy about a nominalist or Platonic language.

After all, whatever our metaethical position, if we are objectivists then we shall consider the moral correctness or incorrectness of, for instance, bombing territories controlled by ISIS in the Middle East, to uniquely depend on the adequacy of the reasons adduced for or against that action. And no one is in a better position than anyone else for that purpose just by the fact of ascribing to one or another of the metaethical views that guarantee the objectivity of our moral practice.

REFERENCES

BAGNOLI, Carla (2015): 'Constructivism in Metaethics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/constructivism-metaethics/>.

BENTHAM, Jeremy (1970): *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, [1789], (London: Athlone Press).

BLACKBURN, Simon (1993): *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

BULYGIN, Eugenio (2015): *Essays in Legal Philosophy*, Carlos Bernal, Carla Huerta, Tecla Mazzarese, José Juan Moreso, Pablo E. Navarro, and Stanley Paulson (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

CARNAP, Rudolf (1963): 'Intellectual Autobiography'. *The philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp, *The library of living philosophers*, vol. 11, La Salle, IIlinois.: Open Court, 1–84.

COLYVAN, Mark (2015): 'Indispensability Arguments in the Philosophy of Mathematics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), E. N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/mathphil-indis/>.

DE LORA, Pablo (2003): *Justicia para los animales* (Madrid: Alianza).

DWORKIN, Ronald (1996): 'Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 25: 97-139.
--- (2011): *Justice for Hedgehogs*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).

ENOCH, David (2005): 'Why Idealize?', *Ethics*, 115: 759-787.
--- (2006). 'Agency, Shamgency, Why Normativity Won't Come from What is Constitutive of Agency', *Philosophical Review*, 115: 169-198.
--- (2007): 'Rationality, Coherence, Convergence: A Critical Comment on Michael Smith's *Ethics and the A Priori*', *Philosophical Books*, 48: 99-108.
--- (2009): 'Can there be a Global, Interesting, Coherent Constructivism about Practical Reason?', *Philosophical Explorations*, 12: 319-339.
--- (2011): *Taking Morality Seriously. A Defense of Robust Realism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
--- (2014): 'In Defense of Taking Morality Seriously: Reply to Manne, Sobel, Lenman, and Joyce', Philosophical Studies, 168:853–865.

ESTLUND, David M. (2009): *Democractic Authority: A Philosophical Framework* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

FARACI, David (2012): 'Book Review: David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously. A Defense of Robust Realism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)', *The Journal of Value Enquiry*, 46: 259-267.

FERRAJOLI, Luigi (2011): 'Constitucionalismo principialista y constitucionalismo garantista', *Doxa. Cuadernos de Filosofía del Derecho*, 34: 15-53.
--- (2012): 'La scelta come fondamento ultimo della morale', *Teoria Politica*, 2: 177-185.

FERRAJOLI, Luigi; RUIZ MANERO, Juan (2012): *Dos modelos de constitucionalismo. Una conversación*, (Madrid: Trotta).

FERRERO, Luca (2009): 'Constitutivism and the Inescapibility of Agency', *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 4: 303-333.

FINE, Kit (2001): 'The Question of Realism', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 1: 1-30.

GIBBARD, Allan (2003): *Thinking How to Live*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).

GUASTINI, Riccardo (2012): 'Dei rapporti tra liberalismo e non-cognitivismo', *Teoria Politica* 2: 137-142.

HABERMAS, Jürgen (1985): 'Etica del discurso. Notas para un programa de fundamentación', en *Conciencia moral y acción comunicativa*, trad. de R. García Cotarelo (Barcelona: Península).

HART, H.L.A. (1982): *Essays on Bentham. Jurisprudence and Political Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

JOYCE, Richard (2012): 'Metaethical Pluralism: How both Moral Naturalism and Moral Skepticism May Be Permissible Positions', en S. Natucelli, G. Seay (eds.), *Ethical Naturalism: Current Debates*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 89-109.
--- (2013): 'Book Review: *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* by Enoch, David', *Ethics*, 123: 365-369.
--- (2014). 'Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously', *Philosophical Studies*, 168: 843–851.

KANT, Immanuel (1997): *Lectures on Ethics*, [1784-1785], P. Heath and J.B. Schneewind (ed. and trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

KORSGAARD, Christine (1996): *The Sources of Normativity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

LENMAN, James (2014): 'Deliberation, Schmeliberation: Enoch's Indispensability Argument', *Philosophical Studies,* 168: 835-842.

