Introduction

1. The term “naturalism” is frequently employed these days as a cipher for respectable philosophical methodology. Authors who do so rely on the assumption of an intimate connection between “naturalism” and the natural sciences. We are all impressed by way scientific thought has enabled the production of technologies that have transformed the face of the earth. It is eminently plausible that this has only been possible because science uncovers the structure and workings of reality. Science may thus seem to have slipped into the role traditionally fulfilled by philosophical metaphysics: the structure of “being” appears, at least up to a point, to be an empirically discoverable matter. There are, however, various points at which doubts arise as to how much of the human world is knowable in epistemic terms modelled on those of the natural sciences. One such point is reached where we step into the ethical sphere.

2. Historically, attempts to understand morality have given rise to a number of strange constructions that certainly don’t permit reconstruction along natural scientific lines. These constructions are, however, not just the products of minds that had not yet grasped the full import of empirical science. They are, rather, attempts to capture constitutive features of moral experience. In what follows, I shall be arguing that the relevant features are best captured
by a version of the expressivist analysis of moral judgement. My central claim will be that it is expressivism that allows a reconciliation between the claims of science and the essentially practical nature of morality. Moreover, only when we get clear on this can we say in what sense we should, and in what sense we should not, be “naturalists”.

3. These claims need some preparation. I begin by distinguishing various senses of the term naturalism. This is important, as the term can be used to designate anything from a broad commitment to keep the “supernatural” out of philosophy to a methodologically highly specific conception of how that has to be done (section 1). There follows a critical discussion of one such conception in its application to the concept of moral normativity: the idea that “the right” could be explicated in functional terms (section 2). I then develop my own reconstructive suggestion, doing so in three steps. The key to understanding moral normativity, I argue, is an understanding of the notion of a standard. I approach this topic via a brief examination of social norms, as it is here that standards are most palpable (section 3). This leads to a discussion of the basic forms of attitudinising at work in the constitution of social norms, what I call optative attitudes (section 4). On this basis, I finally sketch a conception of the attitudinal constitution of moral normativity, which gains its particular profile through the comparison with social norms: it shares with them certain important features, but also differs from them in decisive ways (section 5).

4. An analysis of the optative constitution of moral normativity clarifies why, although the dimension of the human world thus generated is constructed from nothing but natural materials, it remains resistant to analysis in terms of the properties accessible to the natural sciences. Put succinctly, the reason is that the morally normative is a feature internal to optative attitudinising, in the sense that stepping out of the optative mode renders it inaccessible.
1. Ethics and the Ways of Being Naturalist

1. “Naturalisation” is a rapidly expanding philosophical industry. These days a great deal of philosophical energy is invested in projects of “naturalising” our understanding of topics that have often seemed resistant to “naturalist” construals. The development of the cognitive sciences has both made the mind the most intensely hunted game in the philosophical jungle and raised the general confidence that a full-scale naturalisation of all interesting components of the human life form will be possible.

2. Hot on the heels of the mind comes morality. Certainly, reflections on ethics have over the centuries given rise to forms of talk that can only be made sense of if “supernatural” entities or capacities are postulated alongside the components of the empirical world. The Platonic “form of the good” exists in another ontological dimension. Actions that realise the Kantian “moral law” come about as a result of a remarkable “non-empirical causality”. Finally, at the inception of what we know as “meta-ethics”, G.E. Moore insisted that first “the good” and later “the right” are in some significant sense “non-natural properties”.¹

3. If we want to understand the ethical sphere, we have good reason to be unhappy about these sorts of pronouncements. Where we are after clarity, they offer us mystery. In effect, they are telling us that there is a point beyond which we are unable to understand what is going on and that further striving after clarity is futile. It ought to be obvious that philosophers should be very reluctant to make such claims, as they amount to an admission of defeat in our analytic endeavours. Nevertheless, it would be equally unphilosophical to insist that there must for a priori reasons be a perfect fit between the world and our cognitive capacities, which guarantees our ability to give a “full account” – whatever that may be – of everything we set out to comprehend.

¹ For Moore’s (incomplete) thoughts on the “non-natural” character of “right”, see Moore (1993), pp. 4f.
4. Although they drew very different conclusions, Plato, Kant and Moore were all convinced that, one way or another, we come up against significant cognitive barriers in the ethical sphere. This is in itself not uninteresting, as it reflects what I suspect is the general cognitive condition among persons-on-the-street with respect to the morally normative. Firstly, “the folk” will manifest considerable perplexity if asked to spell out what they are talking about when they employ these concepts. Secondly, further prodding is likely to elicit an eclectic mix of cultural conceptions with a tendency to the transcendent. There is, we the folk tend to think, something supra-positive about the moral “ought”; we feel that its demands are somehow time- and placeless. A plausible metaethics ought to be able to make clear what it is about the ethical sphere that generates “intuitions” of this kind. Certain features of morality, in particular moral normativity, do appear to be candidates for the status of irreducible phenomena. If someone is to succeed in “naturalising” moral normativity then, they will in the process need to explain its “non-naturalistic” appearance. Here, as elsewhere, the maxim holds that if we cannot show how our analyses account for the everyday phenomena, then they forfeit the right to count as analyses of those phenomena.

5. Before turning to approaches to the ethical, we need to spend a moment or two considering what is precisely to be understood by the term “naturalism”. For certain philosophers, being “naturalist” seems to be a necessary if not sufficient condition of the respectability of one’s philosophical methodology. And indeed, there are ways of using the term that make this fairly obviously true. Two such uses are the following:

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2 This contrasts starkly and importantly with the epistemic sphere, where just about everybody will serve up some version of the correspondence “theory” of truth without too much prompting. Because the idea of correspondence is the core of what people mean by “truth”, talk of a “correspondence theory” is a misnomer. In this respect, meta-ethical attempts to reconstruct how we think morally when we are on the street are engaged in a different enterprise. The eclectic mixture of cultural conceptions that structure and clutter our ethical thought can only be made sense of by severe pruning. There is a basic asymmetry here that tells against a systematic parallelism of “the true” and “the right”, as postulated for instance in Simon Blackburn’s “quasi-realism”.
(N1) A philosophical approach is naturalist iff its procedures are consistent with the assumption that its subject matter has come into being a result of evolutionary processes.

(N2) A philosophical approach is naturalist iff its procedures are compatible with those of the natural sciences.

6. The popularity of “naturalism” rests squarely on the unprecedented success of the natural sciences since the enlightenment. No one doing serious philosophy can deny that in the last two centuries methods have been developed that have enabled massive leaps forward in the understanding of the how the world hangs together and may be preparing even greater leaps for the not-too-distant future. Philosophy clearly has to ensure its compatibility with these advances and ought moreover to be aware of the results of empirical research that are relevant to its topics. This means not only that the philosophy of mind should, as is widely acknowledged, be in dialogue with the cognitive sciences, but also that action theory needs to keep abreast of the findings of motivational and social psychology. Philosophical attempts to say what actions are, how they are to be explained and justified, and whether and in what sense they can be free need to ensure they are not claiming anything disproven by empirical research. They also need to be aware of the phenomena thus discovered that their own constructions have to be able to account for.

7. Furthermore, philosophical understanding needs to recognise that its subject matter – whether belief, art or virtue – has come into being as the result of a process of becoming that is neither given direction by, nor interfered with by an kind of super-agent. All the agents there are are themselves the result of such processes of becoming, processes that are contingent and which, at least at some level, involve genetic “selection” as a result of survival in a particular environment. How much of contemporary evolutionary theory is

3 For an attempt to bring the relevant empirical findings to bear on a philosophical analysis of wanting and intending, cf. Roughley (forthcoming a), chapters 3, 6 and 7.
true is unimportant here. What is decisive is simply the fact that we, along with all our distinguishing features, are the products of contingent processes of becoming that could in principle be reconstructed in causal terms. In this respect, we humans and our world are like everything else. This is a fortiori true of the mind, beauty and “the good”.

