

ROBUST
METANORMATIVE
REALISM

A CRITICAL DEFENCE OF
DAVID ENOCH'S VIEW

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ABSTRACT

of ROBUST METANORMATIVE REALISM

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I argue for robust metanormative realism (RMR), the view that there are *sui generis* normative facts. I distinguish between formal normativity and the authoritative normativity which I take to be the object of RMR. Drawing principally from David Enoch's arguments – his indispensability argument alongside his arguments against rivals to RMR – I amend and bolster those arguments to strengthen his case for the view. I conclude that RMR is stronger than its rivals, but nonetheless confronts pressing challenges.

In *Chapter One*, I define RMR in terms of its commitment to (i) the existence of normative facts (and, relatedly, normative truths, reasons, properties, values, and so on) and (ii) those facts (and other normative items) being metaphysically *sui generis*. I contrast this characterisation of RMR with characterisations that focus on RMR's *objectivism*; I conclude that, in treating RMR as a commitment to *metanormative factualism* coupled with a distinct commitment to the *robustness* of the relevant normative facts, we better align our conception of RMR with the best case for the view.

Specifically, I argue that the best case for RMR comprises a *factual stage* argument for the existence of normative facts, followed by a distinct *robust stage* argument for a conception of those facts as *sui generis*. The facts purportedly established in the factual stage are open to a variety of distinct factualist interpretations – from quasi-realist, through fictionalist, constructivist, reductive and non-reductive naturalist, to robustly realist – where the robust stage purports to establish their *sui generis* status.

In *Chapter Two*, I consider the factual stage of the case for RMR, and I present Enoch's indispensability argument as an argument for the existence of normative facts. Enoch argues: that we are permitted to infer to the indispensables of rationally non-optional projects; that deliberation is one such project; that a commitment to normative facts is deliberately indispensable; and that we may therefore infer to the existence of normative facts. I concede to the objection that this begs the question against the metanormative nonfactualist. I argue that it does this (i) by treating as normative our permission to infer to the indispensables of rationally non-optional projects and (ii) by understanding rational non-optionality itself normatively. I present an alternative formulation of the argument where both the permission to infer to the indispensables of the rationally non-optional, and rational non-optionality itself, are understood *rationally*, not normatively. While rationality is *formally* normative, I argue that we can nonetheless maintain an (at least *prima facie*) conceptual distinction between rationality and *authoritative* normativity, such that any overlap in the extension of those concepts would be non-trivial. This, I argue, is all that is required to rationally pressure the nonfactualist to abandon her nonfactualism.

In *Chapter Three*, I consider the robust stage of the case for RMR, which purports to take the normative facts established by the factual stage and show that they are metaphysically *sui generis*. I present the Euthyphronic argument, most often deployed against constructivism, and argue that it can be generalised against all non-robust metanormative factualisms. The Euthyphronic argument grants the coextensiveness of normative and natural facts, but then asks what explains this relation: the normative side, or the *prima facie* non-normative side? Neither answer, I argue, is sustainable for non-robust factualisms. I focus on the application of this Euthyphronic argument to constitutivism and constructivism, and then to idealising response-dependence naturalisms, after which I extend the argument to naturalisms in general and to non-metaphysical metanormative non-naturalist realisms.

While I argue that RMR is stronger than its rivals, it nonetheless faces pressing challenges. While I do not attempt to answer these challenges, I do point to the way in which I take them, and their potential solutions, to be connected. Specifically, I suggest that provision of an adequate epistemology of robust normativity would help to solve problems emerging from motivation and supervenience.

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INTRODUCTION

Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett describe metaethics as ‘that theoretical activity which aims to explain how actual ethical thought and talk – and what (if anything) that thought and talk is distinctively about – fits into reality’.¹ In other words, the core metaethical question is how and where to position ethical judgements and claims within the world: how are we to understand the situation within the world of judgements of right and wrong, good and bad, better and worse, and so on?

This description serves to illuminate, through both affinity and contrast, the situation of this thesis about robust metanormative realism (RMR) within the wider field of moral philosophy. For one thing, the focus of robust metanormative realism – and, accordingly, my focus here – is not the *ethical* as much as the *normative* more broadly.² RMR takes there to be normative facts, and it takes those facts to be

¹ Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3.

² This aligns with some – I think most – characterisations of robust realism by David Enoch, my central source, focusing on metanormative realism rather than metaethical or moral realism (I discuss the relation between RMR and moral realism in *Chapter One*). This characterisation also aligns with most of Enoch’s arguments against competing positions, which largely focus on those positions as attempts to capture normativity generally, beyond morality: David Enoch, “Why Idealize?” *Ethics* 115, no. 4 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1086/430490>; David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency: Why Normativity Won’t Come from What Is Constitutive of Action,” *Philosophical Review* 115, no. 2 (2006), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20446897>; David Enoch, “Can there be a global, interesting, coherent constructivism about practical reason?” *Philosophical Explorations* 12, no. 3 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13869790903067683>; David Enoch, “The epistemological challenge to metanormative realism: how best to understand it, and how to cope with it,” *Philosophical Studies* 148, no. 3 (2010a), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40606283>; David Enoch, “How Objectivity Matters,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 5, ed.

metaphysically *sui generis*³ – that is to say, RMR takes there to be normative facts altogether distinct from *natural* facts.

Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010b), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2607071>; David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Enoch, “Indispensability Arguments in Metaethics: Even Better Than in Mathematics?” in *Explanation in Ethics and Mathematics: Debunking and Dispensability*, ed. Uri D. Leibowitz and Neil Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198778592.003.0013>; David Enoch, “Constitutivism: Rabbits, Hats, and Holy Grails,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Practical Reason*, ed. Ruth Chang and Kurt Sylvan (Oxon: Routledge, 2021); David Enoch, “Idealizing Still Not Off the Hook: A Reply to Sobel’s Reply,” unpublished manuscript, accessed October 27, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34347767/ReplyToSobel_doc.

³ Enoch defines RMR as a combination of minimal realism, response-independence, and irreducibility – Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 1-5 – where ‘minimal realism’ (p. 3), is drawn from: Gideon Rosen, “Objectivity and modern idealism: What is the question?” in *Philosophy in Mind*, ed. Michaelis Michael and John O’Leary-Hawthorne (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 281. Though my presentation of RMR is different to Enoch’s, the metanormative view I defend is substantively equivalent to the one he presents (I discuss my characterisation of RMR, and my sidelining of the notion of ‘realism’, in *Chapter One*). Besides Enoch’s writings, my discussion of RMR draws principally from: Ralf Bader, “The grounding argument against non-reductive moral realism,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics 12*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198805076.003.0005>; Dan Baras, “The Explanatory Challenge: Moral Realism Is No Better Than Theism,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12248>; Jeff Behrens, review of *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism*, by David Enoch, *Review of Metaphysics* 66, no. 1 (2012), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41635563>; Gunnar Björnsson and Ragnar Francén Olinder, “Enoch’s Defense of Robust Meta-Ethical Realism,” review of *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism*, by David Enoch, *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 13 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455243-01301001>; Brendan Cline, “Against deliberative indispensability as an independent guide to what there is,” *Philosophical Studies* 173 (2016): 3235-3254, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-016-0661-z>; Terence Cuneo, review of *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism*, by David Enoch, *Mind* 121, no. 484 (2012), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23407323>; Stephen Darwall, “Moore, Normativity, and Intrinsic Value,” *Ethics* 113, no. 3 (2003): 468-489, <https://doi.org/10.1086/345623>;

Before considering this in closer focus, an immediate qualification is required. By ‘normative’, in this context, we may refer to the very broad set of *formal* standards which may or may not be met – laws, conventions, the rules of chess, etiquette,⁴ and tree-houses⁵ – or we may be referring to a narrower set of *authoritatively*⁶ normative standards, those possessed of genuine normative force, those pertaining to

David Faraci, review of *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism*, by David Enoch, *Journal of Value Enquiry* 46 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10790-012-9329-x>; Richard Joyce, “Taking moral skepticism seriously,” *Philosophical Studies* 168 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-013-0213-8>; David Killoren, “Robust moral realism: an excellent religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 79 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-015-9509-2>; James Lenman, “Deliberation, schmeliberation: Enoch’s indispensability argument,” *Philosophical Studies* 168 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-013-0214-7>; G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge University Press, 1993a); Veronica Rodriguez-Blanco, “If You Cannot Help Being Committed to It, then It Exists: A Defence of Robust Normative Realism,” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 32, no. 4 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ojls/gqs020>; Skarsaune, Knut Olav, review of *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism*, by David Enoch, *Utilitas* 27, no. 4 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820815000205>; Pekka Väyrynen, “Moral Realism,” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, ed. Donald Borchert (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2006); Ralph Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Ralph Wedgwood, review of *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defence of Robust Realism*, by David Enoch, *Philosophical Quarterly* 63, no. 251 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9213.2007>; Eric J. Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: the Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Alex Worsnip, “Explanatory Indispensability and Deliberative Indispensability: Against Enoch’s Analogy,” *Thought* 5, no. 4 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1002/tht3.220>.

⁴ Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,” *Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (1972), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2184328>.

⁵ McPherson and Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*

what *should*⁷ be so and what we are *right* to do (in the relevant authoritative senses, as I will use ‘should’ and ‘right’ hereafter).⁸ Conformity to formal standards may *also* be conformity to authoritatively normative standards – we may have good authoritatively normative reasons to follow certain laws, conventions, and rules – but the distinction makes clear that this connection is not *prima facie* conceptually necessary. That is to say, it is not incoherent to deny that (or to ask why) a given formal standard is authoritatively normative; while it is, I take it, incoherent to deny that (or to ask why) we should conform to authoritatively normative standards. Henceforth, when I refer to normativity, I will refer to authoritative normativity unless I specify otherwise.

My sense of ‘normative’ is broad, encompassing both the prescriptive and the evaluative.⁹ Accordingly, not only does the kind of normativity I discuss include authoritative standards, reasons, and requirements, it also encompasses certain kinds of goods and values. Consider W. D. Ross’ distinction

⁷ Throughout, my use of ‘should’ is intended to refer to *presumptive*, as well as *decisive*, reasons. The decisive/presumptive distinction here features much like the absolute/contributory distinction in: Jonathan Dancy, “Moral Particularism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/moral-particularism/>.

⁸ I discuss this distinction further in *Chapter One*. I could also describe this formal/authoritative distinction as a distinction between the *conventional* and the *absolute* (I am grateful to Andrew Chitty for this thought).

⁹ I follow Enoch here: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 1. I do not wish to commit here to any buck-passing, only to a maximally open conception of the kind of distinctly normative value I take Enoch’s RMR to concern. For discussion of buck-passing: Jonathan Dancy, “Should We Pass the Buck?” in *Recent Work on Intrinsic Value*, ed. Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen and Michael J. Zimmerman (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005); Francesco Orsi, “What’s wrong with Moorean buck-passing?” *Philosophical Studies* 164, no. 3 (2013), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41932756>.

between *adjunctive* and *predicative* uses of ‘good’¹⁰ – the former being exemplified by descriptions of good knives, hitmen, and doctors; the latter paradigmatically exemplified by descriptions of good people, actions, and deliberative processes. The normativity with which I am here concerned, and that I take to be the object of RMR, would encompass predicative goods alongside authoritatively normative standards. RMR, as I treat it here, seeks to answer questions about what should be, what ought to be, that for which there is reason, what is right, good, better, preferable, valuable, and so on – in the relevant authoritative senses in which these terms are most commonly used in moral philosophy. I take this sense of ‘normative’ – broader than the ethical or moral, but narrower than the total set of formal standards we may or may not meet – as my central focus.¹¹

¹⁰ W. D Ross, *The Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 255-258. Discussed as in terms of ‘attributive’ and ‘predicative’ goodness in: Dancy, “Should We Pass the Buck?” 34. I do not mean here to take any stand on Geach’s discussion in: Peter Geach, “Good and Evil,” *Analysis* 17, no. 2 (1956), <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/17.2.33>.

¹¹ I shall refrain from seeking to define the distinction between authoritative and formal normativity too sharply at this point, as I take the discussion of RMR to follow to be useful to that end – in the sense that I take the arguments for RMR to purport to vindicate a robust realism only about authoritative normativity. However, a cursory thought I cannot develop in detail here is this: perhaps we can think of the distinction in terms of those things that possess *intrinsic value* and those things that possess *value as ends*. That is, perhaps we can see authoritative normativity as concerning intrinsic goods and/or things valuable as ends, while merely formal normativity does not. This would seem, at least, to clearly position the moral firmly on the authoritative side of the distinction, and the requirements of etiquette on the formal side. The discussion to follow does not depend on this way of characterising the distinction, however, I suggest it here only by way of illustration. This characterisation of the distinction would of course have to address Korsgaard’s discussion of the relation between the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction and the distinction between instrumentally valuable things and those valuable as ends: Christine M. Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” in *Recent Work on Intrinsic Value*, ed. Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen and Michael J. Zimmerman (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).

This sense of normativity is most clearly broader than morality if we take the latter to be the network of interpersonal directed obligations – a reasonably commonplace use of ‘morality’ formalised by R. Jay Wallace.¹² My conception of authoritative normativity is broad enough to include obligations to ourselves, to non-human animals, and maybe even to abstract ideals, as well as towards each other. Note also that I use ‘ethical’ and ‘moral’ in the same breath, contrary to McPherson and Plunkett’s characterisation of the ethical as broader than the moral.¹³

For another contrast between my present focus and McPherson and Plunkett’s description of metaethics, I will be concerned primarily with one particular element of what is captured by their description: ‘what (if anything) [ethical] thought and talk is distinctively about’.¹⁴ Considering my focus on the broader normative sphere, this thesis will concern what (if anything) normative thought and talk is distinctively about; while consideration of the thought and talk *itself* will be largely secondary. Here, I am primarily concerned with the *metaphysical* aspect of RMR (a view that emphatically takes ethical thought and talk to be about something).

McPherson and Plunkett take non-naturalist views (like RMR) to treat normative thought and talk to be ‘*derivatively* authoritative, in virtue of being *about*’¹⁵ the kind of normativity RMR takes as its object. I do not wish to commit to this yet – though it may well follow from the conclusion of this thesis – rather, here I wish only to emphasise the metaphysical as a methodological point. This metaphysical focus is

¹² R. Jay Wallace, *The Moral Nexus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

¹³ McPherson and Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” 14-15.

¹⁴ McPherson and Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” 3.

¹⁵ McPherson and Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” 17.

not intended as a substantive claim about the primacy of the metaphysical over the conceptual or semantic in metanormative theory; rather, I find the arguments surrounding RMR best understood as focusing upon the metaphysics of authoritative normativity as a starting point whence inferences can be made towards the conceptual and semantic implications of the view. McPherson and Plunkett explicitly defend metaphysical approaches to understanding the ethical against conceptions of metaethics as solely ‘the philosophical study of ethical language’; for they claim such conceptions come at the cost of excluding many metanormative projects that appear to be studying the same broad realm as many of the canonical language-centric metaethical works.¹⁶ Here, I assume that the metaphysical approach from whose literature I draw is sufficiently legitimate to be judged on the strength of its arguments and not dismissed on methodological grounds.

However, my metanormative project here, and my description of RMR, will be incomplete by the standard set by Mark van Roojen, who writes:

Every well-developed metaethical theory will offer (a) an account of the subject matter of ethics, (b) an explanation of ethical judgement’s practical action-guiding role in people’s lives, and (c) an account of how we can come to know what it is we do know about ethics and morals.¹⁷

My focus here – and the focus of the texts which have been central to the argument I develop for RMR – is firmly on van Roojen’s (a), adjusted to a focus on authoritative normativity in general, beyond ethics more narrowly. That said, I will briefly discuss van Roojen’s (b) and (c) towards the end of this thesis; for, while I take RMR to offer something convincing by way of (a), I take its offerings by way of (b)

¹⁶ McPherson and Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” 19-20. McPherson and Plunkett cite Enoch, my central source, as a good example of why this exclusively linguistic view of metaethics is controversial.

¹⁷ Mark van Roojen, *Metaethics: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

and (c) to be problematic. I will end the thesis by suggesting that the provision of (b) and the provision of (c) are connected, both to each other and to some other pressing problems for RMR.

In sum, this thesis concerns RMR as a primarily metaphysical view of the (authoritatively) normative: that there are *sui generis*¹⁸ normative facts. In *Chapter One*, I will provide a definition of these terms, and set out RMR's stance on the normative: RMR is committed to there being normative facts,¹⁹ *contra*

¹⁸ Unlike Enoch, I have considered response-independence and irreducibility together under the umbrella term '*sui generis*'. This is not only because the arguments against response-independence and irreducibility overlap in many ways; it is also because a commitment to normativity's *sui generis* character entails a rejection of, beyond response-dependence and reducibility, also *non-reductive* forms of naturalism, like Cornell realism, for instance. My use of '*sui generis*' is, however, close to Enoch's use of 'irreducible', which is broad enough to oppose naturalists who describe themselves as non-reductivist. See: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 100-110; James Lenman and Matthew Lutz, "Moral Naturalism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/naturalism-moral/>; Alexander Miller, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2003), 138-177. This is discussed in *Chapter Three*.

¹⁹ I use 'fact' in line with something like Crispin Wright's minimal sense of facts just as those things to which true statements correspond – where 'correspond' is also understood minimally – neutral on whether a statement's object of correspondence, or the relation of correspondence it shares with that object, is understood in an objectivist way: Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 24-29; Crispin Wright, "Précis of *Truth and Objectivity*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56, no. 4 (1996): 886, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2108286>. I use 'factual' and 'factualism' accordingly; and I borrow 'factualism' and 'nonfactualism' from: Peter Railton, "Nonfactualism about Normative Discourse," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 4 (1992), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2107923>; Eric Wiland, *Reasons* (London: Continuum, 2012).

metanormative nonfactualisms, such as error theory²⁰ and some variants of non-cognitivism;²¹ and RMR is committed to these facts being *sui generis*, *contra non-robust metanormative factualisms*, such as non-metaphysical metanormative realisms²² and *naturalisms*. Note that, in *Chapter One*, I defend a very broad use of ‘naturalism’ that encompasses a wide range of views: reductivist²³ alongside non-

²⁰ J. L. Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1990); Bart Streumer, *Unbelievable Errors: An Error Theory about All Normative Judgements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also: Conrad Bakka, review of *Unbelievable Errors: An Error Theory about All Normative Judgements*, by Bart Streumer, *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 17, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455243-01702009>; Cline, “Against deliberative indispensability;” Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously;” Richard Joyce, “Moral Anti-Realism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/moral-anti-realism/>; Miller, *An Introduction*, 26-127.

²¹ A. J. Ayer, “On the Analysis of Moral Judgements,” in *Philosophical Essays*, ed. A. J. Ayer (London: Macmillan, 1954); A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952); R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952); R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963); R. M. Hare, “Universal Prescriptivism,” in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). For discussion: Miller, *An Introduction*, 26-110; Mark van Roojen, “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/moral-cognitivism/>.

²² Ronald Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Believe It,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25, no. 2 (1996): 87-139, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2961920>; Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Derek Parfit, *On What Matters: Volume One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); T. M. Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For discussion: Annika Böddeling, “Cognitivism and Metaphysical Weight: A Dilemma for Relaxed Realism,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 98, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2019.1651355>; Francesco Orsi, “Meta-ethical Disagreements,” *Trames*, 24, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2020.3.09>.

²³ Peter Railton, “Moral Realism,” *Philosophical Review* 95, no. 2 (1986), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2185589>; Peter Railton, “Naturalism and Prescriptivity,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7, no. 1 (1989), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0265052500001060>; Mark Schroeder, “Realism and Reduction: the Quest for Robustness,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 5, no. 1 (2005),

reductivist²⁴ naturalisms; quasi-realisms²⁵ and fictionalisms;²⁶ constitutivisms and constructivisms.²⁷

While this is potentially controversial in some cases, it is largely a terminological matter, and for ease

<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0005.001>. For discussion: Lenman and Lutz, “Moral Naturalism,” Miller, *An Introduction*, 178-242.

²⁴ For instance, Cornell realism. See: Lenman and Lutz, “Moral Naturalism,” Miller, *An Introduction*, 138-177. Some constitutivisms and constructivisms also seem to me to be non-reductive naturalisms (see footnote 27 below).

²⁵ See: Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Allan Gibbard, *Meaning and Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Miller, *An Introduction*, 26-110; van Roojen, “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism.”

²⁶ See: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 109-116; Matti Eklund, “Fictionalism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/fictionalism/>; Mark Kalderon, *Moral Fictionalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁷ Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Christine M. Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy,” in *The Constitution of Agency*, ed. Christine M. Korsgaard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Christine M. Korsgaard, *Self-constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Onora O’Neill, “The Presidential Address: Constructivisms in Ethics,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 89, no. 1 (1988-1989), <https://doi.org/10.1093/aristotelian/89.1.1>; Onora O’Neill, “Constructivism in Rawls and Kant,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); John Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” *Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 9 (1980), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2025790>; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Michael Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael Smith, “A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons: Its Promise and Parts,” *Law, Ethics and Philosophy* 1 (2013), <https://doaj.org/article/724558f1da274fd2b5016321f54fa0d7>; Michael Smith, “The Magic of Constitutivism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2015), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24475449>; Michael Smith, “Constitutivism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett (New York: Routledge, 2018); David J. Velleman, *Practical Reflection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); David J. Velleman,

of presentation of the common thread of RMR's case against all such views – I address some of these controversies below.

In *Chapters Two and Three* I turn to David Enoch's case for RMR. Enoch has developed an influential, comprehensive, and, I think, very powerful defence of the metaphysics of RMR. I divide Enoch's case for RMR into two stages: a first *factual stage*, where he argues for the existence of (authoritatively) normative facts; and a second *robust stage*, where he argues that these facts are *sui generis*. I should make clear that this is my terminology and that, though this argumentative structure is evident (more or less explicitly) in Enoch's work, I do not suggest that he sees his project in precisely this way. Nor do I suggest that the distinction I draw between the factual and robust stages correlates in any way with the chronological order of his works or the situation of arguments within those works. Rather, I suggest that this is the interpretation of his case for RMR which makes it strongest. While we may diverge from the

The Possibility of Practical Reason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); David J. Velleman, "Précis of "The Possibility of Practical Reason",", *Philosophical Studies* 121, no. 3 (2004a), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4321535>; David J. Velleman, "Replies To Discussion On *The Possibility of Practical Reason*," *Philosophical Studies* 121, (2004b), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-004-5510-9>. My discussion of constitutivism and constructivism also draws from: Carla Bagnoli, "Constructivism in Metaethics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/constructivism-metaethics/>; Enoch, "Agency Shmagency;" Enoch, "Constructivism;" Connie Rosati, "Agency and the Open Question Argument," *Ethics* 113, no. 2 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1086/345625>; Connie Rosati, "Agents and "Shmagents",", in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics 11*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198784647.003.0008>; Russ Shafer-Landau, "The Constructivist Challenge 2," in *Moral Realism: A Defence*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199259755.003.0003>. It is contentious to describe these views as naturalist, but I defend this use of the term in *Chapter One*. For now, suffice it to say that I take them to be metanormatively naturalist if only in the very broad sense that they do not take there to exist normative facts altogether independent of nature. This does not entail that I take them to be *reductively* naturalist.

letter of Enoch's project by conceiving of it in this way, I am confident that we remain within the spirit of that project; and I do not expect that he would begrudge my interpretation of his case for RMR along these lines.²⁸

The division of Enoch's arguments into a first factual stage and a second robust stage correlates with the amendments to his case for RMR that I wish to make. In *Chapter Two*, I consider what I have described as Enoch's factual stage for what I describe as *metanormative factualism*.²⁹ I focus on his *argument from deliberative indispensability*,³⁰ which I understand as primarily an argument for the existence of (authoritatively) normative facts. Enoch argues: that we are permitted to infer to the indispensables of rationally non-optional projects; that deliberation is one such project; that a commitment to normative facts is deliberatively indispensable; and that we may therefore infer to the existence of normative facts. I discuss a problem with the argument, that it begs the question against the metanormative nonfactualist it is designed to pressure by (i) treating as normative our permission to infer to the indispensables of rationally non-optional projects and (ii) understanding rational non-optionality itself normatively. I consider Enoch's defence, which appeals to Moorean epistemological

²⁸ Enoch was kind enough to confirm with me in correspondence that he does not.

²⁹ I clarify below that the appeal to 'facts' in this sense of 'factualism' – along with corresponding appeals to 'truths' and so on – is an appeal to the minimal sense of this notion roughly like that developed by Crispin Wright: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*. Enoch was kind enough to confirm in correspondence that his sense of truths and facts in the indispensability argument is indeed of this minimal variety.

³⁰ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 50-84.

methodology;³¹ and I find this defence wanting, concurring with a critique from Richard Joyce.³² I then present an alternative formulation of the argument where both the permission to infer to the indispensables of the rationally non-optional, and rational non-optimality itself, are understood *rationally*, not (authoritatively) normatively. While rationality is *formally* normative, I argue that we can nonetheless maintain an (at least *prima facie*) conceptual distinction between rationality and *authoritative* normativity, such that any overlap in the extension of those concepts is non-trivial. This, I argue, is all that is required to rationally pressure the metanormative *nonfactualist* to abandon her nonfactualism.³³

In *Chapter Three*, I consider what I have described as Enoch’s robust stage, his argument that normative facts are *sui generis*. I consider his argument against *non-robust metanormative factualisms* – those views that can accommodate the conclusion of the indispensability argument, that there are authoritatively normative facts, but which nonetheless deny a metaphysics of those facts as *sui generis*. I discuss the Euthyphronic argument³⁴ which, in the literature, is ordinarily deployed against specific

³¹ G. E. Moore, “Proof of an External World,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (London: Routledge, 1993b). For discussion: Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously.”

³² Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously.”

³³ Note that, while RMR is a *realism*, my focus in the factual stage is on the view as a *factualism* – that is, a commitment to the existence of normative facts independent of any conception of those facts as objective or response-independent. It is in the robust stage that the robustly realist characterisation view of normative facts is argue for, against *both* non robustly realist and anti-realist factualisms. I discuss this further in *Chapter One*.

³⁴ See: Bagnoli, “Constructivism;” Plato, “Euthyphro,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1997); Shafer-Landau, “The Constructivist Challenge,” 42-44; Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 108-139. Bagnoli discusses the Euthyphronic argument against constructivism drawing from: Sorin Baiasu,

non-robust factualisms;³⁵ but I suggest that its application is universal, against *all* factualisms besides RMR.³⁶ The Euthyphronic argument grants, for the sake of argument, the coextensiveness of normative and natural facts, but then asks what explains this relation: the normative side, or the *prima facie* non-normative side? Neither answer, I argue, is sustainable for any non-robust factualism – specifically, I argue that this is partly in virtue of the conclusions of the indispensability argument by which we arrived

“Constructivism and Transcendental Practical Philosophy: How to Pull the Rabbit Out of the Hat,” *Philosophia* 44 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-016-9746-3>; Christine Bratu and Moritz Dittmeyer, “Constitutivism About Practical Principles: Its Claims, Goals, Task and Failure,” *Philosophia* 44 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-016-9748-1>; David O. Brink, “Externalist Moral Realism,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24, Supplement (1986), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1986.tb01594.x>; David O. Brink, *Moral realism and the foundations of ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); G. A. Cohen, “Facts and Principles,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31, no. 3 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2003.00211.x>; William J. FitzPatrick, “How not to be an ethical constructivist: A critique of Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian constitutivism,” in *Constructivism in Ethics*, ed. Carla Bagnoli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139094221.004>; R. M. Hare, “Rawls’ Theory of Justice,” review of *A Theory of Justice*, by John Rawls, *Philosophical Quarterly* 23, no. 91 (1973), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2217486>; Joseph Raz, “Numbers, With and Without Contractualism,” *Ratio* 16, no. 4 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1467-9329.2003.00228.x>; Robert Stern, “Moral skepticism, constructivism, and the value of humanity,” in *Constructivism in Ethics*, ed. Carla Bagnoli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139094221.003>; Mark Timmons, “The Limits of Moral Constructivism,” *Ratio* 16, no. 4 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1467-9329.2003.00230.x>.

³⁵ Specifically, it tends to be deployed against constructivisms: Bagnoli, “Constructivism;” Shafer-Landau, “The Constructivist Challenge,” 42-44.

³⁶ In this, I follow and go beyond van Roojen’s discussion of the Euthyphronic argument in the context of naturalism in general – van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 258-260 – in that I also suggest an application of it to non-metaphysical metanormative realisms.

at factualism. I consider Enoch's arguments against a number of non-robust factualisms,³⁷ comparing them to the Euthyphronic argument, and concluding that the latter can either make up for weaknesses in Enoch's arguments or even bolster them. Though I do not perform a detailed survey of all the views that I take the Euthyphronic argument to pressure, I consider constitutivist views (and constructivism generally)³⁸ and idealising response-dependence views,³⁹ through the lens of Enoch's arguments against them, in focus; I then suggest the way in which I think the Euthyphronic point discussed in relation to those views can be generalised in such a way as to provide a more comprehensive argument against non-robust factualisms than Enoch himself provides.

³⁷ Enoch, "Why Idealize?"; David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency;" Enoch, "Constructivism;" Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*; Enoch, "Indispensability Arguments;" Enoch, "Constitutivism;" Enoch, "Idealizing."

³⁸ Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism;" Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*; Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*; O'Neill, "The Presidential Address;" O'Neill, "Constructivism;" Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism;" Rawls, *Theory of Justice*; Rosati, "Agents and "Shmagents";" Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori*; Smith, "A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;" Smith, "The Magic of Constitutivism;" Smith, "Constitutivism;" Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, "Précis;" Velleman, "Replies."

³⁹ David Sobel, "Subjectivism and Idealization," *Ethics* 119, no. 2 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1086/596459>; Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Michael Smith, "In Defense of "The Moral Problem": A Reply to Brink, Copp, and Sayre-McCord," *Ethics* 108, no. 1 (1997), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2382090>; Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981a). For discussion: Enoch, "Why Idealize?"; Enoch, "Idealizing." See also Miller's discussion of 'best-opinion' metaethical theories: Miller, *An Introduction*, 128-137.

Cuneo⁴⁰ discusses Enoch's case for RMR – as it is presented in *Taking Morality Seriously*⁴¹ – in terms of a positive and a negative phase. The positive phase, for Cuneo, consists of Enoch's arguments in favour of RMR, while the negative consists of Enoch's defence of RMR against objections. I wish to add that these phases described by Cuneo are distinguished further by the positive phase being primarily *comparative*, while the negative phase is largely *non-comparative*. By this I mean that, in Enoch's positive phase, he argues that RMR is preferable to alternative metanormative views; whereas, in his negative phase, he defends RMR against objections that would trouble the view even if alternative views were out of the picture.

My focus here is largely on what Cuneo considers as the positive phase, which I divide into the factual stage (where Enoch compares RMR to metanormative nonfactualism) and the robust stage (where Enoch compares RMR to non-robust metanormative factualism). My conclusion here is that the (positive phase) factual and robust stages give us strong reason to accept RMR, provided it can fend off (negative phase) objections – though I will be unable to consider those objections in detail in this thesis.

Given the strength of Enoch's case for RMR, it is my ambition in this thesis only to improve it by some degree. I will not seek to revolutionise his arguments; nor will I seek to bolster them to the extent that they would knock down RMR's opponents. Enoch is happy to admit that RMR confronts its fair share of problems, and the arguments in favour of the view contribute only to its overall plausibility relative to other metanormative views, short of winning it any total vindication. Accordingly, the result of this thesis will be, I hope, an improvement of Enoch's case for RMR as a result of relatively modest amendments, alongside admission that RMR faces serious challenges if it is to achieve conclusive

⁴⁰ Cuneo, *Review*.

⁴¹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*.

vindication over its rivals. Specifically, I end by considering very briefly three of the more pressing problems I take RMR to face – concerning the epistemology of robust normative truth,⁴² concerning the connection between robust normativity and agential motivations,⁴³ and concerning supervenience and grounding⁴⁴ – problems for which it will have to provide some satisfactory answer before it can be conclusively vindicated against its rivals. Though serious consideration of these issues falls beyond the scope of this work, I nonetheless end on an optimistic note, pointing to where I think future research should focus if it is to bolster the case for RMR.

⁴² The epistemological discussion principally draws from: George Bealer, ““A Priori” Knowledge and the Scope of Philosophy,” *Philosophical Studies* 81, no. 2/3 (1996), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4320644>; Michelle M. Dyke, “Bad bootstrapping: the problem with third-factor replies to the Darwinian Dilemma for moral realism,” *Philosophical Studies* 177 (2020): 2122, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-019-01301-4>; Enoch, “The Epistemological Challenge;” Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*; Moore, *Principia Ethica*; Ross, *Foundations*; Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th Edition (London: Macmillan, 1962); Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “Moral Relativity and Intuitionism,” *Philosophical Issues* 12 (2002), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3050553>; Knut Olav Skarsaune, “Darwin and moral realism: survival of the fittest,” *Philosophical Studies* 152 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-009-9473-8>; Phillip Stratton-Lake, “Intuitionism in Ethics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/intuitionism-ethics/>; Sharon Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,” *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (2006), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4321684>; Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity*; Eric J. Wielenberg, “On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality,” *Ethics* 120, no. 3 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1086/652292>; Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 134-176.

⁴³ Discussion of the motivational problem draws principally from: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 217-266; Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

⁴⁴ Discussion of the supervenience problem draws principally from: Bader, “The Grounding Problem;” Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 136-150.

CHAPTER ONE

ROBUST METANORMATIVE REALISM

In this chapter, I discuss the commitments of robust metanormative realism (RMR), and try to clearly delineate the focus of the arguments to follow. In *1. 1.*, I discuss the motivations for the view. In *1. 2.*, I discuss the first of RMR's commitments, to the existence of normative facts. Finally, in *1. 3.*, I discuss RMR's conception of those facts as *sui generis*, alongside a variety of other commitments more peripherally held by robust realists.

1. 1. MOTIVATIONS

I have many normative beliefs. So do you, I expect. Some of mine are pretty uncontroversial. I think that knowledge, pleasure, freedom, justice, friendship, happiness, and love are all valuable; I think that it is often right to be compassionate and wrong to be callous; and I think that we often have reason to be honest. I expect that we probably share these beliefs. But perhaps some of our normative beliefs are more controversial. Perhaps, when it comes to the question of what is *more* important, between honesty and compassion, we disagree; perhaps we have different views on the relative value of freedom against friendship, pleasure against justice, or knowledge against love. In these cases, what precisely is going on? When our normative beliefs diverge, does at least one of us have to be wrong? If so, why? Is it preferable to instead think that, in such cases, both of us can be right?

A good metanormative theory will, *inter alia*, help us answer these questions. The answers provided by robust metanormative realism (RMR) command a powerful – at least pre-theoretical – intuitive pull in

everyday normative discourse.⁴⁵ RMR explains normative judgements as functioning much like other kinds of judgements: judging that compassion is good is much like judging that cubes have six sides, that pigeons are birds, or that a given hat is made of cotton. According to RMR, when we are right in normative judgements, we represent reality in a roughly similar manner as when we are right about cubes, pigeons, and hats. Disagreement, too, is handled – at least initially⁴⁶ – very smoothly by RMR: when we disagree in our normative judgements, at least one of us must be wrong.

Furthermore, if RMR is right, then when we discuss normativity, we discuss normative items in a kind of isolation: we discuss rights, wrongs, goods, evils, and so on, without our discourse standing in for any other kind of discourse. Normative terms cannot be swapped out for *prima facie* non-normative terms as one might swap out ‘heat’, say, for ‘mean molecular motion’, or ‘water’ for ‘H₂O’.

Normative discourse, then, given RMR, is just what it looks like at the outset. I do not think it too controversial to suggest that it is at least one (perhaps very small) point in RMR’s favour that it captures normative discourse in this way. RMR reflects how normative judgements *feel* (at least, to many or even most of us, pre-philosophically speaking). When I judge that murder is wrong, this does not feel dissimilar to my judgements about ordinary, run-of-the-mill factual things like cubes and pigeons – indeed, I am likely to feel far stronger in my convictions about murder than I feel in my convictions about cubes. And when we discuss what is right and good and better, it certainly feels as if we are talking

⁴⁵ This is evident in the fact that error theories like Mackie’s and quasi-realisms like Blackburn’s take everyday normative discourse to require revision: Blackburn, *Essays*; Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*; Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*. This point is also made by Enoch (independently of the claim that RMR is *true*) in: Enoch, “Why Idealize?” 769-778.

⁴⁶ For discussion of RMR in relation to problems posed by disagreement, see: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 185-216; Prabhpal Singh, “Moral Realism and Expert Disagreement,” in *Trames* 24, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2020.3.10>.

in a reasonably similar way to that in which we discuss everyday factual things where, if we disagree, someone has to be wrong. Furthermore, it does not pre-theoretically feel as if we should or even could supplement our judgements of rightness and goodness and betterness with talk of more mundane things which we may not initially associate with the normative items we wish to reflect in those judgements. RMR boasts the ambition of providing a deep philosophical justification for this superficial appearance of everyday normative discourse. For my purposes here – which are largely metaphysical – we can describe this ambition in terms of RMR seeking to provide the metaphysical underpinning for judging and speaking about normativity much like we judge and speak about everyday factual things.

Of course, the advantage that this provides to RMR is insufficient for its vindication. A great variety of alternative metanormative theories have very strong reasons for resisting this ambition and offering a metanormative theory at odds – to varying extents – with the superficial appearance of everyday normative discourse. Error theorists⁴⁷ tend to agree with RMR that, were there any normative facts, they would look much like RMR describes; but they deem this description so outlandish that they take the rather extraordinary step of ascribing widespread error to normative discourse. And between these two poles lie a vast array of theories – non-cognitivism,⁴⁸ naturalists of both the reductive⁴⁹ and non-

⁴⁷ Cline, “Against deliberative indispensability;” Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously;” Joyce (2021); Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*; Streumer, *Unbelievable Errors*.

⁴⁸ Ayer, “Analysis of Moral Judgements;” Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*; Blackburn, *Essays*; Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*; Gibbard, *Meaning and Normativity*; Hare, *The Language of Morals*; Hare, *Freedom and Reason*; Hare, “Universal Prescriptivism.” For discussion: Antti Kauppinen, “Moral Sentimentalism”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/moral-sentimentalism/>; van Roojen, “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism.”

⁴⁹ Railton, “Moral Realism;” Railton, “Naturalism and Prescriptivity;” Schroeder, “Realism and Reduction.”

reductive⁵⁰ variety, constructivists,⁵¹ quasi-realists,⁵² non-metaphysical realists,⁵³ and so on – all of whom seek to maintain some of the harmony with everyday normative discourse enjoyed by RMR (thereby avoiding the radical conclusions of error theory) while seeking to distance themselves from the massive weight of metaphysical commitment with which RMR is thereby burdened.

I suspect that it will also be relatively uncontroversial to suggest that, for any advantage RMR enjoys in virtue of its congruence with everyday normative discourse, it suffers at least a similar scale of *disadvantage* on account of the metaphysical commitments required to sustain that congruence. What seem like perfectly straightforward judgements and statements turn out, upon philosophical reflection, to require anything but straightforward metaphysical manoeuvres. Nonetheless, I shall argue in this thesis that RMR does well in justifying these manoeuvres and, ultimately, in supporting the superficial appearance of everyday normative discourse with a defensible metaphysics.

⁵⁰ See: Lenman and Lutz, “Moral Naturalism;” Miller, *An Introduction*, 138-177.

⁵¹ Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism;” Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*; Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*; O’Neill, “The Presidential Address;” O’Neill, “Constructivism;” Rosati, “Agents and “Shmagents;” Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Smith, “A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;” Smith, “The Magic of Constitutivism;” Smith, “Constitutivism;” Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, “Précis;” Velleman, “Replies.” Note that I cite constructivisms and constitutivisms separately from reductive and non-reductive naturalisms given that their status with regard to reduction is not always clear. I nonetheless treat them as naturalisms, in a broad sense, throughout this thesis (for reasons that are made clear in *Chapter Three*).

⁵² Blackburn, *Essays*; Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*; Gibbard, *Meaning and Normativity*; van Roojen, “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism.”

⁵³ Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth;” Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*; Parfit, *On What Matters*; Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*.

Crispin Wright describes realism as combining ‘modesty with presumption’.⁵⁴ Nowhere is this more clearly so than in RMR. RMR places normative truth an Olympian distance above us – something that we may at best diligently apprehend, but that we have no part in constituting. Yet the metaphysics of RMR, in purporting to capture this reality altogether independent of both ourselves and nature, purports to show that our everyday practices correspond to that reality. The central thrust of David Enoch’s *Taking Morality Seriously*⁵⁵ is that only the boldness of RMR can permit us to be appropriately humble before the weight of morality. In arguing that he is right in this claim, adapted to the normative context, I will try to show both that RMR is warranted in its presumption to learn of robust normativity, and that only this characterisation of normativity can permit our everyday normative practices to function as we take them to.

To provide some formality to RMR’s metaphysical commitments, let us define them as follows: that there are (authoritatively) normative *facts*; and that those facts are *sui generis*. I will consider these two commitments in turn in the remainder of this chapter.

1. 2. NORMATIVE FACTS

The first commitment of robust metanormative realism (RMR) is that there are (authoritatively) normative facts. Here, I elucidate this notion and briefly discuss Enoch’s argument for it.

⁵⁴ Crispin Wright, *Saving the Differences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 11. See also: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 1.

⁵⁵ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*.

