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THE NORMATIVE FORCE OF CERTAINTY: A DEFENSE OF REALISM

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THE NORMATIVE FORCE OF CERTAINTY: A DEFENSE OF REALISM

A Master's Thesis

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*To my parents,
Sevgi and Yüksel*



THE NORMATIVE FORCE OF CERTAINTY: A DEFENSE OF REALISM

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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ABSTRACT

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Crispin Wright, in *Truth and Objectivity*, introduces his anti-realist paradigm, arguing that discourse about morality can be truth-apt without holding a realist stance. There, he formulates the criterion of Cognitive Command against realism by claiming that moral realism is defensible if and only if it is *a priori* that any moral disagreement between realists and anti-realists involves a cognitive shortcoming. In this thesis, the methodology I adopt to defend realism is to uphold Wittgenstein's claims about certainty against Wright's criterion of Cognitive Command. In so doing, I argue that the disagreement between realists and anti-realists is a kind of deep disagreement over basic moral certainties, which cannot be rationally resolvable. I then investigate the possibility of basic certainties in metadiscourse by referring to the claims about the existence of moral facts in contemporary metaethics. Taken together, I show that the criterion of Cognitive Command works neither in first-order normative discourse nor in second-order discourse about normativity.

Keywords: Certainty, Cognitive Command, Disagreement, Moral Facts, Realism

ÖZET

KESİNLİĞİN NORMATİF GÜCÜ: GERÇEKÇİLİĞİN BİR SAVUNMASI

Bölek, Sena

Yüksek Lisans, Felsefe Bölümü

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January 2021

Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*'de (*Hakikat ve Nesnellik*), ahlaki söylemin, gerçekçilik görüşünü benimsemeden de, doğruluk değerine sahip olabileceğini savunarak kendi gerçekçilik karşıtı modelini ortaya koyar. Orada, gerçekçilik ve gerçekçilik karşıtı görüşlerin arasındaki herhangi bir ahlaki uzlaşmazlığın bilişsel bir yetersizlik içermesinin ancak ve ancak *a priori* olması halinde ahlaki gerçekçiliğin savunulabileceğini ileri sürerken, Bilişsel Buyruk kriterini gerçekçiliğe karşı formüle eder. Bu çalışmada, gerçekçiliği savunmak için benimseyeceğim yöntem Wright'ın Bilişsel Buyruk kriterine karşın Wittgenstein'in kesinlik anlayışını öne sürmek olacaktır. Böylece, gerçekçilerin ve gerçekçilik karşıtlarının arasındaki uzlaşmazlığın rasyonel olarak çözülemeyecek temel ahlaki dayanak noktalarına ilişkin derin bir uzlaşmazlık olduğunu iddia edeceğim. Daha sonra, güncel metaetik tartışmalarındaki ahlaki olguların varlığı meselesine atıfta bulunarak metaetikteki temel dayanak noktalarının olanaklılığını inceleyeceğim. Böylelikle, Bilişsel Buyruk kriterinin ne birinci dereceden normatif söylemde ne de normatifliğe ilişkin ikinci dereceden bir söylemde kullanılamayacağını ortaya koyacağım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ahlaki Olgular, Bilişsel Buyruk, Gerçekçilik, Kesinlik, Uzlaşmazlık

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INTRODUCTION

In *Truth and Objectivity*, Wright investigates the ways in which discourse about morality can be truth-apt without holding a realist stance. Nevertheless, he does not exclude realists from the debate by offering his minimalist conception of truth against the deflationary accounts. On his account, the talk of representation of the facts or the correspondence relation to the facts is the correct philosophical attitude on the truth-predicate. The applicability of truth-aptness, he argues, could be neutral within a discourse between realism and anti-realism (1992: 27). That is, truth ought to be regarded as *seriously dyadic* (1992: 83).

Wright then introduces the criterion of Cognitive Command as a sort of test for a given discourse to count as minimally truth-apt. If a discourse exerts Cognitive Command, it guarantees that judgment in that discourse will be representational – reliably track mind-independent reality. However, he argues that even if a discourse exhibit Cognitive Command, realists should also ensure the *Correspondence Platitude*, the principle that a true proposition is a proposition that corresponds accurately to reality. In light of these assumptions, he proposes a dilemma against moral realism, arguing that moral realism is defensible if and only if it is *a priori* that any moral disagreement between realists and anti-realists involves a cognitive shortcoming: A realist must choose either that all equally rational people would have a cognitive shortcoming in their moral disagreement without having a false belief about the dispute or that we cannot possibly have evidence for moral truths. In this thesis, I shall argue against his key assumptions to be able to defend realism.

In what follows, I will begin my investigation by discussing realism and its denial in the first chapter. As I will discuss different anti-realist paradigms, I will construe Crispin Wright's denial of realism as the fourth anti-realist paradigm. I will expose his position by representing the basic features of minimalism about truth and truth-

aptness, superassertibility, and the criterion of Cognitive Command, referring to his arguments in *Truth and Objectivity*. In the last section of the first chapter, I will narrow my focus on the criterion of Cognitive Command where he argues against moral realism.

In the second chapter, *contra* Wright, I shall argue that realists do not have to accept that it is *a priori* that no moral disagreement is radical since we can show that the radical disagreement between realism and anti-realism is rooted in their basic moral certainties. That is, deep moral disagreements are indeed analogous to disagreements over basic moral certainties rather than beliefs (or any other cognitive state). In doing so, I will show that the radical (or deep) disagreement between realists and anti-realists is non-cognitive; their disagreement does not involve cognitive shortcomings. This will bring us to the conclusion that the disagreement between realists and anti-realists is a kind of deep disagreement over basic moral certainties, which cannot be rationally resolvable.

To do so, I will give a general characterization of what hinges are based on Wittgenstein's claims in *On Certainty*. And following Nigel Pleasants, I will extend Wittgenstein's inquiry into basic moral certainties (or hinges) while giving a response against Pleasants' naturalistic explanation. Then, I will examine how disagreement might occur in Wittgensteinian hinges and claim that what it changes in disagreements over moral hinges is the same as in the cases of empirical hinges. In what follows, I will show that the subject matter of this change refers to a deep disagreement. This line of argument, I believe, will allow us to clear up the criterion of Cognitive Command in a non-circular way, without an *a priori* emphasis to defend realism.

The third chapter will revolve around the questions of why discourse in metaethics are not necessarily cognitive disagreements and why that is not a reason for defending anti-realism? I shall argue that there might be deep disagreements in metaethical discourse that do not exert the criterion of Cognitive Command. To show this, I will investigate the possibility of basic certainties in metadiscourse by referring to the claims about the existence of moral facts in contemporary metaethics. I will argue that the right kind of attitude towards the existence of moral facts ought

to be our relationship with hinge propositions because their existence cannot be something either argued for or against. After I consider possible objections from quasi-realism, I will show that realism can still be defensible. And finally, I will be able to make clear that the criterion of Cognitive Command works neither in first-order normative discourse nor in metadiscourse about normativity.



CHAPTER 1

THE DISCOURSE BETWEEN REALISM AND ANTI-REALISM

1.1 Realism and Its Denial

Michael Dummett, in his essay “Realism” (1982), has attempted to capture the common characteristics of realist views. On his account, realism hinges upon two fundamental assumptions: the principle of bivalence and the notion of mind-independent (i.e. epistemically unconstrained) truth. Yet, he also argued that the principle of bivalence ought to be rejected because there are many undecidable sentences (e.g. sentences about the future, ethics, or counterfactual conditionals), which we are unable to know their truth-values due to the verification-transcendent truth.

Dummett, in his several papers, approached the dispute from a merely linguistic standpoint, combining Frege’s analysis of sense (and rejecting its underlying realist assumptions), Wittgensteinian meaning as use, and intuitionism in the philosophy of mathematics against Platonism. As he remarks in *Truth and Other Enigmas*, “the philosophy of language is the foundation of all other philosophy” (1978: 442). Thus he claimed that the structure of thought is only to be understood by the systematic investigation of language. This kind of attempt requires a theory of meaning and he understood meaning as a sharable practice at the community level. The knowledge of meaning is a product of rational deliberation instead of practical capacity.¹ And the method of this rational deliberation, for Dummett, is not the principle of bivalence,

¹ It is obvious that we manifest our knowledge of the language for our use. So, there is a practical aspect to it. Yet, he argues that since this practical aspect is in the speaker’s implicit knowledge, what is implicit would become explicit through the rational analysis of the language. Language involves awareness of meanings because speakers use this meaning deliberately and publicly available (1978: 216-7).

the principle that every truth-bearer is determinately either true or false, which classical semantics holds because there is no guaranteed way to give the best possible evidence for determining the bearer's truth or falsity.