8. Short of inserting religious premises into philosophical argument, I have difficulties seeing how anyone could fail to be “naturalist” in either of these two senses. Simon Blackburn’s dictum that “to be a naturalist is to see human beings as frail complexes of perishable tissue, and so a part of the natural order” (Blackburn 1998, p. 48), is basically a concrete illustration of N1. Something close to N2 is expressed by Arthur Danto’s definition of naturalism, according to which “whatsoever exists or happens is natural in the sense of being susceptible to explanation through methods which, although paradigmatically exemplified in the natural sciences, are continuous from domain to domain of objects and events” (Danto 1967, p. 448). Note, however, that Danto talks not of compatibility, but of continuity with the methods of the natural sciences. This may well be a stronger condition, depending on the respects in which natural scientific methods are taken to be “paradigmatic”.4 Certainly, what is often meant in contemporary parlance is significantly stronger.

9. A position whose conception of the relation between philosophy and science would be radically understated as one of “continuity” is that influentially advanced by Quine in his article “Epistemology Naturalized”. Quine proposes that epistemology be understood as “a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science” (Quine 1969, p. 82). This suggests a third conception:

(N3) A philosophical approach is naturalist iff its aims and procedures are aims and procedures of the natural sciences.

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5 My emphasis.
This raises the question of what precisely the aims and procedures of the natural sciences are. If the former are cast in terms of the discovery of laws, then obviously $N3$ massively restricts what can count as naturalist philosophy. However, the basic problem here goes deeper. If philosophy is a branch of natural science, then philosophy would appear to have no special brief for investigating the conceptual and metaphysical foundations of science and its practice. For this reason Quine refused the Logical Empiricists the title of “naturalists”: because they aimed to rationally reconstruct science from the materials of sense data and logic, they were integrating science within philosophy, rather than philosophy within science (Quine 1969, pp. 74ff.). According to Quine, it is only the latter perspective that is genuinely “naturalistic”.

10. Such a conception rejects what many philosophers, myself included, see as an essential feature of their metier: that when we set out to provide philosophical answers, everything is potentially up for grabs. That includes the question of how we should understand the natural scientific enterprise itself – a commonplace in the debates between realism and instrumentalism. When we turn to the ethical sphere, there can be no presumption that being “naturalist” in the sense of $N3$ is an obvious virtue. Indeed, I shall be arguing that any conception that tries to work within such a framework is necessarily unable to make sense of the key notion of moral normativity.

11. To complicate matters further, what is meant by “naturalism” has, in ethical contexts, historically been given a very specific, semantic twist. For G.E. Moore, naturalism was a doctrine concerning the definability of “good”. Leaving aside various problems of Moore philology which need not concern us here, we can usefully distil a conception of ethical naturalism from his writings as the claim that ethical concepts are definable entirely by means of predicates that pick out natural properties. “Natural” properties, in turn, are defined as “[properties] with which it is the business of the natural sciences or psychology to deal” (Moore 1993, p. 13). This gives us:

$$(N4) \text{Ethical naturalism is the claim that ethical concepts can be defined entirely in terms of properties that are the subject matter of the natural sciences or psychology.}$$
One may note the disjunction between natural science and psychology here, which contrasts with Quine’s subsumption of the latter under the former. In view of the controversies within psychology as to the extent to which the discipline is a natural science – the behaviourism accepted by Quine has few remaining adherents – this is no doubt wise.\(^6\) However, if the non-subsumption of psychology under natural science is accepted and if psychological properties are among the main candidates for the reductive role, one ends up wondering why the doctrine should go under the name of “naturalism”.

12. This problem is sidestepped in the conception of ethical naturalism developed by Richard Hare. Hare drops all reference to the natural sciences, instead simply assuming that all genuine properties are “natural” in the broad sense of being part of the causal, empirically accessible order of things. He defines ethical naturalism semantically as the claim that evaluative – and normative\(^7\) – concepts are definable entirely in terms of non-evaluative concepts (Hare 1952, p. 82; Hare 1963, p. 16). Again, riding slightly rough-shod over Hare’s precise understanding of the relationship between ontology and philosophy of language,\(^8\) we can render the conception of naturalism at work here as follows:

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\text{(N5) Ethical naturalism is the doctrine that evaluative – and normative – concepts pick out only properties belonging to the causal, empirically accessible order of things and nothing more.}
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13. There are, then, various ways of being a naturalist that don’t commit one to naturalism in other senses. In the absence of special pleading, we can surely assume that all our philosophical interlocutors are nowadays

\(^6\) The alternative, conjunctive formulations employed by Moore (1903, p. 92; 1993, p. 15) are also naturally taken to imply a non-subsumptive relation. The formulation chosen by Michael Smith, “the subject matter of a natural or social science” (Smith 1994, p. 17 and p. 35), where the latter is taken to include psychology, also raises the question of the “scientific” character of the social sciences.

\(^7\) For Hare, normative concepts are a sub-class of evaluative concepts. Cf. Hare (1963), p. 27, note.

\(^8\) Hare develops his considered opinion on these matters in Hare (1985).
adherents of \( N1 \). \( N2 \) and \( N3 \) require assumptions about the natural sciences, assumptions that in the former case are completely unproblematic, but in the latter case are certainly not. \( N4 \) and \( N5 \) combine the specific focus on the ethical sphere with the idea that the forms of “consistency” or “compatibility” referred to in \( N1 \) and \( N2 \) are to be established by means of semantic reduction. Obviously, nothing in \( N1 \) or \( N2 \) stipulates that this need be so.

14. On the other hand, if someone rejects the form of naturalism codified in \( N5 \) (and a fortiori of that of \( N4 \)), but claims to be a naturalist in senses \( N1 \) and \( N2 \), then she has got some explaining to do. The rest of this essay is an attempt to do some of that explaining. Getting clear on the shape of such a “non-naturalist naturalism” is, moreover, not only vital for an adequate meta-ethics. It also provides some indications of how we should understand the philosophical project in general, in particular what the naturalism of our first two conceptions does not commit us to.

2. The Puzzle of Moral Normativity and its Inexplicability in “Functional” Terms

1. Normativity is arguably the feature of morality that poses the greatest challenge to its understanding as a feature of the world that has developed through evolutionary processes and is studied by the natural sciences. That difficulty was raised with particular poignancy by the Logical Empiricists, who first attempted to distil a theory of meaning out of the scientific world view, before showing that the semantics they came up with disqualifies evaluative and normative\(^9\) utterances from counting as meaningful. These days, virtually nobody thinks that the truth conditions necessary for explicating large portions of meaningful language use have to be explicable in terms of observables. And virtually nobody thinks that morally normative claims – that someone morally “should”, “ought to”, “must” (not) do

\(^9\) The emotivists were not interested in differentiating between the evaluative and the normative. Ayer does remark that, whereas ‘good’ “suggests” what an addressee is to do, ‘ought’ is more of the nature of a “command”. But this is no more than a passing remark (Ayer 1936, p. 111).
something; that some action is morally right, wrong, forbidden, obligatory – are meaningless. Rather, it seems to many as if the loosening of the truth-conditional constraints on meaningful language use has opened up the space in which to understand the meaning of normative utterances: if within such a less tightly-knit semantics there is room for meaningful claims about positrons and the universe, about hopes and fears, then why should not the same be possible for the right and the wrong?

2. Norms, so it may seem, are real in a sense that can only be understood by placing them squarely in the middle of empirical reality. Indeed, it ought to be obvious that everyday human life is permeated by a large variety of norms and that such “permeation” involves norms playing demonstrable causal roles. The “existence” of norms – however we are precisely to make sense of it – leads to all sorts of actions that would not occur without them. If causality is to be analysed at least in part in counterfactual terms, then the “rightness” of certain kinds of actions is plausibly assigned some causal responsibility for the fact that people perform actions of that type, in as far as they would not act thus were there to be no such “normative fact”.