The notion of *facts* invoked here, and a corresponding notion of *truth*, are understood in a minimal sense, in accordance with something like Crispin Wright’s minimalist conception of truth as a non-metaphysical property, ‘a projection, merely, of the standards, whatever they are, which actually inform assertion within’ a given domain of discourse.⁵⁶ That is, RMR’s commitment that there are (authoritatively) normative facts does not commit robust realists to any specific metaphysical conception of those facts – as substantial, say, or objective – beyond that to which truths correspond (in an appropriately minimal sense).⁵⁷ I understand RMR’s factualism as a synthetic *a priori* claim; at least, the argument for factualism that I consider does not purport to draw it out of analytic connections, and nor does it depend on *a posteriori* epistemologies. Following Wielenberg, I think of a fact as an *actually obtaining* state of affairs, and a state of affairs as an abstract entity which may obtain or fail to obtain (all in the relevantly minimal, metaphysically lightweight senses).⁵⁸ Accordingly, RMR is committed to there being actual normative states of affairs⁵⁹ – things that should be, and things that should not; things

⁵⁶ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 61. I say ‘something like Wright’s minimalist conception’ for I do not wish to take any strong stance on the details of his theory here. I take it that a more deflationary model of truth may well suit the factual stage of the argument for RMR just as well as Wright’s minimalism. But I find Wright’s model helpful in this context. For discussion: Michael Glanzberg, "Truth", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/truth/>; Cheryl Misak, “Deflating Truth: Pragmatism vs. Minimalism,” *The Monist* 81, no. 3 (1998), <http://www.jstor.com/stable/27903598>; Wright, “Précis.”

⁵⁷ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 24-29.

⁵⁸ Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 36-37.

⁵⁹ A normative fact like ‘A should *x* in *C*’ may then be understood as corresponding to the state of affairs such that A has reason to *x* in *C*, or such that it would be good (or desirable, or reasonable, or something) for A to *x* in *C*. Nothing rides on this below, however, as the arguments to follow do not depend upon *all* normative facts being articulable as actually

that are, and things that are not, (authoritatively) right, wrong, (predicatively) good, bad, valuable, better, worse, and so on (in the relevant senses).

The distinction between authoritative and formal normative standards is central to this factualist commitment. As I understand RMR, it is first and foremost a view about the authoritatively normative – and it should anyway be entirely uncontroversial to claim that there are facts (in the minimal sense) about formally normative standards like conventions, laws, and rules. Matthew Evans and Nishi Shah⁶⁰ argue that we can distinguish between authoritative and formal standards on the basis of either (i) whether agents can avoid conformity to them when engaging in relevant practices, or (ii) whether agents can avoid those practices altogether.⁶¹ This does not seem to me a helpful way of conceptualising the distinction. It should be uncontroversial that moral standards are on the authoritative side of this distinction as against formal norms; and it should be similarly uncontroversial that torture violates at least one moral standard. But this example does not pass Evans’ and Shah’s test for authoritative standards. Let us be generous and situate the anti-murder standard within the practice of *being an agent* – and let us assume that we cannot avoid the practice of agency (even in something like suicide)⁶² – so as to ensure that this standard does not fail (ii). It still fails (i), of course, because agents can perfectly

obtaining normative states of affairs; but I nonetheless see no reason that this should be particularly problematic. I am grateful to Jiwon Kim for drawing my attention to the need for clarification here.

⁶⁰ Matthew Evans and Nishi Shah, “Mental Agency and Metaethics,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics 7*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 83, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199653492.003.0003>. Note that Evans and Shah discuss the authoritative/formal distinction in terms of ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ norms.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 188; Velleman, “Replies,” 291.

well torture and remain agents, albeit morally bad ones.⁶³ We may be able to provide clear necessary and sufficient conditions for what it is to be an authoritative, as opposed to a merely formal, standard. We may even be able to offer this in non-circular terms, resolving in *prima facie* non-normative conditions (and, as I hope to show in *Chapter Three*, this need not threaten RMR's non-reductive commitments). But no such definitions will be sufficiently uncontroversial to be helpful here.⁶⁴ Ultimately, I do not think that trying to capture the authoritative/formal distinction in terms of practices is helpful – other than to say that authoritative normativity is that in which moral philosophers tend to be interested *inasmuch as they are moral philosophers and not anthropologists*. It is this kind of normative fact to which RMR is committed, and about which it is in debate with its rivals.

I treat normative facts as what McPherson and Plunkett call the 'fundamental explanandum'⁶⁵ of metanormative theory, and of RMR as one such theory. I concur with them, however, that 'this is at

⁶³ Some constitutivist models might challenge this notion in suggesting that we are not truly agents when we fail to live up to the standards constitutive of agency, some of which are moral. If one took a particularly extreme form of this view, and argued that there are thereby no bad agents, only agents and non-agents who resemble agents, then perhaps moral norms would pass the first of Evans and Shah's test. For criticism of this view, see: Enoch, "Constitutivism." Anyway, even if this kind of argument can be made, it remains the case that, if norms like the one against torture is embedded in other practices – like, say, war or law enforcement – they again appear to fail the first test. Evans and Shah's test may well capture the kinds of strong, as opposed to weak, norms relevant in their discussion of belief; but their test does not generalise.

⁶⁴ We may be tempted to point to praise and blame to capture this distinction. But these notions seem to apply only to *decisive* norms; the conception of authoritative normativity, however, seems to me to encompass both decisive *and* presumptive normative reasons – I may have authoritative reason not to lie, say, where this reason is superseded by a stronger reason to protect from harm.

⁶⁵ McPherson and Plunkett, "The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics," 10.

most a strategic point’;⁶⁶ and I take it that the other core explananda of metanormative theory – reasons, goods, evils, rights, wrongs, values, normative properties, *oughts*, *shoulds*, and so on – are all purportedly accommodated and explained by RMR. That said, I do not consider in detail the precise relation between these normative items here. I take it that RMR’s view on normative facts has reasonably common-sense entailments for its view on the other various normative items, which I discuss relatively freely in what follows. As a sketch, I take RMR to treat normative facts to correspond to true normative beliefs, judgements, assertions, and so on; I take normative truths to be about normative properties and values; where those properties and values entail that things are right, wrong, good, bad, better, worse, and so on. Nothing of substance to follow seems to me to ride on precisely how all this gets cashed out.

I sometimes discuss (authoritatively) normative facts as in relation to *reasons*⁶⁷ agents can have to act – or think, or behave in the most general sense – in particular ways. At this stage, I wish to make as few commitments as possible as to what these reasons might be. For the time being (given that we are not presently engaged in first-order normative theory), let us suppose that there might be normative facts about reasons to do just about anything: from reasons to defend justice and freedom to reasons to consume delicious food and wine; from reasons to be prudent to reasons to be honest; from reasons to be rational to reasons to be loving. And I sometimes describe as ‘reasonable’ behaviour in accordance with these (authoritatively normative) reasons.⁶⁸ I will not consider the manner and extent to which

⁶⁶ McPherson and Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” 11.

⁶⁷ I use ‘reason’ not with a psychological focus, or in terms of the operation of the faculty of ‘Reason’, as is sometimes the focus in: Wiland, *Reasons*.

⁶⁸ This use of ‘reasonable’ as meaning something like ‘accordant with authoritative normativity’ may diverge from some of Scanlon’s uses of the term: T. M. Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism,” in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982),

RMR's rivals can share in this focus on reasons thus construed, as I relate the discussion of normative facts to reasons primarily for ease of presentation, and nothing substantive rides on it.

I take it that reasons come in different modes. We can have all-things-considered, or *decisive*, reasons, to which we are ultimately normatively required to conform in a given context if we are to be reasonable; and we can have merely other-things-being-equal, or *presumptive*, reasons, which become decisive in the absence of other, more important reasons.⁶⁹ Some of our reasons may be had in all contexts; some may be had only in some contexts. And we may have reasons to pursue things for their own sake; while other reasons may be in favour of things that are valuable for the sake of yet other things.⁷⁰ In all such cases, that for which there is a reason, in the sense in which I use the term, *should be*, in some sense: some things decisively should be, and others presumptively should be; some should be in all contexts and others only in some; and some should be for their own sake and others for the sake of other things. If there are other important distinctions one might wish to draw within normativity – or indeed if one objects to some of these distinctions – this will not be pertinent in what follows, and I remain largely

<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611964.007>. Nonetheless, I think this reflects a common use of 'reasonable' in natural language.

⁶⁹ See discussion of this distinction (as the absolute/contributory distinction) in: Dancy, "Moral Particularism." Schroeder identifies problems for the view that reasons can weigh up to determine what we decisively ought to do: Mark Schroeder, "Getting Perspective on Objective Reasons," *Ethics* 128, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1086/694270>. I do not consider this here, however. I assume, for present purposes, only that reasons exist in some determinate relation to *oughts*, both as items of authoritative normativity all of which are the object of RMR.

⁷⁰ I am brushing over Korsgaard's distinction here between the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction and the distinction between instrumental values and things properly valuable as ends: Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions." This is not pressing here, however, and I do not consider it further, as I mention intrinsic and instrumental value only for illustrative purposes.

neutral on the finer details of these matters here. I also remain neutral on whether we tend primarily to have reasons to bring about certain kinds of states of affairs (as maintained by consequentialists, roughly speaking) or to engage in certain kinds of deliberation and action (as maintained by deontologists, again roughly speaking), and on the contexts within which reasons arise. None of this is my present concern. Here, I wish only to offer a maximally flexible sketch of normativity to be going on with, for ease of presentation, as we consider RMR at the metanormative level.

The argument to follow does not depend on any particular view of the extent to which theories besides RMR can share in this characterisation of normative reasons. Nor is it pressing, in that respect, that I treat reasons as related in important ways to the goods and values that I have included in the general conception of normativity at work here. I do not wish to commit myself here to a buck-passing account of reasons;⁷¹ but, for ease of presentation, and in order to convey the breadth of my conception of normativity, I will (tentatively) suppose that there are some important relations between acting for reasons and bringing about goods, between doing the right thing and bringing about positive (authoritatively) normative value. RMR is therefore considered here as the view that normative facts – about reasons, goods, rightness, betterness, value, preferability, and so on, in all the relevant senses – are *sui generis*.

Now, to return to RMR's first commitment – to the existence of normative facts, independently of a view of those facts as *sui generis* – it is important to note that this is defined so minimally that it is shared with a broad range of rival metanormative views. The argument for metanormative factualism in *Chapter Two* is therefore aimed specifically at error theorists and some non-cognitivists – those who deny that there are authoritatively normative facts of even a minimal kind – and does not provide

⁷¹ For discussion: Dancy, “Should We Pass the Buck?”; Orsi, “What’s Wrong With Moorean Buck-Passing?”

anything to affront quasi-realists,⁷² subjectivists, constructivists, or indeed most naturalists. Here, RMR is committed only to it being possible to make true first-order normative judgements – that compassion is good, that we have reason to be honest, and so on – for those judgements to correspond (in an appropriately minimal sense) to some fact about normativity. At this stage, it is silent on how these facts and truths are to be understood.

There is a complication here, in that many theories in this field are either exclusively, or more specifically and emphatically, *metaethical*, rather than more generically *metanormative*. Accordingly, my discussion of error theory and some non-cognitivism in the *global metanormative* context, as *global metanormative nonfactualisms*, may only indirectly apply to more limited metaethical error theories and non-cognitivism.

That said, I take it that morality is (relatively unproblematically) a sub-sphere of (authoritative) normativity (I explain why in *I. 3. 3. 2.*). If this is so – and provided I can argue for universal claims about normativity here, as I intend – then everything I say about normativity will apply *mutatis mutandis* to morality too (provided there are any moral facts) and, therefore, to metaethical error theories and those non-cognitivism that deny the existence of moral facts. Of course, it may be that there are

⁷² Blackburn, *Essays*; Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*; Gibbard, *Meaning and Normativity*; Miller, *An Introduction*, 26-110; van Roojen, “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism.” Van Roojen discusses whether the kind of minimalist conception of truth deployed in this thesis undermines quasi-realism, in blurring the distinction between quasi-realism and a sophisticated form of realism. Gibbard also questions this, specifically with regard to Blackburn’s quasi-realism: Allan Gibbard, “Projection, Quasi-Realism, and Sophisticated Realism,” review of *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, by Simon Blackburn, *Mind* 105, no. 418 (1996), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2254565>. I grant here that quasi-realists can provide satisfactory responses to these concerns. The point here is just that made by Blackburn, that the debate between realists and anti-realists is not usefully framed as a debate about cognitivism and truth-aptness: Blackburn, *Essays*, p. 6.

normative facts but no moral facts; our best first-order normative theory may provide us with reason to believe that there are normative facts about prudence, say, but none resembling morality. However, not only do I think this is unlikely; furthermore, even if it is so, it presents no serious trouble for the case for RMR as presented here. If there are no moral facts, then both RMR and a limited metaethical error theory can simultaneously be true.⁷³ Though this would shake some of the motivations underpinning RMR, it does not seem likely and does not directly affect the present argument, so I do not consider this possibility further. Thus far, RMR's commitment to normative facts and truths is made at the most general level of normativity.

Though the theories denying that there are normative facts are diverse, I treat them under the single umbrella of metanormative nonfactualism. This is not only due to their joint rejection of RMR's first core commitment; it is also, more importantly, due to their being the joint target of the single indispensability argument for factualism that I draw from Enoch in the next chapter.

To anticipate, Enoch claims that, when we deliberate, as opposed to when we merely *pick*, we require nonarbitrary standards to guide our deliberation. But, when considering what to do, confronted only by desires, we can only pick desires to satisfy; even if we select the strongest desire, or resolve deliberation by appeal to a higher-order desire, we have merely picked the option of doing so. To deliberate, we require standards above and beyond those provided by desire. Enoch suggests that these standards are none other than normative facts.

⁷³ Richard Joyce and John Mackie both maintain a moral error theory alongside some variant of factualism about other kinds of normativity, but it is not clear that this factualism is *robust*. Joyce, "Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously;" Joyce (2021); Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*.

His thought is that no theory that denies normative facts can accommodate these standards. I precisify this as the claim that no theory that denies *authoritative* normative facts can accommodate the standards necessary for deliberative regulation. Enoch goes on to argue that this inability to accommodate normative facts poses serious problems for such nonfactualist theories, as we are independently justified in those beliefs which are indispensable to rationally non-optional projects. Given that deliberation is one such non-optional project, we are therefore justified in inferring to its indispensable commitments, one of those being the existence of normative facts.

This indispensability argument is not intended as a knockdown argument against theories denying the existence of normative facts. Rather, it is intended to show that these theories suffer a loss of plausibility in virtue of their being incapable of accommodating the entities indispensable to deliberation. Enoch's argument, to put it bluntly, depicts *all of us* as implicitly committed to normative facts – when we deliberate, at least – and purports to show that we are right to maintain this commitment explicitly in our metanormative theory.

1. 3. *SUI GENERIS* NORMATIVE FACTS

The second commitment of robust metanormative realism (RMR) is that normative facts are *sui generis*. Here, I discuss this commitment, briefly anticipate the argument in its defence, and flesh out the picture of robust metanormative realism (RMR) by considering some of its other commitments.

1. 3. 1. THE METAPHYSICS OF *SUI GENERIS* NORMATIVITY

1. 3. 1. 1. *SUI GENERIS* NORMATIVITY AND NATURE

By ‘*sui generis*’, I mean to refer to the property of being distinct from the *natural*.⁷⁴ But we can arrive at an understanding of ‘natural’ by two different routes: with a metaphysical focus, we might be trying to point to the *object* of the natural sciences; or, with an epistemic focus, we might be pointing to whatever it is that is captured by the *methods* of the natural sciences.⁷⁵ For my part, I am happy to accept either of these routes to ‘natural’, as I do not think any important matters of substance presented here ride on it. As with the commitment to metanormative factualism, I take RMR’s commitment to the *sui*

⁷⁴ I use ‘*sui generis*’ to indicate distinction from the natural but also from the *prima facie* non-normative; and treat ‘natural’ and ‘*prima facie* non-normative’ interchangeably. The argument in *Chapter Three* defends this.

⁷⁵ I am grateful to Rachel Handley for this thought on characterising the natural. Killoren defines ‘natural’ simply in terms of the ‘scientific’ – Killoren, “Robust Moral Realism,” 225 – and I could also adopt this.

generis character of normative facts to be *a priori* synthetic; again, the argument I consider for this claim is advanced on that basis.

Now, what does it mean for normative facts to be distinct from natural facts? To see this, consider one instance of the *sui generis* claim: that normative facts are *response-independent*, that they are constitutively independent⁷⁶ of agential responses – the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and so on, of agents – all understood naturalistically. A fact is response-independent iff the truth conditions of judgements about it are not determined by the responses of agents. It may be that these truth conditions *are* said responses – it may be that certain mental states (like happiness, say) are normatively valuable such that those states determine normative truths – it is even compatible with response-independence that *all* of these truth conditions are agential responses (though that is not my view). The point, however, is that it is not agential responses determining what the truth conditions for normative judgements are – even if those truth conditions are those very responses. Lenman summarises it thus:

[Enoch] views [normative truths] as strongly mind-independent. Of course they might nonetheless be mind-dependent in the sense that their truth-conditions may be as psychological as you please: it would be consistent with robust mind-independence that the only things noninstrumentally worth pursuing are states of desirable consciousness. The kind of mind-independence Enoch insists on is a matter of the facts about our consciousness, or what we, or anyone, wants or believes or any other psychological facts not determining [...] what these truth conditions are.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ I think of ontological dependence modally, as opposed to primitively or in terms of essence – but this is not pressing in what follows. See: Tuomas E. Tahko, and E. Jonathan Lowe, “Ontological Dependence,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/dependence-ontological/>.

⁷⁷ Lenman, “Deliberation, Schmeliberation,” 835-836.

Note that Lenman here characterises Enoch as focused on *mind*-independence, while my focus, following Enoch's, has been on *response*-independence. Enoch treats the latter as 'the conjunction of observer-independence and agent-independence',⁷⁸ borrowing the term from Mark Johnston.⁷⁹

According to RMR, (authoritative) normativity is constitutively independent of agential responses. But this point generalises: just as normative facts are constitutively independent of responses, so too are they constitutively independent of *all* natural things. Just as responses do not determine normative facts, neither does anything natural – facts about agency, about evolutionary advantage, or about pleasure or happiness, and so on – though all of these things, like responses, may well be *relevant* to normative facts. To say that normativity is *sui generis* is to say that it exists above and beyond the natural. Even if we are only ever normatively required to pursue natural things, if RMR is right, this will be because of standards of authoritative normativity that exist distinctly from nature. Normative facts, on this view, cannot be cobbled together from non-normative materials, no matter how sophisticated the cobbling.

To envisage the *sui generis* commitment, consider an analogous claim far more familiar, concerning the object of physics. It would seem bizarre, in most contexts at least, to suggest that physical things – mass, energy, and so on – were not metaphysically *sui generis*, that they were nothing over and above some other non-physical things which formed in sufficiently complex ways to give rise to them. Of course, it is possible to doubt this *philosophically*, but the strangeness of doubting it is testament to how familiar we are with it as a commitment. RMR's *sui generis* claim is analogous to this: normativity is fundamentally distinct from non-normative things, including any of the objects of the natural sciences

⁷⁸ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 3.

⁷⁹ Mark Johnston, David Lewis, and Michael Smith, "Dispositional Theories of Value," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63 (1989): 144. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4106918>.

and conjunctions thereof, in just the same way that the objects of physics are fundamentally distinct from non-physical things and conjunctions thereof.

Those positions that share RMR's first commitment to (authoritative) normative facts, but who stand in opposition to this commitment to the *sui generis* nature of normativity – response-dependence views,⁸⁰ reductive⁸¹ and non-reductive response-independence naturalisms,⁸² quasi-realisms,⁸³ and non-metaphysical metanormative realisms⁸⁴ – I describe as *non-robust metanormative factualisms*. And, besides non-metaphysical realisms, I consider these as *naturalisms*.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Johnston, Lewis, and Smith, "Dispositional Theories of Value;" Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism;" Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*; Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*; O'Neill, "The Presidential Address;" O'Neill, "Constructivism;" Rosati, "Agents and "Shmagents";" Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori*; Smith, "A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;" Smith, "The Magic of Constitutivism;" Smith, "Constitutivism;" Sobel, "Subjectivism and Idealization;" Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Smith, "In Defense of "The Moral Problem";" Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, "Précis;" Velleman, "Replies;" Williams, *Moral Luck*.

⁸¹ Railton, "Moral Realism;" Railton, "Naturalism and Prescriptivity;" Schroeder, "Realism and Reduction."

⁸² See: Lenman and Lutz, "Moral Naturalism;" Miller, *An Introduction*, 138-177.

⁸³ Blackburn, *Essays*; Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*; Gibbard, *Meaning and Normativity*; van Roojen, "Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism."

⁸⁴ Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth;" Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*; Parfit, *On What Matters*; Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*.

⁸⁵ To be as clear as possible on the distinction, within what I have described as the non-robustly factualist, between naturalisms and non-metaphysical realisms: the former (either explicitly or implicitly) advance a metaphysics of normativity as other than *sui generis*; the latter avoid offering a metaphysics of normative facts as *sui generis*. In both cases, there is no offering of a *sui generis* metaphysics of normative facts: from naturalism, due to the advancement of an alternative

1. 3. 1. 2. AGAINST NATURALISM

Robust metanormative realism (RMR) is non-naturalist. I define ‘naturalism’ very broadly, inclusive of theories traditionally considered as naturalisms *and* those less often considered in those terms: reductive naturalisms fit the bill, obviously enough, as do those explicitly naturalist programs that seek a non-reductive account of normativity; but so too do quasi-realisms and constructivisms. I do not suggest that all these theories share any great commonality in features or motivations; but I do take it that they all deny the *sui generis* quality of normativity upon which RMR insists, embedding normativity within nature and denying its distinct existence.

Again, however, we face the same complication as we did in considering nonfactualist views: some of these theories are exclusively or more emphatically focused upon the ethical or the moral than the (authoritatively) normative more broadly. So my arguments against global metanormative versions of these naturalisms will apply *mutatis mutandis* to their more limited metaethical counterparts, provided (i) the moral is a sub-sphere of the normative and (ii) there are moral facts. (And, of course, if there are no moral facts, then the metaethical forms of these factualist views will be doomed anyway). So this presents no deep problem for the arguments to follow.

Although these theories are not often treated as a single group, common to them is denial of the *sui generis* quality of (authoritative) normativity. This has implications for the case against them, as I will try to show in *Chapter Three*.

metaphysics; and from non-metaphysical views, in the non-advancement of a metaphysics of normativity as either natural or *sui generis*. I take it that most non-metaphysical metanormative realisms are thereby non-naturalist *and* non-robust. I am grateful to Andrew Chitty for drawing my attention to this potential ambiguity.

The commonality between these views is made explicit in the work of G. E. Moore,⁸⁶ who looms large in the development of RMR. In describing the now well-recognised ‘naturalistic fallacy’,⁸⁷ Moore describes a process of trying to capture goodness in non-evaluative terms. In present terminology, it looks as if he is describing attempts to account for normativity as constitutively dependent upon the natural. So, beyond specific claims of response-independence or irreducibility, Moore seems to argue for something like the *sui generis* claim.⁸⁸ For Moore, both ‘naturalist’ and ‘metaphysical’⁸⁹ ethical projects fall prey to the temptations of the naturalistic fallacy in embedding goodness in that which is not fundamentally normative – pleasure, survival, realisation of true self⁹⁰ – and the same fallacy is evident, for Moore, in all cases.

⁸⁶ Moore, *Principia Ethica*.

⁸⁷ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 62.

⁸⁸ Note that Thomas Hurka reads Moore as a non-metaphysical moral realist, not as a proto-robust realist: Thomas Hurka, “Moore’s Moral Philosophy,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/moore-moral/>. I discuss Hurka’s view of Moore in *I. 3. I. 3*. If Hurka is right, then this characterisation of Moore as advancing a view of *sui generis* normativity will be problematic (provided we see the *sui generis* commitment as a metaphysical one, which I do). For my purposes, however, I discuss Moore’s moral philosophy in this context as robustly realist for illustrative purposes; for, at the very least, it shares a non-naturalism with RMR. Nothing substantial rides on this in what follows. However, it will become important later that I see RMR’s commitment to *sui generis* normativity as a metaphysical commitment, thereby distinguishing it from non-metaphysical views, even in spite of their shared opposition to naturalism.

⁸⁹ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 13.

⁹⁰ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 89-191.

My conception of (authoritative) normativity is in terms of *what should be* – in terms of what is good, better, valuable, and in terms of what there is reason for – as opposed to *what merely is or could be*. Moore’s accusation can be seen as a claim that attempts to locate normativity in nature necessarily fail to capture what should be as opposed to what merely is or could be. One flank of Moore’s attack on these projects is piecemeal: he considers different examples of projects describing this or that natural thing as the sole intrinsic good, trying to shake any conviction that this can be so – thereby shaking the conviction that a grasp on this or that thing can yield a grasp on goodness as such – through examples where this or that thing seems less than intrinsically good, or where something else seems intrinsically good.⁹¹ The other flank is more sweeping, known as the *open question argument*, the central thrust of which Enoch summarises in his discussion of Connie Rosati:

Rosati starts from Moore’s infamous open question argument, arguing that – its many known flaws notwithstanding – it still expresses an insight that should concern ethical naturalists. Rosati’s reading of the insight underlying the open question argument is in line with what is now already a tradition of understanding the argument as insisting that normative judgments cannot be reduced to descriptive ones because such reduction will lose the very normativity it was supposed to capture. This insight arguably survives the rooting out of Moore’s confusions with regard to conceptual analysis and the like and is supposed to pose a threat to synthetic or a posteriori as well as analytic or a priori versions of naturalism.⁹²

The reduction (loosely defined) Moore is understood as resisting here is from *normative* to *descriptive*. I do not favour this terminology; I have used ‘natural’ rather than ‘descriptive’ to capture the things from which RMR insists normativity is distinct. It is important to RMR that making statements about

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 174.

normativity is to make statements which operate relevantly similarly to ordinary kinds of descriptive factual statements, because normative facts are relevantly similar to ordinary kinds of fact. So statements about reasons are both descriptive, in one sense, *and* prescriptive and/or evaluative in another.⁹³ In terms I prefer, the normative/non-normative distinction is between what should be and what merely is or could be. Both normativity and nature can be *described* perfectly well, on this view; but, in describing normativity, one will be describing what should be, perhaps *as well as* what merely is or could be, whereas, in describing only nature, one can capture only the latter.

The Moorean thought relevant here – extracted from the various problems surrounding his arguments, and adapted to present terminology – is that accounts of normativity as constitutively dependent upon nature (as response-dependent in any way, reducible to nature, or identifiable with some conjunction of natural properties) fail to capture the authoritative character of normativity. These theories fail to capture what should be as distinct from what merely is, therefore failing to offer an account of normativity and not, inadvertently, something else.

Moore does not use terms like ‘normative’. His focus is ‘ethics’,⁹⁴ which might be better captured by ‘morality’ than ‘normativity’. Nonetheless, his thought is central to the broader commitment to the *sui generis* character of normativity. He, and robust realists influenced by him, are anxious to argue against any view of normativity as anything other than – in the spirit of Moore’s quoting of Butler – ‘what it is

⁹³ I also take prescription to be a special type of description, along similarly propositional lines, of describing what is to be done, by whom, and under what conditions. The descriptive-prescriptive distinction, when sharper than this, seems to me to have a bias towards non-cognitivism of a broadly Humean kind in distinguishing what should be from what is *simpliciter*, not from what *merely* is. This is not pressing in what follows.

⁹⁴ Moore, *Principia Ethica*.

and nothing else'.⁹⁵ This puts RMR at odds with any naturalistic worldview which leaves no space in robust reality for anything besides the things with which we are more familiar – cubes, pigeons, hats, valleys, rocks, atoms, feelings, thoughts, desires, and so on.

Robust realists therefore (enthusiastically) embrace what McDowell (disparagingly) describes as 'rampant platonism'.⁹⁶ Indeed, it is common for robust realists to refer to Plato,⁹⁷ and it should be clear why: RMR is nakedly anti-Humean in its conception of the world, maintaining that value really is *out there* in the world, altogether independent of our experience – something to be *discovered*, not *created* – something entirely unlike the mundane world. Reasons are, on this view, contra J. L. Mackie's famous claim, really a part of 'the fabric of the world'⁹⁸ – albeit not the world as studied by the natural sciences.

Despite the diversity of the positions with which RMR is contrasted in virtue of this non-naturalist commitment, I treat them under the single umbrella of naturalism, as I present a single argument against naturalism as such. I intend this to bolster Enoch's case against such views, which is more piecemeal in

⁹⁵ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 7.

⁹⁶ John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998a), 77. I should add that McDowell's reference to 'platonism' (without the capital 'p') is not a direct reference to Plato himself, but rather to mathematical platonism. Nonetheless, the connection to Plato himself is clear, though indirect, and embraced by many robust realists.

⁹⁷ Although Enoch wants, to some extent, to avoid the trappings of the term 'Platonism' – Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 8 – he does refer to Plato in a relatively unabashed manner: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*; Enoch, "Indispensability Arguments." So too does Wedgwood explicitly evoke Plato in his argument for his variant of RMR: Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity*.

⁹⁸ Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*, p. 15.

nature. Enoch considers a variety of non-robust metanormatively factualist positions and advances reasons to think that they are less stable than RMR.⁹⁹ The argument I wish to advance, on the other hand, purports to provide a universally applicable reason to be suspicious of naturalisms specifically in virtue of their not sharing RMR's commitment to the *sui generis* character of normative facts.

To briefly anticipate, I argue in *Chapter Three* that all naturalisms confront a problem similar to that identified by Moore in his discussion of the naturalistic fallacy, but that in fact goes back much further to Plato's *Euthyphro*. Plato depicts Socrates asking Euthyphro whether the gods love what is pious because it is pious, or whether that which is pious is so because it is loved by the gods. Euthyphro, devoted to the gods, is in a bind: if he replies that the gods love what is pious because it is pious, then piety looks prior to the gods, and the gods cannot be the source of it; but if he replies that what is pious is so because the gods love it, then piety appears arbitrary, for the gods can change their minds. Socrates' implication, of course, is that piety must be above and beyond the gods and their love.

Note that Socrates grants, for the sake of argument, Euthyphro's commitment to the coextensiveness of piety and that which is loved by the gods. The question is then what is supposed to explain this relation; and neither answer looks palatable to the devout Euthyphro. Applications of the central thrust of *Euthyphro* to the metanormative context¹⁰⁰ make the same move. They allow, for the sake of argument, that normative facts are *coextensive* with natural ones – that, for any normative fact, there exist necessary and sufficient naturalistically-defined conditions – but they ask which side of the biconditional explains

⁹⁹ Enoch, "Why Idealize?"; David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency;" Enoch, "Constructivism;" Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*; Enoch, "Indispensability Arguments;" Enoch, "Constitutivism;" Enoch, "Idealizing."

¹⁰⁰ The Euthyphronic point is also often deployed in debates surrounding colour: Mark Johnston, "How to Speak of the Colors," *Philosophical Studies* 68, no. 3 (1992), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4320356>.

the relation.¹⁰¹ If the answer is the normative side, we seem thereby forced to offer an account of normativity independent of the natural, incompatible with naturalism; but, if the answer is the natural, we seem thereby forced to offer an account of normativity which ultimately loses sight of that which we sought to capture, namely, that which should be as opposed to what merely is.

Though the similarities to Moore's case against naturalism are readily apparent – both seek to explain why attempts to capture (authoritative) normativity in the natural cannot succeed – there are important differences between this Euthyphronic argument and Moore's arguments. There are also important differences between this argument and the closely related normativity objection to naturalism. I discuss the Euthyphronic argument, its distinction from its close neighbours, and naturalist responses to it, in *Chapter Three*. And I try to show that it can be generalised against all of the positions I have described as naturalist. I also find traces of this Euthyphronic argument in some of Enoch's stronger attacks on naturalisms.

Therefore, just as the indispensability argument for normative facts cuts across the variations between those nonfactualist theories denying their existence, so too will the Euthyphronic argument for their being *sui generis* cut across the variations between naturalisms. Whether one thinks of normativity as grounded in particular kinds of desires, thoughts, practices – any kind of naturalistically-defined states of affairs – the claim in the robust stage in *Chapter Three* will be that it is precisely the denial of the *sui generis* quality of normativity that makes naturalisms incapable of providing the authoritatively normative materials we shall see are requisite for deliberation in the indispensability argument in the factual stage in *Chapter Two*.

¹⁰¹ Bagnoli, "Constructivism;" Shafer-Landau, "The Constructivist Challenge," 42-44; van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 258-260; Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 108-139.

The indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments therefore work in tandem: the former tells us that we are justified in positing authoritatively normative facts in virtue of our deliberative process; the latter tells us that, if that which we understand as normativity is to play this regulative role over deliberation, it must be *sui generis*. I hope to show why some naturalist responses to the Euthyphronic argument fall flat precisely because of the deliberative route by which we arrive at the normative facts upon which both naturalist factualists and robust realists agree. That is, I hope to show that the Euthyphronic argument can be not only generalised against all naturalisms, but also strengthened by the indispensability argument.

1. 3. 1. 3. AGAINST NON-METAPHYSICAL METANORMATIVE REALISM

Robust metanormative realism (RMR) is not only opposed to theories that deny the existence of (authoritatively) normative facts and those which offer a naturalistic account of them. It is also opposed to theories that seek to embrace metanormative realism but avoid furnishing it with a metaphysical underpinning. Such theories are sometimes known as ‘quietist’,¹⁰² ‘relaxed’,¹⁰³ or ‘anti-metaphysical’ realisms.¹⁰⁴ In order for me to suggest that the Euthyphronic argument applies pressure universally to all non-robust factualisms, I will also need to suggest in *Chapter Three* that the combination of the indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments can pressure these positions too; and I argue there that

¹⁰² For discussion of this group of theories as ‘quietist’: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 121-133; Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity*, 20-22.

¹⁰³ For discussion of these views as ‘relaxed realism’: Böddeling, “Cognitivism.”

¹⁰⁴ For discussion of these views as ‘non-metaphysical’: Hurka, “Moore’s Moral Philosophy.”

non-provision of a metaphysical answer to the Euthyphronic question yields as unsatisfactory a response as the provision of a naturalistic answer.

We should note that, on Thomas Hurka's reading, Moore endorses not an early form of RMR but rather 'non-metaphysical moral realism',¹⁰⁵ for Moore claims that goodness does *not* 'exist',¹⁰⁶ thereby avoiding commitment to a Platonic 'supersensible reality'.¹⁰⁷ For Hurka, Moore's *Principia Ethica* is all the better for this non-metaphysical approach. However – whether or not Hurka is right in his interpretation of Moore – if I am right that the Euthyphronic argument pressures this kind of position, then the reading of Moore closer aligned to the heavyweight metaphysical commitments of RMR will emerge the stronger. Ultimately, the discussion in *Chapter Three* will preserve the affinities between the Euthyphronic argument and the central thrust of Moore's open question argument.

Be it against theories which seek to disavow the need for a metaphysical underpinning for (authoritative) normativity, or against those which seek to offer that underpinning in nature, I will argue that RMR's commitment to a metaphysics of *sui generis* normativity emerges as strongly supported. As with the indispensability argument – and very much in keeping with Enoch's sense of his conclusions – I will not claim that the Euthyphronic argument (even in tandem with the indispensability argument) provides a knockdown case against non-robust metanormative factualisms. My conclusion will be more modest: that it demonstrates a pressure under which non-robust factualist theories labour – a burden not shared by RMR – in being forced to offer a revisionary conception of deliberation. The force of this conclusion

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 161-163, 174-176.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

then contributes to the force of the various other arguments in favour of RMR against the force of objections to it. I ultimately do not suggest that this clash is decisively resolved as it stands; for RMR faces a number of pressing objections in virtue of its spurning of naturalism, some of which I also discuss (briefly and inconclusively) in *Chapter Three*.

1. 3. 2. SUPERVENIENCE

Robust metanormative realism (RMR) involves a commitment to a kind of metaphysical dualism: a realm of nature and a realm of reason, neither constitutively dependent upon the other. But normativity is not *entirely* detached from nature, according to RMR. Moore describes goodness as ‘a property that depends only on the intrinsic nature of the things which possess it’¹⁰⁸ but which is ‘not itself an intrinsic property’. By ‘intrinsic nature’ and ‘intrinsic property’, I take Moore to be referring to *natural* intrinsic properties.¹⁰⁹ Generalised, I therefore understand Moore as saying that normativity is constitutively independent of nature while connected to it in some way.

The best way of understanding this connection in contemporary terms is, I think, in terms of *supervenience*.¹¹⁰ Supervenience obtains between two kinds of properties where a change in one set of

¹⁰⁸ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ I take it that this interpretation is required if we are to understand it to be possible for objects to possess the property of intrinsic goodness within a Moorean framework. This is not pressing in what follows.

¹¹⁰ Bennett and McLaughlin attribute a supervenience view to Moore: Karen Bennett and Brian McLaughlin, “Supervenience,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/supervenience/>. Wielenberg thinks of the normative-natural relation as

supervenient properties requires a change in another set of *subvenient* properties,¹¹¹ as the aesthetic properties of a lump of clay change only along with its physical properties – first a lump, then a statue. Moore’s thought is understood here, then, as that there can be no change in normativity without a change in nature: naturally equivalent contexts are normatively equivalent.

There are different variants of supervenience;¹¹² but important here is simply that some version tends to be maintained by metanormative realists.¹¹³ Supervenience is most often seen as a *necessary* truth about normative properties; that is, that normative truth is tied to natural truth in all possible worlds,¹¹⁴ and natural things will have the same normative properties across possible worlds. The rampant Platonism

‘making’, not supervenience – Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 24-25. However, it is unclear what this solves. It is deployed to solve a reducibility problem like the one I consider in 3. 3.; but I cannot see how Wielenberg’s making relation is supposed to do this, as it is unclear to me what precisely it is.

¹¹¹ Bennett and McLaughlin, “Supervenience.”

¹¹² Bennett and McLaughlin, “Supervenience.” I do not discuss the different variants here; but, in *Chapter Three*, I note that Enoch takes RMR to be able to accommodate specific strong individual supervenience which, he claims, is the hardest for it to accommodate (besides general strong individual supervenience, which he does not take to be threatening to RMR): Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 136-150. Following him, I take RMR to be consistent with most varieties of supervenience provided it can deal with strong individual supervenience. I consider his attempt to accommodate it and argue that it needs further work. But I think this work can be done, and so I remain neutral here on what kind of supervenience is at work in RMR.

¹¹³ Bader, “The Grounding Problem;” Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*; Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity*.

¹¹⁴ David Lewis, *On The Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

of RMR is therefore somewhat reined in, as the connection between normativity and nature – between what should be and what merely is or could be – is captured as necessary by supervenience.

Towards the end of this thesis, I shall address the challenge that this supervenience relation threatens the robust realist’s conception of normativity as *sui generis*, in making the relation between normativity and nature too intimate.¹¹⁵ The easiest interpretation of supervenience for the robust realist is as *asymmetric* – where supervenient normative properties are multiply realisable in a variety of subvenient natural ones – such that there cannot be a change in normative properties without natural properties changing, but that there *can* be a change in natural properties without normative properties changing. This would make clear that, although normativity is tethered to nature in an important way, it exists as distinct from it. But it has been argued that it is ultimately difficult – perhaps impossible – to maintain this asymmetric conception of supervenience in the face of challenges.¹¹⁶ Accordingly, Ralf Bader suggests that the best path open to RMR is to accept symmetrical supervenience, taking normative properties as coextensive with natural ones, but to also identify some difference in *grounding* between them in order to maintain their non-identity¹¹⁷ – in order to maintain that the normative exists as something above and beyond the natural.

A way of considering the various metanormative theories under consideration in relation to RMR, then, is in terms of supervenience. Those denying that there are any normative facts can be understood as denying that there are any normative properties supervening on natural ones (error theories and some

¹¹⁵ Bader, “The Grounding Problem;” Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 136-150.

¹¹⁶ Bader, “The Grounding Problem.”

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

non-cognitivism). Those accepting normative facts but denying that we ought to account for them as *sui generis* can be understood as maintaining the supervenience of normativity on nature whilst either taking this supervenience relation to be one where normativity is nothing above and beyond nature (naturalisms) or else resisting the provision of an account of supervenience that secures a distinct existence of normativity as above and beyond nature (non-metaphysical realism). And we can think of RMR as accepting the supervenience of normativity on nature but either resisting a symmetric conception of supervenience (which I have said is probably unsustainable) or, taking Bader's suggestion, insisting that symmetric supervenience does not entail the identity of normative properties with natural ones, and then seeking to identify a different kind of difference.

For now, I will consider RMR as incorporating Bader's suggestion. The Euthyphronic argument grants the coextensiveness of natural and normative properties, but will seek to show that we have reason to insist upon the existence of normativity as distinct from nature. However, showing that the symmetric supervenience and coextensiveness of normative and natural properties does not entail their identity is distinct from conclusively showing that there is no identity relation there. The matter, at that point, remains somewhat inconclusive; and Bader suggests that what is required for the extra push in favour of RMR is demonstration of the *specific* difference between normativity and nature to which we can point as evidence of non-identity. Although I discuss supervenience in closer focus in *Chapter Three*, that specific difference will remain beyond the scope of this thesis. For now, what is important is just that RMR is committed to the supervenience of normativity on nature, by which the commitment to the *sui generis* quality of normativity is accompanied by an intelligible account of the connection between the two distinct realms of normativity and nature.

Naturalisms have an easier time of describing the supervenience relation between normativity and nature, given that they do not insist upon the same kind of fundamental distinction between the two realms as is insisted upon by RMR. This is of course part of their attraction. But the Euthyphronic argument in *Chapter Three* will try to show that this attraction is largely superficial.

