

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

MASTER'S THESIS

MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD

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**THESIS SUPERVISOR
ASSOC. PROF. ENIS DOKO**

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MASTER THESIS

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by

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
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**THESIS SUPERVISOR
ASSOC. PROF. ENIS DOKO**

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ÔZ

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Bu çalışma, nesnel ahlak ile Tanrı'nın varlığı arasındaki ilişkiyi ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Daha spesifik olarak, nesnel ahlakı temellendirmek için Tanrı'nın varlığının gerekli olup olmadığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Dahası, ahlaki özelliklerin gerçekliğini değerlendirmede Tanrı'nın varlığının önemli bir rol oynayıp oynamadığını ve alternatif açıklamaları karşısında ne durumda olduğunu değerlendirir. Bu tezin ana argümanı, Tanrı'nın varlığının nesnel ahlak için en iyi açıklamayı sağladığını, çünkü ahlakın temel özelliklerini: nesnellik, evrensellik, ve normatiflik açıklayabileceğini diye iddia etmektedir. Bu argüman esas olarak ahlakın ontolojik statüsüyle ilgilidir ve ahlakı temellendirmek için rekabet halindeki açıklamalar yeterli açıklayıcı güce sahip olmadığından, Tanrı'nın etik için hala önemli olduğu fikrini güçlendirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ahlak, Ahlaki Özellikleri, Metaetik, Tanrı

ABSTRACT

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This work aims to consider the relationship between objective morality and the existence of God. More specifically, it is intended to analyze whether God's existence is necessary for grounding objective morality. Furthermore, it evaluates whether God's existence plays the significant role in considering the reality of moral properties and how it fares compared to the explanations of alternative and competing accounts. The main argument of this thesis claims that God's existence provides the best explanation for objective morality because it is capable of capturing all essential features of morality; objectiveness, universality, normativity. The argument is concerned mainly with the ontological status of morality, and it strengthens the notion that God is still important for ethics as competing accounts lack sufficient explanatory power for grounding morality.

Keywords: God, Metaethics, Morality, Moral properties

DEDICATION

To all of my professors so far...



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CHAPTER I

ARGUING ABOUT GOD

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to say that morality depends on God's existence and why moral arguments for God have been immensely popular throughout history? If morality really depends on God, then does it mean that atheists can't lead moral and praiseworthy life or that they can't discover moral truths? Furthermore, if it is true that morality necessarily rests on God, then does it mean that humans ought to refer to revealed texts in order to know moral values and what are the moral duties they have to perform? Is it true that if there is no God, then there would be nothing of morality and inevitably it would be subjective, arbitrary, whimsical, and delusion? Is it possible to ground morality in something other than God and still capture and explain all moral elements and features?

All these and other essential questions will be partially touched upon in my study. However, the main focus of this thesis is moral ontology. Therefore, the claim about morality depending on God simply means that morality and its main features are best explained by God's existence. The argument I am defending is as follows: "If objective morality exist, then the best explanation for its existence is God's existence. Objective morality exists. Therefore, the best explanation for its existence is God's existence." As it stands, the argument says nothing about moral epistemology. Hence, the argument allows the possibility of atheists being able to discover moral values and behave morally. I consider it very hard to argue otherwise, because firstly it is logically possible and conceivable for a human to be moral without the belief in any sort of divine being. Secondly and more importantly, it seems like it is factually wrong to claim that atheists can't be moral. Since this is an empirical claim there is hardly anyone who would argue that one must believe in God in order to be moral. Luckily, the argument I am defending makes no such claim. It is certainly in the realm of possibility that one can know moral

truths without having a solid grounding or foundation for them. Additionally, the argument also doesn't claim that without God there would be no grounding for morality. It just holds that God provides the best foundation.

The argument I am defending is theoretical in nature, and I will explain the difference between moral arguments later in Chapter I, which is going to be an important part of this thesis because it will clarify the main goals of arguments for God in general, and what is the purpose of the moral arguments and the category to which my argument belongs. Therefore, chapter I is intended to be preliminary material needed to understand the background of the argument I am defending. In Chapter II, I will be concerned with metaethics where I will clarify the most important terms and concepts. This is necessary step because I will be defending my second premise, the existence of objective morality as well as analyzing and criticizing the opposing theories. Therefore, being familiar with cognitivism and non-cognitivism or moral realism and moral anti-realism is essential. After arguing for the existence of objective morality, I will elaborate on how God can explain morality in its completeness. Naturally, since there are alternative theories which are grounding morality in something else, I will consider these accounts and evaluate their success and explanatory power. Lastly, I will look at some significant objections to my account and attempt to provide substantial responses and after this endeavor, I will conclude the work with the results I came upon.