3. However, it ought to be equally obvious that norms, moral or other, are not definable in terms of their causal roles. It is an essential characteristic of norms that their existence does not necessitate behaviour that realises their contents. Indeed, there appears to be nothing self-contradictory about the claim that there “are” norms which have never had any influence on human action. If the causal role norms tend to play is indicative of their reality in some sense or another, the significant possibility of their complete causal inefficacy marks what may appear to be their special ontological status.

4. One can call this the puzzle of normativity. If one lets oneself be hypnotised by it, norms may seem to be entities with a strange ontological dual status – both empirical or “natural”, in as far as they are part of the causal network of the real world, and somehow non-empirical or non-“natural”, in that they also appear to stand outside that network. I think we should understand Kant as articulating this puzzle. He located moral norms outside the empirical reality framed by the constraints of time and space “in a completely
different … order from the order of nature” (Kant 1787, p. 373). Although they are supposed to be immune to influence from empirical causation, they are somehow nevertheless able to – “non-empirically” – influence the behaviour of agents in the empirical world. Thus understood, Kant’s position clearly does not count as naturalist in the sense of $N1$ – and is for this reason not a serious option. Nevertheless, Kant is helpful in providing us with a phenomenologically accurate picture of the puzzle itself.

5. The fact that moral oughts need not be causes makes a type of post-verifi cationist solution that has become popular for theoretical entities and mental states a non-starter here. This is the idea that the relevant kind of entity can be defined in terms of a characteristic causal role: by postulating certain items as intermediaries between typically observable causes and effects. The idea gains its plausibility from the fact that, just because we are – as yet, or perhaps in principle – unable to devise a means of observing goings on of a certain scale or kind, that does not mean that there is nothing there. If, after the occurrence of events of type $e_1…e_n$, events of type $f_1…f_n$ tend to occur, although direct causation of the latter by the former can be excluded, and if the missing links can be formally represented by intervening variables, then it is a plausible assumption that there are real, yet unobservable entities fulfilling the functions thus represented. In this way the introduction of theoretical terms can be made sense of within a truth-conditional semantics. Clearly, this is not going to work with whatever it is we mean by what morally ought to be done or what is morally right. These ideas are quite simply not matters of fulfilling causal roles.

6. Nevertheless, there are two further features of definitional “functionalism” that have made it seem attractive in metaethics, features that had first proven particularly fruitful where the functionalist apparatus was applied in the philosophy of mind. The first is that functionalism provides a way of making sense of the idea of different “levels” of reality, whilst keeping the levels thus distinguished firmly anchored in some basic stratum: where the vocabulary

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10 My translation.
and theoretical apparatus used to describe things in some particular way can be defined in terms of causal roles, the question is open as to what otherwise identifiable entity *realises* that role. A description of some item in functional vocabulary can be added to a non-functional description without giving cause to believe that the item has acquired properties that somehow go beyond what is natural in senses corresponding to *N1*, *N2* or even *N4*. A significant number of philosophers have come to believe that mental states are simply functional states, which can thus be shown to be unproblematically identical to physical states, once they are described in the vocabulary of the physical sciences.\(^\text{11}\) Irrespective of whether the idea really works for mental states,\(^\text{12}\) the distinctive normative and evaluative vocabulary of morals seems to be an analogous addition to all the terminologies used by the sciences. Moreover, the systematic dependence of ethical judgements on justification by reference to descriptive facts seems to parallel the systematic dependence of the mental on the physical. We have what in both cases may be termed a supervenience relation\(^\text{13}\).

7. The second feature of the functionalist analysis of mind that has appeared attractive in meta-ethics is the *definitional holism* of the mental. According to its self-understanding, functionalism differs from its behaviourist predecessor in insisting that mental terms are not definable merely in terms of input-output relations.\(^\text{14}\) Rather, a theory of how inputs come to produce outputs in a law-like manner has to reckon with complex causal interrelations between the items represented by the intervening variables, relations that are in turn not reducible to their relations to behavioural input and output.

\(^{11}\) There is actually disagreement among functionalists as to whether the doctrine supports or undermines the identity theory. Lewis and Armstrong have argued for the former, Putnam and Fodor for the latter claim (cf. Block 1980, pp. 177ff.).

\(^{12}\) In 4.10-12 below, I provide indications of why the “role” that would have to be played by neurophysiological items cannot in the case of our practical attitudes be circumscribed in purely causal terms. The arguments are developed in detail in Roughley (forthcoming a) chapter 3.


\(^{14}\) As a matter of historical fact, this is incorrect with respect to behaviourism. See Roughley (forthcoming a) chapter 3.
Definition of the theoretical constructs in the black box of the mind thus requires reference to other such constructs. Again, there looks to be a promising analogy with the ethical case. There is a fairly widespread consensus that the project of defining individual ethical concepts by adducing necessary and sufficient conditions whose description contains no reference to ethical terms is a lost cause. So perhaps something analogous to a functionalist philosophy of the mental is possible, if rules for entry into, and exit from the ethical can be specified and combined with interdefinition of the ethical concepts themselves.

8. What has been called “moral functionalism” suggests an analysis of the ethical, including the normative, which adopts these latter two features of the functionalist analysis whilst making clear that the relevant “functional” relations cannot be causal in character (Jackson/Pettit 1995, p. 25; Jackson 1998, p. 131; cf. Smith 1983, pp. 44ff.). This idea raises an obvious question: if the notion of “function” is not to be cashed in in causal terms, then what is it a placeholder for? Surprisingly, the “moral functionalists” have virtually nothing to say in answer to this question. The reply that the relevant kind of relation is a matter of “which properties typically go together” (Jackson 1981, p. 131) can hardly count as a clarification. As it turns out, where the so-called “output” clauses concern what “accompanies” what, that connection is at least in some cases a causal matter – as in the “platitude” that certain actions tend to be performed by agents with certain moral attitudes. However, what is decisive for the question of moral normativity is the relation specified by the “input clauses”. It is after all the question of the transition from the descriptive to the ethical, including the normative, that has been primarily at stake here since Hume. The answer tendered by Frank Jackson is disappointing, to say the least: the input clauses, he says, “tell us what kind of situations described in descriptive (sic), non-moral terms warrant kinds of description in ethical terms” (Jackson 1981, p. 130). Certainly, we get from “is” to “ought” by means of “is” descriptions warranting “ought” claims: Jackson has here faithfully reproduced a “platitude” of everyday thinking about these things. The holistic underwriting of interdefinition allows us to

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15 My emphasis.
partly define both “warranting” as what takes us from “is” to “ought” and “the right” as wherever we are taken from “is” claims by the “warranting” relation. Add to this the idea that this network of terms refers to a layer of properties (globally and necessarily) supervening on the non-ethical and it follows that there will be non-ethical properties that constitute the reality picked out by our ethical vocabulary (Jackson 1981, p. 123), just as there are presumably neurological properties that constitute the reality picked out by our mental vocabulary.

9. “Moral functionalism” is a strange animal, not least because the conception of definition in terms of causal roles from which it takes its name is simply dropped. What remain are a holism of the concepts up for explication and the supervenience premise. But once we drop the idea that it is causal relations that permit interdefinition of the concepts, the notion of “function” at work seems to be no more than that of the discursive contiguity of the relevant terms. But the fact that we tend to use these in a systematic manner relative to the descriptions in virtue of which they are applied, or at least to believe that we ought to, is no guarantee that they are systematically used to ascribe properties. Where “supervenience” is taken to refer to a relation between properties, the articulation of this feature of our moral discourse in terms of supervenience can obscure this point.16 Further, where “function” means “causal role”, we are clearly talking description; where, however, “function” means no more than “characteristic terminological environment in discourse of the relevant kind”, this entails nothing about the real relations picked out by the co-occurring terms.