Before moving on, a word on the notion of identity. I am neutral here with regard to whether identity is conceived along the lines of Bader’s hyperintensional account,¹¹⁸ conceived primitively, or else in some manner closer to Leibniz’ law as discussed by Curtis and Noonan.¹¹⁹ My attribution to naturalists of an identity theory of normativity and nature is also intended as neutral with regard to Schroeder’s claim that reduction need not entail property identity but only property analysis.¹²⁰ Even if this is right, at the most general metaphysical level, the reductivist must nonetheless maintain that normative properties have no distinct existence above and beyond natural ones – if she did not, she would be accepting RMR. Naturalism, in virtue of its denial of the *sui generis* character of normativity, must embed the normative *as such* firmly in the natural *as such*. *Specific* normative properties may therefore be non-identical with their *specific* necessary and sufficient natural conditions; but, on a naturalistic view, such properties are thereby themselves natural, metaphysically speaking. This naturalist commitment to identity need not be reductivist: even Cornell-style projects maintain it, in the general sense in which I have described. To accept a supervenience relation but *deny* identity is to accept RMR or non-metaphysical realism – it is to no longer be naturalist.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Bader, “The Grounding Problem.”

¹¹⁹ Ben Curtis and Harold Noonan, “Identity,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/identity/>.

¹²⁰ Schroeder, “Realism and Reduction.”

¹²¹ If the identity claim is deemed problematic, the *sui generis* claim can instead be phrased in terms of normativity *being something over and above nature*. This seems largely terminological to me, so I go between the two formulations for ease of presentation.

1. 3. 3. RELATED COMMITMENTS

Besides the core commitments to the factual and robust character of normativity, robust metanormative realism (RMR) is often associated with other commitments I consider here. In *1. 3. 3. 1.*, I consider the importance of the notions of realism and objectivity to RMR, arguing for largely sidelining these in favour of the notions of factualism and response-independence, which I take to play a more central role in the case for RMR. In *1. 3. 3. 2.*, I consider the connection between RMR and moral normativity in particular, arguing that any successful arguments for RMR will apply also to morality. Finally, in *1. 3. 3. 3.*, I consider further, more peripheral commitments often associated with RMR.

1. 3. 3. 1. REALISM AND OBJECTIVITY

My description of robust metanormative realism (RMR) has not thus far focused very heavily on the term ‘realism’. Rather than dividing the metanormative landscape along realist/anti-realist lines, I have opted to present it in alignment with the argument for RMR as I present it here, with three broad groups: those denying the existence of normative facts (error theory and some non-cognitivism); those denying the virtues of a positive metaphysical account of those facts as *sui generis* (naturalisms and non-metaphysical realisms); and then RMR, with its metaphysics of *sui generis* normativity. I do not necessarily advance this as the single best way to carve up the field for a treatment neutral between the different theories; rather, I intend it as the most helpful way of considering the motivations and the case for RMR.

On this map, the realism/anti-realism distinction has taken a back seat. After all, within the broad camp of non-robust factualisms, as I have defined it, we find clearly realist theories,¹²² clearly anti-realist theories,¹²³ and those positioned somewhere more ambiguous.¹²⁴

Relatedly, I have not focused particularly closely on the notion of *objectivity*, either. I understand objectivity as related in an important way to the response-independence, discussed above; but my argument in this thesis does not require that we commit to any particular way of characterising this relation – and any such characterisation is likely to be controversial.¹²⁵ In the literature, views that do not advance an altogether response-independent view of normativity are sometimes described as

¹²² See: Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth;” Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*; Lenman and Lutz, “Moral Naturalism;” Miller, *An Introduction*, 138-242; Parfit, *On What Matters*; Railton, “Moral Realism;” Railton, “Naturalism and Prescriptivity;” Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*; Schroeder, “Realism and Reduction.”

¹²³ Blackburn, *Essays*; Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*; Gibbard, *Meaning and Normativity*; van Roojen, “Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism.” See also: Joyce, “Moral Anti-Realism.”

¹²⁴ Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism;” Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*; Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*; O’Neill, “The Presidential Address;” O’Neill, “Constructivism;” Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism;” Rawls, *Theory of Justice*; Rosati, “Agents and “Shmagents;” Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori*; Smith, “A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;” Smith, “The Magic of Constitutivism;” Smith, “Constitutivism;” Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, “Précis;” Velleman, “Replies.”

¹²⁵ Enoch, “How Objectivity Matters;” Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 16-41.

objectivist.¹²⁶ And indeed Pettit argues that response-dependence does not compromise objectivity;¹²⁷ while Schroeder argues that expressivism is not ultimately subjectivist.¹²⁸ To add to this complication, in Enoch's discussions of objectivity, he does not define the term clearly in relation to the notion of response-independence,¹²⁹ describing 'objectivity' as 'notoriously ambiguous'.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ I have constitutivism in mind specifically here: Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism;" Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*; Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori*; Smith, "A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;" Smith, "The Magic of Constitutivism;" Smith, "Constitutivism;" Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, "Précis;" Velleman, "Replies."

¹²⁷ Philip Pettit, "Realism and Response-Dependence," *Mind* 100, no. 4 (1991), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2255012>.

¹²⁸ Mark Schroeder, "Does Expressivism Have Subjectivist Consequences?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 28, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12048>. I suspect Schroeder is wrong about this, and I concur with Suikannen: Jussi Suikannen, "The Subjectivist Consequences of Expressivism," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0114.2009.01345.x>. Accordingly, for my purposes here, I treat factualist expressivisms (like quasi-realism, the primary focus of Suikannen's and Schroeder's arguments) as response-dependence naturalisms. However, nothing pressing here rides on how precisely we understand expressivism. The argument against such views in *Chapter Three* assumes only that they deny the existence of metaphysically *sui generis* normative facts. The precise manner in which they deny this is not ultimately relevant to my arguments. Even if they turn out to maintain some form of response-independence, so long as they do not turn out to be variants of RMR, they will nonetheless be targeted by the arguments to follow. Note also that Schroeder's argument is focused largely on expressivist understandings of moral *language*; but normative language is a secondary focus for Enoch, and therefore for myself – what is crucial here is just whether the *metaphysics* accompanying an expressivism are robust or not.

¹²⁹ Enoch, "How Objectivity Matters;" Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 16-41.

¹³⁰ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 40.

The question of metanormative objectivity might be understood in terms of the specific agent(s) of whose responses the relevant normative truth is supposed to be independent. Constitutivists, say, tend to maintain that normative truth is objective in the sense of being independent of any *particular* agent's responses, focusing instead on the responses constitutive of agency *as such*, and purporting to secure much of the bounty sought by realists maintaining absolute response-independence: the impartiality of normative (especially moral) judgements; their categoricity; and a plausible account of normative error.¹³¹ Other response-dependence theories also maintain that normative truths are independent of any particular agent's *non-ideal* responses.¹³² Accordingly, although the response-dependent/response-independent distinction is binary (agential responses either determine the truth conditions of a judgement/statement or they do not), it may well nonetheless be natural to describe metanormative theories as *more* or *less* objectivist, according to the agents whose responses are in question. I have therefore largely avoided the term 'objective', focusing on the less ambiguous notion of response-independence, so as to avoid needless controversy. I do not think any of the arguments for RMR will be impacted by this.

All of this leads to a divergence between my Enoch's presentation of his case for RMR and mine. To begin with, in *Taking Morality Seriously*, where Enoch offers his most comprehensive case for RMR, Enoch is focused largely on *morality* specifically, rather than normativity more generally – though this is dispensable to many of his arguments. Within what Cuneo describes as the positive phase of the book: first, Enoch argues for the objectivity of morality; second, he makes his argument from deliberative

¹³¹ Shafer-Landau, "The Constructivist Challenge," 39-41

¹³² See: Enoch, "Why Idealize?"; Enoch, "Idealizing;" Miller, *An Introduction*, 128-137; Sobel, "Subjectivism and Idealization;" Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Smith, "In Defense of "The Moral Problem";" Williams, *Moral Luck*.

indispensability for the existence of normative facts,¹³³ alongside arguments to the effect that these normative facts should be considered as *sui generis*; then, he argues that, once we accept *metaethical objectivism* and *robust metanormative realism*, we should accept *robust metaethical realism*.¹³⁴ The later chapters return to the question of whether we should consider normativity as *sui generis*, and focus on defending RMR from attacks. Accompanying this, in a number of papers, Enoch offers more detailed objections to alternative metanormative theories.

I have diverged from this in separating Enoch's indispensability argument from his claims to the effect that the entities indispensable to deliberation are *sui generis*, thereby immediately nullifying a number of objections to the argument,¹³⁵ and presenting a more resilient version of the argument in *Chapter Two* of this thesis. I have then tried to complement his various arguments against other metanormative theories with the Euthyphronic argument in *Chapter Three*. But the notions of objectivity and realism are not prevalent in this.

¹³³ The use of 'facts' is largely mine here, but it does not present any substantive divergence from Enoch's focus being primarily on 'truths'.

¹³⁴ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 85-99.

¹³⁵ Björnsson and Olinder, *Review*, 107; Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability," 3249; Lenman, "Deliberation, Schmeliberation," 838; Wedgwood, *Review*, 391-392; Worsnip, "Explanatory Indispensability."

1. 3. 3. 2. MORAL REALISM

Perhaps more noticeably, I omit serious consideration of morality here, and of Enoch's argument for metaethical objectivity,¹³⁶ which he later complements with his other arguments to arrive at robust metaethical realism.¹³⁷ This is because I take robust metanormative realism (RMR) to most likely entail a correspondingly robust metaethical (or meta-moral or, simply, moral) realism. If I am right about this, Enoch's argument for metaethical objectivity will thereby likely be redundant in the case for RMR and, indeed, in the case for robust metaethical realism, too. If the factual and robust stages of the case for the existence of *sui generis* normative facts is successful, it should already make the case for the existence of *sui generis* moral facts, provided we end up with reasons to think that some of our first-order normative facts are moral.

I have been explicit that I take the motivations for RMR to come from everyday normative discourse which, of course, is often about specifically moral normativity. Accordingly, it seems important that the arguments in this thesis have some important bearing upon considerations of morality. I hope here to explain why I take this to be likely the case.

Start with an uncontroversial claim: that moral reasons are a subset of normative reasons. If this does not initially appear as uncontroversial as I suggest, consider again the broad definition of 'normative' Enoch uses – which I have adopted – encompassing everything 'on the ought side of the is-ought distinction, the value side of the fact-value distinction, and the analogous side of analogous

¹³⁶ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 16-49.

¹³⁷ By 'ethical', in 'metaethical', I read Enoch as focusing on, broadly speaking, the moral – Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 16-49 – as opposed to the broader sense of 'ethical' deployed in: McPherson and Plunkett, "The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics."

distinctions.¹³⁸ In other words, if we are considering normativity in terms of what should be – what is good, right, better, and so on – as opposed to what merely is or could be, then we seem to already have morality in our sights. Accordingly, it looks as if anything we can say about normativity should apply to morality too (provided there are any moral reasons). Enoch seems to concur with this:

[...] I include what some others call the evaluative as part of the normative. In this sense of “normative”, then, it is pretty uncontroversial that moral truths are normative truths. By this I do not mean to say that their content is *exhausted* by the normative part of their content – perhaps, for instance, some moral concepts include both descriptive or empirical and normative components (thick concepts are the obvious thing that comes to mind here) [...] My point here is much less interesting: if we are roughly to divide all truths into normative (in this loose sense) and non-normative ones, clearly the moral ones are going to be there with the former.¹³⁹

However, he points to some reasons that it may nonetheless be problematic to take RMR to entail robust metaethical realism. He considers that general concerns regarding ontological parsimony might permit normative, but not moral, truths.¹⁴⁰ In the above passage, he describes morality as normative without committing to the content of moral truths being *exhausted* by their normative content, which he takes to leave room for thinking of the metaphysics of moral reasons as more demanding than that of normative reasons in general.

Of course, if the content of moral reasons *is* exhausted by their normative content, then there will be no space for this suggestion. If, for instance, we see moral reasons as nothing more than normative reasons

¹³⁸ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 1.

¹³⁹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 85.

¹⁴⁰ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 91.

with a specific range of objects, or a specific range of contexts within which they apply,¹⁴¹ then concerns about their ontological commitments outrunning that of non-moral reasons will dissipate. At least, this would stop being a metanormative worry and become a first-order normative concern about whether any reasons have the objects and applicability we reserve for those we call moral.

But what if the content of morality is not exhaustively normative? In that case, it may be that yielding good arguments for RMR falls short of thoroughly accounting for morality. However, when we look closer at the thought that the content of moral truths might not necessarily be ‘exhausted by the normative part of their content’,¹⁴² it is unclear what it amounts to. We are operating here with a conception of normativity defined sufficiently loosely that it uncontroversially includes all the aspects of morality concerning what should be. If this does not exhaust the content of moral reasons, then it must be that moral truth is composed of both normative *and* natural content. But this poses no problem for the entailment of metaethical realism from RMR, as our metaphysical commitments to nature are not in question here. At least, any such problems are on hold while we consider realism about the normative. Generally, when we want to show that normative truths deserve entry to our ontology, we are holding as fixed the deservedness of natural truth. This is why Enoch makes, and I concur with, the following summary characterisation of RMR:

The crucial point is that, in whatever sense there are physical facts, there are normative ones; in whatever sense there are truths in biology, there are in normative discourse; in whatever sense there are mathematical properties, there are normative ones.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Or, as Wallace sees it, as a set of interpersonal directed obligations: Wallace, *The Moral Nexus*.

¹⁴² Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 85.

¹⁴³ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 5.

However we delineate the moral, commitment to it would not seem to be more ontologically demanding than our combined commitment to the existence of normative reasons and natural truths. The looseness of the present definition of ‘normative’ entitles us, as Enoch suggests, ‘to divide all truths into normative [...] and non-normative ones’¹⁴⁴ – and the non-normative ones are not ontologically problematic for present purposes.¹⁴⁵

Anyway, even if the commitment to the natural (or the commitment to some combination of the natural with the normative, which Enoch says we might find in moral truths) *were* problematic for the ontology of morality, this would then be a problem for normative truth *in general*. Most reasons concern nature, in some sense. Normative truths concern what should be: the ‘what’ is (often) natural; the ‘should’ is normative. If I am morally required to be compassionate, say, then the natural content of that requirement is the natural behaviour which satisfies it, while the normative content is the rightness of behaving thus.

So the thought that the content of morality extends beyond the normative seems unproblematic for the entailment from RMR to a correlatively robust metaethical view. Enoch considers that one might accept realism about normativity but resist a corresponding realism about morality due to worries about the epistemology of morality in particular; but he rightly points out that epistemological worries about moral

¹⁴⁴ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 85

¹⁴⁵ Note that I am going between ‘natural’ and ‘non-normative’ relatively liberally here. This could be precisified by using ‘*prima facie* non-normative’, as I do later. Here, though, nothing seems to hinge on this. In any case, I believe the argument in *Chapter Three* does commit me to a view of the non-normative being one and the same as the natural; and this is an acceptable consequence, I think – hence my earlier reference to the metaphysical dualism to which I take RMR to be committed.

reasons are going to stem from, and extend to, worries about normative reasons generally.¹⁴⁶ He makes a similar, and similarly convincing, claim regarding worries about the connection between motivation and morality, as opposed to normativity generally.¹⁴⁷

He also considers that one might be happy to accept realism about hypothetical reasons (those fundamentally agent-relative) but not categorical reasons (those agent-neutral or derived from agent-neutral reasons).¹⁴⁸ Assuming that morality is the categorical sphere of normativity, then, with non-moral reasons being hypothetical, one might accept realism about the normative without a corresponding realism about the moral.¹⁴⁹ However, it is clear neither that *all* moral requirements are categorical nor that *only* moral requirements are. Of course, to think about this with any rigour, we would need to clearly delineate the moral within the normative, which we cannot do here. Moreover, like Enoch, I do not see the distinction between morality and non-moral normativity to be of particular philosophical interest.¹⁵⁰ But, even if we grant that all and only moral reasons are necessarily categorical, the question is then whether categorical reasons are more ontologically demanding than agent-relative ones.

It is unclear that they are. Categorical reasons take a form like that of paradigmatic examples of purportedly moral principles: Kant's categorical imperative, Mill's utility principle, the Golden Rule of Christianity, the Ten Commandments, and so forth. The *thou* in 'Thou shalt not kill' is, of course, not

¹⁴⁶ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 89.

¹⁴⁷ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 90.

¹⁴⁸ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 93-99.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 86.

you or me – it is *one* – the commandment is addressed to all agents, irrespective of anything specific about them. On the other hand, a reason for some agent to brush her teeth, choose red wine over white, or visit a close friend, plausibly has as its content specific facts about the relevant agent.

But why think the latter kind of reason ontologically less demanding than the former? Recall, we are considering whether RMR entails robust metaethical realism; accordingly, we are supposing for the moment that there are *sui generis* normative reasons, and considering the metaethical question within that sphere of robust normativity. Why then think that *sui generis* hypothetical reasons are any less ontologically demanding than *sui generis* categorical reasons? The difference seems only to be that the former kind is more general and the latter more specific. This does not in itself constitute a reason to think that a realism about the categorical is more ontologically controversial than a correlative realism about the hypothetical. In fact, the natural thought for robust realists seems to me to be that the normative force of agent-relative reasons is *derivative* from the force of agent-neutral reasons:¹⁵¹ the reason *I* should brush *my* teeth is that, in general, agents should *ceteris paribus* act prudentially and, in this case, this general preferability will be exemplified by my teeth-brushing; I should choose red wine over white and visit my friend because doing such things will exemplify a general normative preferability for agents *ceteris paribus* to pursue pleasure and honour friendship.

¹⁵¹ In the case of morality, this may be in tension with the view of Wallace – Wallace, *The Moral Nexus* – who treats agent-relative interpersonally directed obligations largely independently of the question of whether or not they are necessarily underpinned by an agent-neutral substrate of normative truth. However, I concur with him that what explains the agent-relativity of certain interpersonal moral obligations is ‘simply their directed character’, as opposed to their being ‘grounded in patterns of historical interaction between individuals’ (p. 18). This characterisation is, I think, open to the agent-relative normativity being explained by the agent-neutral. Nothing further rides on this, however.

So, even if we grant that all and only moral reasons are agent-neutral, it looks as if robust metaethical realism is likely to end up entailed by RMR (provided some of the reasons established by our best first-order normative theory end up fitting our conception of a moral reason, which will depend on how we delineating the moral). So, the likely entailment I suggested from metanormative to metaethical realism, drawing on the liberality of the definition of ‘normative’, looks untroubled. However we delineate morality within normativity, we should expect to find that moral reasons are a simple sub-class of normative reasons generally – a sub-class of particular normative importance, perhaps, or one which concerns particular kinds of things which are of a particularly profound importance under a particularly broad range of conditions. Whether we can ultimately make any good arguments for the existence of reasons which meet these specifications is another matter; but this is a worry at the first-order normative level about whether there are in fact any reasons which live up to our conception of a moral reason. It is not a metanormative concern.

An adequate argument for RMR therefore looks likely to secure robust metaethical realism too. So Enoch’s argument for that conclusion looks likely to be redundant.¹⁵² Once we have RMR, the question of robust metaethical realism will depend entirely on how we delineate the moral; a distinct metanormative argument does not seem to be necessary. Enoch’s argument for robust metaethical realism may contribute to the overall case for the response-independence aspect of RMR’s *sui generis*

¹⁵² That said, Enoch’s argument here does adequately describe the *motivations* behind RMR, and metanormative realisms in general, I think.

commitment; but it is also plagued by other worries that lead one to doubt that it can be helpful in the overall case for RMR.¹⁵³

The argument for metaethical objectivity may, of course, serve a different function. If RMR is understood as an *existential*, rather than *universal* thesis – as Enoch understands it – then it is understood as the claim that *some* normative facts are *sui generis*, short of the claim that *all* of them are. Accordingly, an argument for the objectivity of morality may play an important role in securing morality's position amongst *sui generis* normativity.

However, I think Enoch is wrong to see RMR as existential, short of universal. To see why, consider again the two stages of the argument I have described: the indispensability argument in the factual stage; and the Euthyphronic argument in the robust stage. The former establishes that there are normative facts in virtue of their indispensability to deliberation; the latter establishes that those facts are *sui generis*. But note that the manner in which the robust stage is conducted – both by Enoch and in this thesis – involves largely *negative* claims to the effect that theories other than RMR cannot succeed in capturing the normativity indispensable to deliberation. Accordingly, both versions of the robust stage involve supporting the claim that *all* normative facts are *sui generis* as RMR describes. Recall, the 'normative' in 'robust metanormative realism', as I consider it here, refers to the sphere of *authoritative* normativity; so, the case for RMR consists in claiming that *all* – not just some – authoritative normativity is *sui generis*. There may be other ways of arguing for RMR, but the arguments I consider here necessitate a universal treatment of RMR.

¹⁵³ Björnsson and Olinder, *Review*, 104; Faraci, *Review*, 260, 264-265; Skarsaune, *Review*, 490; Wedgwood, *Review*, 390-391.

So, if morality is a sub-sphere of normativity, robust metaethical realism will follow from RMR, provided any of our normative reasons meet our specifications of a moral reason. Hence, I do not discuss Enoch's argument for specifically metaethical realism further. Nor shall I focus a great deal henceforth on other intranormative distinctions. What will be important, going forward, will be to show that there is some (authoritative) normativity, and that it is (all) robust.

1. 3. 3. 3. FURTHER COMMITMENTS

Robust metanormative realism (RMR), as I present it here, is composed of both conceptual and substantive theses. It is perhaps sensible to make this distinction clear at this point, as the relative importance of the conceptual differs in the two stages of the case for the view. The factual stage indispensability argument presented in *Chapter Two* will try to show that we are conceptually committed to authoritatively normative facts in (certain important instances of)¹⁵⁴ everyday deliberation; it will then seek to vindicate this commitment as enjoying a substantive counterpart. The robust stage Euthyphronic argument, on the other hand, will *not* argue that our everyday concept of normativity is a concept of *sui generis* normativity; rather its focus will be on showing that the best way for us, as metanormative theorists, to make sense of the existence of authoritative normative facts is to understand those facts as *sui generis*. The important claim emerging from this, for my purposes, is the substantive claim that there are *sui generis* normative facts.

¹⁵⁴ This qualification is mine, not Enoch's – I discuss this in *Chapter Two*.

Needless to say, in virtue of its factualism, RMR is also committed to a metanormative cognitivism – the view that normative statements are truth-apt.¹⁵⁵ And robust realists may also be committed to other important claims upon which I will not focus here. For instance, they are probably committed to semantic theses that the purpose of normative sentences is to represent normative truth,¹⁵⁶ and that the meaning of normative terms is to be understood in terms of their contribution to sentences in which they occur.¹⁵⁷ While I am happy to accept these – and while nothing to follow is in tension with them – language is not my primary focus. Despite the rich tradition of considering normativity through the lens of language, that is not the primary manner in which Enoch approaches the issue; given my focus on his work, it shall also not be mine.

Although my focus is the metanormative, the first-order normative will of course never be far out of view. Nonetheless, I try to maintain a relatively strict distinction between RMR as a metanormative theory, on the one hand and, on the other, views about which particular reasons we have.¹⁵⁸ This is in contrast to the view of, say, David Killoren, who argues that RMR also involves commitment to ‘moral optimism, [...] the view that our deepest moral beliefs are true, at least for the most part’.¹⁵⁹ Richard

¹⁵⁵ McPherson and Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” 11-12.

¹⁵⁶ Väyrynen, “Moral Realism,” 379.

¹⁵⁷ McPherson and Plunkett, “The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics,” 12. I adapt McPherson and Plunkett’s characterisation of descriptivism here to the general metanormative context, beyond the moral.

¹⁵⁸ Accordingly, my discussion of RMR takes no stance on, say, the question of supererogation. For discussion: David Heyd, “Supererogation,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/supererogation/>.

¹⁵⁹ Killoren, “Robust Moral Realism,” 226.

Boyd advances similar thoughts in his definition of moral realism;¹⁶⁰ and Russ Shafer-Landau also seems to maintain this, taking our existing normative beliefs as a legitimate constraint on our metanormative theorising.¹⁶¹ Now, leaving aside which of our normative beliefs are to be held in this elevated position to act as a constraint on our metanormative theorising, and what reason we have to embrace this methodology, it is unclear that this kind of optimism is entailed or even supported by the metaphysics of RMR. The bare commitment to there being *sui generis* normative facts tells us nothing of the commitments we must have regarding the content of those facts. Killoren acknowledges that this variety of moral optimism is not a ‘standard component’¹⁶² of RMR, but claims that ‘almost all non-nihilists accept it’.¹⁶³ Well, I am not a nihilist, but I do not accept it; nor do I see why other non-nihilists should. Even if RMR can be decisively supported, it may emerge that we have yet no way of reliably knowing which normative judgements are true and which are false. I suggest later that one of the more serious problems RMR faces is precisely along these lines; and the metanormative debate seems to me undisciplined if it helps itself to outcomes of normative epistemologies for which we do not have clear support. Furthermore, the arguments for RMR can be debated without this extraneous element. The metaphysical commitments of RMR are largely independent of any supposed epistemological pairing,¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Richard Boyd, “How To Be a Moral Realist,” in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, ed. Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 105.

¹⁶¹ Shafer-Landau, “The Constructivist Challenge,” 41-42.

¹⁶² Killoren, “Robust Moral Realism,” 227.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ On Enoch’s understanding, RMR is ‘prima facie neutral on the epistemology of the normative’: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, p. 4.

so Killoren's optimism seems misplaced. For the purposes of considering RMR, I suggest that we adopt an agnosticism with regard to our deepest held moral beliefs, such that consideration of the metanormative may be as little as possible burdened by presupposition.

That said, I do take it that robust realists are *probably* committed to *some* kind of optimism, though only in the form of a belief that *some* normative epistemology will ultimately provide a reliable means to knowledge of *some* reasons. Absent this, RMR would necessarily descend into an extreme pessimism where we can get things robustly wrong but cannot, even in principle, have any idea what or how. Although it is logically consistent to maintain this position, I suspect that very few robust realists do; so, I shall suppose that this is another (sort of) commitment at the core of RMR. However, insofar as we think of this (sort of) commitment as central, it operates only at the *metanormative* level, as the belief that some normative epistemology will ultimately provide reliable means to knowledge of reasons, *whatever they are*; it does not operate as a first-order normative commitment that the reasons *we currently posit* are going to turn out to be the real ones. The former (sort of) commitment may well play some important motivating role for RMR; the latter is extraneous to the project of vindicating RMR and, in advance of a reliable epistemology of robust reasons, is simply dogmatic.

Henceforth, then, when I talk about RMR, I refer only to a substantive metaphysical doctrine that there are *sui generis* normative facts – and, related to those facts, truths, properties, and so on. General worries about facts, truths, and properties, are not my present concern. Nor primarily are worries about normative or moral language. And, as much as is possible, confidence in any specific normative beliefs – especially heavyweight normative beliefs like, say, moral ones – will remain on hold.

Doubtless, there are pertinent issues which fall beyond the discussion thus framed. One of these is the *origin* of robust reasons. Taking normative stuff to exist in the same robust manner as natural stuff tempts the question: whence comes all the stuff? And *why* does normativity irreducibly supervene on nature? Wielenberg's answer to this is in terms of 'substantive, metaphysically necessary brute facts',

which ‘come from nowhere.’¹⁶⁵ This is far from a satisfying response, of course; but any more developed response to these questions falls beyond the strict limits of an argument in favour of RMR.

However, I think it not too controversial to suggest the following, to paint something of a picture of the present characterisation: the more general (authoritatively) normative facts are the more simple, while the more specific are the more complex. More complex normative reasons operating at higher-levels are functions of more basic reasons operating at lower levels – much like the laws of nature, or those of metaphysical necessity. Accordingly, just as natural laws concerning human beings are robust, and functions of more fundamental natural laws which predate humanity, so too are normative ‘laws’ which concern agents similarly robust and functions of more fundamental normative laws which predate agents. While I cannot consider the origin of this normative necessity here anymore than I can the origin of nomological or metaphysical necessity, for the sake of the argument for RMR, let us assume simply that *some* satisfactory answer can be given to these questions – at least, some answer about as satisfactory as the answer to similar questions surrounding other robust realities.

On this view, then, normativity is roughly analogous to nature: both metaphysically *sui generis*, and neither dependent upon the other. The world consists of normative stuff in a similar way as it consists of natural stuff. And the normative realm is autonomous – a law unto itself, as it were – in a similar way as is the natural. There is therefore no denying that RMR commits one, to use Mackie’s term, to truly queer entities.¹⁶⁶ What remains is to see whether this commitment is warranted.

¹⁶⁵ Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, p. 38.

¹⁶⁶ Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*, 38-42.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FACTUAL STAGE

I treat Enoch's case for robust metanormative realism (RMR) as consisting of a factual stage argument for the existence of normative facts, followed by a robust phase arguing for those facts as *sui generis*. In this chapter, I will consider the factual stage, Enoch's argument from deliberative indispensability.¹⁶⁷ In 2. 1., I present the indispensability argument roughly as it is advanced by Enoch, making some clarifications and drawing out certain features that I think are helpful in considering the argument. Enoch argues that we are indispensably committed to authoritatively normative facts when we deliberate, and that this commitment is vindicated by an epistemic principle that permits inference to the indispensables of rationally non-optional projects of which deliberation is but one example.

In 2. 2., I present the major problem with Enoch's indispensability argument: that it begs the question against the metanormative nonfactualist it is designed to pressure. This problem has, I argue, two distinct aspects: first, it advances its key epistemic principle as normative; second, it describes rational non-optionality in normative terms. I try to solve the first aspect by advancing the key epistemological principle as *rational*, rather than authoritatively normative. I then turn to the second, trickier aspect, considering and dismissing Enoch's Moorean-style response, drawing from a critique from Joyce.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ In full: 'The Argument from the Moral Implications of Objectivity (or Lack Thereof)': Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 16.

¹⁶⁸ Joyce, "Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously."

In 2. 3., I try to solve the second aspect of the major problem. I formalise the response from Enoch I deem inadequate; I then consider a response discussed and rejected by Enoch, much to the praise of Dan Baras,¹⁶⁹ which describes rational non-optionality in *pragmatic*, rather than normative, terms. I end by settling on a third response, which describes rational non-optionality in *rational*, rather than authoritatively normative, terms. I conclude that the resulting rationalistically-amended indispensability argument is sufficient to pressure the nonfactualist away from her nonfactualism.¹⁷⁰

2. 1. ENOCH'S

INDISPENSABILITY ARGUMENT

Enoch's indispensability argument extends a strategy pioneered relatively recently by Shafer-Landau.¹⁷¹ Rather than arguing directly for a lightweight metaphysical conception of normativity, or arguing from the nature of everyday normative discourse, Enoch instead argues for the existence of normative facts

¹⁶⁹ Baras, "The Explanatory Challenge."

¹⁷⁰ Note that I do in fact take rationality to be authoritatively normative, substantively speaking. The point is just that we must parenthesise this for the purpose of trying to engage the nonfactualist about authoritative normativity.

¹⁷¹ Russ Shafer-Landau, "Moral and Theological Realism: The Explanatory Argument," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1740468107083247>. Faraci attributes the resurgence of Moorean style non-naturalism principally to Shafer-Landau: Faraci, *Review*, 259. For summary of the background to Shafer-Landau's approach: Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability," 3237-3239.

in such a way as to leave this conclusion open to a number of distinct metaphysical conceptions.¹⁷² According to Behrends,¹⁷³ Enoch’s project is noteworthy in taking ‘more seriously than have many realists the need for positive arguments’, rather than being ‘content to treat realism as the default position, to be supported only by warding off objections’.¹⁷⁴ The indispensability argument exemplifies this. Drawing from indispensability arguments in the philosophy of mathematics,¹⁷⁵ Enoch directly confronts concerns about the ontological status of normative truth – concerns emerging from our worldview so heavily influenced by the natural sciences – purporting to earn the place of normativity within our ontology.

The canonical expression of the naturalistic concerns to which Enoch is responding is what I will call *Harman’s constraint*.¹⁷⁶ Gilbert Harman asks whether moral facts are indispensable to the explanation

¹⁷² It is not entirely clear to what extent Enoch views his argument in this way. The structure of the chapter in *Taking Morality Seriously* in which the argument is situated suggests that he sees the need to argue both *for* the existence of normative facts and then, separately, *against* competing metaphysical conceptions of those facts: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 50-84. But elsewhere he doesn’t seem to think of it like this: Enoch, “Indispensability Arguments.” So I make clear that have imposed this structure onto his project as the interpretation which makes it strongest.

¹⁷³ Behrends, *Review*.

¹⁷⁴ Behrends, *Review*, 146.

¹⁷⁵ For discussion of the connection between metanormative theory and the philosophy of mathematics, see: Justin Clarke-Doane, “Justification and Explanation in Mathematics and Morality,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics 10*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198738695.003.0004>; Justin Clarke-Doane, “The ethics-mathematics analogy,” *Philosophy Compass* 15, no. 1 (2020): e12641, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12641>.

¹⁷⁶ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 3-10.

of phenomena we witness in the same way as, say, electrons, and answers that they are not. Harman concludes that, for this reason, we ought not take moral facts to exist. Enoch summarises Harman's thought as follows:

The general thought seems clear enough: moral facts do not play an appropriate explanatory role [...], and, given that playing such a role is necessary for justified belief in the existence of a kind of fact (the Explanatory Requirement), we are not justified in believing in moral facts.¹⁷⁷

Note that, while Harman's focus is on the moral, Enoch treats his challenge to morality as a challenge to normativity in general, and responds accordingly, by seeking to secure a place for normative facts (beyond just moral ones) in our ontology. Note also that Enoch grants (as shall I) that a number of questions surrounding Harman's constraint can be satisfactorily answered:

Which possible explananda [...] count as shouldering the burden of the Explanatory Requirement? Only observations, as Harman himself seems to suggest? Why this restriction? Maybe explaining non-observational beliefs, or desires, or actions, or non-action sociological events, or more purely causal events suffices for satisfying the Explanatory Requirement [...]? Do *moral* facts count as respectable explananda, such that if moral facts are required in order to explain other moral facts, moral [factualism] is vindicated? This seems like cheating, but can moral facts be declared less than respectable explananda without begging the question against the [factualist]? What assumptions about the individuation of kinds of fact is it reasonable to read into the Explanatory Requirement? What kind of explanatory role must be played by a kind of fact in order to satisfy the Explanatory Requirement? [...] These are some of the questions in need of answers if Harman's challenge is to become a complete threat to Robust Realism.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 51.

¹⁷⁸ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 51-52. Note that I have changed reference to *realism* and *realists* to reference to *factualism* and *factualists*, for two reasons. Firstly, this is the more pressing focus both of my argument here but also of

Enoch grants that a defender of Harman's constraint can answer all these questions in order to mount an attack on metanormative factualism. I think Enoch is right to assume this, and not leave factualism hostage to the fortunes of attempts to undermine Harman's thought. The concern behind Harman's constraint seems to me relatively simple: that, if the rules of admission into our ontology become loose enough to allow in normativity, they become too loose to do the important work of barring the supernatural entities which have been so tirelessly forced out the gate – deities, for instance, or witches.

Harman's constraint says that that we should admit into our ontology only that which is indispensable to the best explanation of observable phenomena. Enoch confronts this directly, trying to show that the philosophical considerations underlying this principle remain satisfied with additional conditions of admission into our ontology. He considers what underpins Harman's constraint, and takes the underlying motivation to be a more basic parsimony requirement, that we should not multiply ontological commitments without sufficient reason.¹⁷⁹ Harman's expression of this more fundamental motivation is insistence that the *only* sufficient reason to admit entities to our ontology is their explanatory

Enoch's response to Harman. Secondly, while Enoch is right to characterise Harman's challenge as a threat to realism, it is also a threat to factualism more broadly (provided we interpret it in such a way as to make sense of Enoch's response to it); so, if it were true that 'moral [or normative] facts count as respectable explananda' with regard to the Explanatory Requirement, in the way that observations do, and that 'moral [or normative] facts are required in order to explain other moral [or normative] facts', this would vindicate only a moral (or metanormative) factualism, not a realism (if we understand realism, relatively naturally, to involve some commitment to objectivity). This is all simply to say that Harman's thought may be taken as a challenge to the existence of *objective* normative facts or to the existence of normative facts *simpliciter*, and the version of the challenge to which Enoch responds is largely the latter.

¹⁷⁹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 53-54.

indispensability; but Enoch claims that this deeper motivation can be realised by more than just explanatory indispensability.¹⁸⁰

Enoch suggests what I will call the *general indispensability* principle: we are justified in believing something exists if that belief is indispensable to a rationally non-optional project.¹⁸¹ General indispensability supposedly explains Harman's constraint: explanation is rationally non-optional, so we are justified in believing in those things which are indispensable to explanation. This permits belief in electrons, for instance, but not deities. For, while *reference* to deities may be indispensable to the explanation of certain religious practices, *belief* in them is not, whereas belief in electrons is necessary to explanation; and while belief in deities may be indispensable to certain religious practices, those practices are not themselves understood as rationally non-optional.¹⁸²

Accepting general indispensability involves accepting that belief can be supported by more than evidential considerations – if we understand 'evidence' to be the sort of thing to which Harman points in his constraint. The general indispensability principle suggests a widening of the scope of considerations in virtue of which we can take a belief to be true. Taking a belief to be true, on Enoch's view, looks to be taking it to be supported by considerations of indispensability. Some such

¹⁸⁰ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 53-68.

¹⁸¹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 54-68.

¹⁸² Baras challenges this, and argues that Enoch's indispensability principle lets in theism just as much as metanormative factualism: Baras, "The Explanatory Challenge." Given that I eventually swap out Enoch's version of the indispensability principle for a different one, I do not consider this here. I also do not think that Baras' claim applies to my amended indispensability argument in 2.3.3.

considerations will be evidential, but not all. What binds evidential considerations to the supposition of truth is, on this view, just the significance of evidence for indispensability.¹⁸³

In effect, then, Enoch argues that Harman's constraint is superseded by general indispensability. If we then think that explanation is a rationally non-optional project, we are permitted to infer to the explanatorily indispensable as we were with Harman's constraint. But Enoch's point seems to be that it is *arbitrary* to limit the practices to whose indispensable commitments we are permitted to infer solely to explanation – what explains the importance of explanatory indispensability is general indispensability – and so we are justified in inferring to the indispensable commitments of *any* rationally non-optional project.

Enoch takes deliberation to be one such project; and he takes belief in (authoritatively)¹⁸⁴ normative facts to be indispensable to it. Deliberation involves a commitment to the possibility of getting it *right*.¹⁸⁵ When we engage in deliberation, as opposed to mere picking, says Enoch, we are committed to the existence of external standards of rightness which constrain our choices; and Enoch argues that these

¹⁸³ Evans and Shah argue that we can have agency over our beliefs – that we can bring ourselves to believe certain things – but *only* on the basis of evidential considerations. They explain this by what they call '[t]he Norm of Truth: Believing that p is correct if and only if it is true that p and incorrect if it is untrue that p.' Because the norm of truth is written into the concept of a belief, they argue, to take oneself to meet it in a given belief is to hold that belief: Evans and Shah, "Mental Agency," 81. General indispensability does not threaten this, but it may suggest that more than evidential considerations (at least those in which Harman seems to be interested) should determine whether we take a belief to be true.

¹⁸⁴ The focus on authoritative normativity is not explicit in Enoch's writing, but he was kind enough to confirm with me that it is indeed implicit.

¹⁸⁵ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 73.

standards must be none other than normative facts.¹⁸⁶ Belief in normative facts is indispensable to the rationally non-optional project of deliberation; thus, according to general indispensability, belief in normative truth is justified.

Enoch's discussion of Harman answers a question posed about Harman by Wright.¹⁸⁷ Harman argues that moral facts do not play any role in the best explanation of moral beliefs; then, according to his constraint, we should not permit moral facts into our ontology. Wright, however, claims this to be the wrong focus:

Rather than ask: what is the best explanation of subjects' holding the relevant [moral] beliefs? – does it need to advert to the states of affairs conferring truth on them? – we should be asking : *what in general can the citation of such states of affairs help to explain?*¹⁸⁸

Enoch, in effect, answers this question in terms of deliberation. Harman may be right that the best explanation of our holding the normative beliefs that regulate our deliberation need not involve appeal to normative facts; but this is not to say that appeal to normative facts explains nothing. In the deliberative case, the citation of normative facts may explain how our deliberation is not erroneous when we deliberate and (at least implicitly) commit ourselves to (authoritatively) normative facts; the indispensability argument vindicates this commitment.

¹⁸⁶ Enoch tends to discuss these standards in terms of normative *truths*, but nothing substantive rides on this that I can see, given my minimal sense of 'fact'.

¹⁸⁷ Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 191-192.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Cuneo argues that Enoch's indispensability argument can be understood as a straightforward application of inference to the best explanation.¹⁸⁹ Accordingly, says Cuneo, Enoch makes his job harder than it needs to be, in presenting an alternative kind of indispensability – the deliberative besides the explanatory – in need of defence. I think Cuneo is wrong here. The best explanation of our deliberation would seem to be one that leaves normative facts entirely out of the picture, and simply explains certain natural processes – of the physical, chemical, biological, evolutionary, social, psychological, and associated varieties – because this explanation requires nothing besides the natural processes to which we are (I presume) already relatively unproblematically committed. Admittedly, such an explanation may not be altogether satisfactory; but plugging in a metanormative factualism does not seem as if it will help explain how physical matter comes together to create deliberating subjects. Accordingly, I think Enoch is right to insist upon an additional indispensability principle.

Furthermore, Cuneo seems to me to miss something by focusing on deliberative indispensability as an independent guide to ontology. I do not think that deliberative indispensability is defended by Enoch purely on its own terms as an *independent* epistemic principle; rather, I take Enoch to be accepting the motivations behind Harman's constraint, but then arguing that that principle is *incomplete* in its focusing arbitrarily on only one rationally non-optional project, explanation, to the exclusion of other such projects.¹⁹⁰ The result of refining Harman's constraint to make it less arbitrary, and therefore more complete, is the general indispensability principle, which vindicates both explanatory and deliberative indispensability. I will not feign certainty that Enoch sees the matter in precisely this way, but this looks to me to be the strongest characterisation of the indispensability argument: for *whatever* reason you

¹⁸⁹ Cuneo, *Review*, 1062-1064.