Although many forms of anti-realist views typically reject the principle of bivalence, one might still wonder why Dummett prioritized the principle of bivalence instead of the notion of truth. In fact, John McDowell, in his "Truth Conditions, Bivalence and Verificationism", referred to this matter and argued that it is possible to distinguish realism from the adherence to bivalence (1976: 48).² On the other hand, Crispin Wright, despite his anti-realistic stance, also agreed with McDowell on the issue that the notion of truth should be at the heart of the debate (1987: 85).

Wright stated that in postwar Anglo-American philosophy three anti-realist paradigms have dominated the literature (1992: 3). One of which is Dummett's work where he construes realism as a semantic thesis rather than doctrines about certain entities by arguing that certain kinds of realism (e.g. realism about the future and ethics) "do not seem readily classifiable as doctrines about a realm of entities" (1982: 55).³ He provided an alternative view, the semantic anti-realism, where he eschews the verification-transcendent truth by rejecting the principle of bivalence. In this way, the Dummettian-type of anti-realism changed the traditional way of thinking about the notion of truth. And Dummett believed that once the disputes about realism and its denial constructed through his meaning-theoretic way, we would be able to unravel the philosophical disagreements in different subject matters. The second stripe of the anti-realist paradigm was the error-theoretic approach, introduced by J. L. Mackie and Harty Field.⁴ Field claimed that it is almost impossible to find a ground for mathematical statements taking their truth-conditions from abstract mathematical entities, in a verification-independent way. Thus, for Field, we seem to exclude any explanation for the reliability of our mathematical beliefs. Similarly, Mackie argued against realism about the ethical statements by claiming that we are

² McDowell (1998:159) has also pointed out that moral features (or facts) "do not belong, mysteriously, in a reality that is wholly independent of our subjectivity and set over against it".

³ Or it is still possible to hold the other view which Michael Devitt (1984) supports. He approaches the debate as classes of entities rather than statements. Realism as a doctrine about the nature of things, for him, is prior to any semantic question about truth.

⁴ See Mackie (1977), Field (1980).

systematically false in our moral judgments because our moral discourse requires the mind-independent moral properties making our moral judgments true but there are no such properties. Therefore, Mackie argues, we are unable to satisfy qualities that the realist demands our moral discourse. The third anti-realist paradigm Wright considered was the expressivist views defended by, for instance, A. J. Ayer, R. M. Hare, Simon Blackburn, and Allan Gibbard.⁵ According to this type of anti-realism, our ethical 'assertions' merely express our attitudes towards certain facts rather than stating true or false judgments.

Wright thought that none of these paradigms effectively prosecute the debate between realism and anti-realism. None of these anti-realist paradigms, he argues, plausibly capture the anti-realist intuition that we sometimes do elicit appropriate responses but it is not clear what this appropriateness means and how we can deploy it in our discourses. For the Dummettian type of anti-realists, "moral reality may transcend *all* possibility of detection" (1992: 9). Yet, for Wright, this kind of response against realism about verification-transcendent truth is not essential to any view of realism and hence, far-fetched. On the other hand, when looking at the error-theoretic model, Wright thinks, we are again unable to find a plausible construction of realism. According to the error-theoretic approach, since there are no moral or comic properties, there is no truth to hit. However, this line of argument gives discomfort to Wright in a sense, "it simply relegates discourse into bad faith" (1992: 9). And more importantly, why do we favor the error-theory over the expressivist approach being capable of explaining the role of moral or comic properties in our discourses? Although Wright thought that the expressivist views have an advantage over the error-theory, he also did not feel satisfied with the expressivist paradigm. On Wright's account, the expressivists could not argue that moral or comic discourses are genuinely assertoric because they do not know how to construe those discourses, even though such discourses exhibit all the syntactic rules of assertion.

It is still ambiguous, therefore, how discourse about comedy or morality can be truth-apart without holding a realist stance. Although anti-realist paradigms could not give an original response against realism, Wright thought, "the truth need not be the

⁵ See Ayer (1936), Hare (1952), Blackburn (1984), Gibbard (1990).

exclusive property of realism" (1992: 12). Thus he attempted to put forward another anti-realist approach with a more charitable interpretation of realism, which I shall construe as the fourth anti-realist paradigm.

1.2 The Fourth Anti-Realist Paradigm

In *Truth and Objectivity* (1992), Wright put forward an alternative version of minimalism about truth and assertoric content, aiming to bolster anti-realist views by solving their problems such as the Frege-Geach problem and the problem of how sentences gain their truth-values. Although his positive account of anti-realism does not lie within the theory of meaning but truth, it incorporates the insights of Dummett's proposal. While anti-realism of the Dummettian-type depends on the later philosophy of Wittgenstein, Wright proposes a Tractarian idea of truth (1992: 37). Yet, both agree on the idea that an anti-realist in some way can hit the truth. Thus Wright argued against the classical deflationists' claim that "truth is not a substantial property; rather it functions as a device for endorsing assertions, beliefs and so on..." (1992: 30).

Instead, he claimed that a truth-predicate could be sustained in any given domain by meeting basic standards of syntactic discipline (e.g. conditionalization, negation, embedding within propositional attitudes, etc.) without the deflationary way of construing the notion of truth.⁶ Wright argued that truth is inherently a normative property and deflationism "can import no norms over assertoric discourse distinct from warranted assertibility" (1992: 33). Deflationism would inflate under pressure, he argues, since the identification of warranted assertibility and truth is untenable.⁷ We simply cannot reduce truth to warranted assertibility, although they are

⁶ Deflationists basically argue that we need not appeal a robust property of truth (e.g. the property of corresponding to the facts) because first, the truth-predicate has an expressive function (and thus, truth does not serve an explanatory role), and second, truth-predicates exist because they perform certain logical functions. See Frank Ramsey (1927) "Facts and Propositions" and Paul Horwich (1990) *Truth*.

⁷ Hilary Putnam, in *Reason, Truth and History* (1981), also does not accept the view that truth is warranted assertibility but his reasons are somewhat different than Wright's arguments against deflationism. Wright argues that Putnam's Equivalence does not work because certain statements would remain undecidable even under epistemically ideal circumstances. There is one way to go out of this argument but Wright argues that it would necessitate a radical revision of our logic. This revision would undermine the law of the excluded middle.

normatively coincident but extensionally divergent. Truth is more substantial than the deflationists think.

1.2.1 Minimalism and Superassertibility

Wright introduced his *minimalist* conceptions of truth and assertoric content, arguing that

...a discourse is possessed of assertoric content, and indeed that its practitioners frequently hit the truth, when truth is so conceived, is to be something which is neutral on the preferability of a broadly realist and anti-realist view of discourse in question (1992: 33).

In this way, he believed that the minimal truth would have a “metaphysically lightweight” role to prosecute the debates between realism and anti-realism. In other words, he thought that minimalism allows a pluralist view of truth, operative within distinct discourses (1992: 25). All we need to do is to determine some principles that a truth-predicate can satisfy so that we can decide which notions of truth pass the truth-predicate test.

That is why he introduced the notion of superassertibility, which functions as a minimalist truth-predicate. He argues that statements in a given discourse are true iff they are superassertible. Wright gives the following equivalence, which satisfies the traditional equivalence schema (it is true that p iff p): “P is true if and only if P is superassertible” (1992: 48). And their being superassertible refers to their being knowable (in this sense it also conforms to the epistemic constraint). That is, he gives a kind of assertibility-based understanding of truth. Yet, superassertibility is stronger than warranted assertibility because it captures the stability and absoluteness of truth by satisfying the number of *a priori* principles (1992: 34). Some of them are,⁸

Transparency: To assert (judge, believe, doubt, or any attitude to a proposition) that p is to present p as true.