10. If we want to understand moral normativity, we need answers to the two central questions raised by Hume in this connection: what constitutes the ought relation and what constitutes the relation of warranting that takes us there from descriptive reasoning (Hume 1739-40, III, i, 1). To say that

16 Note, however, that Hare characterises “good”, “right” and “ought” as supervenient “epithets” (Hare 1952, p. 131, pp. 153ff.; my emphasis). Blackburn uses both the property idiom (Blackburn 1973, pp. 114ff.) and expresses the point in terms of supervening “claims” (Blackburn 1985, p. 137).
they hang together in everyday discourse is hardly to provide answers. Only where we have an answer to how they hang together will we know what sort of properties we can reasonably expect to correlate with them on other “levels” of reality. Above all, only then will we be able to judge if the systematic relationship between “ought” judgements and the descriptions that mark their grounds results from their picking out supervenient properties relative to the properties ascribed in the descriptions. Should it turn out that “the right” is not a property at all, then the only correlated descriptions available may turn out to be ascriptions of neurophysiological properties to the person making the normative judgement.

11. This happens to be what I think is the case. “Moral functionalism” is, it seems to me, on the wrong track from the start because it begins with the assumption that “rightness” is a theoretical term. In what follows, I hope to show why this assumption is mistaken.17 I hope to show that the notion of “rightness” we operate with in moral contexts is best analysed not by listing the moral platitudes in which it occurs and in which neighbouring terms occur. Rather, we can shed considerably more light on the matter if we first analyse certain non-moral normative judgements, before going on to inquire what they have in common with, and in what ways they differ from judgements of rightness in moral contexts.

3. Social Standards

1. The central factor common to all judgements of “rightness” is the notion of conformity with a standard.18 This is the case whether we are dealing with standards for the production of norm-sized copy paper, standards for the qualification for a sports competition, rules for behaviour at the table or with moral norms. If a piece of behaviour is located within the relevant field, then

17 There is a related misconstrual at work in the functionalist philosophy of mind. Cf. above note 12.

18 This point has been emphasized in their different ways by Hare (1952), pp. 111ff. and Copp (1995), pp. 19ff.
it is open to judgement as to whether it satisfies the relevant standards or not. Where it does so, we can say that the agent behaves “correctly”, “rightly” or as she “ought” to have.

2. If this much is accepted as a starting point, the key question to be answered by an analysis of moral normativity concerns the metaphysical status of standards. As far as I can see, there are basically two possibilities. I shall label these the “symmetrical” and the “asymmetrical model”. In the symmetrical model, standards are primitive entities with a status in the practical sphere analogous to that of propositions in the theoretical sphere (Castañeda 1975, pp. 32ff., pp. 169ff., pp. 280ff.; Copp 2001, p. 21). The great advantage of such a model is that it allows us to make (fairly) easy sense of what appear to be truth claims about the moral rightness or wrongness of some action. It is part of our everyday moral practice for people to claim that the way someone acted was right, and for others to contest that claim. The symmetrical model reconstructs such disputes in terms of claims and counterclaims as to whether the action realises a legitimate standard. This is seen as parallel to non-normative factual disputes, in which the assertion that some particular instantiates a property is a claim for the truth of the relevant proposition. Such a conception is to be contrasted with the asymmetrical model, in which standards are conceived as entities consisting of propositions plus something else. On such a construal, there is no parallel between standards and propositions, because the former incorporate the latter (whereas the converse is not true).

3. The nature of propositions is a notoriously controversial matter. For the purposes of this paper, I am simply going to assume that they exist. However, although their controversial nature should not lead us to reject their existence, I do think it should cause us to be highly reluctant to postulate further entities with the same kind of status. This is a first reason to be sceptical about the symmetrical model. As it stands, it does not carry much weight, being merely a consideration of parsimony that will have to be weighed against other considerations. It is however supported by a far weightier reason.
4. This grounds in the fact that, unlike propositions, standards appear to be entities that can have a highly familiar place in everyday life. Think of the various non-moral norms and rules mentioned above (in 3.1). These are standards that not only have a clear place in human social life, but whose sociological objectivity is uncontroversially the result of a genesis through social processes: the norm specifying the dimensions of A4 paper and the offside rule in football exist because social agents have created them.

5. This genetic fact provides the key to grasping what it is these standards consist in. In many cases, of course, there are written regulations, but the pieces of paper are not the standards themselves. The core of such social norms lies in the attitudes taken on by the relevant agents. Let me illustrate: a group of people stranded on a desert island agree to regulate certain everyday processes by means of a mechanism of turn-taking, to take it in turns, say, to hunt the evening meal. Such an agreement institutes a rule within the group. If it turns out that certain members are reluctant to keep the agreement, the group might decide to reinforce it by means of penalties to be imposed under circumstances of its contravention. Depending on the characters of the persons involved, the breaking of the such rules may also trigger feelings of anger, indignation and shame. However, it is perfectly conceivable that some or all of the agents are extremely easy-going, and therefore respond to the contravention of the rules by simply completing the task themselves. Similarly, there is no a priori reason why the rule might not do its coordinating job without requiring any kind of punitive reinforcement.

6. What then is the “mode of existence” of the turn-taking rule? The obvious answer is: the rule is constituted by the coordinated attitudinising of the group members. The founding agreement could have all sorts of complications built into it concerning what is to happen should one of the parties opt out, and other eventualities. But let’s imagine the agents have not had time to consider any such possibilities. All they need is an attitude with a content of the form “Under circumstances $c$, action $a$ is performed by the person who last performed it $n$ days ago”. Obviously, the attitude with that content cannot be just any kind of attitude. More precisely, a doxastic attitude is not going to do the trick. Believing that the specified agents do in fact
perform the action in the specified sequence is not going to help establishing the sequence. Moreover, short of collective hypnosis, the belief is not going to arise if the sequence has not already been established, either in practice or at least by the agreement itself. That agreement has to involve the agents taking on an attitude by means of which some such content (“p”) is framed in the attitudinal mode expressible by the utterance “Let it be the case that p”.

7. Coordinated attitudes of this kind are the core of social standards, norms and rules. This point is of course no more than the starting point of their analysis. Social standards vary according to many additional parameters. These concern matters such as the means by which attitudinal coordination is established; the distribution of the relevant attitudes among all or only a few; their distribution relative to the distribution of the addressee role; the question as to how much detail is attitudinally encapsulated and how much content can, or needs to be assigned to some other storage medium; and the question of whether, and if so how, the standards are to be enforced. What I am claiming is that these are all elaborations of the core datum, which is an essentially attitudinal matter. Note that, if the desert island community decides from the start to fit its norms out with sanctions, it can only do this by taking on a second-order attitude of the same sort. This has the basic form: “Let it be the case that: if (we attitudinise: let it be the case that: if c then a) & (c but ¬a) then the agent responsible for ¬a be subject to sanction s”.¹⁹

8. In what follows I shall, following Kenny and Carnap (Kenny 1963, p. 221; Carnap 1963, p. 1001; cf. Seebass 1993, p. 71), refer to the “let-it-be-the-case” component as the “optative mode” and those mental states that are at least in part constituted by optative framing of a representational content as optative attitudes. Social standards are the products of beings capable of taking on, and coordinating optative attitudes. If this is correct, then we have very good reason not to elevate the concept of a standard to the same kind of metaphysical status occupied by that of propositions. Indeed, the asymmetry between the two notions is now obvious: talk of social standards

¹⁹ In other words, the installation of sanctions is itself a matter of establishing second-order norms that specify what is to be done when first-order norms are contravened.
requires talk of propositions, these being the characteristic content of the attitudes that constitute those standards. In contrast, talk of propositions is independent of talk of social standards. Finally, if social standards are indeed artefacts generated by coordinated optative attitudinising, that ought to make us suspicious of the idea that there are action-guiding standards of one special type, namely of the moral type, that are not the product of some such genesis.