¹⁹⁰ Cline makes a similar error, I think: Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability."

accept explanatory indispensability, you ought to accept general indispensability; and, if you then accept that deliberation is rationally non-optional in the same way as explanation, you ought to accept deliberative indispensability. Accordingly, Cuneo's criticism of general indispensability, that it is too lax and that it permits intuitively implausible beliefs to be presumptively justified,¹⁹¹ seems to miss the point that the argument for the principle undercuts epistemic intuitions. If the argument is successful in putting deliberative and explanatory indispensability on all fours, the result is that one must accept both (and all their potentially strange results) or neither. Given that we are unlikely to relinquish explanatory indispensability, we then seem compelled to embrace the deliberative kind as well.

I return below to whether deliberation is really rationally non-optional in the same way as explanation. Before moving on, however, it is important to make explicit two assumptions upon which the indispensability argument depends. First, general indispensability states that we are permitted to infer to entities if belief in those entities is indispensable to rationally non-optional projects; so, the principle takes us, from a *belief* being indispensable, to an *entity* being legitimately posited.¹⁹² Second (and this is really just a different way of making the same point) general indispensability purportedly provides our belief in normative facts with *justification*; but it then also purportedly gives us reason to take the justification of this belief to indicate its *truth*.¹⁹³ There is no extra step in Enoch's presentation of the

¹⁹¹ Cuneo, *Review*, 1063-1064

¹⁹² Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 78.

¹⁹³ It is unclear to me whether or not Enoch takes the indispensable commitments of deliberation to include a commitment to *superassertible* normative truths. This would, I think, nonetheless leave the resulting conception of truth neutral across a variety of glosses, from those of quasi-realisms and response-dependence naturalisms all the way to that of RMR. In the discussion of the indispensability argument to follow, this is not pressing. But it nonetheless seems to me that that, in taking some belief about authoritative normativity to be true and using that belief to regulate deliberation, we are committed to that

argument walking us from justified belief in normative facts to those beliefs being true; rather, the notion of justification at work makes this extra step unnecessary. If these assumptions seem problematic, think back to Harman's constraint, and remember that inference to the best explanation justifies belief in electrons in just the same way: belief in electrons is indispensable to explanation, and this supposedly legitimises our positing them; and the justification for belief in electrons is taken to indicate the truth of that belief. There may well be other important steps that need to be justified in all this, but Enoch's point is primarily the *analogy* between inference to the best explanation and general indispensability: if you are happy to accept the former, you should be happy to accept the latter; if you are not happy to accept the latter, the burden is on you to show some relevant disanalogy.

For Enoch, the indispensability of normative belief to deliberation consists in its being part of what makes deliberation worthwhile.¹⁹⁴ We might be able to do something which looks like deliberation without normative truth; but Enoch thinks we will not be able to engage in deliberation for the same reasons we initially turned to the practice – just as we might be able to engage in something which looks like explanation without electrons, for instance, where this absence undermines the attractiveness of the explanatory project. Accordingly, for the same reason that we are justified in believing in electrons, we are justified in believing in normative truths.¹⁹⁵ Enoch's challenge to those who accept the existence of electrons due to their indispensability to explanation (most of us) is to identify some important difference

belief being superassertible. The notion of superassertibility features throughout Wright's discussion of what I have described here as factualism: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*.

¹⁹⁴ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 67-70.

¹⁹⁵ Enoch surveys objections to this (some but not all of which I touch on below): Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 75-79.

between explanatory and deliberative indispensability. If they cannot, he says, then they are just as compelled to welcome normative truth into their ontology as they are to welcome electrons.¹⁹⁶

Below, I consider some potential disanalogies below between explanatory and general indispensability. For now, though, note that Enoch's innovation is the turning of parsimonious concerns about normativity on their head: if you are initially tempted by Harman's constraint, you should accept general indispensability; but if you accept general indispensability, you must accept deliberative, as well as explanatory, indispensability; then, because of the deliberative indispensability of normativity, you must accept normative facts into your ontology.

Before moving on to what I take to be the major problems with this argument, I wish to draw out one of its features that is not explicit in Enoch's presentation of it, or indeed in the surrounding literature: that the normative facts supposed as indispensable to deliberation are of the *authoritative* variety; in other words, in deliberation, we are committed to the existence of normative facts 'to which', as Enoch puts it, 'we owe our allegiance',¹⁹⁷ quite beyond merely formal¹⁹⁸ correctness standards. As I shall hope to show below, making this feature of the indispensability argument explicit is essential both to answering objections to it and to connecting it to the robust stage of the case for RMR.

¹⁹⁶ Enoch draws from indispensability arguments in the philosophy of mathematics: Enoch, "Indispensability Arguments;" Hartry Field, *Science Without Numbers* (Oxford University Press, 2016). For a recent example of a mathematical indispensability argument in action: Charlie Wood, "Imaginary Numbers May Be Essential for Describing Reality," *Quanta Magazine*, March 11, 2021, https://www.quantamagazine.org/imaginary-numbers-may-be-essential-for-describing-reality-20210303/?utm_source=pocket-newtab-global-en-GB.

¹⁹⁷ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 125.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

I suggest that we grant Enoch some version of the general indispensability principle – though how precisely we are to understand it will be the main subject of this chapter – alongside his assumptions surrounding belief, existence, truth, and justification. I also suggest that we grant (for the time being, with an eye to reconsidering below) both that deliberation is rationally non-optional and that normative belief is indispensable to it. Enoch’s indispensability argument therefore looks like this:

- 1) We have reason to infer to the indispensable commitments of rationally non-optional projects;
 - 2) Deliberation is rationally non-optional;
 - 3) Commitment to the existence of normative facts is deliberatively indispensable;
- C: We have reason to commit to the existence of normative facts.**

This should make clear why I have divided Enoch’s case for RMR into distinct stages. The indispensability argument concerns only our (perhaps implicit) deliberative commitment to (authoritatively) normative facts. Much more would be needed to show that we have any such implicit commitment to *sui generis* normative facts. Accordingly, criticisms of the indispensability argument that it fails to establish robust normative truths as indispensable to deliberation – such as are made by Björnsson and Olinder,¹⁹⁹ Lenman,²⁰⁰ Wedgwood,²⁰¹ Worsnip,²⁰² and as hinted at by Cline²⁰³ – miss

¹⁹⁹ Björnsson and Olinder, *Review*, 107.

²⁰⁰ Lenman, “Deliberation, Schmeliberation,” 838.

²⁰¹ Wedgwood, *Review*, 391-392.

²⁰² Worsnip, “Explanatory Indispensability.”

²⁰³ Cline, “Against deliberative indispensability,” 3249.

their mark. The robust stage is required to take us to RMR from the conclusion of the indispensability argument, provided that argument can be defended.

Note that the indispensability argument seems to run counter to J. L. Mackie's claims regarding the mutual neutrality of metaethics and first-order ethics.²⁰⁴ This is most clear if we adapt Mackie's claim to the more general normative context and understand it as the claim that metanormative theory and first-order theory are entirely independent – that there are no entailments from one to the other. For, if the indispensability argument is right, one cannot engage in first-order normative deliberation *at all* without implicitly endorsing some form of metanormative factualism. Enoch considers the issue of neutrality in the context of his argument for metaethical objectivity, and claims that it shows that independently plausible first-order moral principles have metaethically objectivist entailments.²⁰⁵ It should be clear that the indispensability argument has similar entailments, not from first-order normative *principles* to metaethical objectivism, but rather from the first-order normative *practice* of deliberation to metanormative factualism.

²⁰⁴ Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*, p. 16.

²⁰⁵ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 41-49.

2. 2. THE PROBLEM

I now wish to consider what I take to be the major problem with Enoch's indispensability argument: its begging the question against metanormative nonfactualisms in virtue of its conception of the general indispensability principle as an (authoritatively) normative fact. This problem has two aspects: first, the treatment of general indispensability itself as providing normative support for certain inferences; second, the treatment as normative of the rational non-optionality the principle concerns. In 2. 2. 1., I consider and try to solve the first aspect of the major problem, advancing a reinterpretation of general indispensability as providing rational, not authoritatively normative, support for its inferences. I draw a distinction between rationality as authoritatively normative and as formally normative; and I argue that, though we may have good reason to take rationality as authoritatively normative, we can parenthesise any such commitment to avoid begging the question against the nonfactualist. In 2. 2. 2., I consider the second aspect of the major problem and, in 2. 2. 3., Enoch's response, which I argue is insufficient.

2. 2. 1. THE FIRST ASPECT OF THE MAJOR PROBLEM

2. 2. 1. 1. EPISTEMIC NORMATIVITY

The major problem with Enoch's indispensability argument is that it begs the question against the metanormative nonfactualism it is designed to pressure. The first way it does this is in its advancing of the general indispensability principle, which invokes *epistemic normativity*.

Shafer-Landau takes Harman's constraint to be normative, telling us that we *should* not infer beyond the explanatorily indispensable.²⁰⁶ Now, if general indispensability is supposed to be motivated by the same considerations that motivate Harman's constraint, then, understanding the latter as normative, a natural understanding of the former is that it is also normative. So, to assert general indispensability as a normative principle would be to assert that there is at least one normative fact – that we have (authoritatively normative) reason to infer to the indispensables of rationally non-optional projects.²⁰⁷

This, of course, is already to be committed to metanormative factualism. If so, Enoch's reliance on general indispensability is problematic, for he is then asking the global metanormative nonfactualist to accept a normative fact in an argument for the existence of normative facts. The nonfactualist of course does not accept this, and so the argument is a simple non-starter. In terms of the summarised argument above, premise (1), in Enoch's view, states an authoritatively normative fact about what we have reason to do; but, given that the nonfactualist denies the possibility of any such facts, she cannot accept it. And we have not yet applied any rational pressure on her to do so.

Of course, it may be that Enoch's imagined interlocutor here is not a truly *global* metanormative nonfactualist. Perhaps she accepts some of what we might tentatively call *lightweight* normativity – the kind operative in epistemic, and maybe even other abstract philosophical, debates. This interlocutor is, say, happy to accept that we have reasons to *believe*; her objection is to the idea that we have reasons to *do* anything in particular. She objects to what we might call *heavyweight* normativity: reasons to engage politically, reasons to be honest, to love and help others, to be prudent, to be rational, and so on – she

²⁰⁶ Shafer-Landau, "Moral and Theological Realism."

²⁰⁷ I am grateful to Enoch for confirming in correspondence that he does see general indispensability as an (authoritatively) normative principle.

objects, in a word, to there being any reasons to do the sorts of things moral philosophers tend to talk about.

Against this interlocutor, Enoch's indispensability argument has serious force even if it makes use of a normative conception of general indispensability. Nothing obviously stops this less-than-globally metanormative nonfactualist from accepting Harman's constraint, and the parsimony concerns which underpin it, as normative, and then accepting general indispensability as assuaging those concerns. If she then accepts that deliberation is rationally non-optional, Enoch is capable of walking her from acceptance of the lightweight normativity involved in general indispensability to a more heavyweight kind, provided that the kind of normative beliefs requisite to regulate deliberation are of the heavyweight variety. And they are: when we deliberate, we tend to concern ourselves with the question of whether we will do the sorts of things moral philosophers tend to talk about – whether and how we will be political, whether we will be honest and loving, whether will be prudent and rational, and so on. So Enoch's indispensability argument still seems able to walk one from an *almost*-global metanormative nonfactualism to factualism.

Now, it may well be that most nonfactualists are in fact relevantly similar to the interlocutor I have described. It is, after all, troublesome to engage in metanormative debate without some at least implicit commitment to certain reasons to believe one theory over another.²⁰⁸ If Enoch's ambition is to persuade this group of interlocutors, then the argument as described – despite its deployment of general indispensability as a normative principle – is powerful. But this group of nonfactualists are not the primary intended targets of Enoch's indispensability argument:

²⁰⁸ Hence Streumer's contention that his global error theory is such that it cannot be believed, even by him: Streumer, *Unbelievable Errors*.

[...] it is important to note that the argument from deliberative indispensability is most directly an argument against global, metanormative error theory [...] if the indispensability argument [...] establishes anything at all, it establishes the falsehood of the most general metanormative error theory.²⁰⁹

If general indispensability is normative, then the indispensability argument cannot establish the falsehood of a truly global metanormative error theory. It therefore cannot do what it is supposed to, which is to establish the general falsehood of metanormative nonfactualism. No consistent defender of nonfactualism will be rationally moved to accept the truth of general indispensability as a normative principle, and so will not be rationally pressured to accept normative truth in virtue of its indispensability to deliberation as a rationally non-optional practice.

Making use of a normative general indispensability principle makes the indispensability argument redundant: either Enoch's interlocutor already accepts general indispensability as a normative principle, in which case she already accepts some form of metanormative factualism and the indispensability argument does nothing for her; or she does not, in which case it cannot get off the ground.

Even if a global metanormative nonfactualist makes *use* of general indispensability (conceived normatively) she may nonetheless resist accepting it as a normative *fact*. Consider, for example, what Brendan Cline, a global error theorist, has to say about Harman's constraint:

On October 31, people in the US can wind up with a bag full of candy if they pretend to be ghosts. Of course, it need not be the case that they pretend to be ghosts to try to get candy. Still, the costumes are useful tools in acquiring candies. Similarly, I suggest, if we conduct ourselves in accordance with certain doxastic principles, we can wind up with a head full of truths. This could be the case even if there were no (normative) epistemic reasons [...]. So, I do not think there is anything self-defeating in

²⁰⁹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 81.

embracing (something in the vicinity of) [Harman's constraint] and using it to cast doubt on normative facts [...]. Like a carefully crafted ghost outfit, [Harman's constraint] can be a frightfully effective tool to fill up on the treats one seeks.²¹⁰

Against someone holding a view like Cline's, a version of the indispensability argument using a normative general indispensability principle will run aground. Even if all parties to the debate conceive of general indispensability as normative, and even if we can rationally pressure our metanormatively nonfactualist interlocutor to make use of it, her use of it will be, at most, purely pragmatic, absent any serious normative commitment, and so she is unlikely to be moved from general indispensability, via deliberative considerations, to metanormative factualism.

However, I do not think that this problem is as pressing as it might appear. We can certainly think of Harman's constraint and general indispensability as normative principles, but it seems to me that there are other ways of understanding them. One way is the pragmatic approach described above by Cline: we simply *want* knowledge, and these epistemic principles are reliable tools for getting it. This conception of epistemology, however, as is clear in the passage from Cline, does not look as if it will help Enoch's indispensability argument. But there is a further way we can understand general indispensability: as *rational*. If the force of general indispensability was understood as rational, rather than (authoritatively) normative, and if we could distinguish between rationality and (authoritative) normativity sufficiently sharply to make general indispensability acceptable even to the global metanormative nonfactualist, then Enoch's indispensability argument may be capable of walking the anti-realist from the *rational* acceptance of general indispensability to acceptance of the *normative* facts that regulate her deliberation.

²¹⁰ Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability," 3251.

2. 2. 1. 2. RATIONALITY AND NORMATIVITY

I will address shortly the question of whether general indispensability can be presented as a rational principle, absent reference to (authoritative) normativity. For now, however, let us see that, for this presentation of general indispensability as rational to help the indispensability argument, it must be that the concepts of rationality and normativity are genuinely distinct. This may initially appear problematic as rationality and normativity are often treated as importantly – and perhaps necessarily – connected.²¹¹ We often describe the rational faculty as the faculty of *reason*, and vice versa; and we often describe the rational as the reasonable, and vice versa.²¹² ‘Rational’ and ‘reasonable’ even share an etymology in the Latin *ratiō*.²¹³ However, while the two may well be intimately connected, I maintain that the concepts

²¹¹ R. Jay. Wallace, “Practical Reason,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/practical-reason/>. For attempts to secure a normative status for rationality: Susan Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 238-242; Benjamin Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Ralph Wedgwood, *The Value of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). And for a very small selection of examples of the far more widespread attempt to secure a rational status for normativity, perhaps the clearest example is that of constitutivism and the Kantian moral philosophy that inspires it: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998b); Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism;” Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*; Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori*; Smith, “A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;” Smith, “The Magic of Constitutivism;” Smith, “Constitutivism;” Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, “Précis;” Velleman, “Replies.” See also Smith’s earlier, less obviously constitutivist work: Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

²¹² Scanlon, of course, does not: Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism.” For discussion: Margaret Moore, “On Reasonableness,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (1996), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24354300>.

²¹³ ‘classical Latin *ratiō* act of reckoning, calculation, proportion, relation, act or process of reasoning, explanation, reason, descriptive account, faculty of reason, guiding principle, consideration, manner, method’ – “ratio, n.” OED Online, September 2022, Oxford University Press, accessed October 20, 2022,

of rationality and normativity are *prima facie* distinct, even if their extensions overlap. While paradigmatic normative concepts are those considered thus far here – rightness, goodness, betterness, value, reason, and so on²¹⁴ – paradigmatic rational concepts are, for instance, those of logic and inference. We may think that it is right or good or reasonable to apply logic and to make rational inferences; but I suggest that this is a substantive claim, not a conceptual one.²¹⁵

Recall that the normativity relevant here – that which robust metanormative realism (RMR) is robustly realist *about* – is authoritative normativity. Accordingly, I do not wish here to deny that rationality is normative in the *formal* sense of involving standards which one may or may not meet. I do not even wish to deny that rationality is, as a *substantive* matter, authoritatively normative – we may well have authoritative reason to be rational, and it may well be rational to be reasonable – all we require here is

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158484?rskey=iOatWa&result=1&isAdvanced=false>. ‘Reasonable’, from *ratio* through the Latin ‘*ratiōnābilis*’: “reasonable, adj., n., and adv.” OED Online, September 2022, Oxford University Press, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/159072?redirectedFrom=reasonable>. And ‘rational’ through the Latin ‘*ratiōnālis*’: “rational, adj. and adv.” OED Online, September 2022, Oxford University Press, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158502?rskey=GIX3sr&result=3&isAdvanced=false>.

²¹⁴ Recall that I am using a sense of ‘normative’ that spans the prescriptive and the evaluative, in accordance with Enoch’s use of the term: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 1.

²¹⁵ I therefore disagree with Smith’s list of the paradigmatic normative concepts as ‘truth, meaning, support, entailment, desirability, and so on’, where I understand Smith to refer to ‘support’ with *inferential* support in mind: Michael Smith, “Internal Reasons,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55, no. 1 (1995): 120, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2108311>. Other than ‘desirability’, these all seem like perfect candidates for paradigmatic concepts of *rationality*, not normativity. Smith’s project of securing a rational status for normative reasons seems to me to suffer due to this lack of a clear initial *conceptual* distinction between normativity and the rationality he wants to show *substantively* necessarily accompanies it. I would argue that this problem is evident throughout: Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

that the *concept* of the rational is *prima facie* distinct from the concept of the authoritatively normative. One may not be able to coherently ask whether rationality is normative in the formal sense, but one can coherently ask whether one has authoritative reason to be rational.²¹⁶

Susan Haack defends a view of rationality (specifically logic) as normative with regard to thought.²¹⁷ I do not wish to quarrel with that conclusion. The point is only that we can characterise this normativity in a manner neutral as to metanormative factualism/nonfactualism. This is because both positions can accommodate rationality as formally normative. If we are factualists, we can understand this formal normativity to be accompanied by authoritative normativity, too; but this is not essential to a conception of rationality in and of itself – even as a set of standards regulating thought. If this is so, and if an argument for metanormative factualism can thereby be formulated without normative premises, then the nonfactualist may be rationally pressured away from her position.

Rationality (logic, inference, and so on) and authoritative normativity (goodness, rightness, and so on) are not defined in such a way that the connection between them is *obvious*. Were we to define rationality and normativity in this way – were we to include the notion of what should be in our concept of a rational requirement, say, or the notion of rationality in our concept of a reason – we would impoverish any debate surrounding the relation between rational requirements and normative reasons. Securing the rational status of normativity is, I think, an important metanormative project; but without a clear distinction between rationality and normativity, how are we to make sense of the attempt to say that one

²¹⁶ John Broome, “Is Rationality Normative?” *Disputatio* 2, no. 23 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2007-0008>; Niko Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” *Mind* 114, no. 455 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzi509>.

²¹⁷ Haack, *Philosophy of Logics*, 238-242.

is accompanied by the other? Furthermore, philosophers such as Kolodny²¹⁸ and Broome²¹⁹ doubt that we necessarily have reason to be rational. Were we to deny this *prima facie* distinction, we would be committed to saying that such debates are conceptually confused.

It may be that, through rigorous conceptual analysis, it can be shown that there is indeed some conceptual connection between rationality and normativity. Benjamin Kiesewetter,²²⁰ for instance, responds to the view presented by Kolodny and Broome with a thorough defence of the view that we necessarily have reason to be rational, by presenting a conception of rationality as response to normative reasons. A conceptual distinction between rationality and normativity can accommodate this: I claim only that there is enough of a distinction to begin with, *pre-analytically*, to make any such findings interesting.

Let us now return to the problem at hand. We want to persuade the metanormative nonfactualist of general indispensability in order to walk her from general indispensability to metanormative factualism, via a focus on deliberation. To do this, we shall conceive of general indispensability as rational, not normative. But can we support general indispensability on purely rational grounds, such that we can

²¹⁸ Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” Note, however, that Kolodny is focused on ‘subjective rationality’ (p. 530-531), which pertains only to internal coherence, not response to evidence. It is a larger question to what extent Kolodny’s arguments would apply to the more ‘objective’ sort of rationality I invoke later on; but I mention him because his view should at least cast some *prima facie* doubt on any conceptual equivalence of rationality and normativity. Whether we have reason to be rational – in a more external, world-directed sense – then looks more like a serious question.

²¹⁹ Broome, “Is Rationality Normative?” Broome appears to be saying only that there is no *conceptual* connection (p. 267). On this, we agree; but some of what he says plausibly has substantive implications. At the very least, as with those of Kolodny, Broome’s arguments should show a clear initial conceptual distinction, and show that work is required to establish that we have substantive reason to be rational.

²²⁰ Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*.

pressure the nonfactualist to accept general indispensability while remaining nonfactualist? Nothing in our initial concepts of rationality and normativity seems to make this problematic. Furthermore, no substantive argument – that we necessarily have reason to be rational, or that it is necessarily rational to be reasonable – makes this problematic either; for any such argument presupposes what the indispensability argument purports to show, namely that there are normative facts, and so features at a later stage of the debate (given an acceptance of factualism) than this one (establishing factualism). What remains, then, is to consider whether general indispensability can be presented solely as rational, without invoking authoritative normativity.

However, before moving on, I shall address one objection to this strategy. Suppose we can persuade our metanormative nonfactualist to accept the premises of the indispensability argument on purely rational grounds, thereby walking her to a factualism about the normative – so what? Have we thereby shown that she *should* accept metanormative factualism? If we are to bracket a view of rationality as authoritatively normative for the purposes of the indispensability argument, and conceive of rationality in purely formally normative terms, then why should anyone care if we score highly in the game of rationality that no longer obviously commands our allegiance?²²¹

This objection rests, I think, on a misinterpretation of the current dialectical situation. I do not suggest that rationality is *not* authoritatively normative; rather, I claim that we can conceive of rationality without invoking authoritative normativity beyond the formal kind. Accordingly, from the perspective of the metanormative factualist – one who believes we necessarily have reason to be rational – walking the nonfactualist to factualism, the rational vindication of factualism will *also* be normative vindication, and the nonfactualist will have normative reason to abandon her nonfactualism. Here, we have

²²¹ I am grateful to Enoch for raising this objection.

everything we might want from a conclusion. From the perspective of the nonfactualist, however, there is no authoritatively normative vindication to be had anywhere, and so vindication in the merely formal game of rationality is all that is available. However, after having been persuaded of factualism on rational grounds, she may then be persuaded that there is reason to be rational and, at that point, may look back on the force of the indispensability argument and see that it was also authoritatively normative.

Needless to say, this is a caricature of the dialectic. I do not suggest that the indispensability argument is likely to decisively *persuade* any metanormative nonfactualists to abandon their nonfactualism; rather the point is to apply rational *pressure* on them to change their position – which is precisely what I argue Enoch’s version of the indispensability argument cannot do. The truly global metanormative nonfactualist, by definition, cannot accept general indispensability as a normative fact – and, if she does, she will use it only pragmatically *a la* the Cline passage above, without accepting its (authoritatively) normative force. But she must be motivated by *something* when she engages in argument. It is a platitude to suggest that argument is regulated by rational standards: if one accepts some form of metanormative factualism *and* that we have reason to be rational, these rational standards will be normative standards too, of course; but one might, perfectly coherently, not accept either or both of these positions. If that is so, then one is left only with rational standards, conceived non-authoritatively normatively, regulating argument. One can then be pressured *on rational grounds* to accept metanormative factualism – and one might subsequently be pressured to see those rational grounds as authoritatively normative. But, irrespective of that, an argument for metanormative factualism invoking rational pressure (authoritative normativity aside) can be perfectly adequate as an argument.

One advantage to this view of things is that we can offer an account of global metanormative nonfactualism even more charitable than is offered by some of its proponents. Cline, in his pragmatic

acceptance of Harman's constraint discussed above,²²² may have given more ground than was required. One can be a global metanormative nonfactualist without being a *metarational* nonfactualist; and it is only the latter position that is inconsistent with wholehearted acceptance of epistemic principles like Harman's constraint and general indispensability. Bart Streumer too, I think, gives more ground than he needs when he says that his global error theory is unbelievable even to him:²²³ if epistemology can be understood as a purely rational process, conceptually distinct from authoritative normativity, then one may well be able to believe the error theory as true (and decisively rationally supported) while nonetheless maintaining that there are no (authoritatively normative) reasons to believe it.

The most threatening, and therefore the most important, interlocutor for Enoch's indispensability argument is a non-self-defeating nonfactualist about normativity: one engaging in argument and belief on solely rational grounds while maintaining the non-existence of authoritative normativity. What has been said here should show that it is this interlocutor to whom the indispensability argument should be speaking.

²²² Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability," 3251.

²²³ Streumer, *Unbelievable Errors*. Streumer takes it to be possible to partially or weakly believe his error theory (pp. 152-154). I would go further to say that the view can be wholeheartedly believed, provided what has been said above regarding rationality, normativity, and epistemology can be maintained. I should note that Streumer does consider ways of characterising belief without normativity and does not see them as feasible; but I cannot discuss those here. If I am wrong on this front, then it is Streumer's position, not mine (or Enoch's), that is weakened.

2. 2. 1. 3. EPISTEMIC RATIONALITY

Here, then, is my suggestion for an understanding of general indispensability as a rational, besides an authoritatively normative, principle: rather than taking general indispensability to state that we have *reason* to infer to the indispensable commitments of rationally non-optional projects, we take it to state that we are *rational* to infer to those commitments. It is important to this rephrasing that we do not see ‘rational’ as necessarily ‘*decisively* rational’ – I take it that rationality, like reasonableness, can be decisive or merely presumptive – so we can maintain symmetry with a normative version of the principle that can accommodate defeasibility.²²⁴ We have, then, a rational version of general indispensability analogous to the normative version and, *mutatis mutandis*, a rational version of Harman’s constraint analogous to the normative version.

If we think that we necessarily have (authoritatively normative) reason to be rational, we will understand general indispensability as (authoritatively) normative, too: we will have reason to infer to the explanatorily indispensable *because* we are rational to do so. But, in targeting the global metanormative nonfactualist, we can bracket this. General indispensability as rational provides the indispensability argument with the beginnings of a non-question-begging route to factualism.

The question is then whether we can support general indispensability solely rationally, such that the metanormative nonfactualist can accept it and the indispensability argument can then pressure her towards factualism. In other words, can we offer a defence of general indispensability using only the concepts of rationality, without deploying normative concepts objectionable to the nonfactualist?

²²⁴ I do not take any stance here on whether Harman’s constraint needs to be, or can be, defeasible to function in the way it is intended. The argument here is neutral on this.

General indispensability is not obviously a *logical* truth; and, given that it is a standard for interpreting evidence, it is also not obviously in itself an *inference from* or *response to* that evidence. So is there another way of supporting general indispensability solely rationally?

My suggestion here is relatively simple: general indispensability permits inferences to the indispensable commitments of *rationaly* non-optional projects; if we are rational to engage in these projects, and if engagement in these projects involves these inferences, then it seems relatively uncontroversial to suggest that we are rational (at least presumptively) to make said inferences. Of course, a lot rides here on just what is meant by *rationaly non-optional*, and I consider this below. But it seems to me that, however we end up understanding rational non-optionality, that understanding will include a commitment to it being at least presumptively rational to engage in rationally non-optional projects.²²⁵ If this is right, then the rationality of inferences indispensable to such projects seems relatively unproblematic; for an inference being an indispensable feature of a rational project seems to make that inference at least as rational as the project in which it is embedded. In a word, I take it that rationality is (at least presumptively) *transitive*. If I am rational to eat cake, and if extending my arm towards the cake is an indispensable feature of my eating cake, I am correlatively rational to extend my arm. Similarly, if I am rational to explain, and if explanation requires that I believe in electrons, I am rational to believe thus.

²²⁵ Enoch's conception of rational non-optionality as normative, for instance, commits us to being rational (as well as reasonable) to engage in rationally non-optional projects – Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 50-84 – hence Enoch's phrasing of *rational* non-optionality. This rational connection is less obvious in the pragmatic version of rational non-optionality I consider in 2. 3. 2. (discussed in: Baras, "The Explanatory Challenge"), but it is certainly not ruled out. Most importantly, however, it is clearest in the conception of rational non-optionality upon which I eventually settle in 2. 3. 3., which commits us *only* to being rational to engage in rationally non-optional projects.

If so, we can amend Enoch's general indispensability principle to describe the permission to make the relevant inferences as rational, rather than as authoritatively normative: *it is rational to infer to the indispensables of rationally non-optional projects*. This amended general indispensability principle can take us to rational vindication for metanormative factualism provided we can show (i) that normative commitments are indispensable to deliberation and (ii) that deliberation itself is rational.

I consider (i) below; and (ii) is not in any desperate need of support. While one may adopt a conception of rationality solely in terms of internal coherence or immediate desire satisfaction, where projects like deliberation (as Enoch considers it) fall out of the notion; but this is merely terminological. Kieseewetter is right, I think, to say that, in considering rationality, we are 'concerned with rational requirements in the sense of standards that apply to us in virtue of being endowed with the rational faculty.'²²⁶ Deliberation is certainly part of the package of being a rational agent; indeed, just as I described it as a platitude to describe argument as regulated by rationality, so too does it seem a platitude to describe deliberation as rationally regulated. For Bernard Williams, ideal rationality involves correct deliberation,²²⁷ if so, and if we may understand actual rationality in light of ideal rationality, then part of what it is to be a rational agent is to deliberate. Provided we can support (i), we now appear to have a version of general indispensability, and the beginnings of an indispensability argument that does not beg the question against the metanormative nonfactualist.

²²⁶ Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 165.

²²⁷ Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in *Moral Luck*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981b), 104. I am making use here of Smith's interpretation of Williams as offering an account of ideal or full rationality: Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 151-161.

2. 2. 2. THE SECOND ASPECT OF THE MAJOR PROBLEM

Here is a summary of the now once-amended indispensability argument:

- 1*) It is rational to infer to the indispensable commitments of rationally non-optional projects;
- 2*) Deliberation is rationally non-optional;
- 3*) Commitment to the existence of normative facts is deliberatively indispensable;
- C*: It is rational to infer to the existence of normative facts.**

Granting the initial attractiveness of Harman's constraint, the move from Harman's constraint to general indispensability, and the phrasing of general indispensability in solely rational terms – all discussed above – (1*) looks stable. Most importantly, (1*) no longer appears to beg the question against the metanormative nonfactualist by appealing to (authoritative) reasons to infer. Let us grant premises (2*) and (3*) for now, as I consider them below.

The second aspect of the major problem, however, is what is meant in (1*) and (2*) by 'rationally non-optional'. The amended general indispensability principle states that it is rational to infer to the indispensable commitments of rationally non-optional projects. While I hope to have shown that the metanormative nonfactualist should accept this principle, we must still ask her to accept that any project is rationally non-optional; and the problem is that Enoch conceives of this non-optional *normatively*. In other words, he takes general indispensability to permit us to infer to the indispensable commitments of projects from which we *should not* disengage.²²⁸ To go from general indispensability to metanormative factualism we must assert that deliberation is one such project. But this clearly involves precisely the kind of normative judgement the nonfactualist cannot accept: that there is a normative fact

²²⁸ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 62.

that we should not disengage from deliberation – that we have (authoritatively normative) reason to deliberate.

The metanormative nonfactualist still cannot accept premises (1*) and (2*) of even the once-amended indispensability argument, provided rational non-optionality is understood normatively. Accordingly, we have still not rationally pressured her to abandon her nonfactualism. A further amendment is necessary. Before I propose a solution to this problem, in 2. 3., let us consider Enoch’s response.

2. 2. 3. ENOCH’S PROPOSED SOLUTION

Enoch is aware of the tension involved in deploying normative premises in the argument to support metanormative factualism. He tries to circumvent the problem by appealing to a ‘one person’s *modus ponens* is another’s *modus tollens*’²²⁹ kind of reasoning.²³⁰ He deploys a Moorean-style epistemological methodology, within which the assertion of some *Moorean fact* (in David Lewis’ terms, ‘one of those things that we know better than we know the premises of any philosophical argument to the contrary’)²³¹ is taken to go some (or perhaps all of the) way towards ruling out any conclusion which clashes with it.

²²⁹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 118.

²³⁰ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 115-122; Enoch, “Indispensability Arguments,” 251.

²³¹ David Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, no. 4 (1996): 549, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048409612347521>. I follow Joyce in describing Enoch as deploying Moorean facts: Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously.” But it is unclear whether Enoch himself views his methodology in this way. Nonetheless, this is largely terminological. However we describe Enoch’s methodology in this respect, he accepts that there is a problem to be addressed here.

In the case of the indispensability argument, the relevant Moorean fact would have to be that deliberation is rationally non-optional²³² (premise (2*) of the once-amended indispensability argument), where this non-optionalness is understood normatively in terms of deliberation being (authoritatively) normatively worthwhile.

Enoch deploys this defence against charges of question-begging levelled at both his argument for metaethical objectivism and his indispensability argument for metanormative factualism. Richard Joyce, who maintains a metaethical, not a global metanormative, error theory,²³³ takes issue with Enoch's response specifically with regard to the charge of question begging in Enoch's argument for metaethical objectivity,²³⁴ but what he has to say is relevant to the question-begging in the indispensability argument. Firstly, Joyce points out that there is something dubious about this method generally:

Many like this conservative way of thinking, but many do not. Since I am an error theorist – someone who ex hypothesi is willing to ascribe massive epistemic failure to common sense – it will come as no surprise that I side with the latter. Indeed, if permitted to speak with an unabashed ad hominem air, I would go as far as to say that Moorean epistemology is an affront to the admirably anti-dogmatic

²³² In correspondence, Enoch suggested that a better candidate for a Moorean fact here would be a first-order moral proposition; but I do not see how this could help. Certainly, in Enoch's argument for metaethical objectivity, moral conviction could play such a role. But here, invoking a moral conviction would seem to immediately bypass the deliberative considerations in the indispensability argument and thereby make it redundant. Accordingly, I treat him here as resting on the proposition that deliberation is normatively worthwhile.

²³³ Joyce, "Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously," 844.

²³⁴ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 16-49.

tradition of post-Cartesian Western philosophy; better to embrace radical skepticism than endorse such a shamefully missing-the-point methodology.²³⁵

Despite my finding little to like in Joyce's error theory, I am in accord with him in this respect. I cannot see what the function is supposed to be of an argument that presupposes the truth of the conclusion it purports to support. It is not only objectionable in its being dogmatic, as Joyce says; it is also fatal to the status of the argument in which it is asserted as capable of applying pressure to those who do not share in the conviction.

Enoch appeals to the reader's confidence that this kind of bootstrapping methodology is sometimes acceptable, and that we accept it in cases where we, say, form beliefs on the basis of perception 'without first having an independently justified belief in the reliability of perception'.²³⁶ But, as Joyce points out, this does little to help the indispensability argument here:

[...] from the fact that bootstrapping is *sometimes* legitimate we cannot just choose our favourite philosophical thesis, provide a bootstrapping argument, and declare "QED." Begging the question remains a serious fallacy to be avoided, even by Mooreans.

[...] What Enoch lacks is any criterion for distinguishing acceptable bootstrapping from objectionable question-begging.²³⁷

²³⁵ Joyce, "Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously," 847.

²³⁶ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 119.

²³⁷ Joyce, "Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously," 847-848.

Joyce makes a comparison to an argument for the existence of witches which has, as its first premise, ‘Wilma is a witch’²³⁸ and, as its second, ‘if Wilma is a witch, then witches exist’.²³⁹ Even if we accept that bootstrapping is legitimate *on occasion*, Enoch then needs to persuade us that the particular instance of bootstrapping upon which he depends is legitimate, unlike the example of Wilma.²⁴⁰ And of course his metanormatively nonfactualist has not been pressured to agree with him on this yet. In Joyce’s words: ‘these clashes don’t result from abuse’ of this style of argument, but rather ‘reveal the troubling relativism inherent in Moorean epistemology.’²⁴¹

But the important point here is this: if all of this is wrong, and if it is legitimate for Enoch to assume that deliberation is worthwhile as a normative fact, then the indispensability argument is redundant. If we are already in a position to legitimately posit normative facts, why bother with deliberative considerations?

²³⁸ Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously,” 848.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ As Joyce points out, intuitive plausibility won’t help, for intuitions are not common across times or people: Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously,” 848. I discuss this (in a different but related context) in 3. 3. For discussion of bootstrapping in the context of a different of Enoch’s arguments, nonetheless applicable here, see: Dyke, “Bad bootstrapping.” Dyke considers Vogel’s ‘No rule circularity’ characterisation of what goes wrong in bootstrapping (pp. 2122-2123), Weisberg’s ‘No feedback’ characterisation (pp. 2123-2124), Douven and Kelp’s ‘No risk, no gain’ characterisation (pp. 2124-2126), and Titelbaum’s ‘Prohibit no-lose investigations’ characterisation (pp. 2126-2127) – Enoch’s indispensability argument looks to fall foul of all of these characterisations. Perhaps there is possible a different analysis of what goes wrong in paradigmatically bad bootstrapping cases which would not capture what goes on here, but that does not look at all promising to me.

²⁴¹ Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously,” 848.

Recall that our target interlocutor here is not the *almost*-global metanormative nonfactualist who accepts some lightweight normativity. Even if acceptance of lightweight normativity includes acceptance of the kind of normativity involved in Enoch's understanding of rational non-optionality, the indispensability argument is *not* primarily designed to walk someone from a small portion to a larger serving of normative facts. It is designed to pressure the *truly*-global nonfactualist. I therefore cannot see upon what ground Enoch can claim that his argument has 'force against an error theory'.²⁴² Perhaps closer to the truth is his claim that we should be 'reasonably confident that the arguments [...] don't objectionably beg the question (or commit some other hideous logical crime) against the error theorist'²⁴³ – that is, provided we allow *both* that bootstrapping is legitimate on occasion *and* that Enoch's bootstrapping is one of those occasions. But developing a forceful argument and not committing a 'hideous logical crime'²⁴⁴ are two distinct goals. Again, what Joyce has to say about the question begging in Enoch's argument for metaethical objectivity applies *mutatis mutandis* to the question begging in the indispensability argument:

[...] his argument, even if entirely successful, at best provides permission not to be an error theorist.

This, however, falls well short of showing that the error theorist is mistaken.²⁴⁵

Now, I do not wish to commit here to an extremely strict and perhaps controversial constraint for argumentative adequacy, and then judge the indispensability argument according to it. I do not wish to say, for instance, that an argument is only adequate if it could in principle rationally pressure *any*

²⁴² Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 120.

²⁴³ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 119.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Joyce, "Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously," 850.

interlocutor to accept its conclusion. There may be good counterexamples to this kind of constraint,²⁴⁶ and defending it will take us too far afield for now. Accordingly, I do not wish to state here that Enoch's question-begging indispensability argument is, strictly speaking, altogether *inadequate*. Rather, I wish to commit to something less dichotomous and, I think, less controversial: that *ceteris paribus* an argument is *stronger* correlative to the range of interlocutors it can rationally pressure to accept its conclusion. This continuous point is all that is required to motivate my first amendment of the indispensability argument above (understanding general indispensability in solely rational terms) and the further amendment I wish to make (understanding rational non-optionality in solely rational terms).

2. 3. THE SOLUTION

2. 3. 1. GENERAL INDISPENSABILITY

If we can make the indispensability argument without begging the question against the metanormative nonfactualist, we would make it stronger. Granting the backdrop which takes us from Harman's constraint to the general indispensability principle, and granting (until returning to it below) premise (3*) of the argument presented above (that a commitment to the existence of normative facts is deliberatively indispensable), the troublemakers here are (1*) and (2*). (1*) asserts that we are rational to infer to the indispensables of rationally non-optional projects, and (2*) describes deliberation as one such project; but if these premises invoke a (authoritatively) *normative* conception of rational non-optionality, they beg the question against the nonfactualist.

²⁴⁶ I am grateful to Enoch for drawing my attention to this.

In considering whether we can amend (1*) and (2*) to express rational non-optionality in a less problematic way, I will here assume some version of both premises to be *true*: the truth of (1*) has been argued for above; and I will return to (2*) below. The pressing issue here is just how to interpret the appeal to non-optionality in these premises. I have argued that we should not accept Enoch's understanding of rational non-optionality as (authoritatively) normative; so we require an alternative interpretation.