MACKIE, John (1977): *Ethics. Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

MANNE, Kate; SOBEL, David (2014): 'Disagreeing about how to disagree', *Philosophical Studies*, 168:823–834.

MARMOR, Andrei (2015): 'Randomized Judicial Review', https://blogs.cornell.edu/marmor/files/2015/02/RJR-April-15-revised-15s4sav.pdf.

MARTÍ, José Luis (2006), 'The Epistemic Conception of Deliberative Democracy Defended. Reasons, Rightness and Equal Political Autonomy' in S. Besson, J.L. Martí (eds.), , *Deliberative Democracy and Its Discontents* (Aldershot: Ashgate), cap. 2.
--- (2012): 'Democracia y subjetivismo ético', *Teoria Politica* 2: 111-136.

McDOWELL, John (1985): 'Values and Secondary Qualities' en T. Honderich, *Morality and Objectivity* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 110-129.

MCGRATH Sarah (2014): ' 'Relax? Don't Do It! Why Realism Won't Come Cheap,'' in R. Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Volume 9*: 186–214.

MCPHERSON, T. (2011) 'Against Quietist Normative Realism.' *Philosophical Studies* 154: 223–240.

MOORE, G.E. 'Proof an External World', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 25: 273-300.

MOSTERÍN, Jesús (1998): *¡Vivan los animales!* (Madrid: Debate).

MORESO, J.J. (2003): 'El reino de los derechos y la objetividad de la moral', *Análisis filosófico*, 23: 117-150. Ahora en Moreso 2009, ensayo 2.
--- (2008): 'El constructivismo ético y el dilema de Eutifrón'. Alegre, M., Gargarella, R., Rosenkrantz, C.F. *Homenaje a Carlos S. Nino* (Buenos Aires: La Ley, 2008), 13 – 21. Ahora en Moreso 2009, ensayo 4.
--- (2009): *La Constitución: modelo para armar*, (Madrid: Marcial Pons).

--- (2012): ‘Antígona como *defeater*. Sobre el constitucionalismo garantista de Ferrajoli’. *Doxa,* 34: 183–199.
--- (2013a): ‘Donde la pala se nos dobla. De nuevo sobre metaética y política’. *Teoría Política*, 3: 287–299 .
--- (2013b): ‘Ethica more iuridico incorporata: Luigi Ferrajoli’. *Anuario de filosofía del derecho.* XXIX: 161–180.
--- (2015): ‘Objetividad moral sin realismo robusto. Comentarios sobre Enoch’, *Discusiones* XVI (2015): 191-222.

NINO, Carlos S. (1988): *El constructivismo ético* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1989)
--- (1996): *The Constitution of Deliberative Democracy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press).

PARFIT, Derek (2011): *On What Matters. Volume Two,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

PUTNAM, Hilary (1979): ‘Philosophy of Logic’, reprinted in H. Putnam, *Mathematics Matter and Method: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1,* 2nd edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 323–357.

QUINE, Willard van Orman (1981): ‘Things and Their Place in Theories’, en W. V. O. Quine, *Theories and Things*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 1–23.

RAWLS, John (1982): ‘Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory’, *Journal of Philosophy,* 77 (1982): 512-572.

SCANLON, Thomas (1998): *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).

SCHROEDER, Mark (2005): ‘Realism and Reduction: The Quest of Robustness’, *Philosopher’s Imprint,* 5 (1): 1-18.

SHAFER-LANDAU, Russ (2003): *Moral Realism: A Defence,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

SINGER, Peter (1975): *Animal Liberation*, (New York: HarperCollins).

SMITH, Michael (2013): ‘A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons: Its Promise and Parts’, *Law, Ethics and Philosophy*, 1.

STREET, Sharon (2010): ‘What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?’, *Philosophy Compass*’, 5: 363-384.

WEDGWOOD, Ralph (2007): *The Nature of Normativity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
--- (2013): ‘Book Review: *Taking Morality Seriously. A Defense of Robust Realism*. By David Enoch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 63: 389-393.

WODAK, D. (2017). ‘Why Realists Must Reject Normative Quietism’ *Philosophical Studies* 174: 2795–2817.