The Fact/Value Distinction and the Social Sciences

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Abstract Metaethics is an especially illuminating context for exploring the relation between facts and values. There are good reasons in favor of a cognitivist, realist interpretation of moral value, and some of the elements of that interpretation suggest bases for rejecting the alleged fact/value distinction in social scientific explanations. Some of the main objections to the alleged fact/value distinction and to expressivist interpretations of moral value are articulated, with a view to showing their relevance to the understanding of social phenomena more broadly. Also, the way in which rationality inevitably involves normativity is discussed because it is a crucial consideration in regard to understanding the normative aspects of issues the social sciences seek to explain.

Keywords Antirealism · Cognitivism · Metaethics · Noncognitivism · Objectivity · Realism · Subjectivity

The present discussion addresses some of the concerns in Professor Gorski's paper, focusing chiefly on metaethical issues. However, in the second half of this paper I comment on facts and values in the social sciences more broadly. While the claims in that section are very programmatic and require considerable elaboration, the metaethical discussion should make it fairly clear why I believe the general contours I sketch out in the second half are defensible. The philosophically interesting aspects of those issues and the metaethical issues are interrelated in various ways, including some common epistemological features, and explanatory affinities.

Gorski's discussion has very broad reach, addressing an extensive range of topics, and raising several important

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philosophical issues. If one wished to follow-up on only the most fundamental of them even that would be a very considerable undertaking. I am sympathetic to many of his views though I will pursue only a small number of thematic concerns. I agree with Gorski that the most familiar, influential drawings of the fact/value distinction are mistaken and that they have figured in untenable views of ethical values and ethical reasoning. Most of my argument concerning ethics is meant to be congenial to Gorski though I develop some matters in terms not found explicitly in his treatment of the topics.

The Role of Analytic Philosophy

It is worth observing that during the last 40 years analytic philosophy has undergone some significant developments and there are important ways in which the developments are interrelated and mutually supporting. Those developments are important background to Gorski's view. As an approach to characterizing those developments I start with some remarks about the overall character of analytic philosophy, since it is possible to mean different things by the expression 'analytic philosophy'. It has two especially significant meanings.

In the first sense analytic philosophy is an approach to philosophical problems in a manner dominated by issues at the intersection of philosophy of language, logic, and epistemology. This is an approach according to which the formulation and employment of a criterion of cognitive meaningfulness and methods of logical analysis (explicating the logical form of statements and logical relations between statements) define the philosophical project. In that view philosophy's task is to explicate whether statements (in whatever context or realm of discourse one wishes to consider) are meaningful, to exhibit their logical structure, and to show how statements are logically related to each other. There are good grounds for seeing this conception of analytic philosophy as dating

roughly from Frege's important work in logic (roughly, the 1870's) to a high point during the first half of the twentieth-century. This was not a monolith, and there was considerable diversity in the various currents of analytic philosophy. In fact, it is too often thought of in overly narrow terms, as though *Language, Truth, and Logic* captured and expressed all that analytic philosophy amounted to. That is not so. Still, the focus on criteria of empirical meaningfulness and on logical analysis are pronounced marks of analytic philosophy when 'analytic philosophy' is understood as the proper name of a distinct, historically bounded approach. It is plausible to think of Frege and Quine as notable historical bookends to analytic philosophy in the present sense.

A second, much broader conception of what we might call analytical (rather than 'analytic') philosophy holds that philosophy requires conceptual clarity, high standards of argumentative rigor, the articulation of principles and their implications, and often, the explication of relations between philosophical claims and theorizing on the one hand, and other types of claims and theorizing (scientific, commonsense, ethical, psychological, aesthetic, moral, etc.) on the other. According to this second conception a great many thinkers including Aristotle, Spinoza, Anselm, Kant, Locke, Scotus, and Hume—to name just a few—count as thinkers approaching philosophy in a broadly analytical manner. In this second, broader sense philosophical analysis is not regimented, so to speak, by an explicitly defined criterion or methodology—what we might call a 'criteriological' conception of philosophy. (The Logical Positivists are perhaps the clearest example of a movement shaped by a criteriological conception).

A key development in analytical philosophy during recent decades is that the conception of what constitutes philosophical analysis, and what constitutes a philosophical issue is no longer beholden to highly specific conception such as a single criterion of meaningfulness. The attempts by Logical Positivists and other empiricists to fashion a conception of philosophy on the basis of criteria of semantic meaning underwent considerable internal and external criticism, one result of which was that a great many philosophers were persuaded that a criteriological approach—at least *that one*—is not tenable.

A second important development is the steadily growing interest in the history of philosophy. It is no longer regarded mainly as scholarship rather than part of philosophy proper. The history of philosophy is now much more widely regarded as an inexhaustible resource and as vitally important for understanding the most significant, persistent problems of philosophy. Interest in Plato and Aristotle is no longer largely limited to Classical scholars. Interest in Spinoza is no longer largely limited to Spinoza-scholars,

and there is much greater interest in entire periods, such as the medieval era, than there was 30 years ago. Interest in Aquinas is no longer largely confined to Catholic philosophy, other medieval philosophers are receiving growing attention, and figures throughout the history of philosophy, figures such as Reid, Grotius, Cicero, and Rousseau, among others are studied much more widely than, say, 40 years ago. Thinkers from any and all periods are now more likely to be regarded as making valuable contributions to significant, enduring philosophical debates.