⁸ Wright has also stressed that “perhaps there are other, independent platitudes that should be reckoned with” (1992: 35). And see Wright (2003: 271-272).

Opacity: A particular truth may be beyond a thinker's ken, that some truths may never be known, that some of them may be unknowable in principle, and so on.

Embedding: The truth-aptness of a proposition is preserved under a variety of operations (negations, conjunctions, disjunctions, etc. which are also truth-apt).

Correspondence: A true proposition is a proposition that corresponds accurately to reality.

Contrast: A proposition may be true without being justified, and vice-versa.

Timelessness: If a proposition is ever true, then it always is, so that whatever may, at any particular time, be truly asserted may –perhaps by appropriate transformations of mood, or tense –be truly asserted at any time.

Absoluteness: Truth is absolute. Truth does not come in degrees; propositions are true if true at all.

On his account, although these platitudes would remain fixed across different domains of discourse and give necessary and sufficient conditions of the concept of truth, the truth properties satisfying the truth concept might change.⁹ The central thesis of minimalism is, therefore, that there is no single and discourse-invariant truth in a given discourse.¹⁰ For example, if we talk about the correspondence theory of truth, correspondence would be counted as a truth property satisfying all the given platitudes above.

As is clear from his minimalism and the formulation of superassertibility, the concept of truth characterized by the basic platitudes considered above would have different

⁹ These properties, of course, must rely on some features set out in those principles.

¹⁰ See Horgan (2001) and Sher (2004) for an alternative notion of truth property: truth would always involve correspondence to the facts and the nature of correspondence relation can change according to the conception of the subject matter.

truth properties, which satisfy all the basic platitudes. These properties might differ in areas of discourse, for instance, while truth in physics would necessitate correspondence relation, truth in mathematics would require coherence relation.¹¹ However, it is also clear that the basic *a priori* platitudes might change depending on a given discourse and they are related to various cognitive attitudes, even though he argues that his minimalism is not offering an account of the theory of meaning of truth but being made in the spirit of Wittgenstein's Tractarian idea of formal concepts.

1.2.2 The Criterion of Cognitive Command

In what way those *a priori* platitudes are related to our cognitive attitudes? Wright proposed the criterion of Cognitive Command as a sort of test for a given discourse to count as minimally truth-apt: A discourse exerts cognitive command iff

It is *a priori* that differences of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness in a disputed statement, or in the standards of acceptability or variation in personal evidence thresholds, so to speak, will involve something which may be properly regarded as cognitive shortcoming (1992: 144).

In other words, if a discourse exhibits Cognitive Command, it guarantees that judgments in that discourse will be representational –reliably track the mind-independent reality. In this sense, Cognitive Command would help us to see the relation between the notion of representationality and cognitive shortcomings. According to Wright's *Convergence/Representation Platitude*: “If two devices each function to produce representations, then if conditions are suitable, and they function properly, they will produce divergent output if and only if presented with divergent input” (1992: 91).

¹¹ For the current debates about the pluralist conception of truth, see Michael Lynch (2009), Nikolaj Pedersen & Cory Wright (2011), Douglas Edwards (2011), Crispin Wright (2013), Brian Ball (2017), Filippo Ferrari (2018).

If a given discourse has this kind of evidence-transcendent character, it is a sufficient but not necessary condition for realists to impose their notion of truth.¹² So, it would be a mark of realism in a given discourse, if two inquirers disagree about something, one of them has a cognitive shortcoming. And the debate calls for an anti-realist treatment. Realists should also ensure the *Correspondence Platitude*. The principle suggesting that a true proposition is a proposition that corresponds accurately to reality (1992: 84).

1.3 Wright's Dilemma Against Realism

In light of these explanations, according to Wright, a realist must choose either that all equally rational people would have a cognitive shortcoming in their moral disagreement without having a false belief about the dispute or that we cannot possibly have evidence for moral truths. Wright does not find plausible both of these conclusions and hence, he rejects moral realism. Put it differently, his argument can be summarized as a dilemma against moral realism: realists must show either that it is *a priori* that no moral disagreement is radical, or that moral truths are evidence-transcendent.

One way to argue against this formulation for a realist is to accept the claim that it is indeed *a priori* that all moral disagreements involve cognitive shortcomings because the cognitive shortcoming in question for a realist is to have a false belief about the alleged judgment.¹³ However, Wright does not accept the realist assumption that having a false belief about the alleged judgment can be counted as a cognitive shortcoming. On his account, a *radical* disagreement between realists and anti-realists is only possible without the fact that one of its parties is in error about the alleged judgment.

It is obvious that whether a moral disagreement is radical or not depends on what counts as a cognitive shortcoming. That is why the first realist reaction is to argue against this point and claim that having a false belief can be counted as a cognitive

¹² This is the *Dummettian point* Wright defends (2012: 426).

¹³ As Tersman (1998) pointed out, on a realist view, a moral judgment is a kind of factual claim and when people disagree morally, it refers that they hold incompatible beliefs.

shortcoming. On the other hand, the other possibility for defending moral realism is to save realists from an *a priori* emphasis. That is, it is possible to argue against Wright's dilemma without an *a priori* criterion.

In the next chapter, therefore, I will show that we need not accept the dilemma for the following reasons. *Contra* Wright, I shall argue that realists do not have to accept that it is *a priori* that no moral disagreement is radical since we can show that the radical disagreement between realism and anti-realism is rooted in their basic moral certainties.¹⁴ That is, deep moral disagreements are indeed analogous to disagreements over basic moral certainties rather than beliefs (or any other cognitive state). In doing so, I will show that the radical (or deep) disagreement between realists and anti-realists is non-cognitive; their disagreement does not involve cognitive shortcomings. This will bring us to the conclusion that the disagreement between realists and anti-realists is a kind of deep disagreement over basic moral certainties, which cannot be rationally resolvable.

To do so, I will give a general characterization of what hinges are based on Wittgenstein's claims in *On Certainty*. And following Nigel Pleasants, I will extend Wittgenstein's inquiry into basic moral certainties while giving a response against Pleasants' naturalistic explanation. Then, I will examine how disagreement might occur in Wittgensteinian hinges and claim that what it changes in disagreements over moral hinges is the same as in the cases of empirical hinges. In what follows, I will show that the subject matter of this change refers to a deep disagreement. This line of argument, I believe, will allow us to clear up the criterion of Cognitive Command in a non-circular way, without an *a priori* emphasis to defend realism.

¹⁴ I take deep disagreements as being "generated by a clash of framework propositions" (Fogelin, 1985: 5). These framework propositions are Wittgensteinian hinge presuppositions manifested by our actions.

CHAPTER 2

BASIC MORAL CERTAINTIES AND DEEP DISAGREEMENTS

2.1 Wittgenstein and Hinge Epistemology

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein remarks that we take for granted some state of affairs as if they play a foundational role in our belief system. In other words, they are the most basic presuppositions providing a fundamental ground for us to evaluate certain beliefs. As Wittgenstein states, “the questions that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn” (OC 341). These state of affairs or later called ‘hinges’ can be represented as ‘obvious truisms’, e.g. “The earth has existed for many years”, “I am a human being”, etc., which was first defended by G. E. Moore in “A Defence of Common Sense” (1925).

Unlike Wittgenstein, Moore held that these truisms are *known* for certain so that he insisted that when I declare that I have hands, I know that I have hands and it is absurd to claim that I do not know that I have hands because the proposition itself has a basic character of which we cannot even be more certain. Wittgenstein objected to Moore’s use of “I know” because he thought that “One says ‘I know’ when one is ready to give compelling grounds. ‘I know’ relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth” (OC 243) but “Moore does not know what he asserts he knows” (OC 151). Put it differently, since nothing is more certain than Moorean propositions, there is nothing left to give grounds to justify them. And because of the groundlessness of Moore’s knowledge-claims, it is not possible to genuinely know something without question-begging claims so that they are subject to skeptical doubts.