1. Moral Argument For God

1.1. God's Existence

The existence of God is one of the main questions and issues in Philosophy of Religion which can be found in the earliest philosophical texts, and it is present in the philosophical literature since ancient times. The reason I am classifying the existence of God as an issue and not as the subject matter of Philosophy of Religion is a common practice of philosophers involved in this matter, which is in line with what was probably established by Aristotle and later on strengthened and further clarified by Ibn Sina. In his "Metaphysics" Ibn Sina arguably demonstrates that the proper subject of metaphysics can't be God, but "*being qua being*" or that which exists inasmuch as it exists. Ibn Sina

reasons that all sciences have subject matters which are not demonstrated by that science, but by the higher sciences. For example, the subject matter of mathematics is quantity which can be a number or magnitude and this is the case regardless of whether it exists in the actual world. The subject matter of physics is the material body which exists in reality and which is subject to movement. These subject matters are taken as axioms and are not proven by physics or mathematics but by the higher science, which is metaphysics. If God's existence was the subject matter of metaphysics, then God's existence would need to be evident to everybody without proof and it would not be possible to prove the existence of God, because the subject matter is always proven by higher science and metaphysics *is* the highest science. However, it is obviously noticeable that God's existence is not evident to all and thus it requires proof. Therefore, God's existence requires argument with premises so certain that there is no room for reasonable doubt. The comprehensive explanation on how Ibn Sina establishes the subject matter of metaphysics and the way he attempts to prove God's existence can be found in Jon McGinnis' book.¹ Regardless of whether Ibn Sina is successful in his proof, I agree with the notion that God's existence is indeed an issue and not the subject matter of, not only metaphysics, but of philosophy of religion as well. Speaking more strictly, philosophy of religion is a field which is involved with many other philosophical studies, but it is mainly related to metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology. It may be useful to distinguish philosophy of religion from religious philosophy, as religious philosophy does not enter the discussions about God's existence and a religion as a whole, but it is more concerned with the implications and the effects of the religious teachings.² Surely the issue of God's existence is the main field of philosophy of religion and it is a central point of the debates between theists and atheists. The most popular contemporary defenders of the proposition of God's existence are: Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, Yujin Nagasawa, Edward Feser, William Lane Craig, Robin Collins and others. The most known proponents of the proposition that God doesn't exist or that the arguments for God's existence are not sufficient to establish this proposition as more reasonable to believe are: Michael Martin, Graham Oppy, Jordan Howard Sobel, Erik

¹ Jon McGinnis. *Avicenna (Great Medieval Thinkers)*. (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 148 - 154.

² Stephen C. Evans. *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith*. (UK: Inter Varsity Press, 1985), 16 - 17.

Wielenberg, Paul Drapper and others. With the ongoing debate on God's existence between atheists and theists, it is important to mention there is a diversity of opinions on this issue inside religious circles by religious thinkers. In Islamic tradition many *sufi* figures expressed the opinion that God's existence needs no rational argument, because God is not meant to be understood by reason and rational faculties, instead it should be done by direct experience of divine, which can be attained and arrived to by a certain religious practices such as prayer and remembrance. Maybe the most acknowledged and familiar person to whom such opinion is attributed in Islamic heritage is Al-Ghazali.³ This type of reasoning is not strange to Christianity, as some of the preachers stress the importance of faith and salvation by acceptance of revelation by faith alone.⁴ Probably the best known representative for this approach in Christianity would be the famous theologian and philosopher Soren Kierkegaard,⁵ who held that one ought to believe in God even if it seems to be against the reason.

This thesis is not intended to enter the discussions on whether God's existence needs an argument; I assume it does, and I think that argument from morality strengthens the proposition in favor of God's existence when it is combined with other arguments for God. Appeal to morality in various forms has been a very common practice in the discussions on God's existence. This is not surprising occurrence, as a frequent presumption of believers is that morality is a law and law needs a lawgiver and that is supposedly God. That means morality can't be a brute fact, which is ungrounded and without an origin. Also, the common belief in the recent past has been that since morality needs to depend upon God, then non-believers can't act morally and they should not be trusted, because they don't have the belief in a divine lawgiver. This line of thought follows what Fyodor Dostoyevski's character Ivan Karamazov has famously said in the *Brothers Karamazov*: "Without God everything is permissible". The same opinion can be found in John Locke who declared: "Those are not to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human

³ Al-Ghazali. *Deliverance from Error*. (Boston, Twayne: American University of Beirut, 1980), 28.