The Criteriological Approach

With regard to ethics and metaethics in the early and mid-twentieth century, the criteriological approach generally held that value-statements have expressive rather than cognitive meaning (because they were held to be empirically meaningless). While Moore's work appeared to have dealt naturalism a heavy blow much of the metaethical work that followed eschewed his Intuitionism and elaborated non-cognitivist accounts of moral discourse and judgment. This was due, in large part, to the then ascendant Logical Positivism.

While Hume's skepticism about how 'ought' statements could be derived from statements of what 'is' certainly influenced the metaethics of the Positivists Hume's account of ethical value was not based on narrowly semantic considerations and was, in fact, much more sophisticated than emotivism.[1] His views have figured prominently in recent versions of projectivism (discussed below) in ways that are more faithful to the complexity of his thought. Nonetheless, in general the Positivists held that there is no substantive project for philosophy with regard to values. Philosophy could explicate the fact that value-statements are neither true nor false and it could show that there are no objective values but there was nothing further for philosophy to say or do with regard to values.
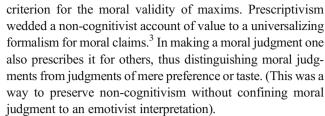
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[1] Hume's conception of moral value was much more complex than emotivism (which was shaped largely by a thesis about cognitive meaning, while Hume's moral philosophy involved several considerations concerning moral psychology and epistemology. I disagree with Gorski on the interpretation of Hume's view. Hume did not claim that, "we can only have true knowledge about the empirical world". It would be more accurate to say that he held that we can only have true knowledge of relations of ideas; i.e., factually empty matters of necessity. Hume largely retained the Cartesian conception of knowledge, (the view that knowledge is a matter of 'clear and distinct' ideas) but he had an unCartesian view of the extent to which the conditions for knowledge are fulfilled. They are fulfilled in a clear, undeniable manner only by relations of ideas (*a priori*, empirically vacuous knowledge). For Hume, even the claim that any of our sensory experiences represent anything outside the mind is, as a claim about a matter of fact or existence, problematic.

In the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties a number of philosophers (several of them women, including Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Iris Murdoch—all with strong interests in the history of philosophy) subjected the fact/value distinction as well as other elements of the criteriological approach to powerful criticism from several directions. This was occurring at the same time that critiques of Positivist semantics and epistemology were gathering momentum and what, for a while, seemed to be the triumph of Logical Positivism was unraveling in ways many regarded as irreparable.

In the context of moral philosophy the criticism was much more important and interesting than simply finding emotivism offensive because it might seem to threaten the authority and significance of moral considerations. The critique was on various substantive *philosophical* grounds, one upshot of which was that the putative fact/value distinction, as generally formulated and explained, was shown to be much more problematic than had been supposed by the Positivists. Numerous philosophers employed considerations from the philosophy of language—the analysts' 'own medicine', so to speak—to force a thorough reconsideration of the relation between facts and values. For example, Philippa Foot argued that attempts to analytically decompose ethical judgments into a descriptive element and a pro-attitude, or commendation, or a prescription fail.[2] With respect to concepts such as *courage* or *generosity* or *justice* competent usage of them involves grasping the empirical conditions meriting the application of the concept, and the grasp of those involves understanding courage or temperance, for example, to be a virtue, to be a praiseworthy feature of a person because of the place of courage and temperance in realizing human good. Competence in using moral concepts involves much more than expressing attitudes.

The non-cognitivist might argue that ethical concepts reflect *socially shared* norms, and that the norms are rooted in shared sensibility rather than values being objective features of actions, agents, and situations. (There are numerous sophisticated versions of this sort of approach.) One response to the critique of the fact/value distinction was to argue that while ethical judgments involve a prescriptive element, (i.e., they do not merely *express* attitudes but also seek to *influence* them) that element is rooted in choice, decision or attitude rather than being responsive to objective valuative considerations. Prescriptivism (the versions articulated by R. M. Hare being especially influential) borrowed from Kant the notion that universalization is a crucial feature of moral judgments but it did not also take on the Kantian view that there is an a priori

criterion for the moral validity of maxims. Prescriptivism wedded a non-cognitivist account of value to a universalizing formalism for moral claims.[3] In making a moral judgment one also prescribes it for others, thus distinguishing moral judgments from judgments of mere preference or taste. (This was a way to preserve non-cognitivism without confining moral judgment to an emotivist interpretation).

However, further objections to the prescriptivist attempt to save the fact/value distinction were forthcoming. Critics argued that prescription, understood as willingness to universalize an attitude, is inadequate as an account of use of an ethical concept. More than just the formal consistency assured by universalizing is involved in moral judgment. Prescription is not unguided by understanding, by an appreciation of the valuative significance of factual considerations. Thus, substantive considerations underwrite concept use; the matters being ethically judged are not valuatively vacuous, open to being prescribed (or not) in just any manner. Here again, Philippa Foot's work was crucial.