We return, then, to the general indispensability principle. Once-amended to avoid the problems surrounding epistemic normativity discussed in the previous part of the chapter, general indispensability states that it is rational to infer to the indispensable commitments of rationally non-optional projects. Let us call Enoch's interpretation of general indispensability, using a normative conception of rational non-optionality, the *normative indispensability* principle. Granted my initial amendment, normative indispensability states that *it is rational to infer to the indispensable commitments of projects in which we should engage*. My use of 'should' is not intended to necessarily refer to a *decisive* should; and, as I understand Enoch, this is in accordance with his view.

There may be some almost-global metanormative nonfactualist interlocutors pressured by a normative indispensability principle. If one such interlocutor accepts lightweight normativity but nothing heavyweight – if she accepts that there are normative facts about reasons to engage in projects like, say, deliberation, but rejects that there are reasons to reach any particular practical conclusion over any other – then the indispensability argument, using normative indispensability, may be able to pressure her to abandon her nonfactualism about heavyweight normativity. But, as made clear above, this interlocutor is not Enoch's primary target. And nor should it be; for what we want here is an argument supporting metanormative factualism *simpliciter* against nonfactualism, not an argument for a strong version of factualism on the back of a weaker kind. Remember, the argument for factualism here is important as part of the case for robust metanormative realism (RMR). In this context, persuading those who already accept some narrow factualism to accept a broader kind is a waste of time; for, as should become clear in the next chapter, we can build the case for RMR on the back of pretty much any variant of factualism.

It should be clear now that normative indispensability can play no role in any version of the indispensability argument which can rationally pressure metanormative nonfactualists and support metanormative factualism – and, eventually, RMR. In what follows, I evaluate in 2. 3. 2. an alternative considered and rejected by Enoch, a *pragmatic* version of the indispensability principle. I conclude in 2. 3. 3. that the problems facing pragmatic indispensability can be solved by a version of the indispensability principle focusing on the *rational* necessity of projects, independently of their normative or pragmatic necessity.

2. 3. 2. PRAGMATIC INDISPENSABILITY

Enoch seeks to justify his deployment of the normative indispensability principle against the metanormative nonfactualist through an appeal to Moorean epistemological methodology. Now, the paradigmatic deployment of Moorean epistemological methodology is in response to radical scepticism about the external world, where the relevant Moorean fact is the existence of something in the external world invoked to rule out scepticism about it.²⁴⁷ Now, one might initially think that there is an important difference between the response to radical scepticism and the response to metanormative nonfactualism. In the latter case, the appeal to the Moorean fact of the normative truth that we should engage in deliberation might be taken to fall flat because our nonfactualist interlocutor does not appear to share that commitment; in the former case, however, the matter is not so simple. In debating the radical sceptic, and in pointing to the existence of something in the external world as evidence for the external world, one invites the criticism that one is begging the question; yet, one's commitment to the existence of

²⁴⁷ Moore, "Proof."

things in the external world *is*, as a matter of fact, (most likely) shared by one's opponent. The sceptic does not *really* believe that there is no external world – observe as she engages in debates about scepticism with others, arrives at locations on time, has relationships, wears clothes, eats food, brushes her teeth, and so on – the sceptic is simply illustrating a problem in one's *philosophical commitment* to an external world.

So the bald assertion of the existence of something in the external world may initially look as if it carries greater weight against the sceptic than does the assertion of normative truth against the metanormative nonfactualist. For, in making this assertion, one's interlocutor cannot but agree. She can drag her heels about agreeing, of course, and she can stubbornly insist that she does not agree; but of course she *does*, whether or not she is at peace with it. Accordingly, the deployment of a Moorean fact against the sceptic demonstrates an inconsistency within her. Perhaps we cannot answer radical sceptical challenges head-on; but we can point to the fact that anyone making such challenges cannot be making them wholeheartedly, as it were, on the basis of a stable philosophical worldview, for commitment to the relevant doubted object appears to be pragmatically *compulsory*.

Perhaps this is not all we would like to be able to say to the sceptic. Perhaps there are other, better responses. Nonetheless, it is certainly a very powerful thing we can say. In demonstrating the sceptic to be incapable of wholeheartedly maintaining her scepticism, we lay bare a profound weakness in it, and this weakness may well be a (perhaps merely defeasible) reason to abandon it. Now, what if it turned out that metanormative nonfactualism and radical scepticism of this kind are, after all, in this same boat? What if we could show that the wholesale denial of normative facts was on just as unstable footing as denial of the existence of the external world? We could then understand the rationally non-optional in terms of the compulsory, and an alternative to normative indispensability would present itself as a

pragmatic indispensability principle:²⁴⁸ it is rational to infer to the indispensable commitments of projects from which we *cannot* disengage – leaving aside the question of whether or not we *should*.

Using pragmatic indispensability, the indispensability argument would present a challenge to the metanormative nonfactualist analogous to the challenge described above presented to the radical sceptic: she cannot but deliberate; when she deliberates, she cannot but be committed to normative facts; and it is rational to infer to the indispensable commitments of compulsory projects – she must therefore accept factualism on the grounds of its pragmatic necessity.²⁴⁹

Taking deliberation as non-optionally pragmatically indispensable would not be taking as non-optionally *rationally* or *normatively required*; rather, it would be taking it as compulsory *for rational beings*. On the normative interpretation, rational non-optionality tells us that we are rationally required, *without any get-out clause*, to deliberate – in a similar manner to how we are rationally required to proportion belief to evidence, to follow *modus ponens*, and so on. On the pragmatic interpretation, however, it tells us that, *simply because we are rational beings*, there is no getting out of deliberating for us – in a similar manner to the way in which, simply because we are rational beings, we are lumped with thinking, using language, believing, and choosing. It is the difference between saying that deliberation is non-optional *if one is to be rational*, and saying that it is compulsory *if one is possessed of the capacity to be rational*.

²⁴⁸ I take the term ‘pragmatic’ in this context from: Baras, “The Explanatory Challenge.”

²⁴⁹ In Mary Leng’s terms, they should ‘put up or shut up’: Mary Leng, “Taking Morality Mathematically: Enoch’s Indispensability Argument,” in *Explanation in Ethics and Mathematics: Debunking and Dispensability*, ed. Uri D. Leibowitz and Neil Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198778592.003.0011>.

Enoch considers and dismisses this suggestion: Enoch, “Indispensability Arguments,” 247-251.

According to Dan Baras, Enoch has gradually moved towards normative indispensability from a starting position of ambiguity between the two.²⁵⁰ But this, as we have seen, may well be a mistake; for, in opting for the former, the indispensability argument loses much of its power as an argument for metanormative factualism, let alone as part of a case for robust metanormative realism (RMR). And so perhaps pragmatic indispensability can give us what we want.

Before considering this, let us note simply that pragmatic indispensability solves the immediate problem of the indispensability argument begging the question against its metanormatively nonfactualist targets. Let us also note that, in this version, not only will the non-optionality of deliberation itself go from normative indispensability to pragmatic compulsoriness in the second premise, so too will the indispensability of normative commitment *to* deliberation go from normative to pragmatic in the third. The pragmatically-amended indispensability argument looks like this:

- 1**) It is rational to infer to the pragmatically indispensable commitments of compulsory projects;
- 2**) Deliberation is compulsory;
- 3**) Commitment to the existence of normative facts is pragmatically indispensable to deliberation;
- C**): It is rational to infer to the existence of normative facts.**

Now, three things are urgent here: most importantly, (i) whether we can defend pragmatic indispensability as a rational epistemic principle; but also (ii) whether we can show that deliberation is pragmatically non-optional in this way; and (iii) whether we can show that normative commitment is pragmatically indispensable to deliberation. We need satisfactory responses to all three of these issues for the pragmatically-amended indispensability argument to be useful in the case for RMR. But I will not consider (ii) or (iii), for I do not think the response to (i) will be sufficient to warrant us sticking

²⁵⁰ Baras, "The Explanatory Challenge." 378, footnote 27.

with the pragmatically-amended indispensability argument. To clarify, I do not think that pragmatic indispensability *cannot* be defended as a rational epistemic principle. Rather, I think that, once we refine it in order to defend it, it will no longer be a pragmatic principle.

To see why, consider Baras' criticism of pragmatic indispensability that it would justify Sisyphus' belief in the value of his boulder-pushing, provided such a belief were indispensable to his curse.²⁵¹ Or consider even Enoch's own treatment of this pragmatic route for the indispensability argument, where he argues that the pragmatic version would be on a par with the constitutivist arguments he criticises on the ground of their adopting Crispin Wright's 'adversarial stance',²⁵² seeking to justify commitments by demonstrating them to be unavoidable, without showing those commitments to be positively justified.²⁵³

In defending the pragmatic indispensability principle against such criticisms, we may want to say two different (related, but perhaps distinct) things: that we have authoritatively *normative* reason to adopt pragmatic indispensability; or that we are *rational* to do so. If what was said in 2. 2. 1. was right, these are two quite different claims. Given that we are trying to pressure the metanormative nonfactualist to abandon her nonfactualism, it will not help us to defend pragmatic indispensability on normative grounds. So the only fruitful way to proceed seems to be to defend pragmatic indispensability as rational.

²⁵¹ Baras, "The Explanatory Challenge," 378-379.

²⁵² Crispin Wright, "Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon," *Mind* 100, no. 1 (1991), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2254985>.

²⁵³ Enoch, "Indispensability Arguments," 247-251.

However, the simplest way to do this would be to ditch the reference to the pragmatic altogether, and state simply that we are rational to infer to the indispensables of *rational* projects. If so, what is required for the indispensability argument is just a *rational indispensability principle*.

2. 3. 3. RATIONAL INDISPENSABILITY

2. 3. 3. 1. A RATIONALISTICALLY-AMENDED

INDISPENSABILITY ARGUMENT

Simply put, a rational indispensability principle would state that we are rational to infer to the indispensable commitments of projects in which we are rational to engage. Rational non-optionality would therefore be understood, as per its name, in solely rational terms.

If we already accept metanormative factualism, and if we already accept that we have some (authoritatively normative) reason to be rational, then we will understand rational indispensability *also* as normative indispensability. But one may accept rational indispensability independently of these normative commitments. Most importantly, the nonfactualist can perfectly coherently accept rational indispensability and remain metanormatively nonfactualist.

We can therefore deploy a non-question-begging version of the indispensability argument in terms of rational indispensability. Note, again, that not only is the non-optionality of deliberation now understood in rational (rather than normative or pragmatic) terms in the second premise, so too is the indispensability of normative commitment *to* deliberation understood solely rationally in the third. Here is a rationalistically-amended indispensability argument:

- 1') It is rational to infer to the rationally indispensable commitments of rational projects;
 - 2') Deliberation is rational;
 - 3') A commitment to the existence of normative facts is rationally deliberatively indispensable;
- C': It is rational to infer to the existence of normative facts.**

This rationalistically-amended indispensability argument will avoid the problems of both Enoch's normative version and the pragmatic version, provided its premises can be defended. I take it that enough was said in 2. 2. 1. by way of defence of (1'). When reinterpreting general indispensability as describing rational (rather than authoritatively normative) permission to infer to the indispensables of certain projects, I argued that rationality is transitive, such that it being (even presumptively) rational to engage in a project makes it (presumptively) rational to do anything indispensable for that project, including making certain inferences. So (1') looks stable.

2. 2. 1. also included a defence of (2'). We can quibble over the referent of 'rational', and whether the standards that regulate deliberation fall under our concept of rational standards; but this is merely terminological. In considering rationality, I wish to consider those standards under which we stand in virtue of our being rational – those standards that regulate the practices in which we engage in virtue of our possession of the rational faculty. Accordingly, it seems clear that engaging in deliberation is part of what it is to be a rational agent. So we have said enough, I think, about (2').

That leaves (3'), which I think presents the biggest challenge to both Enoch's original indispensability argument and to my amended version. In what follows, I will consider arguments in defence of (3') in 2. 3. 3. 2., and I will finish by considering objections to the indispensability argument that remain even after the rationalistic amendment in 2. 3. 3. 3.

2. 3. 3. 2. THE DELIBERATIVE INDISPENSABILITY OF NORMATIVE COMMITMENT

Taking some form of deliberation to be rational (premise (2') of the above argument) seems relatively unproblematic. The problem is precisifying the kind of deliberation that is indispensable such that a commitment to normative facts is clearly indispensable to it. For Enoch, the key distinction between

deliberation and mere picking is that the former involves seeking out a right answer.²⁵⁴ This seeking of rightness requires that we posit a standard of rightness independent of and external to our deliberative process. And Enoch takes these standards to be normative.

But we must be careful here. I have stressed the importance of understanding the indispensability argument as seeking to show that we are justified in a commitment to *authoritatively* normative facts. The existence of merely formally normative facts is not in any need of argument; it seems entirely uncontroversial to say that I either do or not follow a given law, meet the requirements of etiquette, or move a bishop in accordance with the rules of chess. Furthermore, an argument for metanormative factualism about formal normativity would be unhelpful in the overall case for robust metanormative realism (RMR), as formal normative standards seem entirely open to the kinds of naturalistic reductions to which RMR stands opposed. Formal normativity is squarely on the *what merely is and could be* side of the chasm away from *what should be*. So the indispensability argument, as a philosophically interesting argument for factualism and as one part of the case for RMR, needs to show that deliberation involves seeking out a right answer to which we owe our allegiance. We need to show that, when we deliberate, we are committed to the existence of authoritative normativity.

In light of that, we may now consider three objections to this claim. First, an objection from Knut Olav Skarsaune.²⁵⁵ Enoch considers that one might deliberate and decide to do simply what one wants, without seeking any *right* answer; however, drawing from Nagel,²⁵⁶ he takes it that, in resolving

²⁵⁴ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 74.

²⁵⁵ Skarsaune, *Review*, 490.

²⁵⁶ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 76, footnote 64.

deliberation ‘by reference to a desire’,²⁵⁷ one is taking it to be (authoritatively normatively) right, or at least permissible, to act on one’s desires. Skarsaune’s point, however, is that deliberation might resolve in a conclusion about how to get something we want without any explicit awareness *that we want it*.²⁵⁸ If we insist that such deliberative practice must involve some implicit normative endorsement of that practice *at some level*, Skarsaune says that we have then drifted away from a conception of deliberation thin enough that we can legitimately describe it as a rationally non-optional practice.²⁵⁹ The Nagelian-style deliberation in which Enoch is interested *might be* what is at work in everyday deliberation – even that of caricatured Freudians – but this seems a tricky issue to get into, and potentially an empirical matter about which we cannot be particularly confident here. So the challenge stands.

Second, consider an objection in caricature. Let us imagine a caricatured Freudian who says that, in deliberation, all that really happens is the rationalisation of antecedent motivations, and that even the most careful deliberation is, at most, the drawing into consciousness of desires and impulses, without any (even implicit) commitment to standards beyond those. On this view – which, though caricatured, is not uncommon – deliberation may seek out formally normative truths, but deliberation that aims at authoritative normativity is self-deceiving, for the deliberative enterprise is merely an elaborate way of ultimately doing what we want. Now, the indispensability argument can comfortably accommodate this; the important point is simply that we *believe* in normative facts; we do not need the belief to be wholehearted, or reflected at every level of consciousness, we need only the belief and its deliberative

²⁵⁷ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 75.

²⁵⁸ ‘[...] it seems possible for deliberation to terminate in [...] things we want (*de re*), without mention [...] *that we want them*.’ – Skarsaune, *Review*, 489.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

indispensability. But the caricatured Freudian might then respond that *caricatured Freudians*, at least, *do not* have this belief when *they* deliberate. Believing, as they do, that deliberation is nothing but the unearthing of antecedent motivations, that is all they look for when they deliberate.

Third and finally, one may understand deliberation as necessarily involving beliefs about formally normative standards external to the motivations of agents – *contra* Skarsaune and the caricatured Freudian – but without thinking of authoritative normativity being involved. One might think that all that is necessary to deliberate is beliefs about standards of social conformity, accordance with holy texts, prospective self-interest, and so on. Of course, all of these standards may also be authoritatively normative, too; but they are not so by conceptual necessity. It is perfectly coherent to ask whether one has authoritative reason to adhere with conventions and to be prudent – even if the answer to such questions is in the affirmative. If deliberation requires only beliefs in formally normative standards, then we cannot glean authoritative normativity, from deliberative considerations, to play a role in the case for robust metanormative realism (RMR).

The indispensability argument shares some of its important features with transcendental arguments, and these objections reflect that. The three objections just mentioned draw out a thread Robert Stern finds common to many objections to transcendental arguments,²⁶⁰ that, in trying to generate heavyweight conclusions from minimally defined practices, transcendental arguments tend to fall on one horn of a dilemma: inasmuch as we define the relevant practices such that they generate the desired conclusions, they drift away from non-optionality; but inasmuch as we define them as non-optional, we struggle to glean what is desired from them. The objections of Skarsaune, my caricatured Freudian, and that from

²⁶⁰ Robert Stern, “Transcendental Arguments,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/transcendental-arguments/>.

formal normativity, all present conceptions of deliberation as *neutral* on (authoritative) normativity, in opposition to the conception of deliberation upon which the indispensability argument depends as normatively *committed*. But if all that is rational is the normatively neutral kind of deliberation, we will be unable to make the indispensability argument work. Defending the indispensability argument requires that we show the normatively committed form of deliberation to be rationally non-optional.

Note that we need not show that (authoritatively) normative commitment is *explicitly* indispensable to deliberation. The question of which beliefs are indispensable to deliberation should, I think, be understood as the question of which beliefs would emerge as indispensable *upon reflection*. In everyday deliberation, all sorts of implicit beliefs may be indispensable – beliefs that I can act upon intentions, for instance, or that *x* is a means to *y*, and so on. Upon reflection, I find that these beliefs are implicit in my deliberation; that they were not explicit is irrelevant to the background role they play. It is too demanding a constraint on a belief that it be consciously and explicitly held if we are to understand it as indispensable to a project.

So we need to show that part of what it is to be rational involves deliberation regulated (perhaps implicitly) by authoritative normativity. And here I am willing to make a concession to the above objections that Enoch is not.²⁶¹ I concede, for the sake of argument, that *some* – maybe even many – cases of deliberation can function perfectly well without any belief in authoritatively normative facts. I want to concede to Skarsaune and the caricatured Freudian that we may often deliberate thinking only of desire satisfaction; and that it may be possible to deliberate according to standards that are external to one's motivations but nonetheless distinct from the authoritatively normative – standards like

²⁶¹ In correspondence, Enoch was kind enough to confirm this point that I nonetheless take to be evident from his writings on the issue.

approval by peers or deities, say. To be clear, it is not that I am convinced that this is so; but it seems to me that to debate this point will require venturing into empirical psychology. Whether or not a person can deliberate (or do something that looks very similar to deliberation) without thinking of anything beyond her own desires or what is expected of her by her peers and deities seems to me dangerously close to an empirical matter.

However, we can bring things back to the armchair by asking whether such a person is *rational* to deliberate in this way. Here again I am happy to concede that she may well be rational *to some degree*. But I do *not* concede that she is *as* rational as the one who deliberates seeking out an authoritatively right path. To see why, consider an agent who deliberates without concern for authoritative normativity. Without thinking that the standards by which she deliberates are worthy of her allegiance, she decides on the basis of desire satisfaction, or prudence, or social conformity, or religious conviction – or *something*. But herein lies the issue: which is it? She has to choose. We do, after all, seem to have some capacity to step back from the various standards by which we can conduct ourselves and consider which we find most important. Now, I suggest we grant that our normatively neutral deliberator may not have made any such choice according to an independent authoritatively normative standard, even implicitly – perhaps the only good explanation for why she chooses to satisfy her desires or her peers is purely psychological. And I suggest that we grant that she may be, in some sense and to some degree, rational when she deliberates. Nonetheless, there is now something *arbitrary* about her deliberation. If pressed, she would have to concede that she conducts herself according to her favoured standard not because she *should*, but because she *merely does*. There may be perfectly rational processes taking her from a given standard to its application; but the selection of the standard *itself* seems less than fully rational, in that it is arbitrary. For what else could determine which of the standards to follow but authoritative normativity? Faced with a choice between satisfying one's desires or one's peers, between pleasing oneself or one's deity – where such decisions cannot simply be resolved in higher-order desires or conventions – authoritative normativity is, I suggest, the only thing to which one can turn.

This is perhaps clearest if we imagine that our deliberator neutral on (authoritative) normativity is entirely committed to desire satisfaction, but finds her desires pulling in opposing directions, generating

conflicts irresolvable by higher-order desires. In this case – and in all cases of conflict between standards to which an agent is committed, irresolvable by higher-order standards – some choice must be made. Whether or not our choice of standards is real (even if hard determinism is true, say) the *phenomenology* of choice is, I think, undeniable.²⁶² Such choices can be made more or less rationally. And it seems to me that the *most* rational way of making such a choice is in a nonarbitrary manner. And this most rational way of deliberating requires commitment to the existence of authoritatively normative facts.

If this is right, then the objections of Skarsaune, the caricatured Freudian, and the objection from formal normativity, show at most that (authoritatively) normative commitment is dispensable only to *some cases* of deliberation. It remains true that the deliberative project *as a whole*, when pursued nonarbitrarily and thereby fully (or at least more) rationally, involves this commitment. Deliberation according to normative commitments may well be contingent for agents, given that one may be able to deliberate by standards selected for non-normative reasons. So too may normatively committed higher-order deliberation be contingent, as one may well never confront a difficult choice between standards by which to live, or one may confront such a choice arbitrarily. But the more rational a deliberative process is the less arbitrary it will be; ultimately, this will require commitment to the existence of normative facts.

We now have what we need. All the rationalistically-amended indispensability requires is that (authoritatively) normative commitment is indispensable to rational deliberation. We now see that the

²⁶² Rodriguez-Blanco focuses on the indispensability argument's attempt to explain the phenomenology of deliberation:

Rodriguez-Blanco, "If You Cannot Help Being Committed to It."

more rational deliberation is, the more it involves such commitment. Accordingly, premise (3') looks stable.²⁶³

Note that it will not help Skarsaune or the caricatured Freudian here – nor the metanormative nonfactualist – to point to higher-order beliefs that (authoritatively) normative commitments incurred in deliberation are *erroneous*. Enoch's claim is simply that normative beliefs are indispensable to deliberation; the other beliefs we have *about those beliefs* do not alter that. What might be threatening would be if a belief that there are *no* normative facts were indispensable to deliberation – but I cannot see the ground for this suggestion. Such a belief is formed in light of metanormative argument; it cannot be invoked in our deciding which metanormative theory deserves endorsement.

We now have support for the rational indispensability principle (1'), alongside support for the claim that deliberation is rationally non-optional (2'), and that commitment to the existence of (authoritatively) normative facts is deliberatively indispensable (3'). The rationalistically-amended indispensability argument now appears to face no pressing obstacle in pressuring the metanormative nonfactualist to embrace factualism.

2. 3. 3. 3. RESIDUAL OBJECTIONS

The rationalistically-amended indispensability argument, and therefore the factual stage of the case for robust metanormative realism (RMR), now look stable. We may now also respond to a number of challenges to the indispensability argument, in light of this amendment. I consider two such challenges

²⁶³ Relevant here is that I take it that our use of 'rational' is regulated by our conception of full or ideal rationality.

here, specifically to the analogy between explanatory and deliberative indispensability: one from Cline;²⁶⁴ and one from Alex Worsnip.²⁶⁵

Cline answers Enoch's challenge to his opponents to identify a relevant disanalogy between explanatory and deliberative indispensability. Cline argues that disanalogy is evident in that, when deploying inference to the best explanation, we select the most attractive explanation from the potential explanations as the actual one and, granted the scientific realist thesis that 'only true (or at least approximately true) hypotheses actually explain anything',²⁶⁶ we then have no further work to do in vindicating this privileged explanation as a guide to ontology. When, on the other hand, we infer to the deliberatively indispensable, we require an extra stage to endorse those inferences as guides to existence.²⁶⁷ Now, Cline's analysis is flawed, for that extra stage *is* mirrored in inference to the best explanation – precisely in the scientific realism Cline invokes. But his point remains threatening to the indispensability argument inasmuch as it relies on normative indispensability.

As Cline points out, the indispensability argument is designed to persuade those *already* committed to scientific realism of metanormative factualism. It is an attempt to show that 'the scientific realist's acceptance of inference to the best explanation also commits her to accepting deliberative indispensability as an additional, independent guide to ontology.'²⁶⁸ But if we opt for a normative

²⁶⁴ Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability."

²⁶⁵ Worsnip, "Explanatory Indispensability."

²⁶⁶ Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability," 3243.

²⁶⁷ Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability," 3245-3248.

²⁶⁸ Cline, "Against deliberative indispensability," 3242.

understanding of deliberative indispensability, we will no longer be walking the scientific realist from the commitments that make her a scientific realist to metanormative factualism; for nothing about scientific realism compels one to accept normative principles like Enoch's normative version of the indispensability principle. Understood solely rationally, however, we *can* draw factualism out of her existing commitments; for she is presumably guided by rational considerations in her acceptance of explanatory indispensability, and we have now shown that it is rational for her to accept deliberative indispensability *on that basis* – from explanatory indispensability, via general indispensability, to deliberative indispensability. The rationalistic amendment therefore blunts Cline's attack on the indispensability argument.

Worsnip also challenges Enoch's analogy between explanatory and deliberative indispensability. He claims that there are more layers of indispensability than Enoch makes explicit,²⁶⁹ arguing that the analogy depends upon two sets of things being indispensable. Firstly, Worsnip argues that, on the explanatory side, Enoch's argument depends upon both (i) inference to the best explanation *itself*, as well as (ii) the entities posited by inference to the best explanation, being explanatorily indispensable. Second, on the deliberative side, he argues that both (a) deliberative indispensability *itself*, as well as (b) the entities posited by deliberative indispensability, must be deliberatively indispensable for the indispensability argument to work.²⁷⁰ But, he says, while it is true that inference to the best explanation is indispensable to the project of explanation, it is *not* true that inference to the commitments of

²⁶⁹ Worsnip, "Explanatory Indispensability."

²⁷⁰ Worsnip refers to inference to the commitments of deliberation as 'inference to a presupposition of deliberation': Worsnip, "Explanatory Indispensability," 232.

deliberation is indispensable to the project of deliberation. Worsnip's argument is therefore that any analogy with explanation is lost, and so too is the power of the indispensability argument.²⁷¹

The challenge, then, seems to be to show either that both kinds of inference are indispensable to their respective projects, or that neither are. But Worsnip does not make clear why this challenge needs to be met. Does it matter whether or not the analogy is perfect? Does this specific imperfection in the analogy have any impact on the status of deliberative indispensability as a rational epistemic principle? I think not. The analogy need not be perfect for the central point to stand: just as we are rational to welcome electrons into our ontology, so too are we rational to welcome normative facts. That there is a disanalogy between the manner in which attitudes *about* explanation and deliberation feature *within* their respective practices does not seem to alter that. There is a more important analogy here: both practices are rational; both practices have certain commitments as indispensable; and so we are rational to infer to those commitments.

So Worsnip's challenge does not seem particularly threatening. Note, however, that the rationalistically-amended indispensability principle seems to retain the closeness of the analogy better than does the normative indispensability principle, in placing both practices, their respective commitments, and inference to those commitments, on all fours as simply rational. So, inasmuch as we take the closeness of the analogy to be significant here, the rationalistic amendment again seems helpful.

The indispensability argument yields justified belief in (authoritatively) normative facts. What remains is to understand what these normative facts are, metaphysically speaking. Before moving on, however, I wish to address one final concern that may have survived the preceding discussion, especially in light of the ambition of the following chapter to show that the normative facts we have argued for here are

²⁷¹ Worsnip, "Explanatory Indispensability," 231-233.

sui generis. Specifically, it might be worried that there is something suspicious in arguing for the existence of normative facts on the basis of *our* practices, *our* deliberation, *our* rationality, and then going on to argue that these facts are altogether constitutively independent of, among other things, *us*.

This is where the (admittedly imperfect) analogy between explanatory and deliberative indispensability is important. In deploying both the explanatory and the deliberative indispensability principles, we are proceeding from our practices to a truth beyond those practices. This is not a quirk of the general indispensability principle, rationalistically-amended or otherwise; Harman's constraint involves it too – for it is in virtue of electrons being indispensable to *our* explanatory project that we understand ourselves as justified in positing them *in the world*.

We occupy a particular perspective when we ask questions about the world. A perspective being *relevant* to an enquiry is not, however, tantamount to the object of that enquiry being *identifiable with* or *reducible to* that perspective. In other words, the fact that we have found justification for positing normative facts on the basis of our perspective as deliberating agents does not preclude that conclusion from receiving a realist, or even robustly realist, gloss.

The point made in any indispensability argument is that something true *about us* is a guide to a truth *beyond us*. In this sense, indispensability arguments are akin to Kantian-style transcendental arguments, proceeding from features of our cognition to truths about that which we cognise.²⁷² However, in taking ourselves to cognise a world independent of our cognition – as we must if the indispensability argument is to lead us to RMR – we are of course some distance from Kant. It is therefore important to see that nothing in the deployment of an indispensability argument in itself commits one to any particular view

²⁷² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998a).

of the direction of fit between mind and world. In other words, deployment of an indispensability principle leaves open the question of whether our faculties are in touch with a world independent of those faculties because our minds reflect the world, or because the world in some sense reflects our minds.

This is most clearly the case in explanatory indispensability: nothing about the inference to electrons immediately suggests that the object of that inference is constitutively dependent upon the responses of those inferring. But the argument of this chapter, in a word, has been this: inasmuch as we can defend explanatory indispensability, we can defend deliberative indispensability. The point has been to show that deliberative indispensability is just as rational as its explanatory counterpart. And, though the analogy may not be perfect, nothing in the comparison between explanatory and deliberative indispensability suggests that it commits us to a response- or practice- or in any way agent-dependent conception of its object. Accordingly, the metanormatively factualist conclusion of this chapter can be complemented by further argument to form the case for RMR. For that, I now turn to the robust stage.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROBUST STAGE

We arrive now at the second stage of the structure I have imposed upon Enoch's case for robust metanormative realism (RMR): the argument from metanormative factualism to RMR; from a metaphysically open-ended commitment to normative facts, to a conception of those facts as *sui generis*. While the previous chapter argued for metanormative factualisms and therefore against nonfactualisms, this chapter consists principally of an argument against what I have described as non-robust factualisms, views that maintain the existence of normative facts but that do not advance a metaphysics of those facts as constitutively independent of nature. I consider non-robust factualisms in two broad groups: naturalisms that treat normativity as constitutively dependent on natural items; and non-metaphysical realisms that deny the need for a heavyweight metaphysics of *sui generis* normativity. Here, I hope to show that neither of these theories can account for the existence of normative facts as well as RMR.

To this end, I wish to deploy an argument that is relatively well rehearsed in the literature – the Euthyphronic argument – but I will combine its force with that of the indispensability argument, developed in the previous chapter, to strengthen it against objections. Primarily, however, my goal in this chapter is to show that the Euthyphronic argument bolsters Enoch's own robust stage. Enoch argues piecemeal against a variety of alternatives to RMR. Here, I wish to show that a Euthyphronic argument targeting all non-robust metanormative factualisms can, in some cases, make up for shortcomings of Enoch's robust stage and, in other cases, add to the power of his objections to RMR's rivals.

In 3. 1., I develop the Euthyphronic argument I take to be powerful in this way. In 3. 2., I consider how this Euthyphronic argument bolsters Enoch's robust stage. Finally, in 3. 3., I consider the overall plausibility of RMR in light of the indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments, I consider some of

Enoch's responses to outstanding objections to the view, and I try to support some optimism with regard to the prospects of RMR.

3. 1. THE EUTHYPHRONIC ARGUMENT

3. 1. 1. OVERVIEW OF THE EUTHYPHRONIC ARGUMENT

Naturalist metanormative factualisms share a common feature: they take (authoritatively) normative facts to be coextensive with natural facts.²⁷³ The Euthyphronic argument grants this coextensiveness claim. Directed at any naturalist factualism, it grants the coextensiveness of normative facts with the specific set of natural facts favoured by that naturalism. It then asks whether this coextensiveness is explained by the normative side or the natural side of the biconditional. If the answer given cites the normative side as the ultimate explanation, then we are accepting resolution in a normative fact that appears to be unexplained by the natural; this then suggests robust metanormative realism (RMR) and is incompatible with naturalism. If, however, the answer given doubles down on the non-robust view, and cites the natural side of the biconditional as ultimately explaining the relation between normativity and nature, the answer given looks normatively arbitrary, and so no longer captures the normativity it purported to.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ In many cases, this coextensiveness will be deemed necessary, but this is not crucial here.

²⁷⁴ For discussion of various applications of the Euthyphro to a variety of metanormative debates: Bagnoli, "Constructivism;" Shafer-Landau, "The Constructivist Challenge," 42-44; van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 258-260; Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 108-139.

Before considering objections, let us see what the Euthyphronic argument looks like in application to constitutivism.²⁷⁵ Constitutivism will be one of my primary foci below, where I will consider the relevance of the Euthyphro to constitutivist attempts at non-robust metanormative factualism; but I anticipate that discussion here by way of illustration of the general Euthyphronic point. Let us grant the constitutivist, for the sake of argument, that all (authoritatively) normative facts are coextensive with facts of agents meeting the standards constitutive of agency – that all instances of reasons, rightness, goodness, value, in all the relevant senses, are also instances of action and thought in accordance with the standards of agency, and *vice versa*. The Euthyphronic question is why this is so. Is it because of some independent normative standard that makes it such that meeting the standards constitutive of agency is reasonable – because, say, agency is independently valuable? If so, we no longer have a globally metanormative constitutivism, for now at least one thing – conformity to the standards constitutive of agency – is valuable independently of those standards. So, if she is to maintain a global non-robust factualism, the constitutivist must answer that the coextensiveness is explained simply by the standards of agency. But this now veers into the normatively arbitrary. Remember, the constitutivist was trying to give an account of normativity – reasons, rights, goods, values, and so on, *what should be* – in terms of the constitutive standards of agency; if that account ends up as the claim that normativity *just is* accordance with those standards, we do not seem to have captured the normativity we sought. But if she concedes that agency is normatively significant in an agency-independent manner, she concedes that there is some normativity that is constitutively independent of her favoured naturalistically-respectable properties – she is now a robust realist.

²⁷⁵ I consider constitutivism and constructivism generally under the umbrella of naturalism, in line with: Bagnoli, “Constructivism.” I should add, however, that I do understand constitutivism to be non-reductive in its naturalism – at least in its intentions.

Note that it will not help at this point to show that all we could really *mean* by ‘right’, ‘reasonable’, or ‘good’ (in the relevant senses) is something like ‘accordant with the constitutive standards of agency’ – as is the broad goal of the analytic component of Michael Smith’s constitutivism.²⁷⁶ The Euthyphronic argument does not need to deny extensional equivalence of normative and natural facts at the metaphysical level – it grants it, for argument’s sake – and it can just as easily grant the equivalence of normative and natural concepts. But even if we grant this *conceptual* equivalence, this does not entail that the supposed *metaphysical* coextensiveness of normativity and nature is tantamount to their identity. It does not entail that normativity is nothing above and beyond conformity to the standards constitutive of agency.

Any analysis of normativity in terms of some aspect of nature must depict that aspect as *prima facie* distinct from normativity, lest the analysis be entirely uninteresting. Hence Smith’s focus on the standards constitutive of agency: it is at least *prima facie* coherent to ask whether one should do what is in accordance with those standards. The Euthyphronic question is then whether normativity bears its relation to this aspect of nature (*prima facie* distinct from normativity) for some normative reason or rather explained by this *prima facie* non-normative nature. One answer pressures the non-robust factualist towards RMR; the other pressures her towards a change in subject.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori*; Smith, “A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;” Smith, “The Magic of Constitutivism;” Smith, “Constitutivism.”

²⁷⁷ I am grateful to Andrew Chitty for the following objection: that this deployment of the Euthyphronic dilemma rests upon an ambiguity in the interpretation of that to which the constitutivist is supposed to be committed, between ‘natural’ and ‘*prima facie* non-normative’. If so, the constitutivist can reply with a counter-dilemma: either the Euthyphronic argument resists an account of normativity in natural terms; or it resists an account of normativity in *prima facie* non-normative terms. If the former, the constitutivist may want to insist that the standards constitutive of agency are themselves *not* articulable in

Let us note here that, if the Euthyphronic argument works, it will apply pressure to *all* non-robust factualisms, in virtue of their denial of the *sui generis* character of normativity. This is in spite of the fact that it is commonly considered in the context of constitutivism or constructivism more broadly.²⁷⁸ I discuss these views in detail below but, briefly, constructivist models tend to ground normative facts in procedures that supposedly generate normatively privileged results;²⁷⁹ and constitutivism is a form of constructivism that takes the relevant procedures to be bound up with the constitutive standards of agency.²⁸⁰ Shafer-Landau writes, of constructivism's vulnerability to *Euthyphro*:

solely natural terms; and, if the latter, it will not be clear precisely *why* an account of normativity in *prima facie* non-normative terms is so problematic. In response to the first horn, I doubt that the constitutivist can account for conformity to the standards of agency avoiding *both* a natural account *and* an account of those standards as instances of *sui generis* normativity. (Giving this account in terms of ideal rationality, as is the tendency of Korsgaard, for instance, will not help; for, again, rational standards seem to be either naturalistically respectable or *sui generis* normative – see: Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism;” Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*.) This makes clear that I treat the natural and the *prima facie* non-normative as interchangeable (without the ‘*prima facie*’, this would of course beg the question against many naturalists). For it is unclear what a third metaphysical space, between the natural and the *sui generis* normative, is supposed to be. This then answers the second horn of the dilemma above: an account of normativity in *prima facie* non-normative terms will have all the same weaknesses of an account in natural terms. The argument in 3. I. 2. just below – connecting the Euthyphronic argument back to the indispensability argument – should make clearer why I take *prima facie* non-normative terms to be inadequate to capture the normative facts we saw were deliberately indispensable.

²⁷⁸ Bagnoli, “Constructivism;” Shafer-Landau, “The Constructivist Challenge,” 42-44. Note that I grant here, for argument's sake, that constructivists can indeed draw the conclusions they hope to, challenges to which are considered by Bagnoli.

²⁷⁹ Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism;” Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*; O'Neill, “The Presidential Address;” O'Neill, “Constructivism;” Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism;” Rawls, *Theory of Justice*.

²⁸⁰ Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism;” Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*; Rosati, “Agents and “Shmagents;” Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori*; Smith, “A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;” Smith, “The Magic

If the attitudes of idealized agents are worthy to fix moral truth – if the agents are good in the relevant respect – then these attitudes must be developed in response to reasons. But then the reasons come first. So if constructivism is to avoid dignifying the arbitrary choices of idealized agents, and if it is to avoid lapsing into realism, then it must insist that these choices are exemplary because of having been formed through exceptional attentiveness to *non-moral* reasons. But if the reasons that are constraining the choices of the favoured agents are not moral reasons, it is hard to see why the outcomes of the initial conditions should be definitive of morality.²⁸¹

Shafer-Landau is sceptical of the ability of constructivism to handle this challenge. But the critique in this passage applies just as well *mutatis mutandis* to any naturalist factualism. Below, I discuss the vulnerability of constitutivism and idealising views to the Euthyphro; but I also suggest that the Euthyphronic point here applies to naturalist views *in general*, in virtue of the identification of normative properties with natural ones. What comes first, the reasons or the privileged aspects of nature? Are the reasons the reasons in virtue of further reasons, or in virtue of nature? All naturalisms will have to answer whether the coextensiveness of normativity with an aspect of nature – whatever it is – is to be explained

of Constitutivism;” Smith, “Constitutivism;” Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, “Précis;” Velleman, “Replies.” Note that it may be controversial to read constitutivism as a form of constructivism (my thanks to Andrew Chitty for pointing this out). Nonetheless, I take the two groups of views to have significant crossover (as is evident from the literature surrounding them), and to occupy a similar metanormative region. In both cases, there is a following of a tradition that goes back to Kant – Kant, *Groundwork* – of seeking to systematically proceed from meagre premises to substantial normative conclusions to find, ‘between realist and relativist accounts of ethics’, as Onora O’Neill puts it, ‘a third, distinct possibility.’ – O’Neill, “The Presidential Address.” Nothing of substance rides on this that I can see, however, as my argument against these groups of views does not depend on one being a sub-group of the other.

²⁸¹ Shafer-Landau, “The Constructivist Challenge,” 42-43.

by the normative or the natural side of the relation; and neither answer, I claim below, will be as stable as RMR's answer to this question.

Though perhaps less clearly, non-metaphysical realisms will also be pressured by Euthyphro. The argument is designed not only to show the inadequacy of a non-robust answer to the Euthyphronic question, but furthermore the *necessity* of a robust answer. Here, of course, we need not grant the coextensiveness of normativity with any particularly neatly defined aspect of nature; we can return to Bader's concession of a less neat sort of biconditional. But the point remains that it must be for some normative reason that normativity is coextensive with nature. If a non-metaphysical realism is to do more than simply refuse to answer the Euthyphronic question, it must, I argue below, answer in one of the two ways I have described: one route leads to RMR; the other to a change in subject.

Note the differences between the Euthyphronic argument and other comments on RMR in the literature. Firstly, recall Bader's constraint on RMR: that it must accept coextensiveness and then seek out some grounding difference to support its non-identity claim. Though optimistic regarding RMR's prospects for coping with this challenge, Bader leaves the question of the *sui generis* character of normativity open: if we can identify grounding differences, then RMR is salvageable; if not, then it is not. The Euthyphronic argument, on the other hand, if sound, supports the *sui generis* claim directly: if there is indeed any normativity (which the indispensability argument was designed to show), it must be distinct from nature. If Bader is right that the only explanation for the simultaneous coextensiveness and non-identity of normativity and nature is a grounding difference, we can then see the Euthyphronic as an argument to the effect that there *must be* some such grounding difference, even if we do not yet know what precisely it is.