The anti-skeptical solution Wittgenstein proposed for truisms was to explain the role

of *not doubting* in the context of our utterances in our language-games. For Wittgenstein, the only sensible solution for skeptical doubts is to be certain of some propositions because there is any justificatory rule or method that we can rely on to prevent us from making mistakes. As he says, “My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on” (OC 7). Otherwise, if we are not certain of any fact, we cannot be certain of the meaning of our words either (OC 114). Due to the nonsensical skepticism, our uncertainty at one point needs to end (OC 212). Wittgenstein continues “this end is not an ungrounded presupposition; it is an ungrounded way of acting”, “which lies at the bottom of the language-game” (OC 110, 204). In other words, our certainties provide grounds for our actions in the world. Therefore, although our actions can be understood or stated via empirical means, their ground is non-epistemic. We have to bear in mind that, as he puts “the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there - like our life” (OC 559).¹⁵

Turning back to Moorean knowledge-claims and the unattractiveness of appealing to evidence to verify their truth, Wittgenstein refused to use the phrase ‘I know’ as a philosophical reflection. Instead, for Wittgenstein, obvious truisms simply indicate what we are certain of within a particular area of discourse rather than revealing the truths about the universe. In *On Certainty*, therefore, Wittgenstein brought into the view of ‘hinges’ while preserving the logical insight of the certainty of Moorean truisms. What this logical insight meant to be, however, is contentious among philosophers. Whilst there is a general agreement on Wittgensteinian hinges in terms of their foundational role in our language-games, philosophers still discuss what it is to be a ‘hinge’.¹⁶

¹⁵ Here, I would like to note that Wittgenstein gives up his Tractarian idea of transcendental forms of necessity. Hinges that he characterized throughout *On Certainty* do not possess a priori, independent reference point making those certainties correct. In *On Certainty*, he argues that because of the practical consequences of hinges, they are the necessary conditions of our investigation. The practical use of hinges, for Wittgenstein, is completely public compared to the Tractarian view of absolute private use. Therefore, hinges can imply shared norms, and these norms in principle are subjected to change depending on the variable (or uncertain) nature of society. In a metaphysical sense, the objectivity he refers to in *On Certainty* is ‘logically excluded’ because it is not possible not to make any mistakes (OC 194). Instead, what he meant by ‘objective certainty’ is that there are many propositions that stand fast for us and not subject to testing or verification.

¹⁶ Some authors prefer to use different terminology for ‘hinges’. While Wright (2004) uses the term ‘cornerstone propositions’, Pritchard (2016) uses the term ‘hinge commitments’ instead of ‘hinge

For Wittgenstein, hinges are¹⁷:

- i. neither true nor false (OC 196–206);
- ii. neither justified nor unjustified (OC 110, 130, 166, 359);
- iii. neither reasonable nor unreasonable (OC 559).
- iv. Therefore, they are neither known nor unknown (OC 4);
- v. They cannot be called into doubt (OC 123, 231);
- vi. Therefore, they are not empirical propositions but rules (OC 95, 98, 494).

There are two mainstream readings for construing this picture of Wittgensteinian hinge epistemology, namely, the epistemic reading and the non-epistemic reading.¹⁸

On the one hand, the epistemic reading altogether treats hinges as empirical knowledge-claims, claiming that if rationally ungrounded knowledge is possible, one also need not argue that hinge propositions cannot be known.¹⁹ Therefore, hinges can be known for certain even in the absence of rational support. On the other hand, the common view of the non-epistemic reading argues that hinges are not subject to epistemic evaluation because they express pre-theoretical certainty. The further point made by the non-epistemic reading is that since hinges are not truth-apt, they are not propositions at all. Here, I narrow my focus on the non-epistemic reading because I share the common view that hinges are not subject to epistemic evaluation and thus, they are not things we can in principle have a reason for, although I do not agree with the further point that hinges are not propositions. Therefore, according to the version of the non-epistemic reading I defend, hinges are either asserted by certain propositions (and these propositions are in fact fact-stating) or manifested in our actions even so they are neither rationally believed nor propositionally known.

Wittgensteinian hinge propositions seem to be related to *only* empirical states of

propositions' because he argues that it is a controversial issue whether the hinges are propositions or not.

¹⁷ Coliva (2010) gathered up this set of claims from *On Certainty*.

¹⁸ For the epistemic reading of *On Certainty* see Wright (2004) and for the non-epistemic reading see Moyal-Sharrock (2005). For comprehensive discussions about the other accounts of hinge epistemology see Prithcard (2011) or Coliva (2016).

¹⁹ There are two versions of the epistemic reading: epistemic externalism and epistemic internalism. The former view argues that even if hinges lack rational support, they can still be true or false and hence, known. According to the latter view, also known as 'entitlement reading' proposed by Wright (2004), even if there are no reasons for thinking that hinges can be true or false, we can at least have entitlement for them. Therefore, we can know hinges. See Pritchard (2012).

affairs. But he noted that we have the same kind of attitude towards arithmetical or logical propositions when we are evaluating them as ‘absolutely certain’ (OC 448). And this kind of certainty, I believe, can be also found in our moral practices in the same way in our epistemic practices and judgments. Thus, following Nigel Pleasants, I argue that we can extend Wittgenstein’s inquiry into the moral sphere. To elucidate my points, I will elaborate on what is meant by moral hinge propositions or what Pleasants calls ‘basic moral certainties’ and their functions in the moral inquiry by referring to *On Certainty* and Wittgenstein’s other readings such as *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, *Lecture on Ethics* and *Philosophical Investigations*.

2.2 Wittgenstein and Basic Moral Certainties

Wittgenstein’s remarks on ethics both in the *Tractatus* and *Lecture on Ethics* are attempted to elucidate the features of ethical propositions by clarifying the descriptions of the use of ethical language in specific contexts. In the *Tractatus*, he makes a tight connection between the descriptions of logic and ethics. Any meaningful representation or sentence, for Wittgenstein, presupposes a logical (or an ethical) form which we cannot describe. As he states “Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. Logic is transcendental” (TLP 6.13) so that “Propositions cannot represent logical form; instead they show the logical form of reality” (TLP 4.12). In the same way, Wittgenstein renders that ethics is also ‘transcendental’ because just as logic “ethics cannot be put into words” (TLP 421) so that “it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics” (TLP 6.42). Moreover, in *the Lecture on Ethics*, the predicates such as 'good', 'right', or 'value' are used as merely analogical or metaphorical sense (LE 9). He goes on to say that ethical propositions are mere nonsense (LE 10) because they do not express what they are supposed to express; rather their meaning is determined by the empirical states of affairs.

Despite the recurrent theme of his doctrine of ethical ineffability in the *Tractatus* and *Lecture on Ethics*, Pleasants thinks that Wittgenstein abandoned it in his later

philosophy. And I agree with him.²⁰ In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein apparently gives up the idea of transcendental logical and ethical structures; rather he asserts that there is no independent realm making the claims of logic and ethics correct but this does not entail that logic or ethics is groundless and meaningless (PI 92). As in *On Certainty*, the propositions of logic and ethics provide an inherited background in which we distinguish between true and false (OC 94). In other words, they act as if they are rules but because they are not taught as explicit rules (OC 153) their descriptions are liable to change as long as our language-games change with us (OC 256). Therefore, they do not have a purely descriptive structure as described in the *Tractatus*.²¹ They are only learned practically (OC 95).

Given Wittgenstein's remarks on ethics and the shift between his early and later writings, Pleasants (2008) in his essay "Wittgenstein, Ethics and Basic Moral Certainty" claims that the idea of basic moral certainty is an extension of Wittgenstein's views on 'empirical certainty' even though he does not explicitly consider 'moral certainty'. He points out the existence of some basic moral certainties by examining the contemporary analytic philosophers' explanations of the wrongness of killing. First, Pleasants argues that what contemporary analytic philosophers disagree over is not the obvious wrongness of killing but the explanations they present (what he calls 'deprivation explanations'). Then, he concludes that although these explanations are seemingly convincing because they try to uncover which kinds of killing are wrong, impermissible, or unjustified, their sophistication conceals the truth behind the claim. These explanations basically do not try to answer the important question: What makes wrongful killing is wrong? To show this, Pleasants makes a parallel between these 'pseudo' explanations and Moore's *proof* of an external world, arguing that when it comes to the philosophical theories trying to explain these propositions, they "are either tautologies dressed up as explanations or utterly banal understatements of the blatantly obvious" (2009: 676). As Pleasants puts succinctly,

²⁰ Against so-called New Wittgensteinians (see Pleasants 2006). Moreover, there are instances that we can show the apparent shift from early Wittgenstein to later Wittgenstein such as his *Notebooks* and his talks with Frank Ramsey.