⁴ I am not well acquainted with the details of Christian approaches to this matter. However, I am familiar with the fact that usually Calvinist theologians such as Robert L. Reymond defend such position.

⁵ McDonald, William, "Søren Kierkegaard", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/kierkegaard/>.

society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all”.⁶ This kind of reasoning has been largely rejected by both theist and atheist philosophers. Especially if one considers the Enlightenment, the notion of morality depending upon God was seriously challenged and largely renounced. With the immense number of objections and counterarguments against the traditional arguments for God’s existence, the belief in God has been largely deemed as unreasonable and therefore God and religion could not possibly play any major role with regards to morality. Additionally, the belief in God was considered as a hindrance and impediment to the moral progress and development and until this day, this opinion is present and found attractive by many thinkers and common folk.⁷ However, morality was not always used in the way mentioned above, and in the recent times this idea has been almost unanimously rejected by the intellectuals.

Another very common way of using morality in order to prove God’s existence is appeal to humans’ desire for justice. In his book *Conversation with an Atheist*, Mostafa Mahmoud argues that if thirst for water indicates the existence of water, then the thirst for justice points out to the existence of justice. Justice is when everybody is held responsible for his or her moral conduct. However, we see that the absolute justice is not possible in this world, as many people perform immoral acts. This means that there must be another world and the One who will judge those who haven’t been judged for their moral conduct in order to complete the justice.⁸ Although Mahmoud does admit this argument is not originally his and he attributes it to the “thinkers”, it is very plain to see that this is the argument from desire which is formulated by C. S. Lewis in his famous book *Mere Christianity*. Lewis even mentions the exactly same example of the thirst for water as the indication for the existence of water and the thirst for perfect happiness, peace and justice indicates the existence of all these things. Because, Lewis argues, all desires have their objects. He concludes that since the objects of our desires are not achievable in this world, this shows that we are meant for a different world, where the

⁶ John Locke. *A Letter concerning Toleration*, 2nd ed., (Indianapolis: Hobbs-Merrill, 1955).

⁷ For example Derek Parfit writes in his *Reasons and Persons* on page 454. that belief in God is not a basis for morality, nor it should be. In fact it was the religion and belief in God that “prevented the free development of moral reasoning”. Other proponents of such arguments that come to mind are Paul Kurz and Louise Antony.

⁸ Mostafa Mahmoud. *Conversation with an Atheist*. 4th ed. (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 2009), 87.

objects of these desires will be fulfilled by God.⁹ Contemporary moral arguments mostly have different conclusions which can be deemed as a humbler and more careful approach to the issue of God's existence. The reason for this is the arguments for God in the past have usually set a bar very high, because their defenders attempted to have proofs, which basically means to have the arguments with premises that are so certain that no reasonable person could deny their truth. I myself am not trying to develop a proof as it will become clear later in my work, because I find very few philosophical arguments that achieve such standard of certainty and even those that I do find as somewhat certain are in the field of formal logic. What I will attempt to accomplish with this work is to demonstrate that God's existence is the best explanation for objective morality. This kind of argumentation does not intend to prove God's existence, but it seeks to demonstrate the reasonableness of the belief in God, which *can* be used to provide the rational justification and warrant for believing that God actually exists (I don't make this last step, as my intention is only limited to substantiate the conclusion that God provides the best grounding for objective morality and that opposing views are not sufficient to capture the whole nature of it). Therefore, the nature and goal of the argument I am working on is much similar to the nature and goals of contemporary arguments for God: They are meant to show that the arguments for God's existence have rationally warranted premises, which are more likely to be true than false and which are believed by reasonable audience. Furthermore, the moral argument I am working on *can* be used as an addition and support for other arguments to enhance and strengthen the soundness of the conclusion that God exists. However, I will not be focusing on the analysis how moral argument can be used as a support in a cumulative case for God's existence. What I will be stressing on are two central aims: First, I will try to demonstrate that the belief in objective morality is warranted. This will include the explanation of the nature of morality, or what are its features and what it consists of. Furthermore, it will involve the explanation of what is going on in the human mind when we make a moral proposition and a defense of moral realism. Lastly, I will introduce the arguments in favor of objective morality. Second main point will be my attempt to provide the best explanation for objective morality in a way that I will ground