In the view Foot and others developed, competence with an ethical concept involves development of certain forms of attention, perception, understanding, and sensibility. The putative distinctions between cognition and desire, or between cognition and emotionality are not hard and fast as the non-cognitivists

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[2] Some of Foot's most important arguments are found in her *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[3] R. M. Hare's work was crucial to the development of prescriptivism. See R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952) and R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963). Prescriptivism involved aspects not found in early emotivism. While a version of non-cognitivism, prescriptivism was responsive to the notion that, unlike expressions of mere taste or preference, moral judgments are meant to apply to persons generally. Thus, if I say that deliberate deceit is wrong I am not just expressing my disapproval of it but also encouraging others to disapprove of it, and I do so in a way that reflects formal considerations of rationality, such as regarding all qualitatively similar acts (e.g., of lying in certain circumstances) as wrong. The judgment is meant to be universalized in a consistent manner, and does not apply to just *this* particular instance of deliberate deceit. This was incorporation of a Kantian consideration but without Kant's commitment to an *a priori* criterion of the moral validity of maxims of action, one grounded in "pure practical reason". Also, in regard to Kant, I find some of Gorski's characterization of his moral theory problematic. For example, Kant's ethical theory does not "give us rules for moral reasoning". [Gorski, p. 3] Articulating a criterion for testing the moral validity of maxims of action is quite different from providing rules for moral reasoning. In addition, Kant did not hold that we should never treat others as "means to our personal ends". [Ibid., p. 3] He argued that we should never treat persons—ourselves or others—*merely* as means. In many ways we treat each other as means, and that is morally permissible as long as we respect persons as ends in themselves. Whenever one goes to the dentist or makes a purchase in a store we are involved in situations in which we treat each other as means….just (hopefully) not *merely* as means. Also, Kant did not hold that the will supervenes on nature. Indeed, according to Kant, nature is ordered by laws of causal necessitation and the law of volition is a law of reason, which is not related to natural phenomena as a base in the manner required by properties that supervene on other types of properties.

insisted. Developing fluency with concepts such as gratitude, generosity, admiration, compassion, and so forth is not a matter of learning a definition and then finding that one has pro-or con-attitudes to certain sorts of actions, situations, and characteristics of persons. Sensibility (broadly understood as encompassing desire and passion) develops (or fails to develop) along with recognitional capabilities and types of judgment. The prescriptive aspect of ethical judgment is not isolable from the cognitive elements of the judgment, and there are factual reasons for regarding moral judgments as sound or unsound, appropriate or inappropriate, and even true or false.

This type of account contains resources for responding to J. L. Mackie's charge that objective values are metaphysically and epistemically 'queer' and his error-theoretic claim that despite the commonsense assumption of the objectivity of moral values, there just are no objective moral values.[4] The moral cognitivist need not claim that moral values have any sort of inscrutable metaphysical character or that exotic capacities are required for comprehending them. Nothing beyond the familiar conceptual capacities of human beings is needed; and values, as ethically significant features of actions, situations, and agents are no more mysterious than other kinds of entities and properties. They need not be interpreted as possessing ought-to-be-doneness or as implying that intrinsic prescriptivity is an item in the inventory of what there is in the world. Rather, the agent with a sound understanding of ethical considerations recognizes them as constituting *reasons* for judgment and action.[5]

In recent decades non-cognitivists have developed accounts of ethical value that are much more plausible than first-generation emotivism, and cognitivists have developed accounts much more plausible than early twentieth-century intuitionism. The most plausible forms of antirealism strive to retain the form and force of realist moral discourse; and the most plausible realisms seek to retain an important role for sensibility in moral judgment. The realist/antirealist positions in the debate concerning moral values are not as radically opposed and remote from each other as they were in the contrast between, say, Moore and Ayer. Moreover, some of the most important positions on each 'side' of the debate claim the influence of the later Wittgenstein. That influence is explicit in the work of John McDowell and Simon Blackburn, for example.[6] In both cases Wittgenstein's insights concerning the acquisition of concepts and fluency with a discourse (in this case, moral discourse) have a central place. McDowell puts them in service to (broadly Aristotelian) realism and Blackburn to (broadly Humean) antirealism. The Wittgensteinian insights help to guard against bald intuitionism and person-relative subjectivism at one and the same time.

Blackburn's projectivism is an example of the more sophisticated non-cognitivist, antirealist approaches. One likeness to its avowedly Humean roots is that it purports to explicate the genuineness and authority of ethical considerations despite denying that there are objective values and that moral values are objects of cognition. Blackburn writes: "My projectivist says the things that sound so realist to begin with—that there are real obligations and values, and that many of them are independent of us, for example. It is not the position that he says these for public consumption but denies them in his heart, so to speak. He affirms all that could ever properly be meant by saying that there are real obligations…..It deserves to be called anti-realist because it avoids the view that when we moralize we respond to, and describe, an independent aspect of reality".[7] Blackburn is anxious to maintain that projectivism does nothing to undermine moral considerations' genuine claim on us. While morality depends upon our responses—upon sensibility—it does not depend upon our *actual* responses. This is important because that element of the view keeps it from being a version of relativism, something Blackburn wants to avoid. The fact that moral judgments and arguments over moral reasons are independent of the responses we happen to have in this or that particular case, is what underwrites the possibility of meaningful moral argument and showing that a person can be mistaken in a moral judgment. Projectivism does not say, "This is how I feel about the situation so, these are my values. You may feel differently, and that's fine. I have my values and you have yours" as though there is nothing to critically consider or refine, or revise in making moral judgments. At least projectivism purports to enable such criticism and reflective responses to it. That is part of what it means for projectivism to be 'realist sounding'.