9. With the exception of Hobbesian contractarians and other moral relativists, people tend to shy away from taking this suspicion too seriously, because they believe it commits them to seeing moral norms as social standards. And, whereas no-one is tempted by the idea that the laws of some particular land or the rules of football are timeless and independent of what agents at a particular time think, the idea of “supra-positive validity” seems essential to at least some, certainly to the most important, moral claims. I shall be arguing that people are right to shy away from the conclusion that moral norms are social norms. Moral norms are nevertheless like social norms in being constituted by optative attitudinising. The decisive question is precisely how.

4. Attitudinally Internal Standards

1. Before advancing my proposal for an understanding of moral normativity, I need to say something more about the nature of optative attitudinising. Am I postulating some strange kind of essentially normative faculty possessed exclusively by humans? And if that is supposed to be the solution, then, someone might object, the solution is going to fare no better than that of the intuitionists, who also want to fit us out with some special faculty in order to make sense of our peculiar experience of the right, the good and the beautiful. Now, there is a sense in which our optative capacity is indeed

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20 Authors who accept the normatively relativistic consequences of the meta-ethical claim that moral norms are social norms are Harman (1975) and Stemmer (2000).

21 Christoph Fehige has repeatedly done so.
somewhat puzzling. However, this is far removed from the mysteries of intuitionism. For one thing, the optative conception will not lead us to postulate non-empirical properties to make sense of morality. For another, optative attitudinising is not restricted to the moral sphere, nor indeed, to the normative in general. On the contrary, as I see it, optative attitudinising is something we are more or less continually involved in.

2. Mentally representing some propositional content in the optative mode is representing it in such a way that its non-realisation will, from the point of view of the attitude’s bearer, brand what is real as in this respect dissatisfactory. This contrasts with the assertoric mode, which frames the content represented in such a way that its non-realisation will brand the representational content as dissatisfactory. There is indeed something puzzling here, and it seems to me to be extremely important to get clear on what that is. It is this: the two basic modes of propositional attitudinising cannot be analysed without making – implicit or explicit – reference to the idea of a standard. Moreover, this point is true of both kinds of attitude. Various discussions of assertoric attitudinising bring this out in different ways, for instance Bernard Williams’ remark that beliefs “aim at truth” (Williams 1970, p. 136) or Donald Davidson’s claim that being a believer essentially involves having the concept of a mistake (Davidson 1982, p. 104). Belief, at least in the full-blooded sense, is not merely a matter of having certain propositions pass before one’s mind’s eye. Rather, it involves their affirmation as meeting the standard that is constitutively brought to bear in believing, namely that of representing the way things are.

3. If this is right, then the idea of a standard is internal to our most basic propositional attitudinising. Where we are dealing with beliefs, the attitudinally internal standard is fixed. A believer takes it as given that it’s not being met means that there is something “wrong” with the relevant attitude’s content. There is an important sense, then, in which merely believing involves taking ones mental representations to be subject to a standard. Once one sees this, then it becomes easier to see that optative attitudinising also involves a normative component. Where someone takes on an attitude of the type expressible by the utterance “Let $p$ be the case”, she is operating
with a standard in the converse way to that involved in belief. Representing a content in the optative mode is precisely setting that content as a standard against which to measure reality.

4. Such standards are merely *subjective*. As such, they operate well below the level of moral, or indeed any other form of transsubjective normativity. Indeed, they may be of so little importance, even to their bearer, that she abandons them almost immediately after their adoption. Optative attitudes of such short-lived nature and such minimal integration in a person’s life, for instance that there should be parsley on the moon, are often called “whims”. Other optatives, such as biologically generated basic wants, individual long-term goals and spontaneous, but hedonically charged desires tend to have a much stronger hold on their bearers. Note, though, that the differences between these cases all derive from additional components beyond the common optative core. The normativity involved in optative attitudinising itself is not responsible, for instance, if a person feels “bound” to realise an attitude’s content. All the optative component specifies is that, where its content does not represent the way things really are, there is, from the perspective of the attitude’s bearer, something “wrong” with the world with respect to that content. The necessarily “problematic” nature of unrealised optatives is the root of the Buddhist counsel to minimise one’s desires. It is also the key to the marketing strategies of a consumer society whose dynamics depend on the “demand” created through the generation of new wants.

5. The strategy that I think bears the greatest promise for the attempt to reconstruct norms, whether moral or social, involves getting clear on this subjectively normative dimension that necessarily arises for all human attitudinisers. The strategy is promising because the evidence for this component is independent of the analysis of norms. But, one might wonder, how “naturalist” can such a strategy claim to be? To begin with, if the foregoing is correct, optative attitudinising is something we all do empirically: the optative component is simply the feature that is common to our desires, longings, intentions and hopes and that distinguishes them all from our beliefs. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that this feature of these attitudes need have a history of becoming that is not covered by evolutionary
processes. As far as the ontogenesis of mind is concerned, it seems likely that full-blown attitudinising develops out of rudimentary capacities of neonates that involve no such normative dimension and that it only does so as a result of their interaction with full-blown attitudinisers. Furthermore, there is evidence that some of our evolutionarily nearest relatives have the concept of a mistaken belief, which would mean that they, like us, would also merit the title of standard-bearers.

6. There thus need be no conflict between the optative conception and $N1$. “Naturalist” worries are more likely to concern the relationship of such a conception to natural scientific procedures. In particular, they are likely to focus on the idea of taking certain criteria as a standard, whether for the content of one’s attitudes or for the way the world is. The worry is that this idea only has a place as a feature of a subjective perspective: it is only from the perspective of an attitudiniser that the non-realisation of the content of an optative attitude is necessarily problematic. Put another way: the attitude expressed by the utterance “Let it be the case that $p$” needs an author or at least a bearer, whose mental stance on the matter of $p$ is thus articulated. But natural science sees its task as one of decomposing the subject in order to discover the laws, or law-like regularities, which constitute its functioning. There can, so it seems, be no place for subjective perspectives within a scientific view of the world. This is, of course, the primary reason why there have been so many attempts to show that, in what is taken to be the most important sense of “exist”, qualia don’t.

7. We should not forget that a great deal of empirical work in motivational and developmental psychology involves investigating the effects of subjects’ optative stands. For instance, there is an entire research programme that focuses on the effects of persons forming so-called “implementation intentions”, that is, intentions to perform specific actions under specified conditions. Forming such concrete conditional intentions apparently increases

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22 Cf. Savage-Rumbaugh (1986), p. 193; Savage-Rumbaugh/Lewin (1994), p. 82. As I am using the expression here, “having the concept of $x$” does not entail being able to formulate explicit semantic rules for the use of “$x$” or even being able to use the term “$x$” or an equivalent.
the probability of the agent performing the relevant action, decreases reaction times within certain experimental designs and, where the intentions are furnished with appropriate content, leads to the suppression of epistemic stereotyping effects as well as of emotional reactions. The evidence is that getting people to commit themselves by taking a specific kind of optative stand on some future practical matter leads to effects measurable in milliseconds or in terms of EEG frequencies.\textsuperscript{23}

8. The mental stand taken in optative attitudinising, for instance in deciding, is thus an operationalisable datum for empirical research within experimental designs geared to produce quantifiable results. This is an indication that there need be no \textit{incompatibility} between the optative conception and that of the sciences. One can thus consistently be a naturalist of type \textit{N2} and accept the optative conception. However, if it is stipulated that “compatibility” with science is only given where we have definability in terms of the concepts employed in science, that is, if one takes the step from \textit{N2} to \textit{N4}, then the optative analysis clearly does not qualify. Although motivational psychologists can, indeed must, work with concepts grounded in subjective perspectives – there is no other way to get an agent to form an intention with a specific content – neither the notion of a subjective perspective nor a \textit{fortiori} that of its linguistic expression are likely to be definable in anything like the terms of physics or biology. The important philosophical question is whether there is any good reason to reject as illicit an analysis that presupposes a subjective perspective. An affirmative answer must depend on being able to say everything we need to say about the relevant field of investigation without making that presupposition. It ought to be clear that this is not only not the case in ethics; it is out of the question in any sphere of our practical lives.