Secondly, the Euthyphronic argument is also distinct from, though admittedly similar to, the Moorean open question argument.²⁸² Moore attacks both conceptual claims of equivalence between normative and natural concepts alongside substantive claims of coextensiveness (in the form of claims to the effect that this or that natural thing is the sole intrinsic good). The Euthyphronic argument, on the other hand, can accommodate both conceptual equivalence and substantive coextensiveness. It targets specifically any further claim of the identity of normative with natural properties – claims that normativity is nothing above and beyond nature. Accordingly, it avoids the problems surrounding Moore’s conceptual claims,²⁸³ and is not hostage to the fortunes of projects seeking to establish necessary and sufficient natural conditions for normative facts. It is compatible with RMR and the success of the Euthyphronic argument that happiness, say, is the sole intrinsic good (and even that ‘intrinsically good’ *means* ‘happy-making’). The point is to insist that this, if true, is true in virtue of normative reasons constitutively independent of happiness.

Thirdly, note that the present articulation of the Euthyphronic question is neutral as to whether agents *care* about the answer. Van Roojen discusses the Euthyphronic argument as primarily focused on whether agents care about the answer to the Euthyphronic question;²⁸⁴ but this component seems

²⁸² Moore, *Principia Ethica*.

²⁸³ Nicholas Shackel focuses on these conceptual aspects of Moore’s argument and tries to develop them in a different way. My discussion of the Euthyphronic argument is neutral on whether this is successful: Nicholas Shackel, “Constructing a Moorean ‘Open Question’ Argument: The Real Thought Move and the Real Objective,” *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 98, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1163/18756735-00000140>. Similarly, I am neutral with regard to whether Niklas Möller’s version of the open question argument can be made to work: Niklas Möller, “Direct Reference and the Open Question Argument,” *Dialectica*, 67, no. 4 (2013), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42971333>.

²⁸⁴ van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 258-260.

dispensable. This focus on whether or not agents will be appropriately *motivated* by the answer to the Euthyphronic question is most clearly prevalent in the application of the Euthyphro to constitutivism (which I consider below). But any connection between normative truth and agential motivation is, strictly speaking, dispensable to RMR. Admittedly, a version of RMR that *cannot* account for agents being moved by robust normative truth would be unattractive (I return to this briefly in 3. 3.), but failure to accommodate agents being motivated for robust reasons is no fatality for the view. The more pressing point is something else van Roojen writes: ‘Is the action right because I would choose it in conditions of full information and imaginative acquaintance, or do I choose it because it is right?’²⁸⁵ This is the Euthyphronic point I take to be central to the robust stage of the case for RMR.

Finally, the Euthyphronic argument is distinct from the closely related *normativity objection* to normative reduction:²⁸⁶ that reduction of normativity to nature involves metanormative eliminativism in reducing the normative to the arbitrary.²⁸⁷ In contrast, the Euthyphronic argument attacks both reductivist *and* non-reductivist naturalisms; it also attacks both Humean synthetic reductivisms *and* analytic reductive projects.²⁸⁸ Furthermore, as I argue below, the Euthyphronic argument, when combined with the force of the indispensability argument, counters a response to the normativity objection from Patrick Fleming that I consider below.

²⁸⁵ van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 258.

²⁸⁶ Patrick Fleming, “The Normativity Objection to Normative Reduction,” *Acta Analytica* 30 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-015-0255-y>; Lenman and Lutz, “Moral Naturalism.”

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ For discussion: Fleming, “The Normativity Objection,” 420-421.

3. 1. 2. THE EUTHYPHRONIC ARGUMENT AND DELIBERATIVE INDISPENSABILITY

Beyond suggesting that the Euthyphronic argument applies to all non-robust metanormative factualisms, I also wish to emphasise here the way in which it works in combination with the indispensability argument of the previous chapter. To see the importance of deliberative indispensability here, consider an objection from van Roojen. Considering reductive naturalism specifically, he argues that reductivists can resist the force of the Euthyphronic argument by rejecting the constraint on any reduction that it ‘must *transparently* preserve the phenomenology of normative force’.²⁸⁹ If they reject this constraint, then, though they may be offering an account of (authoritative) reasons in terms of something *prima facie* non-normative, they can nonetheless maintain that this reduction is compatible with perfectly adequate answers to questions of normative justification, even if the answer to the question of what it is to be a reason is given naturalistically. In other words, we may point to reason-giving properties when asked ‘why should I do this?’ – and this is as good an answer as the non-naturalist can give – while we may also have good reason to understand those reason-giving properties as constitutively dependent upon natural ones.

The indispensability argument, I think, makes clear why this is problematic. According to the indispensability argument, we are permitted to infer to the existence of normative facts in virtue of their indispensability to deliberation. Specifically, I argued that it is *authoritatively*, as opposed to *formally*, normative facts that are indispensable to deliberation. In other words, we are permitted to infer to the existence of normative facts to which we owe allegiance, distinct from mere standards of correctness.

²⁸⁹ van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 259.

But this appears to suggest that we *do* require the transparent preservation of (authoritatively) normative force in any metanormative account. Our metanormative theory must retain the authoritative character of the deliberatively indispensable normative facts if the resulting account of normativity is to be about precisely that to which we are committed in deliberation. I suggest here that it can only retain this authoritative character by understanding those facts as *sui generis*.

The Euthyphronic argument I have sketched thus far purports to show that this applies to non-reductive accounts too: however we understand normative properties in (at least *prima facie* non-normative) natural terms, *those* terms will not be those that can regulate deliberation *from the perspective of the deliberating agent*. If I am to resolve my deliberation in the belief that I should do something, in the authoritatively normative sense, but then also believe, at the metanormative level, that I should do it in virtue of some aspect of nature, absent any further independent normative reason, I can thereby no longer believe that I should do it in the fully authoritative sense. What I needed was a reason, as opposed to a mere fact – what should be, as opposed to what merely is or could be – so, if the relation between normativity and nature is ultimately explained by mere facts, by what merely is, I will not have what I need.

To clarify, it is not that *sui generis* normative facts are indispensable to the project of deliberation *from within*. The deliberating agent can perfectly rationally deliberate according to normative facts *simpliciter*. Metanormative theory is largely dispensable to deliberation in this sense. The point is rather that, by whatever route we come to the metanormative question, the Euthyphronic argument shows that only a robust answer will do. Let us dramatise the point and imagine the deliberating agent asking the metanormative theorist what she should do. The answer given – perfectly satisfactory in itself – may be in terms of some natural things having authoritative normative properties. But that answer is then countered with a further question: why do those natural things have those normative properties? If this question is seeking just another, more fundamental normative fact, we can respond again in naturalistic terms; but if it communicates the deliberating agent's seeking to understand what her normative facts and reasons consist in, a naturalistic answer will move the conversation away from the authoritative normativity with which she is concerned.

The distinction between authoritative and formal normativity as it features in deliberation therefore looks mirrored in the distinction between *sui generis* and naturalistic conceptions of normativity at the metanormative level. The indispensability argument shows that we are committed to an authoritative kind of normativity that exists, in some sense, above and beyond the formal. Then, when we come to capture this authoritative normativity in metanormative theory, we find that naturalistic theories fail to capture the specific thing to which we are committed in deliberation in failing to capture the normative as above and beyond the natural. Naturalistic theories therefore move the discussion away from the kinds of normative facts vindicated in deliberation. Robust metanormative realism (RMR) does not. So, on this front at least, RMR looks stronger.

We should note here an objection to the Euthyphronic argument from van Roojen, who discusses it specifically with regard to reductivist naturalism. He suggests that both reductivists and non-naturalists alike are vulnerable to something along the Euthyphronic line of thought. For either both theories are under pressure to provide an answer as to why a given natural thing has the normative properties it has; or both theories can provide the same sort of answer, asserting a necessary relation between normative properties and the things possessing them – the difference is just that the non-naturalist takes this relation itself to be irreducible while the reductivist does not. When the reductivist then explains that relation in reductively natural terms, she need not backtrack on her assertion of the right kind of relation between the relevant normative properties and the natural properties by which they are possessed.²⁹⁰ In effect, van Roojen identifies two distinct offerings in the relevant reductivism: first, a normative offering, in terms of some relation between normative properties and natural things which possess them; then, a metanormative offering in terms of an account of that relation ultimately resolving in natural, not

²⁹⁰ van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 258-260.

normative, terms. He treats this reductivism as being able to escape the Euthyphronic dilemma by providing the first offering and then, quite separately, the second on the side. But this, I think, mistakes the Euthyphronic question for the deliberative one. The normative offering is an adequate response to the deliberative question, ‘what should I do?’ Here, van Roojen is right that both reductivist and non-naturalist alike can provide a similar sort of answer. But an adequate response to the Euthyphronic question can only be metanormative: rather than asking what there is reason to do, it asks what the nature of a reason is supposed to be. But to this question, the reductivist can only provide the second offering. And this offering, in natural and not normative terms, cannot capture the authoritative normativity to which we are indispensably deliberatively committed.

Consider an analogy. Heat, we now know, is mean molecular motion. Learning this, nothing about it is particularly intuitive, and the relation is surprising – heat, after all, does not *feel* like mean molecular motion – but inference to the best explanation tells us that it is so. The naturalist may well propose similarly strong grounds for the view that rightness is a natural property, and she may wish to point to all the initially unintuitive relations we accept as evidence that the surprisingness of her claim is no decisive reason to reject it. So far, so good. But when we say that heat *is* mean molecular motion, we may mean to say two different things: either that heat is *coextensive with* mean molecular motion; or that heat is coextensive with *and furthermore identical to* mean molecular motion – that heat has no distinct existence from its necessary and sufficient physical conditions. Now, in the case of heat, we may have no good reason to question or resist the move from coextensiveness to identity. The point I wish to make, however, in pointing to the combination of the Euthyphronic and indispensability arguments, is that, in the normative case, we *do* have a good reason to resist this move (just as we may have good reason to resist the move from coextensiveness to identity in the mind-body problem, say, or in considerations of colour perception). The reason is that there is something about the left side of the copula that is lost when we identify it with the right. RMR can accommodate that rightness is a natural property, provided we disambiguate the ‘is’ by taking it to express a coextensiveness relation. If it expresses an identity relation, we seem to have lost the relevance of our discussion to deliberation. But,

given that deliberation is what got all of this started, this now looks like a serious weakness for naturalist factualism.

Consider a further analogy. Suppose we ask whether a tennis ball is out, or whether a defendant is guilty. In response, we are told that an umpire called the ball out, or that a jury called the defendant guilty. If we ask whether this is any guarantee that the ball/defendant is *really* out/guilty, we are then told that being out/guilty simply *consists in* being declared thus by umpires/juries. So far, so good. We then ask why this is the case. Now, if the response here cites features of the ball's position or the defendant's behaviour, alongside features of umpires and juries which privilege their ability to track those things, we may walk away satisfied. But if the response cites only properties of umpires and juries, absent reference to the positions/behaviour of tennis balls/defendants, we are not likely to be satisfied that the original answer to our question is precisely what we were looking for. We wanted to know something about tennis balls and defendants, but we have ended up with knowledge of umpires and juries – something has gone awry. The response to the question of why being out/guilty consists in being declared thus by umpires/juries must appeal primarily to the out/guilty side of that relation, and only secondarily to the features of the umpires/juries side, if that response is to stand in the right sort of relation to the facts we want to know. If it does not, the subject seems to have been changed, and we are then being told that the ball/defendant is out*/guilty*. Similarly, I think, if we are told that rightness consists in some natural property, where the explanation for this appeals primarily to nature, we end up with an account of rightness*, not the rightness in which we were initially interested. This is not the rightness we sought in deliberation. Any conception of deliberation as seeking rightness*, rather than good old rightness, seems to change the subject. And this, I suggest, is the serious problem for all non-robust factualisms.

I do not wish to overstate this point. It is not that naturalisms are inadvertently metanormatively eliminativist,²⁹¹ or altogether doomed, in virtue of change of subject of which I claim they are guilty. The result of the Euthyphronic argument is, I think, more modest: naturalisms are *revisionary*. They do not provide an account of that to which we are committed in deliberation *in a manner altogether consistent with our deliberation*. This is not eliminativist, as we still understand ourselves to be deliberating according to commitments pertaining to authoritative normativity. But the Euthyphro shows that these commitments are in (some perhaps minor) error or confusion; for the distinction between authoritative and formal normativity cannot be clearly matched at the metanormative level.

There may well be perfectly good reasons to insist upon a revisionary conception of deliberation, of course. It may be that RMR faces too overwhelming a set of challenges to be ultimately sustainable, and so we must retreat to a position that yields as much as we wanted from a metanormative theory whilst avoiding the excesses that embarrass RMR. And perhaps, if this is so, a naturalistic theory is the way to go. I do not wish to debate the overall relative plausibility of the various theories here. My point is modest: *at least* with respect to characterising the normativity to which we are committed in deliberation, the Euthyphronic argument shows that RMR is stronger than its rivals. RMR gives us *precisely* the thing to which we are committed when we deliberate: reasons above and beyond mere facts, authoritative normativity above and beyond the formal, what should be above and beyond what merely is or could be. Naturalistic views, on the other hand, provide at most an approximation of the normativity we seek in deliberation. RMR may ultimately be flawed in this generosity; but, on this front at least, it stands more stable than naturalist metanormative theories.

²⁹¹ Fleming takes the related normativity objection (discussed in the previous section) to attribute eliminativism to naturalism: Fleming, “The Normativity Objection.” I do not wish to phrase the Euthyphronic argument in such strong terms.

But should we be so sure that a non-revisionary theory is, even *ceteris paribus*, more attractive than a revisionary one? In answering this, I do not wish to wave the flag of methodological conservatism too enthusiastically. One of the great virtues of Enoch's case for RMR, atop which this thesis has been developed, is the advancing of positive arguments for the view without retreating to methodological conservatism; and I wish to retain that virtue here. However, I do not think it staunchly conservative to suggest that we require more *motivation* for a revisionary theory than we do for a non-revisionary one. In the present context, this means that naturalisms will have more work to do to show that their theory is warranted. This looks tantamount to saying that, in this respect at least, they are weaker than RMR.

I also do not wish to be too modest about the combined force of deliberative indispensability and the Euthyphro. Deliberative indispensability was how we arrived at the conclusion that there are the normative facts about which naturalist factualists are naturalist. There may of course be other important routes to metanormative factualism; but, if we take the indispensability argument to play some important role in establishing factualism, this entails that deliberation is crucial to the entire project of metanormative factualism as such. If we arrived at our factualism via deliberative considerations, then offering a revisionary theory of deliberation threatens to destabilise the ground of our commitment to normative facts. In revising the distinction between the authoritatively and the formally normative, we thereby destabilise the manner in which the indispensability argument was able to utilise that distinction to respond to conceptions of deliberation that challenged the deliberative indispensability of normative facts (such as those from Skarsaune, my caricatured Freudian, and the conception of deliberation as making use only of formal normativity). It may not be *fatal* for factualist theories to destabilise the grounds for factualism in this way – we may have other grounds for factualism – but if we take deliberative indispensability to be an important tool in the kit of the factualist, then a revisionary theory of deliberation blunting that tool is problematic. The non-revisionary account of deliberation provided by RMR is therefore deeply attractive in at least this respect.

3. 1. 3. THE ARGUMENT FOR ROBUST METANORMATIVE REALISM

Let us summarise the argument for robust metanormative realism (RMR) thus far, taking into account the combination of the indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments, and highlighting the significance of the distinction, within the indispensability argument, between authoritative and formal normativity:

- 1) It is rational to infer to the indispensable commitments of rational projects;
- 2) Deliberation is rational;
- 3) Commitment to authoritatively normative facts is deliberatively indispensable;
- c: It is rational to infer to the existence of authoritatively normative facts.**
- 4) Normative facts are coextensive with natural facts;
- 5) If normative/natural coextensiveness is understood as explained by nature, normativity cannot thereby be understood as authoritative, and we require a revisionary theory of deliberation;
- 6) We have presumptive reason to adopt a non-revisionary theory of deliberation;
- 7) Only a metaphysics of normative facts as *sui generis* is compatible with a non-revisionary theory of deliberation;
- C) We have presumptive reason to understand normative facts as *sui generis*.**

Premises (1) through (3) and the interim conclusion (c) were argued for at length in the previous chapter. (4) is neutral on whether we grant the neat kind of coextensiveness maintained by most naturalists – between normative facts and some clearly defined aspect of nature – or the less neat kind granted by Bader. (5) is, in a word, the central thrust of the Euthyphronic argument that I have advanced thus far in this chapter (I do more to defend this in 3. 2. Just below). Enough was said above, I take it, to support (6).

Note that (7) is formulated specifically to rule out non-metaphysical realisms from benefiting from the argument as it stands. It could have been formulated in the vaguer terms of an *understanding* of normativity as *sui generis* being the only understanding compatible with a non-revisionary theory of

deliberation; but this may have left it open to non-metaphysical realisms to claim such an understanding.²⁹² Accordingly, I mention metaphysics explicitly to precisify that only a *positive account* of *sui generis* normativity can align with our deliberation. I argue for this in 3. 2. 3.

As for (C), perhaps the worry will now arise that it is no great surprise. After all, it is generally accepted that RMR boasts certain advantages over its rivals in virtue of its alignment with our everyday normative practices. Indeed, in the *Introduction* to this thesis, I highlighted those very advantages. Accordingly, perhaps there is now some concern that this conclusion is so weak as to not say anything beyond what we began with. I think this worry is misplaced. As Enoch often points out, looking for knockdown arguments in metanormative theory is not likely the best way to go. Deciding the best metanormative theory is likely a matter of tallying what he calls ‘plausibility points’.²⁹³ The purpose of the Euthyphronic argument I have presented is to contribute to the pool of considerations in favour of accepting RMR. And, as I made clear above, alignment with the very deliberative practice that helped us show that there are any normative facts to begin with is no small consideration.

Beyond that, however, my hope is that this Euthyphronic argument helps to make clear just *why* RMR has the advantages I started off this thesis by describing. Why is RMR so good at capturing the way we tend to think and talk about normativity in the everyday context? Why are other theories less capable of boasting this alignment with our pre-philosophical engagement with the normative? Perhaps one answer is that deliberation is central to our everyday normative practices, and RMR is uniquely hospitable to

²⁹² I take it that Moore, for instance, on Hurka’s reading as a non-metaphysical realist, can be understood as taking goodness to be *sui generis* but without offering a metaphysics of it as such: Moore, *Principia Ethica*; Hurka, “Moore’s Moral Philosophy.”

²⁹³ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 14.

our deliberative practice. The Euthyphronic argument, I hope, formalises the cordiality between RMR and everyday normative discourse and practice, beyond mere methodological conservatism, into a marriage supported by positive argument.

In what follows, I wish to consider the range of applicability of the Euthyphronic argument presented here. Specifically, I wish to bring the focus back to Enoch, who I have said is central to both stages of this case for RMR, but who has hitherto largely been absent from the discussion in this chapter. I wish to mention some ways in which this Euthyphronic argument is present in many of his own robust stage arguments, ways in which it can add to the power of others and therefore to the overall power of the robust stage of his case for RMR, and ways in which the Euthyphronic argument can apply universally against all non-robust factualisms: both naturalisms and non-metaphysical realisms.

3. 2. GENERALISING

To consider the strength of the Euthyphronic argument against a variety of non-robust metanormative factualisms, I consider Enoch's arguments against two non-robust views, arguing that the Euthyphronic argument strengthens them, then going on to generalise the Euthyphronic point against non-robust factualism in general. In 3. 2. 1., I consider Enoch's 'shmagency' objection to constitutivism, identify a problem for it, and try to strengthen it with the Euthyphronic argument; I also apply it this to constructivisms beyond constitutivism, and locate it in Enoch's own attack on constructivism. In 3. 2. 2., I do something similar with his response to idealising response-dependence views. Finally, in 3. 2. 3., I suggest the susceptibility of a wider range of non-robust views in general to the Euthyphronic argument.

3. 2. 1. AGAINST CONSTITUTIVISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM IN GENERAL

3. 2. 1. 1. THE SHMAGENCY OBJECTION

Metanormative theories in the constitutivist family understand normative truth as constituted by agential practices like action or agency, seeking to draw normative conclusions from those practices. Enoch understands the underlying thought as follows:

The intuitive idea can be put, I think, rather simply: In order to know what it takes for a car to be a good car, we need to understand what cars are, what their constitutive functions are, and so on. [...] Analogously, then, perhaps in order to know which actions are good [...] all we need is a better understanding of what actions are, or perhaps of what it is to be an agent, someone who performs actions.²⁹⁴

The appeal of such a view is readily apparent. It purports to secure metanormative factualism without incurring the degree of explanatory debt incurred by the *sui generis* commitment of robust metanormative realism (RMR).

There may be some controversy in describing constitutivism as a response-dependence view and indeed as a form of naturalism. On Shafer-Landau's description, for instance, some constitutivisms are committed to something like metanormative objectivity,²⁹⁵ which is importantly related to the notion of response-independence; and, on van Roojen's description, some constitutivisms are neither clearly

²⁹⁴ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 170.

²⁹⁵ Shafer-Landau, "The Constructivist Challenge," 39-41.

naturalist nor non-naturalist.²⁹⁶ Recall, however, I have considered response-independence in absolute terms: a view of normativity as response-independent is one that maintains metanormative dependence upon *no* agential responses *whatsoever*. Constitutivism, as I discuss below, clearly maintains that normativity is constitutively dependent upon some agential responses – those we share in virtue of our being rational agents, say, or in virtue of our autonomy. Accordingly, though it does not maintain the constitutive dependence of normativity on just any responses of specific agents, it is nonetheless a response-dependence view (albeit one with an objectivist bent to it, more in the spirit of Kant²⁹⁷ than Rawls,²⁹⁸ for instance). For this reason, I treat constitutivism as a naturalism – though not necessarily as a reductivist naturalism.

Enoch's attack on constitutivism is the now well known 'shmagency' objection initially advanced in *Agency Shmagency*,²⁹⁹ where Enoch considers the constitutivism of Christine Korsgaard,³⁰⁰ David

²⁹⁶ van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 260.

²⁹⁷ Kant, *Groundwork*.

²⁹⁸ Rawls, *Theory of Justice*.

²⁹⁹ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency." Haase and Mayr argue that Enoch's case against constitutivism far more clearly targets Kantian style constitutivisms than neo-Aristotelian kinds: Matthias Haase and Erasmus Mayr, "Varieties of constitutivism," *Philosophical Explorations* 22, no. 2 (2019): 96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2019.1601754>. I am not able to address this here, other than to say that I intend the Euthyphronic argument, intended as an improvement on Enoch's argument against constitutivism, to pressure all naturalisms, including those discussed by Haase and Mayr, simply in virtue of their denial of the *sui generis* character of normativity.

³⁰⁰ Enoch primarily considers Korsgaard's 2002 Locke lectures (David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 171, footnote 3) later developed into: Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*.

Velleman,³⁰¹ and Connie Rosati.³⁰² He also develops this critique in response to Smith's constitutivism³⁰³ elsewhere. We should pause to note that Rosati has written that she is not, after all, a constitutivist in the manner in which Enoch paints her.³⁰⁴ But in any case, she identifies the character of her constitutivist self, Shmosati; so what follows can be seen either as a comment on Rosati (if Enoch is right in his characterisation of her) or Shmosati (if he is wrong). The Euthyphronic argument with which I hope to improve Enoch's attack on constitutivism is intended as neutral on this.

Starting with Korsgaard, Enoch understands Korsgaard as seeing action as self-constitution, with an action's worth determined by its role in constituting an agent.³⁰⁵ The rightness of action, on this view, is derived from what is constitutive of action. The appeal of this thought, as Enoch sees it, is that the normativity of action could end up on a par with less controversial kinds of standards. This would provide an ontologically lightweight metanormative factualism, which requires nothing constitutively

³⁰¹ Enoch principally considers: Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, "Précis;" Velleman, "Replies."

³⁰² Enoch considers: Rosati, "Agency."

³⁰³ Smith, *Ethics and the A Priori*; Smith, "A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;" Smith, "The Magic of Constitutivism;" Smith, "Constitutivism." For Enoch's discussion: Enoch, "Constitutivism."

³⁰⁴ Rosati, "Agents and "Shmagents";" Enoch was kind enough to confirm with me in correspondence that he thinks Rosati is wrong about this.

³⁰⁵ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 171.

independent of nature, and it would provide a stable reply to scepticism about normativity.³⁰⁶ This is

Enoch on Korsgaard:

If someone asks why they should care that their action is morally impermissible, [...] just insisting that they should care because it is immoral [...] will be, so Korsgaard thinks, pointless. But if someone is building a house and if sheltering from the weather is a constitutive standard of being a house, then she cannot sensibly ask: “why should I care if the house I’m building cannot – because of my shoddy work – shelter its inhabitants from the weather? [...] Skeptical challenges are rarely raised about the normative status of standards that apply to the proper building of houses, and when they are, they can be met fairly easily and confidently. If skeptical challenges of this kind to morality [...] can be shown to be on a par with skeptical challenges to house-building norms, it seems that progress has been made [...]”³⁰⁷

Enoch then considers Velleman, taking the latter’s constitutivism to frame the normativity of action such that sceptics will struggle to be sceptical about it.³⁰⁸ He reads Velleman as taking the normatively relevant feature of action to be its connection to a desire to be intelligible to oneself, where we satisfy this desire when we act as we think we will.³⁰⁹

Finally, Enoch discusses Rosati’s consideration of Moorean challenges to naturalism – which we saw briefly in *Chapter One*. Rosati argues that reductive naturalisms struggle to provide anything useful to

³⁰⁶ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 171-172.

³⁰⁷ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 172.

³⁰⁸ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 172-174.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

reflective autonomous agents when they engage in practices requiring normative regulation.³¹⁰ She claims that, for reflecting agents, reductions of normative reason to desires, say, cannot help them evaluate their desires; more generally, reductions of normativity to non-normative features of agents will not permit those agents to evaluate those features.³¹¹ Rather than taking this as a refutation of naturalism, however, Rosati takes it as a challenge to be met by a naturalism taking as its reductive base something which can aid autonomous reflection by bearing an important relation to agency. Although Rosati does not flesh out the details of such a base, she takes it to consist in the ‘motives and capacities constitutive of agency’,³¹² which can, presumably, be fleshed out in naturalistic terms. Then, a reduction of normative reasons would be possible which maintains normativity as distinct, in some important sense, from normatively arbitrary portions of nature – thereby supposedly saving it from Moore’s criticism.³¹³

Enoch considers the common thread of these positions:

[...] they are all attempts to ground normativity in what is constitutive of action. And although the rationales suggested for this attempt differ [...] these rationales are obviously related. For all three of these theories are attempts at accounting for [...] features of normative (or moral) discourse as its objective purport, its apparent universality (or claim thereto), its nonoptionality and nonarbitrariness,

³¹⁰ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 174-177.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Rosati, “Agency,” 513.

³¹³ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 174-177.

while nevertheless avoiding a more robustly realist metanormative theory, one that stipulates the existence of purportedly queer irreducibly normative facts and properties.³¹⁴

But the problem Enoch identifies is that the relevant features constitutive of agency look themselves just as normatively arbitrary as desires.³¹⁵ Starting with Rosati, he asks why the privileged features of an agent's psychology which ground agency are less normatively arbitrary than desires with which that agent started out dissatisfied:

According to Rosati, we are to think of [an] autonomous agent stepping back from her desires [...] because she sees them [...] as normatively arbitrary. And we are to think of her as troubled by the fact that [...] all facts of her psychology are just as arbitrary as her desires. She then finds out that some parts of her psychological makeup are unique in that they are such that without them she would not have qualified as an agent at all. Knowing that, is she supposed to be relieved? Why does it matter, as far as the question of normative arbitrariness is concerned, that some parts of her psychology have this necessary-for-agency status?³¹⁶

The same problem confronts Korsgaard, whose response to the metanormative sceptic can be countered by the sceptic failing to be motivated to be an *agent*, in Korsgaard's sense – again, asking why the relevant features of agency should be understood as normatively nonarbitrary – preferring instead to be a *shmagent*:

We are to imagine [...] someone who remains indifferent when we tell him that his actions are immoral [...]. He then reads Korsgaard and is convinced that self-constitution is a constitutive aim of action, so that you cannot even count as an agent and your bodily movements cannot even count as actions unless

³¹⁴ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 177.

³¹⁵ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 177-180.

³¹⁶ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 178.

you aim at self-constitution [...]. And assume that our skeptic is even convinced that [...] morality [...] can be extracted from the aim of self-constitution. [...] Why isn't he entitled to respond along the following lines: "Classify my bodily movements and indeed me as you like. Perhaps I cannot be classified as an agent without aiming to constitute myself. But why should I be an agent? Perhaps I can't act without aiming at self-constitution, but why should I act? [...] I am perfectly happy with being a shmagent – a nonagent who is very similar to agents but who lacks the aim (constitutive of agency but not of shmagency) of self-constitution. I am perfectly happy performing shmactions – nonaction events that are very similar to actions but which lack the aim (constitutive of actions but not of shmactions) of self-constitution." Has Korsgaard put us in a better spot vis-à-vis this why-be-an-agent problem than we were vis-à-vis the why-be-moral [problem]?³¹⁷

Enoch attacks not only the conclusion of this approach, but its starting point. Recall that the initial attraction of constitutivism was its positioning moral normativity on all fours with less controversial forms of normativity – like, say, the standards of building houses. The problem with trying to understand moral normativity as uncontroversial in this way, he thinks, is reflected in a problem with trying to understand *any* normativity as uncontroversial:

[...] suppose we manage to convince [the builder] that certain standards [...] are constitutive of being a house. It seems he is entitled to respond: "Very well then, I guess I am not engaging in the project of building a house but rather in the project of building a shmouse, of which these standards are not constitutive. So what is it to me how you classify my project?"³¹⁸

³¹⁷ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 179. I have omitted mention of rationality here, and of what Enoch describes as Korsgaard's attempt to derive 'the whole of practical rationality, and perhaps even rationality more generally' through her constitutivism (p. 171). Partly this is because this aspect is not relevant to the present discussion; but it is also because, with a clear conceptual distinction between authoritative normativity and rationality, this aspect of Korsgaard's project becomes less plausible, and the project less threatening for RMR.

³¹⁸ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 179.

Enoch finds this problem in Velleman too, and in any theory which grounds normativity in constitutive features of agency. He discusses Rosati's attempt to respond to this challenge, within which he identifies three distinct claims: that the relevant features are not *really* normatively arbitrary; that we care about these features and that this caring does not involve a mistake; and that challenges to the authority of these features are self-undermining such that the features themselves are self-vindicating.³¹⁹

Enoch's response to the first of these claims, that the relevant features are nonarbitrary, is simply to reiterate the challenge:

Of course, if being constitutive of agency renders the relevant motives and capacities nonarbitrary (in the intended, normatively relevant sense), then the problem is solved. But this, remember, is precisely where the problem was located. The question was *why* it is that being constitutive of agency renders these motives and capacities nonarbitrary. Just saying that they are does not, of course, constitute a satisfactory answer.³²⁰

His response to the second claim, that we care about these features without that caring involving a mistake, is to challenge both the thought that we *do* in fact care about them and, even granting that we do, to challenge the thought that the absence of a mistake in that caring would be sufficient to vindicate them as normatively nonarbitrary.³²¹ He points out that Rosati rejects hedonism as normatively arbitrary, while it remains true that caring about pleasure is not obviously mistaken.³²²

³¹⁹ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 181.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 182.

³²² Ibid.

Finally, Enoch considers Rosati's claim that challenges to the normative authority of the motives and capacities constitutive of agency are self-undermining, such that those capacities emerge as self-vindicating.³²³ Enoch notes this response in Velleman and Nagel too and, later, in Smith.³²⁴ The problem, Enoch says, is that the constitutivist mistakes the challenge she is trying to meet.³²⁵ Short of positively establishing the normativity of the capacities constitutive of agency, she merely shows that those capacities are unavoidable; these two accomplishments, for Enoch, are not one and the same. The challenge to constitutivism is that it looks legitimate to accept that one cannot but engage in projects, all the while rejecting the standards constitutive of those projects. While this may be unstable, this is less of a problem for the rejector of constitutivism than it is for the constitutivist, on Enoch's view:

“Perhaps,” Korsgaard's skeptic may say, “I cannot opt out of the game of agency, but I can certainly play it half-heartedly, indeed under protest, without accepting the aims purportedly constitutive of it as mine.”³²⁶

I take it that the shmagency objection is powerful against many constitutivisms. Nonetheless, I think it requires supplementation if it is to have force against constitutivism *as such*.

³²³ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 182-185.

³²⁴ Enoch, “Constitutivism.”

³²⁵ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 183-185.

³²⁶ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 188.

3. 2. 1. 2. BOLSTERING THE SHMAGENCY OBJECTION

The problem with Enoch’s attack on constitutivism is that it does not target constitutivism in a form most threatening to RMR. To see why, note that Enoch’s shmagency objection targets the specific constitutivist claim that we have reason to *care* about the standards constitutive of agency. Constitutivists tend to seek, beyond metanormative factualism, an existence-internalism that guarantees some connection between normative facts and agential motivations³²⁷ – where motivations are necessary for normative reasons. The constitutivist hopes that even the normative sceptic can be shown that she does, in some sense, *already* care about the normativity regulating her agency in virtue of *already* caring about the standards constitutive of agency. Enoch challenges this by asking why the sceptic should be moved by the observation that certain standards are constitutive of agency – why should she care about agency?

I take it that the shmagency objection is ultimately powerful against most constitutivisms as they appear in the literature. Enoch has, to my mind, convincingly applied it against Korsgaard, Velleman, Rosati, and Smith. But the internalism against which the shmagency objection hits hardest is ultimately dispensable to constitutivism – which I understand here as just the view that authoritative normativity is constitutively dependent upon agency (or action, or the like). One can perfectly well imagine a constitutivist – let us call her Shmenoch – who ditches internalism and says simply that we are *rational* or *reasonable* to care about the standards constitutive of agency, not that we *simply do*.

This should now bring to mind the discussion in the previous chapter. There, I presented three different indispensability principles that could vindicate metanormative factualism via deliberative considerations: Enoch’s original normative indispensability principle; a pragmatic indispensability

³²⁷ David Enoch, “Agency Shmagency,” 177.

principle; and a rational indispensability principle. Enoch's criticism of constitutivism treats it as if it makes use of the *pragmatic* indispensability principle (indeed, he is explicit that he cannot advance a pragmatic version of the indispensability argument precisely because it would undermine his attack on constitutivism).³²⁸ But what if Shmenoch makes use of normative or rational indispensability?

For exactly the same reasons as it was problematic for Enoch to deploy normative indispensability in his argument metanormative factualism, it will be problematic for Shmenoch to do the same. But that still leaves rational indispensability. And a rationalistic constitutivism could make a claim very close in character to that of the indispensability argument: we are *rational* to treat the standards constitutive of agency as authoritatively normative. How precisely Shmenoch might make this claim is not of pressing concern here. The point is simply that constitutivism *as such* – maintaining the constitutive dependence of normativity on agency – can accommodate this view. In fact, the argument for such a position could be very similar to the rationalistically-amended indispensability argument developed in the last chapter: we are *rational* to engage in agency; certain normative commitments are indispensable to agency; the rational indispensability principle therefore shows that it is rational to maintain those commitments.

Any attack on Shmenoch's constitutivism is likely to backfire, undermining the indispensability argument which grounds the very metanormative factualism the robust interpretation of which Enoch is seeking to defend with his shmagency objection. And note that it will not help the shmagency objection to reject the rationalistic amendment to the indispensability argument and revert to the normative version. Shmenoch – if she is happy to beg the question against the nonfactualist and/or the sceptic – can advance the following argument: we have (authoritatively normative) *reason* to engage in agency; certain normative commitments are indispensable to agency; the normative indispensability principle

³²⁸ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 62, footnote 33.

therefore shows that it is rational to maintain those commitments. Absent the pressure to bind normative truth to motivations, we still have here a perfectly coherent, metaphysically light response-dependence metanormative factualism that is immune to the shmagency objection.

Of course, the fact that Shmenoch is hypothetical is relevant. Enoch is primarily interested in responding to *actual* constitutivists. However, the internalism present in modern constitutivists is arguably far less pronounced in the roots of constitutivism in Kant, according to Stephen Finlay and Mark Schroeder.³²⁹ In any case, I do not think we can ignore Shmenoch, in the case for RMR, simply because she is hypothetical. Remember, the point of the robust stage is to support the claim that *no* non-robust view can accommodate normative facts as well as RMR. The case for RMR is therefore best served by an argument against constitutivism *as such*, beyond a piecemeal series of attacks on the details of specific constitutivisms.

And this general argument is, I think, none other than the Euthyphronic argument sketched above. Let us grant the constitutivist that we have normative reason to do all and only that in accordance with the standards constitutive of our agency; what explains this relation between normativity and agency? Is it explained in virtue of the fact that we have independent normative reason to be agents, or is it explained in virtue of further facts about agency? If the former, we seem to lean towards RMR; if the latter, we seem not to have presented the kind of authoritative normativity to which we are committed in deliberation. Neither outcome looks desirable for the constitutivist: one commits her to RMR; the other forces her to revise her conception of deliberation. And if I have been right to highlight the similarities between the practice of deliberation and the practices upon which constitutivists tend to focus, the

³²⁹ Stephen Finlay and Mark Schroeder, "Reasons for Action: Internal vs. External", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/reasons-internal-external/>.

constitutivist is in a uniquely uncomfortable position in advancing a revisionary theory of such a core normative practice as deliberation and declaring that, when we deliberate, we are in some form of error.

Another way of phrasing this is to say that the standards constitutive of agency may simply be *formally*, not *authoritatively*, normative. That is, it may well be clear that we *can* succeed in conforming to these standards, but is it the case that we *should*? Let us grant that the answer is in the affirmative; the question remains – why should we? The Euthyphronic argument shows, I think, that the constitutivist answer to this, in failing to adequately do justice to the distinction between normativity and nature, thereby fails to adequately capture the distinction between authoritative and formal normativity. And no conceptual claim can help, either. To say, as Smith does, that we mean something to do with the constitutive standards of agency when we talk about normativity,³³⁰ tells us only that there is some *conceptual* connection. The Euthyphronic argument works at the *substantive* level to show that this conceptual equivalence cannot be matched in reality, lest we fall foul of our deliberative convictions with regard to authoritative normativity above and beyond the formal.

And all of this can be argued without concern for the actual motivations of agents. Often, the Euthyphronic argument is presented in the literature with an emphasis upon this concern. But the version I have advanced can take it or leave it. What is important is that it is rational to maintain normative commitments – whether or not a given agent is rational is then a contingent matter.³³¹ This Euthyphronic objection to constitutivism therefore overcomes a weakness in Enoch’s shmagency objection, despite

³³⁰ Smith, “A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons;” Smith, “The Magic of Constitutivism.” This analytic connection is also evident in: Smith, *The Moral Problem*. Though, it is developed there in a less obviously constitutivist way. For discussion: Enoch, “Constitutivism.”

³³¹ This is Smith’s view in: Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 130-181.

the two objections being closely related. I suggest that the Euthyphronic argument can combine with the shmagency objection, and other objections to features of specific constitutivisms, to increase the appeal of RMR relative to that of constitutivism.

3. 2. 1. 3. AGAINST CONSTRUCTIVISM IN GENERAL

The Euthyphronic attack on constitutivism can be generalised to pressure constructivism generally, of which constitutivism is one sub-group. Constructivism in general involves attempts to justify normative conclusions on the basis of *procedures* which generate them;³³² such attempts, like the constitutivist ones, purport to establish metanormative factualism without the ontological burdens of *sui generis* normativity.³³³ Here, the Euthyphronic point is more clearly evident in Enoch's critique.

Enoch's focus is not *local* constructivisms, which explain one region of normativity in terms of another taken to be less problematic. Such constructivisms ultimately depend upon a conception of unconstructed normativity beyond their target discourse; accordingly, they are not unique metanormative models in competition with RMR.³³⁴ Rather, he focuses on *global* constructivisms which take all normative facts to be grounded in certain procedures.³³⁵ In constitutivist constructivism, for instance, the procedure which justifies normative conclusions pertains to agency or action; in the

³³² Enoch, "Constructivism," 319-320.

³³³ As well as making clear things like the relation between normativity and motivation: Enoch, "Constructivism," 324-325.

³³⁴ Enoch, "Constructivism," 323.

³³⁵ Enoch, "Constructivism," 325.

constructivism of Rawls, by contrast, the procedure which justifies his principles of justice is his ‘original position’.³³⁶

For a global constructivism to offer a metaphysics, beyond an epistemology, of normativity – and for it to be more than a restatement of other metanormative models – its privileged procedures, Enoch says, must be *ineliminable*.³³⁷ It cannot be, for instance, that the procedure is a mere ‘heuristic device, a way of making a naturalist reduction sound more appealing.’³³⁸ It must be that the relevant procedure cannot be dispensed with, and that the relevant normative results cannot emerge without it – as the democratic process, in an example from Enoch, cannot be dispensed with in a democracy, even if a vote can be perfectly predicted in advance.³³⁹

Enoch’s critique is that the pressures of a constructivism’s being global in scope pull in the opposite direction to the pressures of its positing an ineliminable procedure:

In order to be interestingly constructivist, the relevant constructivist procedure would have to be ineliminable in some way. But in order to be global – that is, in order to attempt to construct *all* normative reasons and truths – such a theory cannot help itself to any (unconstructed) normative material with which to characterize the constructivist procedure and to motivate its ineliminability. It’s not clear that these two constraints can be satisfied by one and the same theory.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p. 11.

³³⁷ Enoch, “Constructivism,” 331.

³³⁸ Enoch, “Constructivism,” 328.

³³⁹ Enoch, “Constructivism,” 331.