McDowell argues that both Mackie's charge that objective values are 'queer' and Blackburn's claim that projectivism preserves the genuineness of moral considerations cannot be upheld. In each case the error involves the notion that

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[4] See J. L. Mackie, *Ethics*: *Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977). He presents his error-theory of morality and develops a critique of objective value, which, unlike emotivism and prescriptivism, is not based upon considerations in the philosophy of language but upon ontological considerations. He argues that commonsense morality presupposes objective values but, in fact, there are none. Thus, commonsense morality involves an erroneous presupposition.

[5] There is a difference between *valuations* and *deliberative or practical judgments*, as Wiggins points out. In the present discussion I do not elaborate on that distinction—which is, indeed, important but not crucial for present purposes. There are moral judgments of each of those two basic types, the former concerning the values we encounter (e.g., "that was a remarkably admirable thing to have done") and the latter concerning action-guiding judgments (e. g., "given the situation, I see that I must distribute the remaining resources equally"). See Wiggins, "Truth, Invention, and the, Meaning of Life" in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 133.

[6] See, for example, Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also, John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[7] Simon Blackburn, "Errors and the Phenomenology of Value", in *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, p. 157.

objective values would have to be entities with *primary quality* status; that we would have to be able to conceptualize them in a manner that is altogether independent of human sensibility. McDowell argues that such a claim imposes a needless burden on the case for objective values. He also argues that Mackie and Blackburn misinterpret *secondary quality* status. This is important because, on their view of secondary quality status, if values are like secondary qualities, they could not possibly be objective, and McDowell wants to show that while values are rather like secondary qualities, that likeness does not undermine the claim for them being objective.[8] He argues that a misinterpretation of the status of values in regard to the primary/secondary quality distinction leads to the denial that values are objective. Mackie and Blackburn both insist that objective values would either have to have primary quality status (which is profoundly implausible) or secondary quality status (in which case they could not be objective because secondary qualities are thoroughly subjective).

The debate over the interpretation of *subjective* and *objective* is a core issue in recent metaethics. In explicating what he takes to be an erroneous view McDowell notes that 'subjective' may mean: (i) not real; a figment of a subjective state without being a veridical experience of what the experience claims to be an experience of. Or, 'subjective' may mean (ii) a quality such that it cannot be adequately understood except in terms of dispositions to give rise to certain subjective states.[9] McDowell argues that the second sense is the one relevant to a secondary quality, a quality such that *it is ascribed to an object in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance*. Nonetheless, it can be a fully objective matter that a feature has that status. Consider the red of a 'Stop' sign of the sort used on roads in the U.S. That such signs are red is a fully objective matter, and the claim that they are not red or not *really* red would be mistaken. They do not merely look red; they look red because that is what color they are though, to be red is to be such as to present a certain perceptual appearance—namely, appearing red because of objective features of the object. The example shows that in the description of real features of an object there can be a role for dispositions giving rise to certain subjective states. Color is like that. Moral qualities are not precisely like that because in the case of moral qualities it is not that features of the object *cause* us to have certain reactions or responses but that the features *merit* certain reactions or responses; we are in the space of reasons and not just the sphere of causal relations. Thus, McDowell writes, "The disanalogy, now, is that a virtue (say) is conceived to be not merely such as to elicit the appropriate 'attitude' (as a colour is merely such as to cause

the appropriate experiences), but rather such as to *merit* it".[10] Still, having shown that antirealist metaethics often relies on an improperly drawn distinction between primary and secondary qualities McDowell can include a role for human subjectivity in the explication of the realism of moral value.

Projectivism claims to be adequate as a metaethic while requiring no realist commitments. McDowell argues that the projection that is supposed to result in the seeming feature (the moral quality) cannot be made sense of except in terms of the concept of that feature. That is, we cannot make a distinction that is crucial to projectivism, namely, the distinction between (i) the projected subjective state and (ii) the concept of the feature to which that state is a response and onto which it is projected. McDowell writes, "[i]f there is no comprehending the right sentiments independently of the concepts of the relevant extra features, a no-priority view is surely indicated".[11] He suggests that, rather than making either a feature of things in the world or a subjective response the primary explanatory factor in our making valuative judgments, we should adopt a "no-priority" view, which does not take the one or the other to be "leading in the dance" of *world* and *response*, as we might put it. In the no-priority view the comprehension of right sentiments depends upon conceptions of the features they address.

By a "no-priority" view he means one in which explanatory priority (regarding moral value) is attributed neither to sensibility nor things in the world. "The interest of the no-priority view, now, is that it opens up the possibility that it might be respectable to use the apparently world-describing conceptual resources with which we articulate our responses, in earning truth in one of the relevant areas". The relevant area is ethics, and by "earning truth" McDowell means "that we do after all have at our disposal a conception of reasons for ethical thinking which is sufficiently rich and substantial to mark off rationally induced improvements in ethical stances from alterations induced by merely manipulative persuasion".[12] By loosening the (unjustified) grip of the notion that objective properties must be interpreted as primary qualities, and that secondary qualities are subjective in the sense that they are not real properties, we see that there is an interpretation of ethical values that properly preserves a place for sensibility in the awareness and discrimination of values without interpreting ethical thought as attitudinizing all the way down. Also, the interpretation shows how there can be objective ethical reasons despite the fact that ethical values are not brutely 'there', cognized without any involvement of sensibility. McDowell's view does not involve intuitionism's difficulties, yet it preserves a realist interpretation of moral value, one in which it is possible to evaluate moral claims with respect to truth and falsity.