9. It may well be the case that, whenever someone adopts an attitude best expressible in optative terms, one of a complicated disjunction of interacting neural networks is firing. There are well-known reasons why some people would like to say that this complex disjunction of conjoined event patterns would be what optative attitudinising “really is”, presumably at least so long

\textsuperscript{23} The relevant experiments are summarised in Achtziger/Gollwitzer (forthcoming).
as the rest of the neural and other biological stuff is there within which the relevant networks have to be embedded for the sequence to generate a subjective state thus expressible. Of course, we have no idea at the moment what this all might be, but that is not the point. What is essential is that the **criterion** for whether these event patterns and their surrounding states are the right ones remains the **expressibility in optative terms of the subjective state thus generated.**

10. It reflects a lack of genuine attention to the “folk’s” use of concepts such as “wanting” to suggest that the criterion of optative expression is dispensable in favour of the scientifically respectable idea of causal role. Our main use of these notions simply does not involve the application of an explanatory “theory”. Of course, as Hume pointed out (Hume 1739-40, II, iii, 1), it is important that we can make successful assumptions about what people are going to do on the basis of what we know about their motives. But that doesn’t make prediction and explanation of behaviour the primary function of our psychological idioms (pace Lewis 1972, pp. 256f.). It’s certainly not what we are doing when we express our own “desires”. Rather, we need the language of concerns, wants and aims first and foremost in order to facilitate and represent forms of practical deliberation. We generally think about our concerns, clarify and mull over what is bothering us and relate these things to our overarching aims not in order to discover what we are going to do or explain why we have done what we have done. Reflective episodes in which we take on such a distanced theoretical perspective towards ourselves are the exception and require specific explanations. What we are normally doing in such episodes of reflection in terms of our optative attitudes is wondering **what to do.** As the folk all know, this is not at all the same as wondering what you are going to do.

11. The kind of thought in which agents engage in order to answer the first-person practical question “What shall I do?” constitutively requires an optative answer. For the deliberator, no amount of scientific or other descriptive information can substitute for the mental step expressed by

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24 On the notion of “the practical question”, see Hare (1963), pp. 54ff.; Tugendhat (1979), pp. 182ff.; Williams (1985), pp. 18f. Strictly speaking, there are also derivative second- and third-person practical questions. I can ask what you or she “should” do – where “should”
the words “Let me a”. This point would be valid even if neuroscience had managed to develop an exact model of what is going on neurally during our optative moments. It is only because we are bearers of the subjective states expressible in optative terms that there are such things as practical deliberation and decision. It would be very surprising if there were not to be neurological and other explanatory stories to be told about how these subjective states come into being. The essential point for our purposes though is that, where agents are fitted out with them, they create for their bearers a relation to the world that only makes sense for a mind entertaining the same sort of modal relation to the world.

12. To summarise: Taking on the practical perspective on one’s immediate or distant future involves taking an attitudinal stand of the form “Let me a”, or at least working towards such a stand in order to answer the practical question as to what to do. Optative attitudinising opens up a dimension of human existence that is only accessible to subjects fitted out with this attitudinal capacity. When we are making decisions or asking for advice, we are thinking in ways that have an optative component which, at least for our purposes as agents, is obviously irreducible. If it should turn out that it is possible to map optative occurrences exactly onto neurological events from the “absolute” perspective of science,\(^{25}\) that would be irrelevant from the agentially internal perspective of the optative attitudiniser.

13. Let us now return to the conception of social norms proposed in the previous section, which I claimed are constituted by the coordinated optative attitudinising of relevant participants in the social practice in question. Two points now need to be made about social norms, before I can sketch a proposal as to how we should understand moral normativity. These two points concern firstly, a specification of the internal structure of those optative attitudes that can count as norm-constitutive and secondly, the application of the distinction between optatively internal and external perspectives to the case of social norms.

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14. On the first point: I have claimed that optative attitudinising involves the setting of subjective standards for the realisation of states of affairs. Here, talk of “standards” means no more than that the realisation of some representational content is taken as “correct” and its non-realisation as marking something “wrong” with the world. Because the notion of “correctness” at work here is purely subjective, what I have been loosely terming the “coordination” of the optative attitudes of members of a social group is insufficient to constitute social norms. Norm-constitutive optatives need to take on an *impersonal* character. This is done by excising all proper names and definite descriptions, employing only structures that incorporate the universal quantifier and variables. This gives us attitudes of the form: “Let it be the case that: all agents of type \( g \) perform (or refrain from performing) actions of type \( a \) under conditions of type \( c \)”. Coordinated optatives with this structure constitute behavioural “standards” in the everyday sense of the term, according to which the criteria of correctness are not only accepted by more than one agent, but also avoid any specifications in terms of particular individuals.

15. The second point to be made before we move on to morality concerns the importance of the distinction between the practical perspective of the optative attitudiniser and the external theoretical perspective. This distinction is vitally important for an understanding of the functioning of social norms. Above all, it allows us to see what I shall argue is crucial difference, that between being a *norm* and being *normative*.

16. Someone standing outside a society (an ethnographer) or some particular practice within that society (a sports sociologist) can gather data that enables her to say what coordinated optative attitudes characterise the participants. This enables her to describe the norms or standards in question in sentences such as “In society \( s \) it is legally forbidden to have sex before marriage” or “In football, it is forbidden for everyone but the goalkeeper to handle the ball within the field of play”. These are claims that can be true or false according

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26 We acknowledge the role of such subjective standards in everyday English in turns of phrase such as “That’s all right (for me)” and “Things went wrong (for her)”.

as to whether these proscriptions are indeed laid down by the relevant human powers-that-be. Thus, their truth-value can alter with changes in the relevant attitudes.

17. The ethnographical or sociological stance is merely a systematisation of a perspective that participants in any practice can adopt by “taking a step back from” that practice. The mental move thus designated is the relinquishing, or at least ignoring, of one’s optative relationship to the contents of the relevant standards. Instead, one focuses epistemically on what norm-constitutive optatives are played host to by relevant agents. The role of this attitudinal shift is decisive for our topic. In as far someone has such a purely epistemic relationship to existing social norms, these norms are grasped only as social facts devoid of normativity. In other words, the normativity of social norms for an agent arises only in so far as she is optatively engaged with them. That some content is of normative import means that it is framed in the “to-be-the-case” mode. But no matter how many other people take on attitudes according to which an agent “should” a, as long as we only register the fact of the others’ coordinated attitudinising, the relevant norm remains devoid of normativity. The normativity of a norm is dependent on its content recurring in the content of a concurrent optative stand.

18. It is because people generally concur optatively with the attitudinal stands constitutive of the norms of their practical environments that there is no “puzzle of social normativity” analogous to the puzzle of moral normativity enshrined in the Kantian picture (2.4). The causal efficacy of social norms results from the fact that people tend to “want” to realise the contents they prescribe. This is because a central part of socialisation into a human culture or sub-culture is what is often called the “internalisation” of social norms, that is, the adoption of optative attitudes concurrent with those of our educators. Such processes prepare the ground so that the impersonal optatives of social standards, rules, laws and conventions can be taken by social agents as supporting their answers to their own practical questions. It is because we know this – and not only because we know that people try to avoid sanctions – that we can frequently predict people’s behaviour on the basis of our knowledge of social norms.
5. Moral Standards

1. Social norms, I have been suggesting, are constituted by specific constellations of coordinated optative attitudinising. This suggestion provides a clear sense in which social standards are real: “cognitivism” about social norms is hardly likely to be a disputed position. However, if what I have just been claiming is correct, the normativity of social norms is another matter. If I merely recognise that some such optative constellation is a contingent, or even essential feature of some practice or of a certain society, that by no means commits me to judgements to the effect that agents ought to act in accordance with those standards. This holds even if I happen to be a member of the relevant society and I am making judgements about what is normatively binding for myself. That commitment only ensues where I am optatively aligned with the relevant optative constellation.