⁹ C. S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*.(London: HarperCollins, 1952), 136 - 138.

it in God's existence, which will be able to give answers and explain all features of morality. Although my work is not concerned with other arguments for God and it is limited only with the moral argument (a very specific one), I still believe it is necessary to be aware of other arguments in order to understand the nature and goal of my argument completely. For that reason, I will mention and only briefly explain the most popular and well-known arguments for God's existence.

1.2. Arguments for God

1.1.1. Ontological Arguments for God

I begin with the ontological arguments because they are very unique and distinctive when compared to other arguments for God. What makes them so different are their premises, which are, unlike the premises of other arguments, supposed to be necessarily true, a priori knowable and they are presumably analytically true. This means that the premises are allegedly knowable without an appeal to empirical data; they are true in every possible world and what makes them true are the definitions and concepts. What is also special for ontological arguments is the fact that they attempt to prove God in totality with all His attributes, which means they try to prove the existence of the maximally great being or the greatest conceivable being, which is traditionally considered to be omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. Other arguments are not like this. They are usually intended to demonstrate only one divine attribute or to use the empirical data as an indication of the attribute which reasonably needs to be the attribute of a divine being. For example, teleological and arguments from design are meant to show that there is a purpose in the universe and therefore, there needs to be an intelligent designer behind it. Cosmological arguments are directed toward the attempt of demonstrating that there needs to be a cause which is uncaused or the first cause, because the world or the universe had a beginning and it can't be the case that it caused itself into existence. However, this would only show one attribute of a God, whereas the ontological arguments are intended to prove God completely. Historically, probably the best-known ontological argument is the one formulated by Saint Anselm of Canterbury

in his *Proslogion* in chapter 2.¹⁰ There are diverse formulations of the argument, but the fundamental premises are: the God is a being than which none greater can be conceived, the God exists in the mind, that which exists in reality and mind is greater than that which exists only in mind, therefore God necessarily exists in reality and in mind. Unsurprisingly, this argument and other ontological arguments have been criticized and objected to, not only by atheists but by believers as well. Arguably the greatest Christian theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas has rejected the ontological argument and preferred to use cosmological arguments in proving God's existence. However, ontological arguments have always attracted the attention of philosophers because they are so unique and they involve many philosophical fields such as linguistics, metaphysics, ethics and others. Furthermore, although to many philosophers ontological arguments seem very unlikely to demonstrate what they are intended for, they are still very hard to completely refute and counter. This concern was well-expressed by Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy* where he writes: "The argument does not, to a modern mind, seem very convincing, but it is easier to feel convinced that it must be fallacious than it is to find out precisely where the fallacy lies."¹¹ Since Anselm, there have been many different versions of the ontological argument including Descartes, Leibniz, Gödel, Plantinga and others. The most comprehensive works on the ontological arguments I have been acquainted with so far, which include other ontological arguments with the analysis and objections, are that of Graham Oppy¹² and Tyron Goldschmidt.¹³

1.1.2. Cosmological Arguments for God

It is apparent from the section above that cosmological arguments differ from ontological arguments in a way that they don't consist of the premises that are known *a priori* and without empirical observation. Instead, cosmological arguments include some empirical data and facts about the universe in order to conclude that these facts point towards divine being. In cosmological arguments the existence of God is always derived

¹⁰ Anselm. *Proslogion: With the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).

¹¹ Bertrand Russell. *History of Western Philosophy*. (London: Routledge, 2004), 536.