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8 See McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities", in *Essays on Moral Realism*.

9 John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities", in *Essays on Moral Realism*.

10 Ibid., p. 175.

11 John McDowell, "Projection and Truth in Ethics", in *Essays on Moral Discourse and Practice*, eds. Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, Peter Railton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 220.

12 Ibid., p. 218.

With regard to the no-priority view involving an *earned* notion of truth, McDowell says: "Instead of a vague attempt to borrow the epistemological credentials of the idea of perception, the position I am describing aims, quite differently, at an epistemology that centers on the notion of susceptibility to reasons. The threat to truth is from the thought that there is not enough substance to our conception of reasons for ethical stances".[13] The no-priority view is intended to meet and defeat that threat. The no-priority view is not a guarantee that we have sound and adequate ethical concepts or that the ethical judgments we accept are actually true. It *does* mean that in ethical discourse and reasoning our resources are not limited to attitudinizing and that the only conceivable (though untenable) alternative to attitudinizing is "bald intuitionism"— a realism of direct cognitive awareness of values.[14] There are reasons for one type of response rather than another and we can explain the *truth* of correct moral judgments by referring to objective considerations though there is a role for sensibility in reason-giving, truth-aspiring thought and judgment.

MacDowell's response to some of the most recent and most important antirealist metaethical positions has involved explication of the primary/secondary quality distinction, explication of the role of sensibility (and desire) in objective ethical judgment, an account of the rationality of ethical judgment, and an account of the basis for moral judgments being truth-evaluable. His view shows marked signs of the combined influence of Aristotle and Wittgenstein. (See, for example, McDowell's "Virtue and Reason", in particular.)[15] It (as well as Blackburn's projectivism) illustrates how the relation between facts and values is a complex issue involving several significant aspects, with roots deep in the history of philosophy.

Aristotle had argued that the agent with practical wisdom is the person whose dispositions of desire and emotion are such that they are aligned with what reason understands to be good. The virtuous person becomes angry to the right degree, at the right time, for the right reasons, at the appropriate person. The virtuous person finds it gratifying to act justly and honestly and is disposed to so act, and doesn't have to overcome an internal conflict in order to do so. In addition, the virtuous person's desires and passions enable him to perceive and appreciate situations correctly. Receptivity (passions, sensibility) enables the person to react and to be discerning in the right ways, and to find it gratifying to act well. The person's desires enable him to aim at what in fact is good. Sensibility and receptivity have crucial roles in the shaping of well-ordered habits; this is not a view in which moral judgment is 'purely' cognitive. Nevertheless, the rightness of correct moral judgment is not wholly assimilated to norms of sensibility or affective dispositions.

The interpenetration of cognition and sensibility gives each a vital role and there are relations of mutual support between them. For example, the person aspiring to be virtuous experiences the pain of regret over her ethical lapses. Aristotle noted that the virtues concern pleasure and pain but he did not mean that virtuous activity is pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance. Rather, the virtuous person, the person who has acquired good habits and correct understanding, finds it pleasing to act well. (The virtuous person is minimally susceptible to motivational conflict and regret.) While in the broadly Aristotelian view the virtuous person's desires are a correct measure of what is desirable that does not mean that subjective preference is the fundamental anchor of value. Reasons can be given for why the things deemed worthy of pursuit by virtuous agents do indeed merit being chosen. Reasons can be given for what makes correct judgments correct. We are not left with a sort of mute piety consisting of no more than, "Do as X does, for X is a virtuous person". Yet, it is true that we can point to X as indeed having correct desires and appropriate reactive attitudes.

Courage, for example, concerns the management of fear and judgment concerning what risks are worth taking and why. Someone may react very fearfully to a situation that is not, in fact, fearful. That person is mistaken about sort of challenge the situation presents. Granted, that individual may still be afraid but her fear is not merited. The person is mistaken about the features of the situation. We can be similarly mistaken (or correct) regarding what merits gratitude, when generosity is appropriate, and when compassion is praiseworthy. It is not as though the involvement of value or the presence of normativity is something independent of, separate from, 'the facts'.

Such a view could be interpreted as a form of naturalism but what is most basically at issue is (i) the relation between attitudes, desire, and sensibility on the one hand and features of actions, agents, and situations on the other and (ii) whether there are adequate grounds for the truth-evaluability of moral judgments given the account of that relation. McDowell's approach is one of a number of significant responses to antirealism and non-cognitivism during the last 30 years. Many of those responses are explicit projects of articulating naturalistic versions of realism.

Nicholas Sturgeon's view is a good example, a view in which showing that naturalistic moral facts are explanatory is a central concern. The approach is a response to Gilbert Harman's relativism and Harman's claim that *even if there were moral facts* they would not be explanatory.[16] The point

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[13] Ibid., p. 221
[14] Ibid., p. 220
[15] John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason", *The Monist*, 62 (3), 1979, 331–350.