³⁴⁰ Enoch, “Constructivism,” 332.

Enoch's thought is that it is only inasmuch as a constructivism is local that it will be able to account for its preferred procedure as ineliminable in the right way.³⁴¹ This is directly analogous to his critique of constitutivism: that we can only think of the privileged capacities of agency as normatively nonarbitrary if we presume some normativity beneath them whence they derive normative significance.

And this is now the central Euthyphronic point. The metanormative constructivist claims that some procedure generates normative conclusions; but is this supposed to be for some normative reason, or is it supposed to be that the procedure *just does* generate these conclusions? If the constructivist appeals to normative reasons to explain the normative significance of the procedure, then she must appeal to procedure-independent normativity, thereby no longer offering a theory of normativity in terms of that procedure; but if she appeals only to the procedure itself, she offers a *prima facie* non-normative fact in place of a normative reason. Why should I do that which is in accordance with the relevant procedure? The answer cannot, it seems, be a reason, if the constructivism is to be global; and so it must be a mere fact, which fails to furnish us with the authoritative normativity to which we are justified in our deliberative commitments.

We can therefore strengthen Enoch's critique of constructivism. His claim is that 'it is highly unlikely'³⁴² that any global constructivism can be made to work. If the Euthyphronic argument is right, he can say something stronger: *no* global constructivism can be made to work – at least with respect to the project of preserving authoritative normativity in answer to the Euthyphronic question.

³⁴¹ Enoch, "Constructivism," 331-335.

³⁴² Enoch, "Constructivism," 335.

3. 2. 2. AGAINST IDEALISING

RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE VIEWS

Like the constitutivist theories considered above, idealising response-dependence theories treat normative reasons as constitutively dependent upon privileged agential responses. Grounding normativity in *actual* responses would leave response-dependence views open to powerful counterexamples – if I have reason to do all and everything I *actually* desire, I may be normatively required to do all sorts of bizarre and mutually contradictory things – hence the focus on ideal responses. Again, the appeal is readily apparent: idealising purports to secure metanormative factualism without the demands of *sui generis* normativity. Less defining a discreet family of views, idealisation tends to be a feature of a variety of response-dependence metanormative theories. Constitutivism, and constructivism in general, may well idealise, but so too do other naturalisms.³⁴³

The problem that all idealising views share, however, as Enoch sees it, is that they must motivate the move from actual to ideal responses, but that they cannot adequately do so.³⁴⁴ In *Why Idealize?*,³⁴⁵ Enoch considers a number of ways in which idealisers might try to motivate their idealisation, and finds each wanting.

First, he considers that idealisation can take us closer to an idealisation-independent truth; however, appeal to this idealisation-independent normative truth leans us away from the response-dependence key

³⁴³ Sobel, “Subjectivism and Idealization;” Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Williams, *Moral Luck*.

³⁴⁴ Enoch, “Why Idealize?” 761-787.

³⁴⁵ Enoch, “Why Idealize?”

to idealising projects.³⁴⁶ Second, he considers that idealisation generates extensional adequacy; but he cautions that extensional adequacy is, by itself, insufficient for theoretical adequacy if attained in an *ad hoc* manner – this appeal, says Enoch, thereby only delays the question of the rationale for idealisation.³⁴⁷ Third, Enoch considers that idealisation provides the best explanation of our justificatory practices; but he argues that it is rather robust metanormative realism (RMR) that provides the best explanation of these practices *even if* it ultimately turns out that RMR is false.³⁴⁸ Fourth, he considers that idealising theories have overall plausibility relative to metanormative rivals; but he finds the absence of any plausible rationale so high a cost to pay that idealisation would have to yield enormous other benefits that he does not take it to deliver.³⁴⁹

Fifth, Enoch considers that idealising response-dependence views might offer their theory as revisionary, attributing systematic error to everyday normative discourse with its robustly realist flavour, and advancing a conception of normativity which provides what we wanted from normative discourse but without the error.³⁵⁰ Such a theory cannot appeal to the first two possible rationales for idealisation – truth-tracking or extensional adequacy – but it may be able to appeal to justificatory practices, arguing that, although these are best explained by RMR, a commitment to *sui generis* normativity is incompatible with an independently plausible naturalistic worldview. Granted sufficient support for that

³⁴⁶ Enoch, “Why Idealize?” 761-765.

³⁴⁷ Enoch, “Why Idealize?” 766-769.

³⁴⁸ Enoch, “Why Idealize?” 769-778.

³⁴⁹ Enoch, “Why Idealize?” 778-781.

³⁵⁰ Enoch, “Why Idealize?” 785-787.

perspective, then, the best we can hope for is a revisionary normative discourse in terms of idealised responses. And Enoch argues that this kind of idealising theory may well be off the hook.

This response is akin to the conclusion I suggest we draw from the Euthyphronic argument: that non-robust theories must offer revisionary conceptions of some of our first-order normative practices. If idealising response-dependence theories motivate themselves along these lines, it would amount to the concession that the Euthyphronic argument seeks to draw – that a revisionary theory of normativity is not ideal – but alongside argument to the effect that this conclusion is well-motivated.

However, this is not the end of the story; the assertion that such revision is necessary depends upon our finding that RMR, and its commitment to *sui generis* normativity, cannot cope with the pressures under which it labours. This matter does not seem to me to be at all closed. At the end of this chapter, I argue that some of the balms to RMR's pressures advanced by robust realists are inadequate; nonetheless, I think we have reason to be optimistic that others can be found. Moreover, as I suggested in 3. 1., retreat to a revisionary conception of our first-order normative practices, if that includes deliberation, destabilises the grounds for the metanormative factualism which is the object of this debate. I therefore take this response to hinge on the objections to RMR I consider below.

Note that Enoch presents his critique of idealising theories as a challenge to *all* response-dependence views.³⁵¹ Given that actual responses are so shaky a ground for a metanormative theory, Enoch takes it

³⁵¹ Indeed, he takes the group of views he considers to be wider than those traditionally conceive of as ideal observer theories: Enoch, "Why Idealize?" 760, footnote 7.

that idealising is the only way to support response-dependence. If, however, ideal responses provide just as shaky a ground, then the whole project of response-dependence naturalism would be in trouble.³⁵²

But a strong response to Enoch is provided by David Sobel.³⁵³ Sobel proposes a rationale for idealisation that Enoch does not consider – one Sobel takes to be ‘the best rationale’, ‘right on the surface’, and one he has ‘always assumed motivated and guided various idealization proposals’.³⁵⁴ Sobel proposes that, the more a desire is informed, the more it is for its object – the more I understand what it is that I want, the more I want that particular thing as opposed to something else.³⁵⁵

Enoch concedes that this rationale overcomes the challenge described in *Why Idealize?*:

[...] Sobel is right in claiming that informed desires [...] are more genuinely for their object. [...] suppose that I believe that what it is like to taste vanilla ice-cream is what it is actually like to taste pistachio ice-cream. In such a (admittedly weird) case, there is considerable pressure to say that I don’t *really* want vanilla ice cream at all, and perhaps even some pressure to say that my desire is for pistachio ice cream instead. At the very least – and this is all that is needed for Sobel’s Rationale – there is an intuitive sense in which this desire is *less* genuinely for vanilla ice cream compared to your desire (based on true phenomenological beliefs) for vanilla ice cream. So I want to concede this point.³⁵⁶

³⁵² Enoch, “Why Idealize?” 760-761.

³⁵³ Sobel, “Subjectivism and Idealization.”

³⁵⁴ Sobel, “Subjectivism and Idealization,” 343.

³⁵⁵ Sobel, “Subjectivism and Idealization,” 343-345.

³⁵⁶ Enoch, “Idealizing,” 10-11.

The problem, for Enoch, is that, while this response looks ‘sensible’,³⁵⁷ it is not clear to what extent it is *available* to the idealiser granted her response-dependence stance. The initial challenge was to provide a rationale for idealisation from within the philosophical concerns which motivate idealising metanormative theories. Sobel’s rationale, however, is not obviously consistent with these concerns:

This property – being more genuinely for its object – that some desires have and others lack seems to me arbitrary from a subjectivist point of view. In this respect this property is like the property of being, say, kind. Some desires are kinder than others. And it is quite sensible (in some contexts, at least) to privilege the former over the latter. But from within a subjectivist framework, [...] there is no rationale for such privileging. [...] similarly, desires that are less genuinely for their object are just as much desires as those that are more genuinely for their object.³⁵⁸

Nonetheless, Enoch concedes that there is something less arbitrary, from a response-dependence standpoint, about desire being for its object than there is about desire being, say, kind.³⁵⁹ But he is concerned that it is unclear that it ‘is *sufficiently* less arbitrary for Sobel’s Rationale to be completely satisfactory in coping with the why-idealize challenge.’³⁶⁰ More work is required to show why this characteristic of some desires makes them normatively significant within a response-dependence framework.

But it seems to me that Sobel can easily show this, nonarbitrarily from the response-dependence standpoint: we *want* our desires to be about their objects. If I desire vanilla ice-cream, I (at least

³⁵⁷ Enoch, “Idealizing,” 11.

³⁵⁸ Enoch, “Idealizing,” 11-12.

³⁵⁹ Enoch, “Idealizing,” p. 12.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

implicitly) want this desire to be informed; if it is not, then I may expend energy upon acquiring something which does not satisfy me. To want vanilla ice-cream is also to want my imagination of the taste of vanilla ice-cream to *not* in fact be an imagination of the taste of pistachio ice-cream. If I want vanilla ice-cream because I think it tastes like pistachio ice-cream, I would have been happier had I sought the latter. A desire uninformed in this way is likely to lead to disappointment upon its satisfaction. If I want to go to Compton (Berkshire) because I think it has all the properties in fact possessed by Compton (California), and I expend time and energy on getting to Compton (Berkshire) only to find that the music scene is not what I expected, I have wasted time and energy on getting something unsatisfactory inasmuch as I really wanted to experience the virtues of Compton (California).

We do not, in general, want to have desires uninformed in this manner. Accordingly, we can identify a motivation to idealise our desires purely on the basis of our response-dependence theory in the fact that we want to have ideal desires. This property is clearly fundamentally different, from the response-dependence standpoint, from the property of being kind. So Sobel provides a clear rationale for idealisation.

But the Euthyphronic argument looms nonetheless. Even if it is somehow written into the structure of desires that they are more suited to overall desire-satisfaction the more they are for their objects, we may still ask why we should engage in desire-satisfaction. If the response to this request is an independent normative reason, we drift towards RMR; but if the response is simply to point to natural features of desire-satisfaction, then we drift towards the arbitrary. Neither option looks stable for response-dependence factualisms seeking to capture authoritative normativity above and beyond the formal.

Enoch's response to Sobel allows that the latter's rationale might work – at least, for some idealisation theories.³⁶¹ And we have seen that Sobel's rationale is even stronger than Enoch gives it credit for. But the Euthyphronic problem for idealising views seems to apply universally. From the deliberative standpoint, pointing to desires that are more genuinely for their object, as importantly related to the authoritative normativity we seek in deliberation, may be perfectly adequate. But when we try to offer a metanormative theory of why our authoritatively normative reasons are so intimately connected to our desires, the Euthyphronic dilemma seems to force us to say one of two things, neither of which looks to be able to capture the authoritative normativity in the manner the idealiser seeks. If the coextensiveness of the pursuit or satisfaction of these privileged desires with normative rightness is explained by the desire side of the relation, we fail to preserve in a transparent manner the *what-should-be-ness* of the authoritative side of the distinction away from formal normativity. But if the coextensiveness is explained by the normative side, we seem to drift towards RMR. The problem is, then, not so much the idealising as much as it is simply the absence of a commitment to *sui generis* normative facts.

3. 2. 3. AGAINST NON-ROBUST VIEWS IN GENERAL

I hope to have shown thus far that the Euthyphronic argument supports Enoch's robust stage of his case for robust metanormative realism (RMR), in shedding some of the problematic aspects of his attack on constitutivism, and in answering a potential response to his attack on idealising response-dependence views. I wish now to suggest ways in which the Euthyphronic argument might further bolster Enoch's robust stage by applying universally to all non-robust metanormative factualisms: response-dependence

³⁶¹ Enoch, "Idealizing," 12-13.

naturalisms, and naturalisms generally, as well as non-metaphysical realisms. Given the scope of this work, what follows is only a sketch of how I understand Euthyphro to be relevant across the board of non-robust factualisms; I do not suppose that there are no responses to the Euthyphronic point available to those theories I claim are targeted by it. Furthermore, I do not consider all of Enoch's robust stage piecemeal arguments against the various factualist alternatives to RMR in the same detail in which I considered his treatments of constitutivism and idealisation. Nonetheless, I hope to point to the way in which the robust stage of Enoch's case for RMR may be strengthened by a general argument targeting the denial of *sui generis* normativity common to all non-robust factualism.

Starting with response-dependence metanormative factualisms, the Euthyphronic argument serves to pressure all such views in a similar way. For any account of normativity in terms of any set of agential responses, we can grant any claim of coextensiveness for the sake of argument, but still request an explanation for this relation, and neither of the two possible answers look promising for response-dependence views to maintain.³⁶² Answering the Euthyphronic question in constitutivist terms, in terms

³⁶² This would complement the force of Enoch's various arguments against response-dependence metanormative theories: Enoch, "Why Idealize?"; David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency;" Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*; Enoch, "Idealizing."

of idealising, in quasi-realist terms,³⁶³ say, or fictionalist³⁶⁴ terms, will all invite the same problem. Even granting that it is right to do all and only what is in accordance with the relevant responses, if the reason for this is given in terms of the responses and not the rightness, this will be insufficient to reflect our deliberative commitment to the authoritatively normative as above and beyond the merely formal. We may have told the deliberating agent what reasons she has with such a theory – and indeed given her the right answer – but when she asks why she has these reasons (in the constitutive sense), replying by ultimately restating natural features of our engagement with reality will be inadequate. With respect to capturing the authoritative normativity indispensable to deliberation, RMR looks stronger than response-dependence theories in general.

³⁶³ Here we should note that Blackburn rejects the label of response-dependence for his quasi-realism in virtue of the manner in which normative discourse can be conducted on the quasi-realist model: Simon Blackburn, “Moral Realism,” in *Morality and Moral Reasoning*, ed. John Casey (London: Methuen, 1971); Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*; Simon Blackburn, “Must We Weep For Sentimentalism?” in *Practical Tortoise Raising: and other philosophical essays*, ed. Simon Blackburn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199548057.003.0007>. This is challenged (successfully, I think) by Jussi Suikannen: Suikannen, “Subjectivist Consequences of Expressivism.” For a defence of Blackburn’s view against Suikannen: Schroeder, “Does Expressivism Have Subjectivist Consequences?” However, even if we remain neutral on this point, what is relevant here is the naturalism of quasi-realism, broadly defined in terms of the denial of the *sui generis* character of normativity. Whatever the quasi-realist can say about normative discourse to the effect that we can engage in it as if it had a *sui generis* object, she nonetheless, as an expressivist, maintains that normative properties are not *really sui generis*, that they bear important necessary relations to agential responses or other privileged aspects of nature that permit normativity to exist only within a strongly naturalistic worldview. If she did not maintain this, she would maintain instead a non-metaphysical metanormative realism – in which case, as I argue just below, she would be vulnerable to a variant of the Euthyphronic argument – or RMR.

³⁶⁴ Eklund, “Fictionalism,” Kalderon, *Moral Fictionalism*.

For the same reason, the Euthyphronic argument seems to exert pressure against naturalisms in general, across the response-dependence/response-independence divide. And it seems to do this in a manner that undercuts distinctions between reductive and non-reductive forms of naturalism. Granting that non-reductive naturalists can make good on their promise to offer a naturalism without reduction,³⁶⁵ the problem looms the same for them as it does for their (more clearly) reductive relatives. The problem, again, is simply the very denial of *sui generis* normativity that distinguishes these views from RMR. For any supposed coextensiveness of normativity with *any* aspect of nature, the Euthyphronic question as to why this relation obtains cannot, I think, be answered satisfactorily by a naturalism without offering the revisionary theory of deliberation I have argued is (at least presumptively) undesirable.

Enoch is upfront that his argument against naturalism depends largely upon an intuition that normative facts are 'just-too-different'³⁶⁶ from natural facts. Much like the assertion of normative premises in an argument against error theory, this will not hold much sway with naturalists. Joyce puts it gently: 'A champion of naturalistic realism [...] would, I suspect, find little to lose sleep over'.³⁶⁷ The Euthyphronic argument, however, provides something far stronger than mere intuition that normativity is 'just too different' from nature; it compels us either to embrace RMR or undermine our conception of deliberation. Although this depends upon the indispensable commitments at work in deliberation, I stress that these indispensable commitments are distinct from intuitions as, in George Bealer's terms, *seemings*

³⁶⁵ To cast some doubt on this, consider the moral twin earth problem. For discussion: Lenman and Lutz, "Moral Naturalism;" Miller, *An Introduction*, 162-168; Jeffrey Wisdom, "A dose of reality for moral twin earth," *Philosophical Psychology* 34, no. 6 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2021.1917534>.

³⁶⁶ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 105.

³⁶⁷ Joyce, "Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously," 843.

as opposed to beliefs.³⁶⁸ It is not that, in deliberation, normativity merely *seems* to be authoritative in the manner in which I have claimed naturalisms cannot capture – this would be wide open to beliefs and intuitions contrary to those seemings – rather, it is that, when we deliberate, we cannot but *believe* in an authoritative normativity above and beyond the formal kind, inasmuch as we are rational. And the Euthyphronic argument purports to show that this belief (independently justified by the indispensability principle) is then in tension with any metanormative theory besides RMR. Intuitions may or may not be shared; the point of the indispensability argument was that certain beliefs are necessarily shared by *all* deliberating agents. I return to the matter of intuition – and its distinction from indispensable commitment – briefly below; but suffice it to say here that the Euthyphronic argument seems to present a significantly more powerful case against naturalism than an intuitive one.

Furthermore, the Euthyphronic argument is immune to Wedgwood’s criticism of Enoch’s case against reductivist naturalism, that it falls prey to ‘the broadly neo-Fregean distinction between sense and reference’, given that one might think normative concepts irreducible to natural concepts while nonetheless understanding normativity itself as ultimately natural.³⁶⁹ The Euthyphronic argument does not primarily challenge any supposed conceptual relation between normativity and nature. We can grant analytic connections between normative and natural *concepts* while still being independently pushed by the Euthyphronic argument to resist committing to the wrong sort of synthetic connection between normative and natural *things* – a connection that is supposedly explained by the natural, and not the normative, side of the relation.

³⁶⁸ Bealer, “A Priori Knowledge,” 123-124.

³⁶⁹ Wedgwood, *Review*, 391-392.

Moreover, this helps us to bolster some of the other non-naturalist responses to naturalism. In 3. 1. of this chapter, I mentioned that the Euthyphronic argument helps to counter a response to the normativity objection.³⁷⁰ Patrick Fleming argues that the best articulation of the normativity objection describes naturalistic reduction as reducing normativity to the *arbitrary*. However, he takes this to be an overstatement. Instead, he thinks that naturalistic reduction reduces normativity to the *contingent*, which need not be arbitrary.³⁷¹ But the connection between the Euthyphronic and indispensability arguments should make clear why this reduction to the contingent *is* reduction to the arbitrary *from the deliberative perspective*. Certainly, Fleming is right to point to the distinction between the arbitrary and the contingent in terms of the former being essentially mysterious and the latter not.³⁷² But the detached perspective from which we note this difference is not the perspective within which nonarbitrariness is crucial. Granting the coextensiveness of normativity with some feature of nature, we now want some account of normativity that can capture that to which the deliberating agent is indispensably committed. Resolving that account in the contingent is, from that perspective, to resolve it in the arbitrary. Why is the answer to my deliberative question that I should pursue some natural state of affairs? Pointing to some contingent feature of nature cannot answer this question in a manner that retains the authoritative character of normativity any better than could the constitutivist, for it involves changing the subject from normative to natural.

³⁷⁰ Fleming, “The Normativity Objection.”

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² Fleming, “The Normativity Objection,” 425-427.

Fleming is wrong to say that RMR, like reductive naturalism, depends upon some contingency in virtue of taking agential responses to be normatively important.³⁷³ He mistakes, I think, normative facts being *constitutively dependent on* agential responses with those responses *featuring* in some normative facts. RMR purports to explain our normative questions with *normative necessity*. In this regard, it aligns far smoother with our deliberation than can any naturalism. Indeed, it seems to me that, even if we could imagine an instance of deliberation concerning no contingency whatsoever – in a world constituted entirely by necessary things, where the outcome of one’s sole instance of deliberation is the only contingency – answering the Euthyphronic question naturalistically faces the same problem. The contingency of nature does not seem to me to be the real problem. The problem lies deeper in that the materials provided to understand normativity by the naturalist do not align with the kind of normativity to which deliberating agents are indispensably committed.

If the above considerations are right, metanormative factualisms that are non-robust in virtue of a naturalistic worldview are susceptible to the Euthyphronic argument.³⁷⁴ But they share in rejecting a metaphysics of *sui generis* normativity with a group of non-naturalist views which are nonetheless non-

³⁷³ Fleming, “The Normativity Objection.”

³⁷⁴ Where does John McDowell fit into all of this? McDowell tends to present his ethics as an alternative to naturalism: John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 66-86; McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 77-218. And his ethics are often discussed in this way: Miller, *An Introduction*, 243-283. While I doubt that McDowell’s moral philosophy is ultimately non-naturalist, I mention it here to avoid confusion. If McDowellian moral philosophy is really non-naturalist, then it is similar to the non-metaphysical realism discussed presently at least inasmuch as it is vulnerable to the same variant of the Euthyphronic argument I deploy against non-metaphysical views. If, however, it is ultimately a kind of elaborate naturalism (as it seems to me) then I think it will be vulnerable to the variant of the Euthyphronic argument discussed earlier in the context of naturalism.

metaphysical in their approach: non-metaphysical metanormative realisms.³⁷⁵ Annika Böddeling³⁷⁶ argues that non-metaphysical approaches to metaethical realism – such as are exemplified by Dworkin,³⁷⁷ Parfit,³⁷⁸ and Scanlon³⁷⁹ – fall prey to a dilemma. She argues that these views seek to distinguish themselves from sophisticated forms of expressivism by embracing cognitivism, the view that moral statements are truth-apt and express beliefs. However, if the notion of truth in this cognitivism is fleshed out in the minimal sense in which I have been using it throughout this thesis, then the non-metaphysical approach is insufficiently distinct from such expressivisms to carve out its own unique space in the metaethical debate. If, however, the notion of truth is defined in a more metaphysically

³⁷⁵ Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth;” Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*; Matthew H. Kramer, *Moral Realism as a Moral Doctrine* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Parfit, *On What Matters*; Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*. Enoch considers such views (Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 121-133) as part of a cluster of concerns he describes as ‘quietist’, drawing also from: Blackburn, *Essays*; John McDowell, “Values and Secondary Qualities” in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, ed. John McDowell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998b); John McDowell, “Projection and Truth in Ethics,” in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, ed. John McDowell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998c); Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*; Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Hilary Putnam, “Are Moral and Legal Values Made or Discovered?” *Legal Theory* 1, no. 1 (1995), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1352325200000045>; Thomas M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³⁷⁶ Böddeling, “Cognitivism.”

³⁷⁷ Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth;” Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*. Dworkin argues that many metaethical disagreements are first-order ethical disagreements in disguise, but Orsi doubts whether this is sustainable: Orsi, “Meta-ethical Disagreements.”

³⁷⁸ Parfit, *On What Matters*.

³⁷⁹ Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*.

heavyweight fashion, then we appear to lean into RMR. Enoch and McPherson,³⁸⁰ too, doubt whether Scanlon's non-metaphysical ambitions to secure realist outcomes – truth, objectivity, stance-independence, modal connections between normative and other kinds of truths and an explanation of normative epistemology³⁸¹ – are feasible. They claim that, like quietists such as Dworkin,³⁸² Kramer,³⁸³ and Parfit,³⁸⁴ Scanlon accepts 'something like the quasi-realist's *negative* program', arguing that these realist outcomes need not entail a robust metaphysical project, all the while rejecting 'the *positive* expressivist program that is supposed by the quasi-realist to provide the underlying interpretative alternative to these putative ontological commitments.' However, they question the details of his account and raise a variety of independent objections. Enoch also challenges elsewhere that Scanlon's non-metaphysical approach collapses into something analogous to both mathematical and metanormative fictionalism,³⁸⁵ which he takes to be problematic for the view – along with making other objections.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁰ David Enoch and Tristram McPherson. "What do you mean "This isn't the question"?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 47, no. 6 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2017.1312963>.

³⁸¹ Enoch and McPherson, "What do you mean "This isn't the question"?" 820.

³⁸² Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth;" Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*.

³⁸³ Kramer, *Moral Realism*.

³⁸⁴ Parfit, *On What Matters*.

³⁸⁵ Eklund, "Fictionalism;" Field, *Science Without Numbers*; Kalderon, *Moral Fictionalism*. For discussion: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 109-115.

³⁸⁶ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 122-127.

I wish to grant, for the sake of argument, that non-metaphysical realisms can cope with these sorts of objections. I suggest, however, that they confront the Euthyphronic argument all the same *solely* in virtue of their denial of the metaphysics of *sui generis* normativity. But the Euthyphronic argument, if it is to respond to this group of RMR's rivals, will have to be slightly modified. After all, here there is no positive naturalistic metaphysical conception of normativity being advanced in opposition to RMR's; rather, what is denied is the need for any such conception. If we can carry on in our first-order normative discourse quite without metaphysical accompaniment, then why bother with a view as troublesome as RMR?

Against the various naturalisms, I tried to show that the Euthyphronic argument could grant their respective coextensiveness claims concerning normativity and specific, relatively neatly defined, aspects of nature, but nonetheless show that RMR provides stronger explanations of those claims. Against non-metaphysical views, less relevant are these neat coextensiveness claims and more relevant is the kind of coextensiveness discussed by Bader. Granted infinite disjunctions and conjunctions, we can identify *some* (perhaps rather messy) natural necessary and sufficient conditions for any normative fact. One way of looking at the power of the Euthyphronic argument against non-metaphysical views, then, is in terms of seeking an explanation for *this* coextensiveness between normativity and nature. We need an explanation that retains the authoritative character of normativity; but what answer can be given besides either a normative or a natural answer? The latter was, I argued, inadequate; and the former takes us to RMR. Where is the non-metaphysical view positioned with respect to these options? It looks as if failure to provide a metaphysical explanation of the relation between normativity and nature is failure to provide the right kind of *assurances* that the normativity to which we are committed in deliberation is really how it appears to us in deliberation – in just the same way as did providing the answer in naturalistic terms.

The Euthyphronic argument, then, beyond showing naturalistic answers to the metanormative question to be inadequate, furthermore seems to suggest that a robust account of metaphysically *sui generis* normativity is necessary for an adequate answer. Just as the naturalist was, I claimed, shown by the Euthyphronic argument to be forced to accept a revisionary conception of deliberation, so too is the non-

metaphysical realist. In both cases, there is a failure to support the notion of authoritative normativity as it features in deliberation as efficiently as RMR.

There may of course be important advantages to an approach that purports to capture what we wanted from non-naturalism without the metaphysical burdens of RMR. And indeed there may be powerful answers to the Euthyphronic challenge to non-metaphysical realism as I have laid it out. I cannot consider this in detail here; I have sought only to provide a sketch of a way in which the Euthyphronic point relevant to both response-dependence and response-independence naturalisms may apply also to non-metaphysical realisms. The point, though modest, nonetheless seems to me to trouble such views: providing no metaphysical account of the relation between normativity and nature looks weak in a similar way as does providing that account in natural terms – at least, from the perspective of trying to capture the authoritative normativity to which the deliberating agent is necessarily committed. In virtue of the feature which non-metaphysical views share with naturalisms – their rejection of a metaphysics of *sui generis* normativity – their answer to the Euthyphronic question also looks less stable than that provided by RMR.

That we can engage in deliberation perfectly well *from within* without considering that practice *from without* does not alter that, for whatever reason we come to consider deliberation from without, only RMR provides an answer in line with our conception of deliberation from within. The non-metaphysical realist may have good reason to think that this consideration of our normative practices from without is ill-advised – Enoch considers a number of such reasons – but the Euthyphronic argument nonetheless reveals a burden shared by the non-metaphysical approach alongside naturalism. In any case, I think Enoch is right to dismiss a number of reasons advanced in the literature as to why we are better off avoiding metaphysical approaches to metanormative theory, or indeed avoiding metanormative theory altogether. He considers various charges against metanormative theory: that it is inherently confused or

unintelligible in seeking to ‘look at the universe from nowhere’;³⁸⁷ that it is a fruitless pursuit;³⁸⁸ that it is superfluous or a hindrance to first-order normative theorising.³⁸⁹ I will not discuss his responses in detail here; but a common thread to those responses is to simply point to the metaphysical arguments made in favour of various metaphysical views – do such arguments seem inherently confused or unintelligible, fruitless, superfluous, or to provide any hindrance to first-order normative theory? I think he is right to say that they do not.³⁹⁰ Non-metaphysical approaches to metanormative realism may well be able to powerfully motivate their rejection of the metaphysics of normativity along these and/or perhaps other lines. All I hope to have motivated here is the thought that such approaches remain pressured by the Euthyphronic problem. Accordingly, the Euthyphronic argument may well bolster Enoch’s own responses to this non-metaphysical alternative to RMR.

I hope, then, to have shown that the Euthyphronic argument pressures *all* non-robust metanormative factualisms, just as the indispensability argument pressured all nonfactualisms. Most importantly for my present purposes of bolstering Enoch’s particular case for RMR, I hope to have shown that the Euthyphronic argument can complement the robust stage of that case. Needless to say, the matter is not, at this point, settled decisively in favour of RMR. The indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments combine to give us some strong reasons to abandon views besides RMR; but, as Enoch maintains, the

³⁸⁷ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 127-128.

³⁸⁸ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 129.

³⁸⁹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 129-133.

³⁹⁰ Relevant here is Wright’s treatment of Wittgensteinian concerns about the possibility of metaphysical debates: Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 202-230. Naturally, I concur with Wright’s doubts that metaphysical debate is ultimately impossible (p. 230).

case for RMR is not a knockdown argument against its rivals. Accordingly, what is now important is to consider relative plausibility. To that end, I turn to objections to RMR that remain outstanding even if we take the above considerations to yield its preferability at this stage.

3. 3. OUTSTANDING OBJECTIONS TO ROBUST METANORMATIVE REALISM

3. 3. 1. WHERE WE STAND NOW

Even if the indispensability argument of *Chapter Two* is entirely successful in establishing metanormative factualism, and the Euthyphronic argument above effective against the full range of factualist alternatives to robust metanormative realism (RMR), the result would nonetheless be only *presumptive* support for RMR. What remains is to tally up the overall plausibility of RMR against its rivals. While this largely falls beyond the scope of this thesis, I will here consider some of the more pressing objections to RMR remaining even after the preceding discussion.

Specifically, as my goal here has been to strengthen Enoch's case for RMR specifically, I consider three areas in which I find Enoch's response to objections inadequate or incomplete. These objections concern motivation, epistemology, and supervenience. While I take these objections to be seriously threatening for RMR, I am optimistic regarding the prospects of adequate answers to them. If those answers can be provided, RMR will emerge not only as preferable to its alternatives but also as internally stable.

Before moving on, however, it is important to stress that, insofar as the above painting of the metanormative landscape above is accurate, *even if* objections to RMR are insurmountable, we will nonetheless remain confronted with the instability of the alternatives to RMR. The result would then be rather gloomy: *all* metanormative positions – robust realist, non-robust factualist, and nonfactualist – would be revealed as unstable.

If, for instance, we found ourselves moved by something like Mackie's argument from queerness,³⁹¹ adapted to the global metanormative context, this still would not in itself provide reason to think that either non-robust factualism or nonfactualism can easily cope with the combined pressures of the indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments. Enoch's response to the queerness objection is simply to point to the arguments for RMR, which of course purported to earn a place for robust normativity within ontology;³⁹² and we can now strengthen this response, as nothing in the amended indispensability argument begged the question against nonfactualisms like error theory. This, it seems to me, is perfectly adequate. But suppose that some variant of the argument from queerness is ultimately convincing. Does this enable non-robust factualisms or nonfactualisms any more capable of coping with deliberative indispensability and Euthyphro? I do not see that it does.

But I do not take the objections to RMR to be as damaging as this. If RMR can, after all, withstand them, it should be able to use the indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments to win out against its rivals. Granting those arguments for the time being, then, objections to RMR of interest here are those that can be made on the basis of their success. Such objections will show that RMR is internally unstable *even if*

³⁹¹ Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*, 38-42.

³⁹² Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 134-136. Enoch also cites (p. 135) the following passage from Mark Platts: 'The world is a queer place. I find neutrinos, aardvarks, infinite sequences of objects, and [...] impressionist paintings peculiar kinds of entities; but I don't expect nuclear physics, zoology, formal semantics or art history to pay much regard to that.' – Mark Platts, "Moral Reality and the End of Desire," in *Reference, Truth and Reality: Essays on the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Mark Platts (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 72. Enoch does not cite this as a direct argument against Mackie's argument from queerness, of course – he takes the positive case for RMR to be sufficient in that respect – but he is right to cite Platts nonetheless, as the cited passage points to an observation that takes out some of the sting from Mackie's claim, and that helps to reconcile RMR with a wider picture of a world 'queer' in a variety of ways.

the indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments hit their mark. These problems remain for RMR independently of its relative virtues against alternative theories.

I shall consider three objections along these lines, and suggest serious work is needed to defang them if RMR is to enjoy stability. Most importantly for my purposes here, these are objections to which I find Enoch's responses incomplete. Though I will not be able to offer developed responses to these objections, I will share my optimism, as best as I can, that they may be dealt with adequately by robust realists. I shall do this by considering the way in which these objections are related, and the way that this may point to a joint solution.

3. 3. 2. THREE PROBLEMS FOR ROBUST METANORMATIVE REALISM

I consider here three objections to robust metanormative realism (RMR). Firstly, I address a specific epistemological worry articulated by Street,³⁹³ responded to by Enoch,³⁹⁴ Skarsaune,³⁹⁵ and Wielenberg³⁹⁶ – where that response is then countered by Dyke.³⁹⁷ I then extrapolate from the problem

³⁹³ Street, "Darwinian Dilemma."

³⁹⁴ Enoch, "The Epistemological Challenge."

³⁹⁵ Skarsaune, "Darwin and Moral Realism."

³⁹⁶ Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking;" Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 134-176.

³⁹⁷ Dyke, "Bad bootstrapping."

identified by Dyke to a general epistemological problem for RMR, drawing from Bealer,³⁹⁸ Moore,³⁹⁹ and Sinnott-Armstrong.⁴⁰⁰

Secondly, I consider the problem for RMR emerging from motivation, as discussed by Smith in *The Moral Problem*;⁴⁰¹ I consider Enoch's response, and suggest a way in which this problem is related to the epistemological one. Finally, I consider the supervenience problem posed by Bader,⁴⁰² Enoch's response,⁴⁰³ and I suggest again that this problem is importantly related to the problem of provision of an adequate epistemology for RMR.⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁸ Bealer, "A Priori Knowledge."

³⁹⁹ Moore, *Principia Ethica*.

⁴⁰⁰ Sinnott-Armstrong, "Moral Relativity and Intuitionism." This discussion also draws from: Stratton-Lake, "Intuitionism."

⁴⁰¹ Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

⁴⁰² Bader, "The Grounding Problem."

⁴⁰³ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 136-150.

⁴⁰⁴ For some problems facing RMR from an angle I don't consider here – concerning the personal cost of maintaining the view – see: Rob Compajen and Michiel Meijer, "The Reification of Value: Robust Realism and Alienation," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 29, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2021.1923779>; Max Khan Hayward, "Immoral realism," *Philosophical Studies* 176, no. 4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1218-0>. Needless to say, I do not see that any such cost of maintaining RMR is not clearly worth paying.

3. 3. 2. 1. THE FIRST PROBLEM: EPISTEMOLOGY AND INTUITION

The first pressing problem for robust metanormative realism (RMR) is epistemological: how we are to take ourselves to have justified beliefs about robust reasons? Mackie's argument from queerness has both a metaphysical and an epistemological component.⁴⁰⁵ As mentioned above, I take the indispensability and Euthyphronic argument to combine to adequately manage the metaphysical component. But nothing has been said yet to manage the epistemological.

If RMR is true, and reasons are independent of the way we think about them and of things with which we are more familiar, then knowledge of them cannot make use of more traditional epistemological methods like introspection or empirical enquiry. But if there is no replacement for these methods, and if we remain convinced by RMR, then we are stuck with knowing that we get things right and wrong, but no way of knowing what or how.

Note that this problem does not *directly* attack RMR. Rather, it is such that, left unsolved, it would make RMR extraordinarily unattractive. The pressure to solve the epistemological problem is not, then, a pressure to defend the metaphysics of RMR; it is a pressure, in light of those metaphysics, to rescue us from epistemological pessimism.

Skarsaune does not see this as a serious problem for RMR, claiming that robust realists can happily accept it.⁴⁰⁶ Now, both Skarsaune and I take the epistemological challenge to be orthogonal to the rational justification for the central metaphysics of RMR; and, if this is what Skarsaune means in saying we can 'happily embrace' epistemological pessimism, then we agree. If, however, he means that the

⁴⁰⁵ Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*, 38-42.

⁴⁰⁶ Skarsaune, "Darwin and Moral Realism," 236-238.

epistemological problem does not affect the overall plausibility of RMR, then I disagree. As Enoch puts it, the metaphysical and epistemological projects are ‘related, because if the apparatus needed for a rejection of normative skepticism is unavailable to the robust realist, and if normative skepticism is highly implausible, this may count as a reason to reject robust realism after all.’⁴⁰⁷

Now, in trying to solve the epistemological problem, it seems to me clear that it will not do to assume the truth of any *particular* normative commitments. This assumption may be appropriate when we are considering the implications of particular normative commitments – if, say, we want to know what the value of compassion entails for political ethics – but it is altogether illegitimate when we are enquiring about the ground for our normative commitment in general. Confidence in particular normative propositions cannot be warranted until we have a clear sense of how we came by it. More importantly, an account of normative knowledge which assumes some at the outset will be entirely unconvincing to one who doubts we have any. But it is this true pessimist, who accepts RMR but who doubts that we have any normative knowledge *at all*, who presents the strongest challenge to RMR. If we are to develop the strongest answer to the epistemological problem, it is this interlocutor we should be seeking to pressure.

Accordingly, I think that the epistemological question should be approached from an entirely different angle than it is approached by Enoch,⁴⁰⁸ Skarsaune,⁴⁰⁹ and Wielenberg.⁴¹⁰ Their arguments are made

⁴⁰⁷ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Enoch, “The Epistemological Challenge,” Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 151-184.

⁴⁰⁹ Skarsaune, “Darwin and Moral Realism,” 229-243.

⁴¹⁰ Wielenberg, “Evolutionary Debunking,” Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 134-176.

specifically in response to a variant of the epistemological problem for non-reductive realisms best formulated by Sharon Street,⁴¹¹ that they struggle to explain any supposed correlation between normative truth and beliefs because they cannot appeal to either the agential constitution of normative truth or to its causal efficacy. Enoch, Skarsaune, and Wielenberg all offer *third-factor* responses to Street's challenge, arguing that a correlation between normative truth and belief is explained by a third factor – the truth of some normative proposition and its coincidence with our evolutionary needs – therefore explaining our developing systems of belief around normative truth.⁴¹² For Enoch, the relevant proposition is that 'survival or reproductive success (or whatever else evolution "aims" at) is at least somewhat good,'⁴¹³ For Skarsaune, it is that '[p]leasure is usually good and pain is usually bad.'⁴¹⁴ For Wielenberg, it is that creatures like us, who form beliefs about the rights that creatures have, necessarily have rights.⁴¹⁵

Matthew Braddock argues that Enoch's response is ultimately unstable on empirical grounds;⁴¹⁶ but let us here grant the broad strokes of Enoch's response, and of those like it, for argument's sake. The

⁴¹¹ Street, "Darwinian Dilemma."

⁴¹² Dyke sees this as a direct attack on RMR: Dyke, "Bad bootstrapping," 2122. For reasons stated, I do not; but I accept the capacity of the argument to detract from the attractiveness of RMR in a manner sufficient to make pressing an adequate response.

⁴¹³ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 168-176.

⁴¹⁴ Skarsaune, "Darwin and Moral Realism," 232.

⁴¹⁵ Wielenberg, "Evolutionary Debunking;" Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 134-176.

⁴¹⁶ Matthew Braddock, "Evolutionary debunking: Can moral realists explain the reliability of our moral judgements?"

Philosophical Psychology 29, no. 6 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2016.1163667>.

problem remains that all these responses beg the question against the interlocutor who denies that we have any normative knowledge.⁴¹⁷ As made clear by Michelle M. Dyke, these approaches amount to an objectionable, question-begging kind of bootstrapping.⁴¹⁸ Dyke considers different characterizations of bootstrapping and argues that the third-factor replies fall foul of them all. In order to understand these arguments as legitimate, we would have to endorse epistemic principles which would then legitimise paradigmatically bad instances of bootstrapping, like the following example taken from Jonathan Vogel:⁴¹⁹

Vogel offers the example of Roxanne, who comes to ‘know’ that the gas gauge of her car is reliable simply by looking at it on a number of different occasions. Roxanne first forms a belief, via perception (a reliable process), that her gas gauge reads “full.” She then forms the additional belief that the gas tank is indeed full (trusting the gauge is also, by hypothesis, a reliable process). Roxanne deduces that the gauge is displaying the correct value on this occasion. Roxanne repeats this process many times and comes to ‘know,’ via induction, that the gauge is highly reliable. By stipulation, Roxanne does not engage in any other activities that provide a means for independently verifying the accuracy of the gauge.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁷ Björnsson and Olinder raise other worries: that Enoch is not responding to what really worries people epistemologically about RMR; and that Enoch’s response has normative truth playing ‘no role whatsoever in explaining the shape of the mechanisms by which we form [normative] beliefs’: Björnsson and Olinder, *Review*, 109. The suggestion in 3. 3. 3. addresses these worries very briefly.