¹² Graham Oppy. *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹³ Tyron Goldschmidt. *Ontological Arguments*. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

from the causation. However, it involves other facts about the universe like movement, or the fact that the universe is contingent as it could be conceived as non-existing, or the supposed fact that universe is finite and others.¹⁴ Because cosmological arguments always depend upon scientific discoveries and empirical data, they are more open to criticisms and objections than ontological arguments. For example, if it is scientifically proven that the universe did not have a beginning and was eternal, then a very important premise in the cosmological arguments would be refuted, namely that the universe did have a beginning. When it comes to the inference that God exists, this is done inductively, deductively and in recent times it is very common to find the conclusion of God's existence inferred abductively or by the inference to the best explanation. Maybe the most prominent version of the cosmological argument today is the *kalam* cosmological argument, which was very important argument in Islamic tradition, especially for theologians. However, it gained the popularity again through defense of William Lane Craig.¹⁵ The argument has a very simple form, consisting of two premises and conclusion; everything that begins to exist has a cause, the universe began to exist, therefore the universe has a cause. As it is the case with every other argument, this one received and continues to receive numerous objections. For example, the argument does not show that God is the cause of the universe; it could have been something else. Also, it doesn't establish that the cause needs to be great, omniscient and all-good, because it is logically possible that the cause of the universe is an evil being. Furthermore, the second premise is the usual target of the rivals. It is clear that all these and other additional points need to be addressed by separate arguments and Craig has done so. Whether Craig is successful in his attempt, is not the subject of this work. However, what is important to have in mind, are the types of inference, because current moral arguments for God are formulated in a similar way.

¹⁴ David S. Ordberg. "The Cosmological Argument". In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Chad Meister and Paul Copan. (Routledge, 2007), 341-350.

¹⁵ William Lane Craig. "The Kalam Cosmological Argument." In *Two Dozen (or So) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, eds. Trent Dougherty & Jerry Walls. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 389-405.

1.1.3. Teleological Arguments for God

Like cosmological arguments, the teleological arguments infer God's existence from the empirical facts and data. However, the teleological arguments arrive at the more detailed description of God, as they conclude that the being who designed the universe must possess certain properties like infinite wisdom and knowledge. While the starting point of cosmological arguments is causation, the teleological arguments usually start from arrangement of the world or the seeming order of the universe. They are also more specific when it comes to the premises, because unlike the cosmological arguments, they completely depend upon particular scientific discoveries. Teleological arguments or the arguments from design are probably the most widespread and the most famous arguments for God's existence today. Usually, they have been well-received even by the medieval philosophers with the exception of those who defended the theory of emanation, like Farabi or Ibn Sina. It is known that Ibn Rushd, who was very critical of other arguments for God's existence, accepted only teleological argument as a sufficient proof, because everything in the world seemed as it was made having humans in mind and that scrutiny and observation of the world and everything that exists in it seemed to indicate that it was arranged and designed. A more known version of the teleological argument in the West is the watchmaker analogy, which is the version developed by William Paley in his *Natural Theology*.¹⁶ Although it is still widely used by common people, the argument met serious objections firstly with the work of David Hume *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, and then with the developments in biology and publishing of *Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. When it comes to biology, Paley's argument is considered seriously undermined and refuted by the evolution by the natural selection. This is because his argument depends on intuition that cause is always greater than the effect and the complex object necessitates the designer. However, evolution shows that it is possible to have the organism without the need for more complex designer or a cause because all living organisms evolved from simpler life forms. However, the story is different when it comes to physics. The teleological arguments have found a refuge and a strong foundation in physics with the development of fine-

¹⁶ William Paley. *Natural Theology or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

tuning arguments. The arguments from fine-tuning are considered as the strongest arguments in favor of God's existence by both theists and atheists. They always begin with the proposition that there is a fine-tuning of various aspects of the universe. For example the gravity of the universe is fine-tuned. If the value of gravity was different, then the stars would not be formed and also the formation of planets would not be possible, and without the planets there would be no chemistry, which means there would be no life. Additionally there is a fine-tuning of the physical and cosmological constants which allow the formation of the area suitable for life. Furthermore, arguably the universe is fine-tuned to be discoverable and knowable.¹⁷ If the strength of electromagnetic force was changed by 10%, then it would be impossible to have burning of fire, which means we would not be able to have metals, which are essential for scientific discovery. If this force was stronger by 10% we could not have civilization and we wouldn't be able to do science, but if it was 10% weaker, then we would not be able to see and discover the cell. Moreover, if entropy is not low as it is, then it wouldn't be possible to observe other stars and galaxies; we could not create theories, etc. These are just some of the instances that are being used to justify and establish the case that the universe is finely tuned. After this, the common approach is to make a proposition that this fine-tuning requires an explanation and theism has the best explanation: God designed the universe and that is why it is fine-tuned and there is no comparably satisfying explanation. The fine-tuning is considered the most successful contemporary argument for God's existence.