[16] See Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations", in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, 229–255.

about the non-explanatory character of putative moral facts is what makes Harman's relativism somewhat more challenging than relativism that mainly focus on the fact of moral diversity—a fact which, in its own right, does not imply anything about the objectivity or non-objectivity of moral values. Sturgeon argues that there are non-relativistic moral facts and that they are explanatorily significant; they are necessary to explanations of morally relevant behavior and moral judgments. It is one among several recently elaborated versions of naturalistic moral realism.

While making the case for naturalism is not my present concern, it is worth noting that in recent decades the naturalistic fallacy is much less taken for granted than in the first few decades following Moore's *Principia Ethica*. Careful scrutiny of the alleged fallacy has weakened its grip and several approaches to explicating moral value have been elaborated in ways that are not vulnerable to the alleged fallacy's critical thrust. There has been a robust flourishing of multiple species of non-reductionist naturalistic realism, and it is a view with the resources to challenge emotivist and prescriptivist non-cognitivism and the multiple varieties of relativism.

Facts and Values in the Social Sciences

In the remainder of this paper I will make some remarks concerning facts and values in regard to explanation in the social sciences. These remarks do not directly address explanation in one or another particular social science but concern some general epistemological considerations in a manner that follows-up the metaethical points made already.

One of the main points of the discussion so far is that there is an important respect in which ethical thought can enable us to attain correct conceptions of what we might call 'moral reality'.[17] There is such a thing as a correct understanding of moral values and there are genuine differences between sound ethical judgment and unsound, incorrect ethical judgment. It is not as though the world (including human actions, relations, institutions, and practices) is morally neutral or morally vacuous, with moral values as an expressive or projective laminate. Moral considerations are not a matter of two distinct realms—one of facts and one of values—being brought into some sort of relation to each other expressively or projectively.

As in other areas of inquiry and thought, in morality we often start with a thin understanding of a concept and then, with thought and experience we enlarge and deepen our understanding and connect it with other elements of

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[17] See Mark Platts, "Moral Reality", in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, (Ithaca, NY:: Cornell University Press, 1988), 282–300. Also, Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good* influenced the development of moral realism in recent decades though that work is not explicitly a defense of moral realism. Numerous defenders of realism and critics of non-cognitivism acknowledge Murdoch's influence.

understanding. For example, our grasp of fairness is likely to start out as consisting largely of certain general rules or one or two key ideas, but we go on to add considerable texture and subtlety to it and we increasingly understand relations with, say, honesty, courage, friendship, generosity, and other moral matters. This is not so different from the course of development in our understanding of what it is for something to be a feline creature or our understanding of what it is for something to be iron or a bacterium or an asteroid. Often, we initially acquire a concept of some kind of thing by having our attention drawn to an example or a paradigmatic instance of the relevant kind. Someone points to the girder and says, "That girder is iron. Anything made of the same stuff, is iron. It may not always look exactly like that but it will have the same constitution". We learn to discriminate iron from copper, aluminum, etc.; and then perhaps learn details about its properties and constitution. The concept has not changed with the development of our knowledge but our conception of iron has developed. We learn to employ the concept in more discriminating, more careful ways and we recognize the multiplicity of relations it has with other concepts. (We learn a bit about ore, about smelting with coke, and about other processes, and so forth.) If we are serious about trying to enlarge our understanding, whether in the moral context or the non-moral context, we inform and enlarge our conceptions and the relations between them. This is *work*; it does not just 'happen' naturally, and it is world-guided. We are bringing the reality into view, and not painting the world with ideas.

What has this to do with facts and values in the social sciences? Before commenting on that question it is important to emphasize how careful we need to be in drawing conclusions from the metaethical considerations discussed above. It was limited to moral value; there are other kinds. Moreover, it did not address the question of how morality, *as a social phenomenon*, is to be studied. Thus, there remain important, difficult matters to consider regarding questions concerning facts, values, and the social sciences. Nonetheless, the metaethical discussion is relevant in the following way.

For one thing, it shows that in at least one very significant valuative context an aspiration to objective understanding is perfectly appropriate. Even if, given the complexity of moral life, our understanding of moral values is never complete we see that it can be enlarged and revised in ways that are responsive to objective considerations. One reason to think that enlarging and deepening our understanding of other kinds of value is possible is that moral values are not so cleanly and sharply separated out from other values that the study of them is unconnected with attempts to understand other aspects of human lives and human societies. In understanding moral values we are also understanding conceptions of human need, of what it is to live well, conceptions of what has importance and why, conceptions of what is regarded as intrinsically valuable and what has instrumental value, and many other

matters. There are many kinds of value, many normative aspects of the human world and the discussion of metaethics showed that it is a mistake to think that if we are considering values, we have entered a sphere in which objectivity is not attainable.