⁴¹⁸ Dyke, “Bad bootstrapping.”

⁴¹⁹ Jonathan Vogel, “Reliabilism Leveled,” *Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 11 (2000): 613-614, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2678454>.

⁴²⁰ Dyke, “Bad bootstrapping,” 2120.

Dyke shows that there is no way of making the bootstrapping of Enoch, Skarsaune, and Wielenberg legitimate without also making legitimate Roxanne's. She concedes that she has not considered all characterisations of bootstrapping, and that some may be able to permit third-factor replies while prohibiting Roxanne.⁴²¹ Even so, it seems to me that the problem with these responses is more fundamental. It is the same problem we found in Enoch's original indispensability argument against the metanormative nonfactualist: the desired conclusion (in this case, that some of our normative beliefs are a reliable guide to normative truth) is right there, barely hidden, in the premises; so the argument cannot rationally pressure anyone who does not already accept its conclusion.

In any case, there is a more general epistemological problem, encompassing the one considered by Enoch, Skarsaune, and Wielenberg in their response to Street. Those responses are attempts to explain how normative commitments can sometimes be justified; but even if we accept the third-factor arguments, we will still need a satisfactory story about how we get from the supposedly uncontroversial starting points to other justified beliefs.⁴²² There remains, then, a more general concern about how we are to understand normative beliefs in general as justified. In other words, we need an adequate epistemology of robust reason.

But once we have *that*, it will likely make redundant any further argument to the effect that our beliefs are sometimes justified on the basis of the third-factors discussed. After all, an adequate epistemology will provide a satisfactorily stable basis for our more fundamental normative beliefs from which we can proceed to others. Accordingly, the evolutionary issue is a side-note to a more pressing question about

⁴²¹ Dyke, "Bad bootstrapping," 2127.

⁴²² Enoch appeals to 'reasoning mechanisms (and perhaps some other mechanisms as well)': Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 166.

the epistemology of robust reasons: how can we know them?⁴²³ If we can answer this, we will have dispensed with the need to respond to Street directly.

The answer given to this more general question tends to be in terms of intuition.⁴²⁴ Intuitionism provides a superficially attractive partner to RMR because it promises knowledge of truths which are neither constituted by us or identifiable with things with which we are more familiar. If reasons were constituted by our responses, say, we could introspect to know them;⁴²⁵ if they were external natural things, we could employ *a posteriori* methods.⁴²⁶ Absent these options, we require something more unusual. And intuitions are unusual indeed. Best understood as ‘intellectual seemings’,⁴²⁷ intuitions make certain propositions *seem* true. Intuitionists take it that we are entitled, under certain conditions, to take this

⁴²³ A convincing answer here would make unnecessary Skarsaune’s concession that, if his starting proposition is false, we must therefore accept scepticism: Skarsaune, “Darwin and Moral Realism,” 236-238.

⁴²⁴ David Enoch and Joshua Schechter, “How Are Basic Belief-Forming Methods Justified?” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, no. 3 (2008), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40041198>; Moore, *Principia Ethica*; Ross, *Foundations*; Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*; Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity*.

⁴²⁵ Kant, *Groundwork*; Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*; Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism;” Korsgaard, *Self-constitution*; McDowell, *Mind and World*, 66-86; McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 77-218; Railton, “Moral Realism;” Railton, “Naturalism and Prescriptivity;” Rawls, *Theory of Justice*; Rosati, “Agency;” Sobel, “Subjectivism and Idealization;” Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Smith, “In Defense of “The Moral Problem;” Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*; Velleman, “Précis;” Velleman, “Replies;” Williams, *Moral Luck*.

⁴²⁶ See: Miller, *An Introduction*, 178-242; Railton, “Naturalism and Prescriptivity.”

⁴²⁷ Stratton-Lake, “Intuitionism.”

seeming as justification. Intuitionism relevant to RMR is of course distinct from the Rawlsian kind,⁴²⁸ for instance, where intuitions assist our learning of normative truths partially constituted by us. The present focus is an intuitionism closer to Moore's,⁴²⁹ where the object of intuitions is robust normativity constitutively independent of us.

Classical intuitionism maintains that intuitions present normative propositions as self-evident truths,⁴³⁰ such that intuitions *directly* provide sufficient justification for certain normative propositions. Contrast that with the more modern intuitionism of Wedgwood,⁴³¹ for instance, where intuitions provide presumptive justification for normative propositions that *indirectly* provide sufficient justification through their being formed into coherent first-order normative theories through reflective equilibrium.⁴³² Common to intuitionism, then, is the thought that intuitions can play a central role in (directly or indirectly) sufficiently justifying propositions about robust normativity.

The problem, however, it seems to me, is that there is no independent reason to trust intuitions. If you and I diverge in intuitions, what reason do I have to trust mine over yours? Even if we precisify the kinds of conditions under which we are thinking in a supposedly clear and non-biased manner, why should I trust the way things *seem*, in the normative context?

⁴²⁸ Rawls, *Theory of Justice*.

⁴²⁹ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 2-27.

⁴³⁰ Moore, *Principia Ethica*; Ross, *Foundations*; Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*.

⁴³¹ Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity*, 227-234.

⁴³² *Ibid.*

One might, in response, note the standpoint from which this objection is mounted. It is the *third-personal* external standpoint from which one judges two intuitional sets; and from this standpoint, the *mine-ness* of my intuitions is unimportant, and I am rationally required to consider the issue as if I am deciding neutrally between the intuitions of any two people. But the intuitionist might reply that it is not this third-personal standpoint from which the importance of intuitions is best understood, but rather the *first-personal* standpoint: as intellectual *seemings*, it is important *to me* that *my* intuitions make things seem a certain way *to me*; from this standpoint, the fact that you have divergent intuitions is of little relevance. Wedgwood's defence of intuitionism seems to me to be along these lines.⁴³³

An analogy with sense perception might be invoked here: someone else's perceptions may support divergent propositions about the natural world, but that does not lead me to reject the thought that *my* sensory perception can bestow justification on certain propositions *for me*. However, the problem with this response is that the analogy between intuition and sense perception pales in the face of the disanalogy. We have a pretty comprehensive story to tell about how our sensory faculties reliably track aspects of the natural world under normal conditions. We can thereby understand ourselves as rational to trust sensory perception under these *normal conditions*. But what are the supposedly normal conditions under which we should trust intuitions? What story can we tell about the connection between intuitions and robust normative truth by which we can distinguish well-functioning intuitions from malfunctioning ones?

It seems to me that we have none at all. George Bealer defends the role of intuitions in *a priori* enquiries;⁴³⁴ but, while I do not wish to take a stance on the success of his argument with respect to the

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Bealer, "A Priori Knowledge."

intuitions he considers, it seems to me that many of the intuitions he discusses are very different in character from those featuring in normative intuitionism. Bealer focuses on intuitions about mathematical theorems, logical axioms, modality, and concepts. But for all these it looks as if there is some background respectability to these intuitions entirely lacked by normative intuition. I suggest that we understand this background respectability in the now familiar terms of *indispensability*: our mathematical, logical, modal, and conceptual intuitions are supported by the indispensable commitments of the relevant practices. Doing maths requires that we accept certain axioms; failure to do so entails engaging in a different practice – these axioms are indispensable.

In this, I draw from Enoch and Joshua Schechter, who propose that basic belief-forming methods are justified on grounds of indispensability,⁴³⁵ and that this adequately explains how we come by mathematical axioms, say. But this does nothing for normative intuitions. While it may be that having *some* intuitions about normativity is indispensable to our non-optional normative practices – like, say, deliberation – certainly no *particular* intuition is so indispensable, as evidenced by the very apparent widespread and thorough normative disagreement we can observe in everyday normative (and especially political) discourse.

Enoch and Schechter defend normative intuitions on the grounds of indispensability – on the ground that, without them, deliberation as we know it would become impossible.⁴³⁶ But even if one is tempted to think that this general indispensability vindicates intuition *per se*, it cannot privilege any *particular* intuition over another. I still appear to have no rational ground to trust my intuitions over yours – nor

⁴³⁵ Enoch and Schechter, “Basic Belief-Forming Methods.”

⁴³⁶ Enoch and Schechter, “Basic Belief-Forming Methods,” 547-579.

does anyone have any rational ground to trust theirs over anybody else's – and so intuitionism looks to be on shaky ground.

In any case, Enoch's and Shechter's argument in favour of normative intuitionism assumes what it is supposed to show. It assumes that intuition has a status so privileged that deliberation would be impossible without it. But we cannot simply select a method that some people happen to use and declare it indispensable. One who deliberates solely according to the teachings of some holy text, for instance, or according to Kantian moral philosophy, would surely disagree that intuition is indispensable to their deliberative practice. Anyway, why not think that reading horoscopes, say, or the entrails of birds is indispensable to deliberation? Enoch and Schechter do not seem to offer support for this privileging of intuitions. Their claim looks no better than saying that, prior to the development of the scientific method, augury was a justified belief-forming method on the basis that prediction would have fallen apart without it.

Bealer argues that intuition is altogether distinct from mystical belief-forming methods by pointing to consistency, corroboration, and confirmation.⁴³⁷ And that may provide a perfectly adequate defence for mathematical, logical, modal, and conceptual intuitions – those I have suggested reflect indispensable commitments. But the normative intuitions of a given person absolutely do *not* appear to be internally consistent or corroborated by those of others (beyond, perhaps, their quite narrow sphere of association). And, as for whether normative intuitions tend to be confirmed in reality, that is precisely the epistemological problem writ large: to establish that, we would need a reliable epistemology to begin with. Accordingly, normative intuitions do not seem to me to pass any of Bealer's tests.

⁴³⁷ Bealer, "A Priori Knowledge," 124-125.

Furthermore, it looks as if Bealer rigs the game in favour of intuitionism by defining the set of intuitions he wishes to defend as those that do not tend to be disproven by empirical reality.⁴³⁸ In natural language, it is perfectly sensible to describe intuitions about empirically verifiable and falsifiable states of affairs: intuitions about the best way to get to a cinema, about who committed a crime, about who is and is not trustworthy. Ordinarily, we use ‘I intuit’ much like ‘I have a hunch’, ‘I have a feeling’, or, as Bader makes explicit, ‘things seem this way’ – and all of these are deployed commonly with regard to empirical matters. A plausible defence of intuitions would need to cordon off these empirical intuitions from the kinds that are to be defended, and it would need to do this *in some nonarbitrary way* – as in, not simply in virtue of some being capable of being empirically disconfirmed and others not. Otherwise, it looks as if we have rigged the game by excluding a large amount of intuitions that seem to function in just the same way as the ones we want to defend, but which are very often *not* consistent, corroborated, or confirmed. This may be possible; but then the normative intuitionist will then need to show that normative intuitions fall on the defensible side of this nonarbitrary distinction of intuitions against the far less plausibly defensible ones. This is precisely what I doubt can be shown.

It will not do, in response to the epistemological problem, to simply pick some method out of thin air and claim the problem solved, all concern for reliability thrown to the wind. Would it be legitimate, in the absence of reliable methods, to take up tarot in desperation to engage in explanation? Clearly not. Joyce’s comment on Moorean facts springs back to mind: ‘better to embrace radical skepticism than endorse such a shamefully missing-the-point methodology.’⁴³⁹ The robust realist’s appeal to intuitions

⁴³⁸ Bealer, “A Priori Knowledge,” 125.

⁴³⁹ Joyce, “Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously,” 847. I have taken some liberties in applying what Joyce says about one kind of Moorean epistemology to consideration of another, but I do not think he would hold this against me.

is not motivated by an independently plausible account of the connection between intuition and robust normative truth, but rather by a desperate need to explain how we might discover truths about something terribly important that is neither constituted by us or things with which we are more familiar. Enoch and Schechter seem to say as much. As Monroe Beardsley puts it:

Since intuition is a last resort as a way of resolving the problems of value theory, it is fatal that ethical intuitions conflict; that criteria cannot be given for distinguishing correct from incorrect ones; and that the alleged analogies with other types of *a priori* knowledge (mathematical, for example) break down.⁴⁴⁰

Without the comfort offered by intuitionism, RMR threatens to descend into the epistemological pessimism I have claimed makes the position profoundly unattractive. But this desperation does *not*, in itself, provide rational ground to trust intuitions over other ways of forming normative beliefs, or to trust my intuitions over yours. Here is Joyce on intuitionism:

One may agree with the intuitionist that, all else being equal, things that seem intuitively compelling should be accorded some kind of epistemic privilege. But then the question is: When are all things equal? If there is evidence that people would have this intuition even if it were false [...] then things are not equal. Similarly, if there is evidence [it] derives from personal bias or obfuscation, or that others in equally good epistemic conditions have opposing intuitions [...] then [...] the intuition loses (or is never accorded) its epistemic privilege. [...] This is not to say that moral intuitions are false, merely that they should not be accorded the benefit of the doubt; they require some independent confirmation.⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴⁰ Monroe Beardsley, "Intrinsic Value," in *Recent Work on Intrinsic Value*, ed. Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen and Michael J. Zimmerman (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 72.

⁴⁴¹ Joyce, "Taking Moral Skepticism Seriously," 849.

I think that Joyce is putting this gently. He describes the matter as if we had some even vague conception of what it would be for all things to be equal – some state of reliability which is then disrupted by complicating factors like disagreement and bias. But these factors only draw out what was already clear: we have *no* initial sense of the conditions under which we would be justified in trusting intuitions as a guide to robust normativity. If a tool is not *always* reliable – or, at least, if its reliability is determined by something unknown – then it is simply not a reliable tool *at all*.

We trust intuitions as we trust an armchair that is just as likely to collapse as it is to support, or a person who is just as likely to lie as tell the truth. It is not rational to do this. The accurate analogy is not, then, between intuition and sensory perception *under normal conditions*; rather, it is between intuition and sensory perception under *conditions which may just as likely be abnormal as normal*. Justifying normative belief by intuition is not analogous to everyday cases of trusting sensory perception; rather, it is analogous to trusting sensory perception while under the influence of perception-altering hallucinogens having an entirely undetermined effect. Why should we do this?

Normative intuitions, at least in the context of RMR, seem to fall short of another aspect of Bealer's defence of intuitions: that there should be some necessary connection between intuition and the truth it purports to capture in 'suitably good cognitive conditions'.⁴⁴² With the connection between intuition and robust normativity so thoroughly indeterminate, we should not think intuitions capable of justifying normative propositions in virtue of such a connection.

The radical sceptic might be right, of course, and we might have no decisive rational support for trusting our senses either. But we surely have *some* support for trusting our senses. In some cases, we have more support than in others. Upon tasting a whisky, I will have more support for trusting my palate if it has

⁴⁴² Bealer, "A Priori Knowledge," 130.

been cleansed and if I have experience tasting whisky. Of course, the whisky might be the figment of the imagination of a brain in a vat, but there are nonetheless *some* (perhaps minor, defeasible) rational considerations supporting my trusting my palate when I sense the whisky is an Islay, not a Skye; for my senses are operating under normal conditions, as far as I am aware. This is what intuition lacks: *any* story as to what normal conditions would be, and therefore *any* rational support for preferring one set of conditions over another. Intuitions therefore seem to provide no epistemic support in and of themselves.

Sinnott-Armstrong develops an extensive empirical case against intuitionism,⁴⁴³ arguing that we have empirically verifiable reason to distrust them due to their vulnerability to interference by a variety of epistemologically-arbitrary factors. The criticism I want to make of intuitions is more fundamental than this: *even if* intuitionists could precisify the kind of intuitions they want to depend on, and the kinds of conditions under which they take intuitions to be trustworthy, they would have still shown us no rational support for trusting them unless they can *also* provide an account of the relation between intuition and robust normativity to explain intuitional reliability. And, at the risk of stating the obvious, they *cannot*, in this context, legitimately point to intuitively supported normative propositions.

Accordingly, the epistemological problem for RMR is a serious one, and the solution most often provided seems inadequate. In what follows, I consider two other pressing problems for RMR that bear, I think, a surprising relation to the epistemological problem considered here.

⁴⁴³ Sinnott-Armstrong, "Moral Relativity and Intuitionism."

3. 3. 2. 2. THE SECOND PROBLEM: MOTIVATION AND RATIONALITY

The problem posed by motivation concerns how to connect robust normativity to agential motivations and their rationality in a single coherent picture. Michael Smith considers an analogous problem – what he calls *The Moral Problem*⁴⁴⁴ – but we can adapt his discussion from his response-dependence metaethical framework into our current robustly metanormatively realist framework.

Smith tries to square three independently plausible claims which are in apparent tension: that moral judgements are statements which can be true or false, a view Smith describes as objectivism but that I will describe as *cognitivism*; that agents' moral judgements have necessary implications for their motivations, *internalism*;⁴⁴⁵ and the Humean theory of motivation (HTM), which states that beliefs and desires are distinct existences both of which are required to motivate agents.⁴⁴⁶ The tension arises because, if one's moral judgments are judgments of fact, then they are beliefs; but, if those beliefs bear some necessary relation to one's motivations independent of one's desires, then this connection appears to violate HTM.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

⁴⁴⁵ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 6-7.

⁴⁴⁶ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 7-9.

⁴⁴⁷ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 9-13.

Smith claims that attempts to resolve this tension by dropping cognitivism, internalism, or HTM, are unsustainable.⁴⁴⁸ In the interests of providing as stalwart a defence for robust metanormative realism (RMR) as possible, let us grant this for now (though I respond to Enoch's doubts about this just below).

Smith offers defence for all three apparent belligerents of the moral problem, and offers a way out which can appease them all.⁴⁴⁹ He tries to solve the problem by defending *defeasible internalism*, the view that an agent's judging that she should do something will necessarily result in her being correspondingly motivated *inasmuch as she is rational*; then, he claims, our motivation to do the right thing may be squared with both cognitivism and HTM, given that the extent to which our desires are rational is an altogether contingent matter.

Now, Enoch's take on this problem is different from Smith's.⁴⁵⁰ He suggests that we can abandon internalism⁴⁵¹ – even the defeasible kind – something Smith argues is not feasible. Enoch takes defeasible internalism⁴⁵² to be potentially vulnerable to *amoralist* challenges, which imagine otherwise-rational agents who make genuine normative judgements, armed with a mastery of normative concepts, but whose motivations are unmoved by those judgements. His discussion focuses on amoralism and

⁴⁴⁸ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 16-129.

⁴⁴⁹ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 130-202.

⁴⁵⁰ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 249-252. Enoch considers a number of other challenges relating to motivation (pp. 217-266) but I omit many of these, either because I take Enoch to handle them adequately, or because my discussion here makes them irrelevant.

⁴⁵¹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 247-249.

⁴⁵² Which he describes as 'mitigated internalism': Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 249-253.

moral judgement internalism, but we can adapt what is said to *anormativism*, if you will, and normative judgement internalism. He does not conclusively take internalism to be vulnerable to such challenges, but nonetheless takes them to result in an apparent stalemate which he thinks is (probably) fruitless to pursue.⁴⁵³ Emerging from that is a dent in any confidence that internalism is a good starting point.

Enoch ultimately takes defeasible internalism to be unthreatening for RMR, however, because the appeal to rationality makes it either trivial or no longer recognisable as the internalism that generates the conflict with cognitivism and HTM:

[...] the suspicion arises that what does the work in [defeasible internalism] is not so much the internalism as the mitigation. Thus, if the necessary connection is supposed to hold, say, between an agent's normative judgements and her motivations *in so far as she is rational*, then it is *very* tempting to read the resulting [internalism] either as a trivial claim (so that the understanding of rationality invoked here is whatever it is that is needed in order to render this [internalism] true), or else as a substantive, intra-normative thesis, one about what it takes to be rational.⁴⁵⁴

Enoch's thought seems to be that rationality can be defined in such a way as to make it trivially true that, insofar as one is rational, one will do what one judges right. But it seems to me that this would only be possible if we lacked a clear initial conceptual distinction between rationality and normativity. We may assert a form of internalism which is clear on the initial conceptual distinction required to make this internalism informative. If, as I argued in 2. 2. 1., rationality, though clearly conceptually *formally* normative, is conceptually distinct from *authoritative* normativity – the kind of normativity at issue here – then some form of internalism may yet be threatening to RMR.

⁴⁵³ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 247-249.

⁴⁵⁴ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 251-252.

The question is then whether such an internalism is independently plausible for robust realists. While I cannot argue this at length here, it looks to me that it is. Very briefly: it looks to me as if the most plausible conception of rationality is as proportional response to the world; and, given RMR, normative facts are part of the world; we then seem to be under serious pressure to claim that we would judge and intend proportionately to normative facts inasmuch as we are rational – and this is Smith’s defeasible internalism (I elaborate on this suggestion very briefly in 3. 3. 3.). I do not, of course, take this to be the end of the matter; but further consideration would take us too far afield. My point here is just that internalism commands some plausibility, and I do not think that RMR should be hostage to the fortunes of attempts to show that it is false. Accordingly, for the sake of argument, I will treat defeasible internalism as true. And I will furthermore assume that Smith’s solution can indeed be adapted to the framework of RMR.

This now points to a different problem. Note that Smith’s solution only helps us understand how we might be motivated by our *judgements* about our reasons – not the actual reasons themselves. Smith explains how we might be motivated by our *supposed* reasons; but this does not obviously help us understand how we might be motivated by our *actual* reasons.⁴⁵⁵ RMR takes normative truth to be causally inert. So, how are actual reasons supposed to impact upon our motivations?

Like the epistemological problem, this problem does not *directly* attack the core claims of RMR. It is of course possible to maintain RMR alongside maintaining that we are never motivated by our actual robust

⁴⁵⁵ For Smith, this distinction is less sharp, given his response-dependence metanormative view. It is unclear to me the extent to which *The Moral Problem* – Smith, *The Moral Problem* – succeeds in establishing necessarily rational motivations towards actual, beyond merely supposed, reasons. And it is even less clear the extent to which, if it is successful, the result could be adapted to RMR.

reasons. But this is a deeply unattractive view – so unattractive, perhaps, that it might threaten the stability of RMR in such a way as to tempt us to an alternative.

But we can incorporate Smith's solution to the normative problem here: we are motivated by our supposed reasons inasmuch as we are rational; so, when we are rational, *inasmuch as our supposed reasons correspond to our actual reasons*, we are motivated by our actual reasons. The question then is this: what determines the extent to which our supposed reasons correspond to our actual reasons?

Enoch is right to answer questions along these lines by pointing to the need for an adequate epistemology of normative truth.⁴⁵⁶ And thus we return to the epistemological problem. Applied to Smith's solution to the normative problem considered here, a sound normative epistemology would enable us to establish not only that we are motivated by our supposed reasons, but furthermore that we are motivated by our actual reasons, too, inasmuch as we are rational – provided this epistemology could secure some important connection between rationality and normativity such that the former is sensitive to the latter. This would make it such that, inasmuch as we are rational, our supposed reasons correspond to our actual reasons. The motivational problem may, then, be solved by combining Smith's proposal with a solution to the first pressing problem I identified for RMR: the need for an adequate epistemology of robust normative truth.

⁴⁵⁶ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 237.

3. 3. 2. 3. THE THIRD PROBLEM:

SUPERVENIENCE, REDUCTION, AND GROUNDING

The last major issue confronting robust metanormative realism (RMR) emerges from supervenience. Recall Bader's claim, mentioned throughout the preceding discussions, that, for any normative fact, some necessary and sufficient natural conditions can be identified. Bader argues that, even if RMR retreats to a *hyperintensional* account of identity (as a combination of extensional equivalence and an absence of 'worldly' difference)⁴⁵⁷, a hyperintensional version of the same problem can be raised, identifying normative facts with hyperintensionally equivalent natural truths.⁴⁵⁸

Now, it might look as if we can plug in the Euthyphronic argument here to deal with this problem. If Bader's worry is that normativity's supervenience on nature leads us inexorably to naturalism, can we not respond that, in virtue of the combined force of the indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments, we now have good reason to understand normativity as *sui generis*? Surely we can insist that something just *must* have gone wrong in Bader's reasoning?

We cannot. Unless we can say precisely what has gone wrong in Bader's reasoning, RMR looks just as untenable as its non-robust factualist and nonfactualist rivals, for it would then be an assertion that normativity is *sui generis* in spite of conclusive reason to think that it cannot be. The indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments, remember, only provided presumptive reason to accept RMR. The supervenience challenge is precisely the kind of issue that can tip the balance against RMR in favour of

⁴⁵⁷ Bader, "The Grounding Problem," 113.

⁴⁵⁸ Bader, "The Grounding Problem," 115.

its alternatives. Note also that, unlike the epistemological and motivational problems, this challenge from supervenience is a direct threat to RMR.

If we deny supervenience – nipping Bader’s challenge in the bud – we end up with a bizarre conception of normativity. On this conception, it would be *entirely* free-floating. Two actions with all the same natural properties, performed in two contexts with all the same natural properties, the result of two processes of reasoning with all the same natural properties, and with two sets of effects with all the same natural properties, would have different normative values *for no discernible reason*.

The problem here is not just that denial of supervenience is intuitively implausible. It is also that it seems mutually incompatible with any useful epistemology of normative facts. If we have some normative epistemology which tells us that compassionate actions are (presumptively) right, we then want to see which actions are the compassionate ones, and we presumably do this by looking at certain natural features they have. On this basis, we then find another action which has these properties and call it right in virtue of its being compassionate. Taking two actions, possessed of the same natural properties which make them compassionate, to be right, on the basis of an independent reason to think that compassion is normatively valuable, seems to be part of any epistemology which tells us that compassion is valuable in this way. But this requires supervenience. Without supervenience, we could not say that an action is right in virtue of its having the natural properties which make it right, because we could not say that those natural properties consistently give an action any particular normative properties – for, without supervenience, there may be changes in normative properties absent any changes in natural ones. So we cannot abandon supervenience.

However, Bader’s conclusion is not pessimistic for RMR. He argues that robust realists must insist that hyperintensional equivalence is extensional equivalence and the absence of any worldly difference, but

insist also that the absence of a worldly this includes the absence of any difference in *grounding*.⁴⁵⁹ RMR could then resist hyperintensional equivalence and reduction by pointing to robust differences between normative and natural truths in terms of their grounding. If normative grounding relations are themselves *irreducibly* normative, then reduction can be avoided.⁴⁶⁰ if normative facts are grounded in a fundamentally different way to natural facts, then worldly difference can be established, reduction resisted, and RMR rescued.

Enoch responds to the worries surrounding supervenience by considering *strong individual supervenience*, which is the hardest for RMR to accommodate, whereby two things with indistinguishable natural properties must have the same normative properties (even if those things are in different possible worlds).⁴⁶¹ If RMR can cope with this kind of supervenience, Enoch says, it should have shown that it can cope with most of the threat posed by supervenience in general. Enoch makes the same argument Bader attributes to the non-reductive realist in his discussion: that this necessary coextensiveness is insufficient for identity. Unlike Bader, he does not explicitly venture into a hyperintensional theory of identity. He does argue, however, that non-identity can be established given that normative properties are determined by the content of reasons.⁴⁶² If these reasons are universal, then

⁴⁵⁹ Bader, “The Grounding Problem,” 123. Grounding is understood as distinct from supervenience by Bennett and McLaughlin: ‘Roughly and schematically, one fact grounds another when the latter obtains in virtue of the former: the former in some sense makes the latter obtain. It is a productive, generative relation.’ – Bennett and McLaughlin, “Supervenience.”

⁴⁶⁰ Bader, “The Grounding Problem,” 125.

⁴⁶¹ Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 136-150.

⁴⁶² Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 136-148.

we can assert the coextensiveness of any normative fact with any natural fact without falling into an identity claim.⁴⁶³

In effect, then, Enoch is appealing to a kind of uniquely normative grounding relation. This has the potential to answer Bader's challenge: even if we do not know quite what these specific grounding relations are, we may nonetheless have some confidence that things have the normative properties they have in virtue of reasons – in virtue of normative, not natural, facts.

But, without knowledge of the specific relations which explain these normative truths, this is an unsatisfying response. It amounts to saying that *something* is determining normative properties in such a way as to make them nonidentical with natural properties, but that we cannot quite point to what that thing is. Furthermore, though we may be confident that different normative truths and reasons explain each other, this confidence will not be as great as it would be with a clear view of the specific reasons grounding such truths.

But such grounding reasons, if clearly established to solve the supervenience problem, would, I think, provide us with the very epistemology I have said is key to solving the epistemological and motivational problems discussed just above. Such grounding principles would provide a clear understanding of why things have the normative properties they have. If so, the irreducibly normative grounding principles that determine the normative properties of objects would also seem to be epistemological principles by which we come to know them. And, in the other direction, an account of the epistemological principles by which we can reliably come to know irreducibly normative properties may well also be an account

⁴⁶³ This, Enoch admits, applies only to specific supervenience, not *general* supervenience, but he takes the latter to be at most a conceptual truth, and therefore not presenting of any metaphysical worry pertinent here: Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 148-150.

of irreducibly grounding relations. The solution to the supervenience problem seems to me to be one and the same as the solution to the epistemological – and thereby the motivational – problem.

This, I think, entails that van Roojen's characterisation of RMR with regard to the Euthyphronic argument is not necessarily correct. When van Roojen discusses the Euthyphronic argument with regard to reductivist naturalism, suggesting that both reductivists and non-naturalists alike are vulnerable, he treats the robustly realist response to the Euthyphronic question to *either* involve an account of why natural things have the normative properties they do *or* an assertion of some irreducible relation between those things and their normative properties.⁴⁶⁴ He therefore takes RMR to be in similar trouble to reductivism: by the first route, presumably because he is sceptical that RMR can provide a plausible account of why things have the normative properties they have; and, by the second, because the assertion of an irreducibly normative relation between normative properties and natural things can only satisfy the Euthyphronic question as much as the reductive answer. I considered the second route in 3. 1., arguing that the reductive answer is not ultimately satisfactory in this way; but we may now add that, if RMR can meet the challenge laid out by Bader, the asserted relation will be even more clearly steeped in normative necessity, and therefore even more satisfactory to the Euthyphronic question. And, with regard to the first route: in meeting the epistemological challenge, we would provide a plausible account of why things have the normative properties they have. Such an epistemology would retain a satisfactory answer to the Euthyphronic question, by maintaining the *sui generis* character of normativity as altogether independent of us, while also making normativity intelligible to us – and it would, I suggest, furthermore answer the challenge posed by supervenience.

⁴⁶⁴ van Roojen, *Metaethics*, 258-260.

3. 3. 3. THE CONNECTION

The deep issue, in all three of the residual problems for robust metanormative realism (RMR) I have presented, is the lack of an adequate epistemology of robust normative truth. Had we such an epistemology, we would be able to explain how we can be justified in our beliefs about our reasons, how we can be motivated by causally inert reasons, and how those reasons ground normative properties in such a way that makes them non-identical with the natural properties on which they supervene. The arguments for the core metaphysical claims of robust metanormative realism (RMR) are strong enough; the real work that is needed to defend the view is, I suggest, epistemological.

While I cannot discuss this at length here, I do wish to point to a common thread throughout the discussion of epistemology thus far, namely the connection between rationality and normativity. I have suggested throughout that the epistemological problem for RMR would be best tackled by showing that we are sensitive to normative truth inasmuch as we are rational. I wish here to elaborate on this suggestion (though unfortunately, I should add, in an unsatisfying way, given the scope of the present work).

First, recall the discussion of Smith, where I suggested that we conform to our *supposed* reasons inasmuch as we are rational. Let us now supplement this with Smith's conception of ideal rationality, that he draws from Bernard Williams,⁴⁶⁵ as: possession of all relevant true beliefs; possession of no relevant false beliefs; and correct deliberation.⁴⁶⁶ Given that conception, we may also be able to show that our supposed reasons are our *actual* reasons inasmuch as we are rational – because ideal rationality

⁴⁶⁵ Williams, "Internal and External Reasons."

⁴⁶⁶ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 151-161.

involves having all and only true relevant beliefs, some of which are about reasons. Coupled with Smith's defeasible internalism, the resulting picture is one within which an ideally rational agent conforms to all her *actual* reasons. In this picture, we are necessarily rational to conform to our reasons. We can describe this view as *normative rationalism*:⁴⁶⁷ the reasonable is necessarily rational.⁴⁶⁸ Adapted to RMR, this would be the view that, for any robust reason, we are necessarily rational to accord with to it. If it is decisive, we are decisively rationally required to accord with it; if it is presumptive, then we are presumptively rational to do so – for ideal rationality involves both ideal normative beliefs and the ideal relation between beliefs and intentions.

If ideal rationality involves all the relevant true beliefs and none of the false, alongside correct deliberation, then, given rationally defeasible internalism and RMR, it looks as if ideal rationality will entail ideal reasonableness, and we will necessarily be rational to conform to our normative reasons. Part of what needs to be shown, however, for this to be workable, is that the various modes of normative reason – decisive and presumptive, intrinsic and instrumental, context-independent and context-specific, and so on – are accompanied by corresponding modes of rationality. But if this can be shown, the entailment from ideal rationality to ideal reasonableness – and normative rationalism – will be off to a good start.

⁴⁶⁷ I take this term from: Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

⁴⁶⁸ Note that normative rationalism makes conformity with authoritatively normative reasons sufficient for rationality but not necessary, and makes rationality necessary for reasonableness but not sufficient, at the level of specific reasons and rational enjoinders. But, at the general level, it makes ideal rationality sufficient for ideal reasonableness, for an ideally rational agent would necessarily conform to all her reasons.

Second, I suggest that we complete this picture with the inverse position, *rational normativism*. Adapted to RMR, this would be the view that we necessarily have a robust *reason to be rational*. If this could be shown, it would give us a foothold into knowledge of the normative via knowledge of our rational enjoinders⁴⁶⁹ (which seems *prima facie* less problematic) given that all of those rational enjoinders would be accompanied by robust reasons.

For an extremely brief illustration of how we might begin to show rational normativism to be true, consider the conditions under which it would be false – namely, if there were a set of rational principles which were not also normative principles. The best candidate for these, I think, would be rational principles towards the development of internally coherent sets of *false* beliefs and *bad* intentions. However, if we take normative rationalism to be true, our normative principles are rational principles, too; and so we are rational to accord with our reasons to develop sets of *true* beliefs and *good* intentions. Then it looks as if the development of internally coherent sets of false beliefs and bad intentions cannot really be rational, as it would run counter to its being rational to have true beliefs and good intentions (given normative rationalism). And so this candidate for a form of rationality in which we have no reason to engage looks to be not really a form of rationality after all. Work would remain, however, to establish that this is the only viable candidate for a non-normative rationality, and that the conflict between the development of true beliefs and good intentions, on the one hand, and internal coherence for its own sake, on the other, is fatal for the latter.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ I do not refer here only to decisive rational enjoinders, but to presumptive ones too.

⁴⁷⁰ Kieseewetter takes normatively objectionable internal coherence to be an acceptable casualty in showing that we necessarily have reason to be rational: Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*.

However, if both normative rationalism and rational normativism could be shown, we would then have shown the *coextensiveness* of rationality and normativity: for any normative reason, we are rational to accord with it; for any rational principle, we are reasonable to accord with it. Given our possession of the rational faculty – and the fact that we can provide descriptions of conformity to rational principles *prima facie* distinct from authoritatively normative terms – knowledge of the rational seems initially less problematic than knowledge of the robustly normative. This would appear to be a promising starting point for an epistemology of robust reason. If all this is right, then it will emerge that, inasmuch as we can know what is rational, we will know what is robustly reasonable. Our rational faculty would then emerge as the guide to robust normativity that intuition, I have argued, cannot be. This would furthermore defend RMR from the constitutivist critique, discussed by Shafer-Landau,⁴⁷¹ that non-naturalist realism struggles to secure the rational status of normative (and specifically moral) demands, in that it would establish a rational enjoinder for every normative one.

I have suggested that the three of the pressing problems confronting RMR, in effect, share a solution in an adequate epistemology of robust normativity. By no means has the preceding discussion provided anything beyond a sketch of how robust realists might begin to pursue this. However, this suggestion, if followed, would combine the metaphysics of RMR with the kinds of normative epistemologies deployed by those in the Kantian tradition – primarily, constitutivists. This combination, of a Platonic metaphysics of normative facts alongside a Kantian epistemology, is where I believe RMR's best hopes lie.

⁴⁷¹ Shafer-Landau, "The Constructivist Challenge," 48-50.

Enoch, in his critique of constitutivism, is clear that, given some ground to claim robust value in agency, the constitutivist project may then proceed atop that stable foundation.⁴⁷² And Cuneo and Harp⁴⁷³ argue that Thomas Reid's 'constitutivist version of moral non-naturalism'⁴⁷⁴ shows that the latter can accommodate the centrality of agency. It seems to me that much could be achieved by detaching intuitionism from RMR and replacing it with a Kantian-style constitutivist-inspired epistemology – this being of course detached from any accompanying Kantian metaphysics. Crucially, I wish to suggest that, although consideration of this possibility falls beyond the scope of the present work, beyond the combination of the indispensability and Euthyphronic arguments' power against alternatives to RMR, the provision of an adequate epistemology constitutes the bulk of the remaining defence of RMR.

⁴⁷² David Enoch, "Agency Shmagency," 192.

⁴⁷³ Terence Cuneo and Randall Harp, "Reid on the Autonomy of Ethics: From Active Power to Moral Nonnaturalism," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 2, no. 4 (2016): 523-541, <https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2017.3>.

⁴⁷⁴ Cuneo and Harp, "Reid," 523.

CONCLUSION

On the back cover of Enoch's *Taking Morality Seriously*, there is an endorsement (of sorts) from Harry Field which reads: 'On the scale of texts arguing for an obviously false conclusion, this actually ranks pretty high!' Besides being very funny – and leaving aside whatever developed critique is behind Field's comment – this raises two related worries about arguments for robust metanormative realism (RMR).

The first worry is that *any* argument which entails rejecting the naturalistic worldview will be dismissed at all costs by many philosophers. Perhaps there is some profound appeal to the naturalistic worldview which Enoch and other robust realists are simply unable to see, a cost they do not realise they are paying. Or perhaps those persuaded by the naturalistic worldview simply cannot visualise the metaphysically *sui generis* normative truths Enoch posits up in Plato's heaven, and will therefore go to any lengths to avoid committing to them. It is not clear where the blame lies; but, whatever the reason, Field's sort-of-endorsement may hint at a deeper dialectical issue faced by RMR which is not going to be solved by arguments, no matter how good those arguments are.

The second worry which Fields's sort-of-endorsement may express, however, is one for which I think we can lay the blame more clearly at the door of robust realists: that many of the arguments presented for the view, though argumentatively interesting, are not *persuasive*. This is most obvious in Enoch's argument for metanormative factualism and his attempt to rescue RMR from epistemological pessimism, both of which involve substantive normative commitments as premises. Both of these quite crucial moments in Enoch's project are distinctly Moorean in style – to their detriment, I think. And so, if Field's sentiment is seen as an attack on an unpersuasive kind of argumentation, I take it to express a worry of profound importance.

In David Faraci's review of *Taking Morality Seriously*, this is the theme on which he focuses. In fact, Faraci argues that, for some of Enoch's opponents, the arguments of his book, far from troubling them,

end up bolstering their own views.⁴⁷⁵ Needless to say, I do not agree; but I do think that Faraci is right to pick up on the problem of persuasiveness.⁴⁷⁶

Accordingly, although my case for RMR has drawn extensively from Enoch's arguments, I have tried to filter out the Moorean flavour from some of them, to enhance their capacity to pressure RMR's opponents. Some of these revisions would, I presume, be palatable to Enoch and other robust realists; others may not be. But I have tried in this thesis to present an argument for RMR much more ecumenical than Enoch's – closer, I hope, to Plato than to Moore.

My refinement of Enoch's case for RMR was divided into two stages. In the first factual stage, I considered Enoch's indispensability argument for metanormative factualism, and the problem that it begged the question against the nonfactualist it was designed to pressure. I tweaked the central epistemological principle deployed by Enoch in that argument to focus on rational, rather than normative, support for beliefs; and I argued for a *prima facie* conceptual distinction between the authoritatively normative and the rational. I then rephrased the indispensability argument to state that it is rational to accept metanormative factualism. The resulting indispensability argument, now capable of pressuring the nonfactualist away from her nonfactualism, better supports metanormative factualism than Enoch's.

Enoch's second robust stage purports to take us from normative facts to *robust* normative facts. He does this by considering factualist alternatives to RMR piecemeal, seeking to identify shortcomings in their accounts of normativity. I sought to supplement this stage with a unified Euthyphronic argument that

⁴⁷⁵ Faraci, *Review*, 264-265.

⁴⁷⁶ Faraci, *Review*, 263-267.

targets all non-robust factualisms in virtue of their common rejection of a metaphysics of *sui generis* normativity. In some cases, this Euthyphronic argument provided stronger responses to non-robust views than Enoch's; in others, I took it merely to add to the overall case against such views.

Enoch's case for RMR was, I hope, strengthened by these two alterations. I ended this thesis, however, with some reasons to think that the case for RMR is still in need of supplementation. Specifically, I suggested that an epistemological problem for RMR has not been satisfactorily answered in the manner that some robust realists think it has. I also suggested that two other pressing problems for RMR, concerning motivation and supervenience, are related to the epistemological problem in sharing a solution in the provision of an adequate epistemology of robust normative truth. The result, I think, is that developing a defensible epistemology of robust normative facts is key to defending RMR. If RMR does as well against its nonfactualist and non-robustly factualist rivals as I have argued, then an adequate epistemological pairing for the metaphysics of RMR will be key to making progress in metanormative and metaethical theory.

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