After these brief clarifications on the arguments for God, I will now switch to the moral arguments, where I will point out the common things they share with regards to the methodology and goals, but I will also explain what makes them specific and different from other arguments as well as elaborate on different versions of moral arguments.

¹⁷ Robin Collins. "The Argument from Physical Constants: The Fine-Tuning for Discoverability". In *Two Dozen (or So) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, eds. Trent Dougherty & Jerry Walls. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 89–107.

1.1.4. Moral Arguments for God

Arguments from morality are similar to the cosmological and teleological arguments in a way that they usually start with the claim of some supposed fact of the world. In the case of moral arguments, the starting point is usually the claim that moral duties or objective morality exist or that moral properties are in some sense real, and from there they proceed to the existence of God. Also, another similarity with the cosmological and teleological arguments is that moral arguments are not intended as a proof of God in totality with all his attributes, instead they are commonly meant to show one divine attribute, which is God's goodness. Regarding the conclusion of the moral arguments, they are also inferred inductively, deductively and by abductive reasoning depending on the form of the argument. However, when compared with the teleological arguments, moral arguments obviously have a much harder time in justifying their premises, because they are vaguer and therefore more open to objections. Furthermore, the aim of demonstrating the conclusion that morality depends upon God's existence or that morality is best explained by God's existence additionally complicates the work. Defenders of moral arguments must show that objective morality do exist against the numerous philosophical views that reject this proposition like; emotivism, error theory, quasi-realism, relativism, skepticism, etc. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche rejects the belief of objective morality although he admits that it is not surprising that humans come to believe in such a notion. To explain this phenomenon Nietzsche develops a theory in which he explains that morality was born out of the social relationship, more particularly from the debt that humans used to take. It seems very reasonable to think that humans who live together would feel a debt to their community, because this community offers them safety and numerous advantages. Nietzsche proceeds with the explanation that this feeling of indebtedness has developed from the human beliefs that they owe a debt to the ancient ancestors, regardless of whether they were real or not, which were deified with time. That is how morality of the individuals became the debt towards the community.¹⁸ However, it is not the case that only atheist thinkers reject moral realism, it is very common to find the opponents of this proposition in the theistic intellectuals including

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. (New York: Vintage, 1976), 71, 89.

theologians and philosophers. This is mostly evident in the views of the defenders of ethical voluntarism, who believe that what is moral and non-moral depends only to what is approved or disapproved by God in the particular revelation. The reason for such opinion is to ensure God's omnipotence, because if there were objective moral values, then God's commands would only comply with them and they would be independent from God and he would be subjected to these objective facts as well. However, this is not the only front that the defender of moral argument needs to attend to. The second front is to justify the claim why God provides the best explanation for the objective morality. There are also many philosophical views that explain objective morality and ground it in something other than God like; naturalism, evolutionary explanations, social contract theories and the theories of self-legislation. This is the reason why the defense of moral argument for God is so tough and complex as there are many opponent and competitor theories. However, although the opponents are numerous, there are many partial allies. On the one hand the defender of moral argument will disagree with Nietzsche regarding his view on objective morality, but he will be happy to support him in his view that morality depends upon God. It is known that Nietzsche has criticized the attempts of utilitarianism of justifying morality without God:

In England, in response to every little emancipation from theology one has to reassert one's position in a fear-inspiring manner as a moral fanatic. That is the penance one pays there.-With us it is different. When one gives up Christian belief one thereby deprives oneself of the right to Christian morality. For the latter is absolutely not self-evident: one must make this point clear again and again, in spite of English shallowpates.¹⁹

Also, the defender of the moral argument will agree to some extent with the naturalistic account or any other account which defends moral realism. However, the defender of moral argument will have to demonstrate that theism provides the best explanation for the objective morality and also he will need to show why other accounts are lacking the explanatory power and how they fail to capture the whole nature of morality. This is what makes the moral argument specific but also more fragile when compared to cosmological or teleological arguments. It is very hard to defend a strong conclusion but the moral argument can be valuable when it is combined with other arguments in a

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. (Penguin Classics; London: Penguin Books, 1990), 80.

cumulative case to make the proposition of God's existence more reasonable to believe and more likely to be true.

This being said, not all moral arguments have the same starting point and conclusion. What I described above are usually the features of the theoretical moral arguments, such as the one I am defending. However, there are other types of moral arguments such as the argument from human dignity and the intrinsic worth of humans, argument from moral knowledge, argument from moral accountability and practical moral arguments. In the next section I will discuss and distinguish different moral arguments that were mentioned.