Suppose that, instead of *metaethics*, we are now considering the study of a society's actual *morality*, people's beliefs, practices, strategies of justification, and so forth rather than framework questions concerning the objectivity (or not) of moral value. A great deal of human activity is undertaken for reasons, and is thought to involve values and significance of various kinds. There is an ineliminably normative character of much that human beings do. Practices, activities, institutional arrangements, forms of association, and so forth typically reflect reasons, and those reasons give normative shape to the practices, etc. What counts as doing X is often a normative matter, and the reason for doing X may be that X is thought to realize a specific value, whether this is a value in the sense of a purpose, or a value in the sense of having a certain kind of meaning or significance not instrumentally related to bringing about something else. Rational activity is normatively laden, reflecting diverse valuative commitments. If that is the case, then a great deal of social scientific understanding may depend upon comprehension of the norms and values that are essential to the intelligibility of human activity (even when that intelligibility reveals dubious or defective reasoning on the part of the persons and activities studied). Whether or not others act for the same reasons we do, or share our conceptions of worth and significance, rationality makes it possible to comprehend their reasons and their valuative conceptions.

Indeed, the notion of rationality is normative inasmuch as *having a reason* and *giving a reason*, no matter how austere the rationale and no matter how trivial the issue, are justificatory undertakings. The rationality of human beings makes it possible for them to infer, hypothesize, plan, dispute, inquire, propose, agree, explain, refute, and engage in a huge variety of actions and practices with normative dimensions. Thinking is unavoidably normative, and that is one of the most marked differences between thinking and hallucinating or between thinking and daydreaming. The normativity of thought is perhaps the chief distinguishing feature of the human social world in contrast to the worlds of other creatures, including other social creatures (such as bees, ants, and wolves). Human beings can exhibit concern for justification and they can find significance and attribute significance to all sorts of considerations, phenomena, and facts. This does not ensure that our grasp of others' normative considerations and reasons will be complete or fully accurate. Nor is it that case that because we understand the reasons for X we also see that the reasons are adequately justificatory. But it does mean that diverse conceptions of normativity can be intelligible *as* normative considerations.

Seeing how to place an action, a reason, a practice, a conflict, a principle (and so on) in a sphere of normativity (however poorly rationalized by those participating in it) is perhaps one of the most basic tasks of social explanation. We can also see how being differently situated in an institution or a social world can make a difference to how the sphere of normativity is understood and can be crucial to understanding it. Consider, a maximum-security prison and the different perspectives of prisoners, correctional officers, the warden, visitors, journalists, and the local Congressional representative. Rationality figures in all of this but rationality does not necessarily determine some single way that all these persons should understand the institution. The multiple perspectives can illustrate the importance of a non-relativist appreciation of the importance of how something is seen by persons differently situated socially. It is not as though there are the normatively neutral facts and then the diverse valuative perspectives attached to them.

I have only mentioned some issues concerning the social sciences; there isn't space here to pursue them in depth. However, this very programmatic beginning is part of a larger view that conceptions of value and significance are rationally intelligible, and that the evaluation of such judgments and commitments is a feasible undertaking. We may struggle to comprehend the values of a very different social world and we may be perplexed by their justifications but those values and reasons for value-judgments are not altogether inaccessible; we are not skeptically cut-off by a clean break between facts and values. The hard—but doable—work is in explicating how and why certain kinds of considerations are taken to be *reasons with specific kinds of normative weight*. This is not the view that understanding implies endorsement. We can be rationally, non-relativistically critical. The risk is that we will be too comfortable with our own values and justifications. However, the social sciences can be a source of knowledge that can help deepen and enlarge individual and social self-understanding and understanding of the world. In regard to values the social sciences are not limited to supplying descriptions of different valuative conceptions without deeper comprehension of them and their rationality or lack of rationality.

Fuller development of this view would show that the fact/value distinction is not something that has been *overcome*; instead, the formulation of it in the first place was *mistaken*. The very identification of the actions, practices, and relations being studied often depends upon grasping their valuative or normative aspects and negotiating their rationality.

At the same time there are illuminating generalizations about and explanations of social phenomena that employ concepts that are not part of the self-understanding of the people studied. I suspect that explanation in economics is often like that. For instance, an inquirer might explain behavior in terms of preferences, regardless of aspects of the vocabulary of value informing the behavior of the people studied. In some contexts many phenomena can be 'assimilated', so to speak, to a single language of description and explanation, even though the persons studied think and speak in terms of

diverse kinds of significance and worth not directly expressed in the explanatory theory.

It would almost certainly be a mistake to insist that there really is no more to the behavior being studied than preferences and instrumental rationality but the generalizations and hypotheses arrived at might be quite useful. It may be possible to describe some types of phenomena entirely in a specific, limited theoretical vocabulary but that does not imply that we have attained an entirely adequate understanding (or even description) of the phenomena. The fact that we can describe something in *exclusively* T-terms does not imply that the reality is *nothing but* what the T-terms say. (It should be noted, also, that such an approach to economic explanation reflects certain normative commitments on the part of the inquirer—commitments concerning the relations between preferences and rationality, for example).

It is important to guard against assuming that one's own norms and values (moral and non-moral) or the terms of one's preferred theory are what rationality uniquely requires or that they are normatively authoritative for human beings generally. That does not mean that rationality is relative or subjective. It often seems that critics of objective rationality believe that if there were such a thing, it would yield unique and exhaustive results regarding anything that can be asked of reason. But what is the basis for thinking *that*? To say that human beings are rational does not imply that they will think the same things about everything, even if they are thinking carefully. It means (at least) that human beings can act for reasons, that they are capable of regarding many different kinds of considerations as reasons, that they can be responsive to considerations of consistency, coherence, and justification, and that the assessment of reasons and the formulation of norms for belief-acceptance can be regular features of thought. In addition, human beings are capable of poor reasoning, uncritical dogmatism, misinterpretation, fantasy, illusion, self-deception, specious rationalization, and countless other epistemic faults, lapses, and vices.