2. There are interesting and complicated questions about when precisely that optative alignment can be said to be given relative to particular kinds of social practice. A comparatively simple case is provided by a participant in some clearly circumscribed sport. Someone who opts to play a game of football thereby accepts the constitutive rules of the game. You cannot play the game whilst rejecting the rule that handling the ball constitutes an infringement. There is a decisive sense in which your running around the pitch under these circumstances would not even amount to playing football. You enter into a normative relationship to the football rules by taking the optative stand you need to take in order to enter into the practice in the first place.

3. Things are not so simply for the citizen of a country with a certain legal system. Accepting the idea of a legal system does not commit anyone to acceptance of all the laws that particular countries happen to have developed. Nevertheless, there is also a significant sense in which opting to live within the constraints of a specific legal system involves, at least pro tanto, buying into a positive optative relationship to the laws of the land.\(^{27}\) Importantly,\(^{27}\) This is obviously highly schematic. Certainly one would need to differentiate here. One might wonder to what extent acceptance of the penal law involves commitments to the statutes of civil law. There also is an important question as to when precisely someone is to be seen as having taken this step. If I decide to take on the citizenship of some
this is a matter of their acceptance as legal standards and does not entail anything about a person’s moral perspective on those standards. Where, for instance, individuals or ideological groups reject particular laws of their country, such rejections are frequently moral rejections. This is then a matter of the relativisation of one set of standards in the light of another set. This, however, need by no means involve the dissolution of the normativity of the relativised standard. There is a difference between protesting against a particular law, for instance by demonstratively breaking it on some occasion, and living systematically in such a way that you simply ignore the collective demand that constitutes it. Only in the latter case has a person retreated from the optative relationship that endows the law with normativity for her.

4. Imagine that there is some quasi-religious practice that involves the contravention of a law of some country and that there are sub-cultural groups which nevertheless continue to practice it. A, who is considering joining one of these groups, has asked B for advice. One thing B might do is point out to A that taking this step would involve him subjecting himself to normative demands that conflict with those of the country’s legal system. Independently of any moral considerations, he would be creating a problem for himself by taking an optative step that has local normative consequences that conflict with the normative demands of the more extensive legal system he has also bought into optatively.

5. The question of moral normativity is raised in particularly stark terms where someone relativises legal norms by appeal to moral standards. It is particularly in such cases that the puzzle of moral normativity arises. Moral norms are at least sometimes causally efficacious. Yet this seems not to depend on them being constituted by coordinated optative attitudinising. Indeed, we tend to think that what is morally right is independent of what any individuals think, however many of them there may be. Plato’s and Kant’s parallel universes and Moore’s sphere of non-natural properties acquire a certain appeal precisely because the only plausible reconstruction of social
norms seems obviously inapplicable to the moral sphere. On the other hand, the fundamental mystery on offer here is massively unattractive, not least so because of its incompatibility with even the broadest forms of naturalism encoded in $N1$ and $N2$. This is the dilemma faced by any attempt to provide an explanation of moral normativity and thus to dissolve the puzzle it poses.

6. This seems to me to be the point at which the appeal of meta-ethical expressivism becomes manifest. What I call *optative expressivism* 28 accepts the following three points: firstly, the claim that certain kinds of behaviour in far-off places ought morally not to take place is a paradigmatic case of moral judgement. Secondly, for that judgement to be coherent, there need be no structures of coordinated optative attitudinising in place that involve both the author of the judgement and its addressees. Thirdly, the only analytic option by means of which we can make sense of the idea of practical standards sees them as generated through optative attitudinising.

7. It follows from the second point that, in paradigmatic cases of the kind referred to in the first, the cognitive dimension of judgements about social rights and wrongs is not available. There is nothing in the world about which I am making an assertion when I morally condemn certain actions in Africa or the Middle East. The moral standard contravened by the relevant forms of behaviour is – unfortunately – not “out there” at all. Rather, moral standards are simply set by the optative attitudinising of the persons who make moral judgements. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a moral norm. There is only the moral normativity that emanates from the stands of the individual bearers of moral standards.

8. Obviously, moral normativity is not simply generated by means of *any* kind of optative stand. Everyday desires, longings and intentions need have nothing whatsoever to do with morality. Rather, moral standards appear to be characterised by a form of “objectivity” that contrasts with the subjectivity of the standards set by mere wants. Moreover, the transcendence of the subjectivity of their bearers actually seems to go beyond the

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28 The following brief sketch is based on Roughley (forthcoming b).
intersubjectivity of social norms. Thus, although the internal features that distinguish the norm-constitutive optatives in the case of social norms, namely their impersonal formulation (4.14), are also necessary here, they are obviously not in themselves sufficient to make the relevant difference. An adequate explication of moral normativity should make it clear how the claim of the relevant standards on agents exceeds the mere intersubjectivity of social norms. And surely, it might plausibly be argued, this is exactly the opposite movement to their localisation in the individual optatives of the bearers of moral judgements.

9. An explication of moral normativity has indeed to clarify the sense in which the claims being made when we take moral stands transcend our own subjective perspectives. This can be labelled “the objectivist challenge”. Moreover, it also has to clarify a further feature of moral normativity that is naturally seen as a correlate of the belief that moral norms are more objective than social norms. This is the idea that they are also in some sense more “real” than the norms of some social constellation. What is morally wrong is, in some important way that is hard to pin down, unavoidably so. We have a strong sense that moral “oughts” are forced on us by features of the way things are – in a way that may feel similar to the unavoidability of snow in the Swiss Alps. Call this “the realist challenge”. It is essential to the expressivist case to meet both challenges. This is best done by showing that, contrary to appearances, the two challenges are rooted in two different features of the optatives constitutive of moral normativity. That is, the expressivist strategy here is one of divide-and-rule.

10. The objectivist challenge, I want to suggest, is met by the following move: as there is no standard out there in the world against which a moral claim can be measuring actions, the transsubjective feature at work also has to be optative in character. My suggestion is that the relevant feature is a higher-order optative concerning the attitudes of all other persons who consider the matter at hand: making a moral judgement involves taking a stand according to which all those who consider what optative stand to take on someone’s a-ing under certain circumstances should adopt the same stand as oneself. In other words, a normative moral stand involves at least conjoined optative attitudes of the following form:
(1) Let it be the case that: all agents of type \( g \) perform action \( a \), or refrain from \( a \)-ing, in circumstances \( c \).

(2) Let it be the case that: all persons who consider whether it should be the case that agents of type \( g \) \( a \) under circumstances \( c \) take the optative stand specified in (1).

The “should” in (2) is the indirect rendering of an optative stand. Moral claims thus do have a dimension that can be characterised as transsubjective, whilst not being dependent on the factual intersubjective stands of other attitudinisers. However, we “reach out beyond” our subjectivity in making moral claims not by referring to any particular kinds of objects, or properties of objects, but by making claims on the optatives of other subjects.

11. What I called the realist challenge is, I think, to be met in a different manner. Unlike what “realist” and “objectivist” metaethicists assume, moral normativity is unavoidable in a way that is independent of its transsubjective component. The unavoidability is psychological in character: the optatives constitutive of our morally normative stances are attitudes we cannot help adopting. One way to gloss this is to say that they are attitudes we are disposed to continue to want to uphold. In other words, they are at least the potential, if not the actual objects of further higher-order optative stands of the form:

(3) Let it be the case that: I retain the optative stand specified in (1).