1.3. Different Types of Moral Argument

1.3.1. Moral Argument from the Human Worth

The moral arguments from human worth obviously start from the premise that human lives possess intrinsic worth which is special when compared to the rest of creation. Many have argued that this idea originates from Judaism and Christianity, which is not far from the truth considering Genesis (1: 27): "So God created man in His own image..." Indeed the Biblical verse offers a good grounding and the explanation for the claim that humans have a special kind of worth, but it can also be extended to the basic human rights. Some thinkers, like Nicholas Wolterstorff claim that the idea of the natural human rights is not only historically based on the conception of human of Judaism and Christianity, but it can be grounded only in those two specific frameworks with no alternative elsewhere.²⁰ I disagree with Wolterstorff on the claim that special human worth and basic natural rights can be grounded only in Judaism and Christianity. In Islam human life is regarded as a special gift from God and it is deemed sacred. In a commonly recited verse the Qur'an states: "...whoever kills a soul unless as a legal punishment for murder or for corruption in the land, it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one soul, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely..."²¹ Furthermore, there are multiple narrations of the prophet Mohammad where he states

²⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 316-319.

²¹ "The Holy Qur'an". (Trans.) Yusuf Ali, Abdullah (1937), Lahor, (5:32).

something very similar to the Bible, which is that man was created in God's image: "If one of you fights his brother, let him avoid the face. Verily, Allah created Adam in His image."²² Because of similar numerous verses from the Qur'an and narrations from the prophet Muhammad, life has been considered as one of the fundamental rights of the individual. Islamic thinkers would agree with Wolterstroff that the value of human life can't be grounded only on the ability of reasoning or some other capabilities. If it was so, then it would follow that humans who lack such capability like people who suffer from dementia or some other severe mental disease wouldn't possess the worth other humans normally have. However, this would again provide the theistic explanation for human worth which is not the only contender in the game. For example Christine Korsgaard makes her case by claiming that we ought to regard other humans as ends in themselves, who possess the innate dignity and worth.²³ Korsgaard is clearly influenced by Immanuel Kant because she also defends the position that the basic human worth does not differ from person to person and although someone might be better than others in some regards, like for example Mike Tyson being better than others in boxing or Roger Penrose being better than others in physics, but there are no degrees when it comes to the worth of being human as all human beings are equally worthy. Since there are multiple explanations for human worth, the moral argument will work only if theistic defenders can show that other accounts of it are incomplete or in some way inferior to the theistic explanation. For example in this case, the theist might criticize Korsgaard for being inconsistent with her constructivist account, which doesn't allow human worth to be objective fact but Korsgaard treats it that way. This might be easier than the attempt to defend the objectivity of human worth, because it is very easy to object to this premise, as some may believe that humans are nothing special and their worth is not distinct from those of animals. It also might be the case that humans do not possess any objective intrinsic worth whatsoever. One thinker who defends this position is Daniel Dennet.²⁴ Having these objections in mind and all the difficulties for response that come

²² Muslim ibn Hajjaj. "Sahih Muslim". Hadith no: 2612.

²³ Christine Korsgaard. *The Sources of Normativity*. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 92-98.

²⁴ Daniel Dennet. *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. (New York: Penguin, 2006), 107.

from them, it does seem reasonable to conclude that if one believes human beings have special intrinsic worth and value, then theism offers a better ground and explanation.

1.3.2. Moral Argument from Moral Knowledge

Arguments from moral knowledge presuppose that the ability to possess different types of knowledge is not controversial opinion and this includes the moral knowledge as well. Therefore such arguments are committed to cognitivism, which is the field of moral psychology and can be briefly defined as a position that moral propositions are expressions of beliefs which can be true or false. This opinion naturally excludes the skepticism about epistemology in general and non-cognitivist positions in moral psychology such as expressivism, prescriptivism and others. Defenders of the argument from moral knowledge usually don't make extensive defense against non-cognitivist approaches and skepticism but I will tackle these position in chapter II, where I will defend objective morality.