Human rationality informs the social world with complex webs of normativity, rationally justified or not. Often, social scientific explanation aims at explicating and articulating those webs and how they figure in lives, practices, institutions, and arguments. At the same time it is plain that theorizing about social phenomena can require more than appreciating the views, attitudes, and perspectives of the people studied. Facts about geography, nutrition, physiology, agronomy, and meteorology can be crucially important, for example. The fact that many members of a society suffer from a vitamin deficiency or a genetic condition (of which they have never even heard) might be explanatorily crucial if one is trying to explain something about mortality. In another case, understanding the groups' creation story or conception of the end of the world in its own terms may be vital. Much can depend upon the inquirer's purposes, and the inquirer's concepts and categories may be different from those used by the persons whose activity is to be understood. Though trying to appreciate the society's conception of something is a matter of one subject (the inquirer) seeking to grasp the perspective of another subject that does not mean that there is no role for objectivity in the task. Reason can (plausibly) aspire to negotiate this kind of complex, textured conceptual terrain without each layer of texture adding a measure of relativist-remove, distancing the inquirer from the phenomena.

The aspiration to objectivity is certainly appropriate in the social sciences in ways that do not involve a clean break between facts and values. The inquiry can be part of the project of trying to understand the complex, diverse ways in which reason shapes and orients human action, relations, and practices. It is part of understanding what a society takes to be good reasons and what has value, significance, and meaning. This is not a matter of discovering different fabrics of subjectivity projected onto a value-neutral world. It is a matter of discovering the ways (supportable and unsupportable; strongly coherent and less coherent; illuminating and not illuminating, etc.) that human beings find the world to be rich with value of multiple kinds in multiple ways.

Beyond Straw-Men

The argumentation so far points to a number of conclusions regarding the question of the relation between facts and values. First, reflection upon moral thought offers precious little support for the view that facts and moral values belong to mutually exclusive categories. The specific semantic and epistemological grounds that supported the most sharply drawn contrasts between facts and values in twentieth-century philosophy have undergone a quite thorough destructive critique. The alleged fact/value distinction misrepresented both elements. Its conception of what moral values would have to be like if they were objective was often a straw-man conception. Its conception of the valuative vacuity of facts was also inaccurate. That something is the case can have valuative significance independent of how people feel about it. For instance, the wrongness of abandoning one's children, and the appropriateness of gratitude to a benefactor are explicable in terms of objective considerations. They are not the result of a combination of value-neutral facts and factually empty valuations.

Also, Humean concerns about whether prescriptions can be based upon factual beliefs are no longer seen as insurmountable impediments to rational prescriptivity (in more than just the formal sense of consistency). Humean skepticism regarding the derivation of 'ought' from 'is' is a worry for Humean formulations of practical rationality and motivation, and there are other—more plausible—formulations. In addition, the relativist refuge in which the fact/value distinction sought safety after abandoning the wreckage of Logical Positivism offers little protection. And, as a place from which to view morality or engage in moral thought, it makes little, if any, illuminating contribution.

A second conclusion concerns the recognition of how the human world is thickly informed by value and normativity (not limited to morality) *because* human beings are rational. It is not as though rationality is value-neutral and then, perhaps from a source in affect or desire, value gets projected onto actions and institutions, and so forth. Rationality makes it inescapable that human beings lead lives shaped by valuative considerations and by conceptions of how different kinds of value are related to each other. Human social worlds are value-laden, not because human beings always *apply* values to facts but because the complex texture of the normativity of rationality *constitutively pervades* what human beings do, how and why they do it, and the ways they think it matters. That is not to say that whatever humans think, there are good reasons for thinking *that*; many valuative conceptions lack rational justification or are stubbornly maintained despite there being decisive reasons to revise or abandon them. The rationality of human beings does not imply that they always have good reasons. Intellectual and moral vices and defects—and relations between them—abound. Nonetheless, seeking sound and supportable conceptions of value is a rational undertaking and can be guided by objective considerations.

A third implication is that the social sciences can be a genuine source of knowledge and understanding of the kind needed in order to think about how to live. The more fully we understand the ways in which human beings inform the social world with reason (and unreason), and the ways in which they find meaning and significance in the world, the better informed our own rationality can be in thinking about those things. If facts and values were separated by a clean break, there would be little to learn about their relation. The facts could 'accommodate', so to speak, any valuative overlay whatsoever. Moreover, if we *knew* that, the effect might well be a kind of deeply demoralized cynicism or skepticism, because we would know that 'anything goes' with regard to value, since value amounts to no more than projected feelings and desires; and if 'anything goes' in *that* sense, there goes any rational basis for concern, commitment or an aspiration to seek and to realize the good. There would be no genuine task of engaging the world with a view to understanding how to be at home in it or how to do well in living a life. Rather than offering a liberating opportunity for human freedom, a clean break between facts and values would be profoundly alienating, evacuating human activity of significance except in the most arbitrary and discretionary ways. Fortunately, we are not condemned to that predicament. It is possible for us to strive to be at home in the world through *understanding* the complex texture of value and through undertaking to realize value.

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