²¹ Hereby, it can also be argued that since the practice is normative and the propositions are contingent, the relation between the practice and the related hinge proposition is not a deductive relation.

The primary symptom of a basic certainty is that when an attempt is made at putting an unquestionable truism into propositional form in a real-life context the effect is a mixture of absurdity, mirth, incongruity, bemusement, and offensiveness. Statements taking the form: “Death is bad because...” or “Killing is wrong because...” may look like ethical propositions, but contemplation on the effect of offering or receiving such an “explanation” in a real-life context shows them rather to be expressions of basic moral certainty (2009: 675).

For Pleasants, therefore, moral certainties similar to empirical certainties are fact-stating. However, those who have not convinced the claim that empirical and moral certainties are analogous to each other maintain a kind of relativistic view of moral certainties.²² Opponents of the analogy basically argue that moral certainties cannot be universally held due to the historical and cultural variability of moral language-games. Therefore, they only argue for the existence of localized moral certainties. In contrast to this line of argument, Pleasants (2015) presented his naturalistic defense for the existence of universal moral certainties. He accepts the view that even though there is a widespread historical and cultural variability of moral judgments, what has changed is not our conception of the wrongness of killing but what is not to count as wrongful killing (2015: 210). In other words, while what is localized is our language-games and discourses, what is universal is bequeathed basic moral certainties. He proceeded that due to inherited dispositions, our attitudes to the wrongness of killing are not radically different from our ancestors *because* “they unjustly inflict death, pain, and other modes of suffering on people” (2015: 202). According to Pleasants (2015: 212), therefore, there is no contradiction “in both having basic moral certainty that killing is wrong and allowing it to be permissible in some cases” iff these certainties justly inflict death, pain and other modes of suffering on people.

The naturalistic defense Pleasants gives for thinking that killing is wrong, I believe, does not justly explain the obvious wrongness of killing. *Contra* Pleasants, I contend that the idea of basic moral certainty refers to that we cannot say anything more basic. That is why any attempt to give reasons for thinking that killing is wrong

²² For the critics see Michael Kober (1997), Rom Harre (2010), Robert Brice (2013), and Steffan Rummens (2013).

would be implausible. I argue that the source of our basic moral certainty on the wrongness of killing is *not* natural if it is the badness of death. That is to say that death is in fact not bad at all since death (not killing someone) is a natural and necessary ending for humankind. Although I agree with Pleasants on the view that basic moral certainties would denote our collective interest enabling us to live cooperatively and harmoniously²³, I think that it would not be a sensible thing to imagine humanity without death (or extinction in some sense). What is not natural, an obvious wrong, or a basic moral fact, I argue, is killing someone intentionally without self-defense. Relying on naturalistic views about basic moral facts can lead one philosopher to defend, unfortunately, what is not natural and hence, arbitrary things. Here is where the ethical disagreement starts over basic moral hinges.

Bernard Williams, in his essay "Saint-Just's Illusion" (1995), indeed touches upon this point. He discusses ancient and modern conceptions of liberty, accepting that their concepts are not the same –because conceptions are differently understood at different times. Yet, he also asks "what is this item that is differently understood at different times?" He suggests that in order to understand what this conception refers to, we need to look at the historical narrative; then, we will be able to see how one ideal 'transmutes into' the other. At the end of his essay, he says that this is only understood by the proper understanding of ethical disagreement, which I try to show in the subsequent chapter. To do so, I will discuss how disagreements over basic moral hinges deploy the issues of what is or is not natural, focusing on another basic moral certainty: the wrongness of slavery.

2.3 Deep Disagreements Over Basic Moral Certainties

As Williams pointed out, what can really change over time is not quite clear. To shed light on this point, I will examine how disagreement might occur in Wittgensteinian hinges, arguing that what it changes in disagreements over moral hinges is the same as in the cases of empirical hinges. And the subject matter of this change refers to a deep disagreement.

²³ Pleasants (2015: 212) also adds that since people cannot recognize our basic moral reasons as real reasons for their actions, they cannot have a genuine concern for others; rather they manifest self-interested behaviors.

Think about the non-moral case Wittgenstein offered. He says that “I know that I have never been on the moon” (OC 111) because “It would not tie in with anything in my life. When I say ‘Nothing speaks for, everything against it’, this presupposes a principle of speaking for and against” (OC 117). Put it differently, I am certain that I have never been on the moon because I did not learn this fact in isolation; my certainty depends on “a host of interdependent propositions” (OC 274). Yet, it is possible that someone might disagree with Wittgenstein today and argue that the proposition that I have never been on the moon cannot be a hinge proposition anymore because we know that it is possible for us to be on the moon (as opposed to the time Wittgenstein lived). So, what it changes is not the empirical knowledge-claims but our certainties manifested in our actions in the first place. In this sense, even if I give several explanations for being certain that I have never been on the moon, none of them is able to provide sufficient credence for me to believe that proposition. Those explanations would detain us to see the other parts of the whole picture since they are isolated. The moral of the story is this. I do not need extra credence for my action other than my certainty. I can be certain of the fact that I have never been on the moon *without believing* it. Therefore, in the next section, I shall argue that a deep disagreement over hinge propositions cannot be characterized as a cognitive disagreement since it is not based on what we know or believe but what we are certain of.

2.3.1 Non-Cognitive Deep Disagreements

How disagreement about hinge propositions is not a cognitive disagreement? Although Wright is not clear at all what cognitive shortcoming means anywhere in his book, my construal of cognitive shortcomings would be that cognitive shortcomings are mistaken beliefs since they can only be resolved by evidence or reasoning. On the other hand, as I have stated earlier, hinges are not things we can in principle have a reason for since they do not have grounds but are built into our way of life (OC 559).²⁴ Wittgenstein argues, “At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice-versa” (OC 336). Then, it is

²⁴ Hinges have content that can be expressed by sentences that we assert. Therefore, assertions would be the expressions of beliefs and certainties.

possible for us to argue that what is distinctive about hinges would be their groundlessness (OC 166).

That is why when two people disagree about what hinge propositions they have, we cannot say that either of them has a mistaken belief. Therefore, disagreements about hinges do not involve cognitive shortcomings. The argument goes as follows:

1. A belief is something that we can in principle have a reason for.
2. Hinges are not things we can in principle have a reason for.
3. Therefore, our relationship with hinges is not a belief.
4. If cognitive shortcomings can only be resolved by evidence or reasoning, they would involve mistaken beliefs.

Therefore, disagreements about hinges are not cognitive shortcomings.

Alternatively, one might put forward another argument without relying on any controversial claim about beliefs –with the same conclusion. Similar to the first argument, one might also argue that cognitive shortcomings involve mistakes with respect to evidence or reasoning since those mistakes can only be resolved by evidence or reasoning. And since we accept hinge propositions without depending on evidence or reasoning, differences about hinge propositions would not involve cognitive errors. Therefore, disagreements about hinges do not involve cognitive shortcomings. The alternative argument runs as follows:

1. Cognitive shortcomings involve mistakes with respect to evidence or reasoning.
2. Our acceptance of hinge propositions does not depend on evidence or reasoning.

Therefore, differences in hinge propositions do not involve cognitive errors in evidence or reasoning.

Therefore, disagreements about hinges are not cognitive shortcomings.

Thus there are two different arguments we can come up with for the same conclusion. The conclusion that differences in hinge propositions do not involve cognitive shortcomings.

