Editorial

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Published online: 12 September 2017
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The papers on Objectivity in Ethics published in this issue of *ETMP* derive from contributions to a conference on that topic, held in Utrecht, The Netherlands, on March 31st and April 1st 2016. This conference has been organised by the members of the research programme ‘Evolutionary Ethics? The (Meta-)Ethical Implications of Evolutionary Explanations of Morality’, chaired by Professor Herman Philipse and funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (see www.evoethics.com).

Most of us agree that moral norms are, or should be, more objective than aesthetic judgements or expressions of taste, for example. Ordinary moral judgements contain a claim to objectivity. Their validity is thought to be independent from one’s individual desires or inclinations. However, philosophers disagree deeply about nearly all aspects of objectivity in ethics. Should we analyse the objectivity of moral judgements in terms of truth or falsity? If so, how should we understand moral truth? How would moral properties fit into our science-based view of the world? Should facts about human nature influence our conception of moral objectivity? Can the empirical sciences contribute to a better understanding of morality’s purported objectivity?

The papers in this special issue are all concerned with these or related aspects of objectivity in ethics. *Sophie-Grace Chappell* defends moral objectivity from a Wittgensteinian point of view. She considers what she calls two pictures of our world; viz., the bare Democritean world of atoms and the void and the human world that includes lovers, battles, romantic hopes, paternal care, undue suffering, excessive punishment, *et cetera*. She uses this set-up to argue that when we can’t see how one real thing is connected to another—in this case moral objectivity and particle physics—we mustn’t regard this as a reason to doubt the reality of either of these things. Instead we should appreciate it as an unsolved puzzle about how to connect two real things. She also argues that we cannot be justified in abandoning our belief in the human world.

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Catherine Wilson examines what she calls a naturalistic approach to metaethics. In particular, she analyses a version of naturalist realism according to which moral properties supervene on underlying descriptive properties. Naturalism so understood aims at securing the possibility of objective knowledge in morality in a way similar to that in which we aim to secure objective knowledge in chemistry, for example. Wilson argues that we should reject this approach. She also offers an alternative narrative in terms of an ensemble of (cognitive) instruments, experiments and observations, which delivers what we are entitled to call greater objectivity. This allows us to understand the potential objectivity of moral beliefs within a naturalist framework that differs from the kind of framework offered by naturalists who endorse a supervenience theory.

Allan Gibbard argues that morality is objective in a particular sense that accords with his expressivist stance in metaethics. The objectivity of morality thus understood is consistent with a kind of subjectivity in moral inquiry, which type of subjectivity characterises other kinds of normative inquiry as well, and even scientific inquiry. Gibbard also claims that there is more to learn from comparing morality to mathematics than he used to think, although he still holds that these two realms differ too much from each other for it being legitimate to carry over results from the philosophy of mathematics to moral philosophy and metaethics.

Herman Veluwenkamp examines critically Thomas Scanlon's and Derek Parfit's metaethical quietism. This quietism is a form of metaethical realism that accounts for morality's objectivity, understood as mind-independence, by postulating moral properties that do not have positive ontological implications. He compares this view to metaethical anti-realisms such as Simon Blackburn's theory, which also aim to account for morality's objectivity understood as mind-independence, but not by postulating moral properties of any kind. Veluwenkamp argues that on one proposal of how quietism can be developed, it fails to be more realistic than contemporary versions of anti-realism like Blackburn's. Veluwenkamp's argument has the following consequence for the version of quietism that he considers. This version of quietism cannot be endorsed by philosophers who doubt the plausibility of anti-realist accounts of moral objectivity understood as mind-independence, who nonetheless want to account for moral objectivity thus understood, but who also want to avoid the (allegedly) dubious metaphysical entities that non-quietist versions of moral realism are committed to.

Jeroen Hopster argues that, if armed with the notion of standpoint-invariance rather than their standard commitment to mind-independence or attitude-independence, metaethical constructivists can vindicate an account of objectivity in ethics that has just the right strength, given the commitments of ordinary moral thought and practice. In order to substantiate this claim, he develops a version of Humean constructivism inspired by Sharon Street, and he provides an interpretation of recent empirical findings about folk objectivism in ethics.

Michael Klenk aims to evaluate evolutionary debunking arguments (EDAs) in metaethics to the effect that robust moral realism is incompatible with evolutionary explanations of morality. He argues that such arguments do not need to appeal to evolutionary explanations at all, since they amount essentially to the Benacerraf-Field challenge, which is the challenge to explain the reliability of our beliefs about causally inert properties. He also argues that if we try to formulate EDAs that include an essential causal empirical premise, the resulting arguments are either self-defeating or of limited scope. There may be strong arguments against robust moral realism, but Klenk argues that such arguments should not take the format of an EDA.

Camil Golub invites us to consider the reliability challenge to normative realism. Suppose that there are objective normative facts, including objective moral facts, and that our beliefs about such facts are at least by-and-large true: how did this come to happen? A similar challenge applies to quasi-realists, because they hold that normative judgments express truth-apt beliefs. Golub argues that the commitment of quasi-realists to what he calls the Negative Functional Thesis, according to which normative concepts are not naturally representational and do not have the function of tracking normative facts, allows them to dissipate epistemological worries about our objectivist commitments.

The papers in this special issue exemplify a wide variety of views about moral objectivity, which shows that it is still a hotly debated issue.