12. On my understanding, this makes the objects of morally normative claims propositions that are valued by their bearers (see Roughley (2002), pp. 180ff.). Certain authors have argued that there are further dispositions that need to be added here. These tend to include dispositions to react with specific emotions, such as indignation, resentment or guilt when the relevant optatives are flaunted (cf. Gibbard 1990, pp. 41ff.; Copp 1995, pp. 94ff.; Blackburn 1998, p. 9). My impression is that such dispositions are only typically present

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29 This part of the proposal is consonant with a suggestion by Blackburn (1998), pp. 66ff.
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where we are dealing with contraventions that are taken to be particularly serious. Here, however, let me simply note that I would be open to such extensions of the strategy sketched here should they turn out to be necessary.

13. Clearly, there are serious objections with which this proposal should be confronted. I attempt to reply to the most important of these elsewhere (see Roughley forthcoming b). However, there is one central objection that I do think needs commenting on here in order to avoid a basic misunderstanding. Someone might accept something like the construction I have sketched, but object that the question of moral normativity is the question of when optative stands of the structure detailed in (1) and (2) and backed by dispositions to optatives along the lines of (3) are justified. What I have called the constitution of normativity would then at most be the constitution of putative normativity. For genuine normative force to be thus generated, we would need to be dealing with warranted optative attitudinising. And if that is the case, then that makes normatively decisive the descriptive properties that justify optative stands. That should, so the objection goes, lead us to conceive normativity as constituted by those descriptive properties that warrant the relevant optative steps.

14. The objector has a point: we should indeed see only those optative stands as generating moral normativity that are justifiably adopted. Moreover, justification here does involve reference to properties that can at least in principle be characterised in purely descriptive terms: such as whether certain actions cause people pain or pleasure, and what their consequences are for the autonomy or self-esteem of those agents they affect. Where the objection goes wrong, however, is in the assumption that characterising an optative stand as justified on the basis of certain descriptions is itself a purely descriptive matter. It is the defining move of expressivism to reject this assumption.

15. Once again the comparison with social norms is instructive. We can describe an action as wrong or a judgement about some action as correct or justified when there is some relevant established social standard, i.e. factual culture of coordinated optative attitudinising. A description in these terms is
then quite simply a matter of measuring the action or the judgement against that standard. In doing so we are adopting exactly the same kind of procedure as an inspector whose job is to check whether the paper being produced at some factory conforms to A4 norm size, or a meta-inspector checking on whether the inspector has been passing judgements that are guided accurately by that standard. The problem with this model, once again, is that there is in the moral case no ontological niche for a standard against which actions or judgements of actions could be measured.

16. But are we not effectively left with a rejection of the idea of ethical justification, replacing it with whatever may happen to move individuals to take on the relevant kinds of optative attitudes? Surely the contingent facts of what moves individuals in this way does not invest their optative stands with the kind of “authority” we attribute to justified moral judgements. That all depends on what kind of authority we think people attribute to justified moral judgements in everyday contexts. That seems to me to be anything but clear. The feature that I take to be central is that moral judgements make claims on their addressees, where the type of claim at issue cannot be reconstructed as a demand that one’s addressee simply accept that something is the case. The “authority of truth” – the ultimate warrant for assertoric claims – is quite simply not the kind of authority we are after. Rather, the type of claim in question demands certain things of its addressees. I have suggested that the contents of such demands are, firstly, the performance or non-performance of actions by all agents of a certain type in situations sufficiently similar to that of the addressee and, secondly, the adoption of a stand that itself demands the content of the first demand.

17. It is a further contingent fact about us humans, but decisive for the content of our morality, that we only tend to make such demands on all potential considerers – as opposed to demands on those individuals who happen to be

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30 Peter Schaber pressed this point.

31 Unlike some authors, I see very little evidence that there is a philosophically untutored agreement that moral claims describe something in the world. The fact that Mackie’s interpretation of “the apparent authority of ethics” in descriptive terms (Mackie 1977, pp. 32f.) led him to see the ethical as a fictional system tells first and foremost against a descriptivist reading of the kind of “authority” in question.
standing in our way – where we are ourselves moved by considering certain kinds of properties, in general, properties such as those mentioned above in 5.15. To take some normative moral judgement to be justified is to take a norm-constitutive optative stand on the basis of assertoric attitudes that sway us to take on that stand. And to take as normatively binding a meta-judgement that some moral judgement is justified involves adopting exactly the same attitudinal structure. There is nothing more substantial to be had. (What could it be?)

18. In spite of what many seem to feel, seeing this does not force us to conceive morality as a mere subjective construct in the heads of various individuals. On the contrary, the optative structures set out in (1) and (2) provide the basis for the rational discussion of moral claims between attitudinisers prepared to interact optatively. We demand demands – and meta-demands – from each other, supporting our own claims by appeals to descriptions which we hope will sway our interlocutor to adopt congruent stances. Where congruent responses are established, this may increase our confidence in our own optative stands: we may feel more strongly “authorised” to take moral stands. There is, however, no metaphysical safety net we can fall back on to guarantee these stands independent “authority”. There are undoubtedly people who expect morality to provide authority in that sense. But that seems to be primarily a hangover from religious conceptions within which there is an author of the relevant standards whose essence invests him with the right to demand compliance.

19. The human life form, like those of other animals, can only be lived in confrontation with the way things are. There is a great deal of stuff around that we cannot ignore, but moral norms just do not belong to that stuff. Of course, those who want to live an amoral life do well to take note of the kind of behaviour that is typical of those who think morally. Those of us who do so can be led to produce very unpleasant reactions when faced with contraventions of those optative stands constitutive of moral normativity. In interpersonal dealings, these are often forms of emotional behaviour; in the sphere of international relations, these can taken on the form of diplomatic, economic, even military sanctions. The fact that we are often driven
to adopt such measures is, on the other hand, an indication of the fact that moral normativity is, in itself, often causally impotent. Many people simply do not see the transsubjective optatives of others as providing them with serious candidates for good reasons for action. Nevertheless, normative claims can unfold causal power by the simple and direct means of being raised, furnished with grounds, listened to and then adopted by their addressees. Whether this happens depends on whether the addressees are prepared to see them as answers to their own practical questions. Where this is the case, moral normativity can turn out to be a causal force to be reckoned with.

**Conclusion**

1. What I called the puzzle of moral normativity, according to which moral norms seem to be located both inside and outside the causal network of empirical reality, is to be explained by moral normativity’s character as an internal feature of our optative attitudinising. In as far as other agents are prepared to see my transsubjective optative stands as potential answers to their own practical questions, they may end up developing congruent optatives and acting accordingly. Where this is not the case, they will carry on regardless.

2. We also have an explanation why, although the stuff of morality is “natural” in the sense of resulting from a causal process of becoming, moral normativity cannot be “naturalised”, where “naturalisation” involves the reduction of claims about rightness to statements about the way things are. Saying that an action is right or wrong obviously does not involve saying anything about the attitudes people have towards such actions. It is, rather, articulating the internal perspective constituted by such a stand. For the same reason, although the empirical “science” of psychology, including neuropsychology, may one day be able to tell us everything we want to know about the mental states of attitudinisers, just as sociology may provide extensive information about the norms they set up, neither have access to the normativity thus generated. It is constitutive of the scientific perspective to approach the world epistemically.
Normativity, however, does not only exist because there are agents that can take on an optative relationship to the world. It only exists for such agents and it only exists for them in as far as they are optatively engaged.32

References


32 This paper and Roughley (forthcoming b) have both been influenced by the helpful discussion of my talk at the workshop documented by this volume. My thanks to all the participants, as well as to Julius Schaelike for his comments.


– (forthcoming b): “Optative Expressivism”.