2.3.2 Non-Cognitive Deep Disagreements over Basic Moral Certainties

The moral analog of non-cognitive disagreements can be this. Notably, in Book I of the *Politics*, Aristotle introduces his theory of natural slavery, claiming that since natural slaves lack the capacity for rational deliberation by nature, their enslavement is just.²⁵ Abandoning the practice of slavery, for him, would impede the necessary virtuous activities allowing the community to reach *eudaimonia*. Therefore, it ought to be a necessary part of a political community. Here, we might wonder why Aristotle thinks that slavery is natural and hence, just. Is it really because there are inherent features making some people *natural* and *real* slaves? Or is it because of the benefit of slavery to the culture of the Greeks? Forthrightly, could the Greeks have ever achieved such prosperity without the institution of slavery? I argue that the results of the empirical observations Aristotle did for the justification of natural slaves were stemming from his uncongenial idea about a community without the institution of slavery. In other words, for the sake of the Greek community, he produced empirical-knowledge claims to justify his argument about slavery.²⁶ If he could have been *certain* of the possibility that a community *can* perform virtuous acts without the institution of slavery, he could give us an inclusive ethical theory that no one has to be enslaved with the arbitrary criterion of naturalness. Remember the Wittgensteinian idea, even if Aristotle could not have the *belief* that a community can perform virtuous acts without the institution of slavery, he could just be certain of.

In *Shame and Necessity*, similarly, Williams argues that slavery “was not merely conventional but arbitrary in its impact” because “it was intensely unpleasant for the slaves” (1993: 109).²⁷ He states,

Equally, free people in the Greek world were able to see what an arbitrary calamity it was for someone to become a slave. What they found it much

²⁵ For Aristotle, the non-Greeks, the majority of the human population, can be classified as slaves by nature. Thus, their enslavement is just. He believed that acting against their nature would be unjust. John McDowell has noted that this idea is the ‘embarrassing feature of Aristotle’s thinking’ (1995: 201).

²⁶ Aristotle argued, “it is not difficult either to determine the answer by argument or to learn it from actual events” (*NE* 1254a19).

²⁷ A similar kind of thought can be found in Iris Murdoch’s (1993) *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. However, it is not as well elaborated on as in Williams’ account.

harder to do, once they had the system, was to imagine their world without it. For the same reason, they did not take too seriously the complaints of the slaves. They had nothing to put in the place of the system, and granted the system, it would be surprising if slaves did not complain, and in those terms. What the Greeks were not generally committed to, however, was the idea that if the system were both properly run and properly understood, no one, including the slaves, would have reason to complain. This is the conclusion that Aristotle offered (1993: 112).

Williams thinks that what Aristotle failed to do is to show why slavery is a *natural* or *necessary* part of a political community. Aristotle insists that some people have figures of authority but as Williams argues (1993: 113) “this in no way determines who should be in whose power”. The Greeks did not specifically decide whether slavery is just or unjust; rather the only thing about slavery was that it was necessary, although they were aware of the fact that it rested on coercion. For Williams, therefore, Aristotle failed to take this ‘simple truth’ into his account because he was trying to find a ‘just’ way in which he could justify the institution of slavery.

Still, one might argue that “Slavery is acceptable” might not have been a hinge proposition for the ancient Greeks because if it was, Aristotle would not have been able to argue for it – yet, he did.²⁸ He did because what he really seem to be defending was not the actual practice of slavery in ancient Greece. Slavery could in principle happen to anybody in the world of ancient Greek. Yet, Aristotle defended the claim that there are natural slaves –as if it is a hinge proposition for the ancient Greeks because, as I have stated before, he tried to justify the institution of slavery by putting forward arbitrary empirical-knowledge claims.

Our ethical ideas and practices, today, are different from the Greeks’. Slavery is no more seen as a necessary part of our community. We do not act as if the practice of slavery is a natural institution. However, there are (and will) unjust practices if philosophers continue to construct their theories on arbitrary identities and practices. In this regard, I believe, philosophers’ task is to find seemingly natural but arbitrary

²⁸ I would like to thank Daniel Wolt for raising this point.

things accepted by a political or a scientific community. Otherwise, we will not be able to recognize basic certainties, either moral or empirical. The biggest obstacle to achieve such an objective is the theories being “either tautologies dressed up as explanations or utterly banal understatements of the blatantly obvious”, in Pleasants terms. Therefore, I aim to overcome one of these obstacles: Wright’s dilemma against realism.

2.4 Returning to Wright’s Dilemma Against Realism

In light of the assumptions that I have made, recall Wright’s claim about the disagreement between realists and anti-realists. He argues that a genuine disagreement between them is possible only without the fact that one of its parties in error about the alleged judgment. Besides, remember the fact that he does not accept the realist assumption that having a false belief about the alleged judgment can be counted as a cognitive shortcoming. As Wright demands, we have a genuine disagreement (either empirical or moral) without having a false belief about the alleged proposition since our disagreement is non-cognitive. That is to say, we do not have to accept the realist assumption that a cognitive shortcoming is to have a false belief about the alleged proposition. Thus I am certain that realism *can* still be defensible.

The alternative realist solution I propose against Wright’s dilemma is that given that there are areas that non-cognitive disagreements emerge, I argue that if this is not a reason necessarily to be an anti-realist about those areas, then the non-cognitive disagreements over moral hinges would not give a necessary reason for us to be an anti-realist about morality. Therefore, the idea that the possibility of disagreement about certainties in a particular domain should not necessarily be seen as a reason for being an anti-realist about that domain. That is to say that when we disagree over the hinge proposition “I have never been on the moon”, we necessarily take into account the existence of the moon. Even though we can share different degrees of certainties towards the existence of the moon without having cognitive shortcomings, this does not necessarily lead us to be an anti-realist about the moon since we are certain of the fact that there is the moon we can look and wonder at.

The upshot for realism is this. I argued that realists do not have to accept that it is *a priori* that no moral disagreement is radical since we showed that the radical disagreement between realism and anti-realism is rooted in their basic moral certainties. That is, deep moral disagreements are indeed analogous to disagreements over basic moral certainties. I also showed that the radical disagreement between realists and anti-realists is not cognitive; their disagreement does not involve cognitive shortcomings. This led us to the conclusion that if there are disagreements over hinge propositions, which do not satisfy the criterion of Cognitive Command, the failure to exert Cognitive Command is not a good criterion for realism.



CHAPTER 3

DISAGREEMENT IN METADISCOURSE

In the previous chapter, I dealt with the disagreements in ethical discourse and gave a defense against Wright, arguing that the Cognitive Command criterion does not work in first-order discourse. *Contra* Wright, I argued that deep moral disagreements are analogous to disagreements over hinge propositions. And this led us to the claim that the disagreement between realists and anti-realists is a kind of deep disagreement over basic moral hinges, which cannot be rationally resolvable. Having said that, I also hinted at the possibility that there might be deep disagreements in metaethical discourse that do not exert the criterion of Cognitive Command because Wright assumes that there is a natural division that we make between first-order ethical discourse and metadiscourse about morality. Even though the standard distinction seems to be fundamental to the way philosophers investigate things in the current literature, the claim that normative ethics and metaethics are independent of one another is indeed controversial. I will not dwell on the details of this debate, although I think that metadiscourse is *not* normatively neutral.²⁹ For the purpose of this chapter, I will assume that there is a distinction between first-order discourse and metadiscourse about normativity. And I shall make clear that the criterion of Cognitive Command does not work in second-order discourse as well.

3.1 Returning to the Criterion of Cognitive Command

There is an argument for thinking that even if first-order ethical discourse exerts Cognitive Command, you should still be an anti-realist about that discourse because if Cognitive Command is a correct criterion for realism, and if we have to be anti-

²⁹ My view is different from Dworkin (2011), Kramer (2009), and Fantl (2006). In response to these critiques, see Dreier (2002) and Ehrenberg (2008).

realist about which platitudes we should accept (e.g., representation or correspondence platitude), then we cannot be a realist about ethics.³⁰ Here is an argument that is supposed to show that Cognitive Command cannot be sufficient for realism:

1. Assume for the sake of argument that Cognitive Command is necessary for realism.
2. Suppose further that we can prove that debates about the nature of the truth-predicate do not exert Cognitive Command.
3. This would mean that you must be an anti-realist about truth in metaethics and hence, ethics.

However, we would be committed to the two incompatible claims when we suppose that ethical discourse did exert Cognitive Command:

- a) We should be realists about ethics (because it satisfies the criterion of Cognitive Command).
- b) We should be anti-realists about ethics (because you cannot be more realist about ethics than about metaethics).

It means that if we take the fact that disagreements have to be cognitive disagreements as a reason for not being a realist, then we have to be an anti-realist about metaethics. The reason is that he also assumes that second-order discourse could fundamentally affect the way we see first-order discourse. Put it differently, if you are an anti-realist about the nature of truth-predicate, then you ought to be an anti-realist about the truth-bearers as well. However, his argument seems to undermine the possibility of regarding Cognitive Command as a criterion for whether we ought to be a realist about ethics. To be able to deal with the contradiction in the argument, we have to discard one of its initial assumptions and show that there is not an obvious distinction between first-order and second-order discourse as Wright takes for granted.

I already showed that there are disagreements over hinge propositions, which cannot be characterized as cognitive disagreements so that the failure to exert Cognitive

³⁰ Wright does not put forward this line of argument but there is a similar kind of argument in chapter 6 of *Truth and Objectivity*. He does not explicitly defend but discusses the claim that we cannot be less realist at the metalinguistic level than we are at the object-linguistic level (1992: 222-3, 227).

Command is not a good criterion for realism. In this regard, I have argued against the first assumption. For a further realist construction of the criterion of Cognitive Command, let us remember Wright's dilemma again. I have already given defense against the first horn of the dilemma, arguing that it is *not a priori* that no moral disagreement is radical. There is also the second horn, which says, moral facts are evidence-transcendent: We cannot possibly have evidence for moral facts. Wright argues that even so we reliably track evidence-transcendent moral facts if realists cannot show that those facts correspond accurately to reality, realism cannot be defensible.

There are at least two things to be said in response to the second horn of the dilemma. First, appealing to independent moral facts does not have to be the distinctive characteristic of realism. To show this, I shall argue that the right kind of attitude towards the existence of moral facts ought to be our relationship with hinge propositions because their existence cannot be something either argued for or against. I will argue for this claim not because I think that there is a separate question of whether there are moral facts but because if we regard some first-order ethical propositions as basic moral certainties, then we can also treat the claim "there are moral facts" as a basic moral certainty. In this way, I will be able to call into question the distinction Wright makes between first-order and second-order discourse. And second, the claim "there are moral facts" would help us to avoid one moral mistake that realists and anti-realists frequently do in second-order discourse: conditionalizing our moral commitments on the question of whether there are moral facts. I shall argue that since the claim "there are moral facts" is a basic certainty, we do not have to conditionalize our moral commitments on the existence of moral facts. After I consider possible objections from quasi-realism, I will show that realism can still be defensible. And my answer to the question of whether the criterion of Cognitive Command really succeeds in being a good criterion for second-order discourse will be 'no'.

3.2 Moral Facts as Basic Certainties

Settling the issues of contemporary metaethical discourse between realism and anti-

realism usually implicates the typical expectation that it is necessary to give grounds or rational requirements for justifying our claims about a specific case. The debate over the existence of moral facts, for instance, revolves around the questions of what those moral facts are, how we can know them, or whether they could have been different. Moral realists and anti-realists seem to be disagreeing about those matters while giving sophisticated theories or explanations to these questions. Their explanations are seemingly convincing because they either provide debunking explanations for the existence of moral facts or postulate an independent moral reality to save our first-order ethical discourse. When they do so, while anti-realists accuse realists of defending mysterious mind-independent moral facts, realists declare that anti-realists' moral worldview is at stake.³¹

Melis Erdur (2016) challenged this picture and made clear that those metaethical positions are indeed substantive moral views because they ultimately try to answer why right things are right and wrong things are wrong rather than just saying whether things are right or wrong. To Erdur, although the question "Why?" is a legitimate question in our moral practice as we should not stop making a case for or against our moral claims, neither realism nor anti-realism provides a satisfactory account: they even make our account of why right things are right and wrong things are wrong weaker. That is why, she argues, both realism and anti-realism must be rejected.

I agree with Erdur on the point that this outcome does not necessarily be seen as philosophically frustrating. Her account sheds light on an important point because even though moral realists and anti-realists regard themselves as having morally neutral views, they cannot escape from making normative claims and thereby being criticized on normative grounds. Then, yes, we should reject moral realism and anti-realism and turn our face to the actual practice itself. Therefore, she alternatively argues that when we try to decide, for instance, whether killing is morally right or wrong, what we need to do further is to prosecute the normative debate and stop at the point where our case is strongest. While she thinks that the strongest case only comes to light as we keep asking why-questions, I argue that once we accept that the ultimate task in our moral practice is to ask why-questions, we will not be able to

³¹ As Wittgenstein says, "Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic" (OC 611).

arrive at any strongest case. Rather, as I have argued in the previous chapter, we should accept basic moral certainties.

I argued that when we assert basic certainties, our moral justification comes to an end. We should not provide any further explanation for the existence of basic moral facts because we cannot make our case strongest with those explanations. Instead, I argue that ‘the reason’ why sometimes killing is permissible is not self-defense but the basic certainty “killing is wrong”. I think that the ultimate task in our moral practice is not consistently asking why-questions but to reveal basic certainties and find out when we should stop asking why-questions.

3.2.1 You’d Better Be Certain of It: The Normative Force of Moral Facts

In this sense, certainty has a normative force, which gives us ‘a reason’ to assert things rather than providing *pro tanto* reasons. It gives us the possibility that there might be false things we ought to say and there might be true things we ought not to say. For example, the wrongness of slavery as a basic moral certainty was ‘the reason’ for the ancient Greeks to assert that slavery is wrong but the empirical claims in favor of the institution of slavery as *pro tanto* reasons have prevented Aristotle to assert the things we are certain.

Likewise, I argue that our attitude towards the claim “there are moral facts” is more like our attitude towards a hinge proposition than a belief because their existence cannot be something either argued for or against. In other words, the claim “there are moral facts” is a basic certainty because when we assert that it is certain that there are moral facts, what we refer to is just facts about the state of affairs (moral or empirical) in the world.³²

First of all, it would be a controversial thing to say that the claim “there are moral facts” is like a hinge proposition. It is because when Wittgenstein argues that hinge

³² My claim about the metaethical certainties is similar to Wright’s (2004) claim about the external world. He thinks that we cannot provide justification for the proposition “there is an external world”. He does not think that we can give any reasons for believing that there is an external world since it is presupposed by lots of other arguments against skepticism. The justification of the external world comes by default. He argues that we are entitled to believe in the external world.

propositions stand fast for us to evaluate certain beliefs, he means that they have a practical purpose in our language-games but when it comes to the claim “there are moral facts”, he would argue, at least *prima facie*, it does not have such a practical purpose. In other words, for Wittgenstein, such a claim does not have any use in first-order ethical discourse because uttering it would not add extra meaning to my speech in first-order discourse.

Nevertheless, whether or not it is the kind of thing Wittgenstein would have regarded as a hinge proposition, I argue that it is the kind of thing to which our attitude should be analogous to the attitude that we have for hinge propositions because the claim “there are moral facts” does not say anything more than some moral claims being true. In short, my claim is that if ethics and metaethics are continuous with one another, once we establish that our attitudes for some ethical propositions should be our relationship with basic moral certainties, then there is no reason why it should not be true of our attitudes towards some metaethical propositions such as “there are moral facts”.

Moral realists and anti-realists obviously do not take moral facts as basic certainties: what they disagree about is the explanations they present for the justification of the existence of moral facts.³³ But as long as they are committed to those explanations, we will not be able to discern which moral facts are substantive. In this sense, they conditionalize their moral commitments on those explanations but I argue that it is a moral mistake to conditionalize all our moral commitments on the question of whether there are moral facts.³⁴

For example, when somebody says “killing is wrong”, they also assert “it is a moral fact that killing is wrong”. There is nothing more to something being a moral fact than a certain moral claim being true. It is enough to show that I am certain that there are moral facts because it is certain that there are moral facts. Thus it is not only absurd to claim that moral facts refer to mind-independent moral reality but also

³³ As Wright did, I exclude error theory from the debate.

³⁴ Similarly, Max Khan Hayward (2019) argues that moral realism is a morally objectionable view because they conditionalize all our moral commitments on the question of whether there are non-natural moral facts. But our approach to the realism/anti-realism debate is different.

pointless to justify the claim “there are moral facts”. Instead, the moral practice speaks for itself. In other words, contemporary realists and anti-realists generate pseudo-philosophical problems because they fail at paying attention to the rules working in the ordinary use of language. As I will show, quasi-realism is a good candidate for solving these pseudo-problems. Understanding the debate between moral realism and anti-realism within the boundaries of contemporary metaethics, therefore, does not allow us to see the heart of the disagreement. So, we need to push the boundaries.

Quasi-realism attempted to push the boundaries of realism and anti-realism. Very roughly, they argue that when we engage in a realistic-seeming moral talk, we are not systematically false in our moral language. Rather than meddling in the ontological claims of realism, we have the right to talk about moral properties, facts, and so on. Therefore, the moral reality is nothing but our ordinary moral practice. I definitely agree with quasi-realists on the point that when we engage in a moral talk, we do not refer to independent moral reality. As I have explained, what we assert is the actual practice of morality. However, quasi-realists could also claim that if we merely express our attitudes towards moral facts, the idea of being certain about those facts would also be just a matter of approval or disapproval. Then the question is: if realism does not have the Holy Grail to offer, why should we defend it? Before moving on to their argument, I shall explicate what quasi-realism is.

3.3 Objection from Quasi-Realism

Since quasi-realism is a kind of ethical expressivism, first we need to understand what expressivist views try to explain.³⁵ The fundamental thesis of expressivism is that moral statements do not literally describe or state facts; rather when we assert moral statements, we express non-representational (i.e. non-cognitive) evaluative states such as sentiments, commitments, or attitudes towards those facts. The ethical expressivists maintain that we are unable to describe how the world is when we

³⁵ I try to give an overview of expressivism, I therefore will not discuss the difficulties that expressivists face such as the Frege-Geach Problem. For other expressivist views, see Ayer (1936), Stevenson (1937), Hare (1952), Field (1980), Gibbard (1990), and Horgan & Timmons (2006). On the other hand, for the critiques of quasi-realism, see Wright (1987), Dworkin (1996), Street (2011), and Kramer (2017).

express such statements (e.g., “Killing is wrong”) since there is no property of wrongness instantiated by killing. Instead, what we merely express is our attitudes towards acts of killing. As early expressivist (or emotivist) A. J. Ayer stated in *Language, Truth, and Logic*, “In saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments” (1936: 107).

Yet, Simon Blackburn, in *Spreading the Word*, argued that expressivists often have a tendency to believe that our projections towards moral facts generally involve mistakes (1984: 171). Such expressivists (there he specifically refers to Mackie) claim that our ordinary moral language involves full of mistakes because our moral discourse requires the mind-independent moral properties making our moral statements true even though there are no such properties. Although Blackburn himself also thinks that there is no such independent moral reality that we can refer to when we assert moral claims, this does not necessarily mean that we are systematically false in our ordinary moral talk. Indeed, he adds, “perhaps there is no mistake”. That is why he put forward a modified version of expressivism that he calls projectivism and demarks his position as quasi-realism, claiming that,

Projectivism is the philosophy of evaluation which says that evaluative properties are projections of our own sentiments (emotions, reactions, attitudes, commendations). Quasi-realism is the enterprise of explaining why our discourse has the shape it does, in particular by way of treating evaluative predicates like others, if projectivism is true (1984: 180).

In this way, Blackburn does not disregard our realistic-seeming moral talk. Elsewhere, in *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, he describes quasi-realists, someone who “starting from an anti-realist position finds himself progressively able to mimic the thoughts and practices supposedly definitive of realism” (1993: 4). A quasi-realist starts from an anti-realist position because he believes that moral language cannot describe the world. Yet, Blackburn argues, since the quasi-realist is able to mimic the thoughts and practices of realists, we do not have to give up our talk of moral properties, facts, or truths. On his account, therefore, while we can still keep the expressivist claim that our moral statements ought to be understood as expressions of non-cognitive attitudes, he also preserves our ordinary talk of moral practice as it is,

claiming that we are entitled to assert moral propositions committing us to moral properties, facts, or truths. Thus Blackburn need not take into account the existence of metaphysically heavyweight moral properties or facts. He illustrates (1998: 78) his metaphysically lightweight theory of truth, adopting F.P. Ramsey's redundancy theory of truth,

Because of the minimalism we can have for free what look like a ladder of philosophical ascent: 'p', 'it is true that p', 'it is really and truly a fact that p' ..., for none of these terms, in Ramsey's view, marks an addition to the original judgement. You can as easily make the last judgement as the first – Ramsey's ladder is lying on the ground, horizontal. ... From its top there is no different philosophical view than from the bottom, and the view in each case is just, p.

This allows us to argue that when we assert moral propositions such as “killing is wrong is true”, we only assert that “killing is wrong”. Nevertheless, we are still entitled to assert, “it is true that killing is wrong”. In this sense, our concept of truth is merely a logical device. Since there is no substantive truth property (e.g. correspondence, coherence, etc.), there is no need to discuss the question of what makes claims really true because the answer is nothing. The predicate ‘is true’ does not add extra meaning to our sentences. For these reasons, Blackburn remarks, “quasi-realism is trying to earn our right to talk of moral truth, while recognizing fully the subjective sources of our judgements, inside our own attitudes, needs, desires, and natures” (1984: 197).

Given their commitment to the redundancy theory of truth, quasi-realists can say that our moral claims can still be true or false in spite of the fact that what we really express is not our representational but attitudinal states towards those claims. They can mimic the realist appearances and deflate realists' metaphysical claims that other anti-realists try to undermine. Quasi-realists, therefore, might want to raise an objection against my view and claim that if we merely express our attitudes towards moral facts, the idea of being certain about those facts would also be just a matter of approval or disapproval. That is to say, even if you insist that it is certain that there are moral facts, that claim would not be different from the claim that there are moral facts; the predicate ‘is certain’ would not add extra meaning. Instead, one might be

neutral about the existence of moral facts while talking *as if* there are moral facts.

3.3.1 Reply: Expressive Silence

Quasi-realists believe that we do not describe the world when we assert something because truth-predicate does not have any other function than expressing our attitudinal states when it comes to morality: the truth-predicate ‘is true’ does not refer to any robust property of truth. As quasi-realists, I argued that our moral discourse is not constrained by our epistemic abilities because it rests on our non-epistemic practices. That said, even if I give a further defense by claiming that certainty as a non-epistemic attitudinal state does have the ability to describe the world, they could still argue that certainty as a realist truth-predicate has just an expressive function.

I argue that quasi-realists can only assert things with bestowed certainty since what it is to think something factual and true, in fact, depends on the ontological commitments of realism. In other words, quasi-realism cannot capture all the realist discourse by adopting deflationary accounts of what it is to think something factual and true because there is a fundamental disagreement between quasi-realists and realists that cannot be described in terms of what they believe, know or assert but what they are certain about. And I also do not think that approaching morality from a fairly neutral standpoint is morally acceptable. We could then say that if quasi-realists shall move the world, realists can certainly give a place to stand with a lever. The Archimedean point³⁶ for quasi-realism is, unavoidably, the certainty of realism.

³⁶ We might say, echoing Heraclitus, that no man ever steps in the same point twice, for it's not the same point and he's not the same man.

CONCLUSION

Wright reminded us of a Fregean thought: the assertion describes the world accurately iff it is true (1992: 23). After having established that the norm of assertion is truth, he argued that truth is distinct from warranted assertibility. The truth-predicate that Wright put forward is aimed at providing a neutral ground between realists and anti-realists. However, he also claimed that realism is not defensible in a moral domain of discourse because moral discourse cannot exert the criterion of Cognitive Command. In this thesis, I have argued that discourse about morality can be truth-apt without holding an anti-realist stance. On the one hand, I have defended Wittgensteinian epistemology referring to his claims in *On Certainty* against Wright's criterion of Cognitive Command. In this way, I have defended that the disagreement between realists and anti-realists is a kind of deep disagreement over basic moral certainties, which cannot be rationally resolvable. On the other hand, I have focused in particular on the basic certainties in metadiscourse and claimed that the right kind of attitude towards the existence of moral facts ought to be our relationship with hinge propositions; it is a moral mistake for realists and anti-realists to question the ontological status of moral facts because it is certain that there are moral facts. This led us to the conclusion that the criterion of Cognitive Command works neither in first-order normative discourse nor in second-order discourse about normativity.

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