The stronger versions of this argument claim that moral knowledge would not exist if God doesn't exist. But since it is supposedly obvious that moral knowledge does indeed exist then it follows that God exists. Just like the other strong versions of the arguments for God, this one is open to serious objections and it is not particularly hard to undermine the premises. One could give other possibilities of how moral knowledge possibly arose in humans and automatically cripple the very first premise of the argument. However, there are weaker versions of the argument that might provide a stronger case for God's existence and which are probably more valuable and harder to threaten with objections, although their conclusion is not as strong. One such argument is from Richard Swinburne from his *The Existence of God*. Swinburne does not argue that God is necessary condition for the moral knowledge, however without God the moral knowledge would be very unlikely to occur in the universe. Swinburne argues that although God might not be necessary, still, moral truths would need to be grounded in some necessary truths, regardless of whether moral truths themselves are contingent or necessary. He gives the example of the proposition that dropping the bomb on Hiroshima being wrong is not necessary, because the existence of this city is not necessary for the obvious reason that it could be conceived as non-existing instead.

However, the truth of this proposition might be necessary because it is grounded in some other necessary truth such as that killing human beings is wrong. What is significant for Swinburne here is that we as human beings are aware of these moral facts and this is what requires an explanation. Swinburne rejects the evolutionary explanation where morality is required for the survival benefits and advantages on the grounds that there are many animal species which do have some kind of moral behavior, but they are not aware of moral facts and they don't possess the moral beliefs as we humans do. This proves that moral beliefs are not necessary for the survival and therefore this particular evolutionary explanation is not sufficient.²⁵ If we assume that theism is true then the moral knowledge would not be surprising and we would have a sufficient explanation for it. The explanation would be that God had good reasons to make moral knowledge possible in order enable humans to choose good actions and not bad, and it would make them morally responsible for their choices.²⁶ Assuming that one was able to prove objective morality, arguments of this type would still not be sufficient to demonstrate that God exists per se, but nevertheless, they are still valuable because they can be used in a cumulative case with other arguments for God, and as a result they would increase the probability of God's existence.

1.3.3. Practical Moral Arguments

Practical or pragmatic moral arguments are different than the previous two arguments in their conclusion as well as in their starting point. The main distinctive feature of practical arguments is apparent from their name, which is that they are supposed to be practical. This means they are not starting from some presumed known fact about the world, such as that humans possess a special kind of worth or that we have the ability to know moral facts, and then from there proceed to offer the best possible explanation, namely God, which can't be challenged by the proposals of the opposite worldviews. They initiate the argument with the premise that morality needs to be connected with the good or some end. Then they proceed with the claim that this is only feasible if God exists. So the conclusion here is not that God exists because it is inferred from the

²⁵ Richard Swinburne. *The Existence of God*. 2nd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 217-218.

²⁶ *ibid*, 218.

known facts, but that we ought to believe in God. The best known practical moral argument and maybe the most famous moral argument of all times is that of Immanuel Kant. Although, Kant dismissed theoretical moral arguments as insufficient, he still defended the claim that we as a rational agent ought to believe in God.²⁷ Stephen Evans comprehensively summarizes the reasons for Kant believing so in his *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*. Evans writes that Kant argued how rational moral agents aim at the highest good necessarily, where this good is made of a people who are virtuous and happy and where this happiness is habituated by the virtue. Then it is our duty to seek the highest good which is an end, and we may do it exclusively by acting in accordance with morality.²⁸ However, what is important in this pursuing is that we don't use shortcuts. The problem arises when we don't necessarily experience happiness by performing our moral duties. But since our desire for happiness is inescapable and since we can't give up the belief that happiness is worth pursuing, which we can only seek by acting morally, then we ought to believe, even if it sometimes contradicts our experience, that happiness and the highest good is attainable by moral actions. However, to have such a belief it is necessary to possess a faith that our moral actions will not be pointless in the long run. To have this belief it is necessary to have a faith in providence where the universe is not blind and indifferent, and this requires a faith in a Creator who is moral and who created the universe where moral actions are not fruitless and absurd.²⁹

Arguments of this type are open to various criticisms. The weakest point of practical arguments is that they are not pursuing the truth in their conclusion, rather what they are trying to achieve is some prudential end which is very problematic when it is viewed from the philosophical perspective. The reason is that it is widely held that we ought to pursue what is true no matter what kind of benefit we might attain or lose in that pursuing. Therefore, if we don't have good reasons for belief in God aside from the practical reasons, then we ought not to believe in the existence of such a being even for the sake of morality. Furthermore, one may object that belief in God is not necessary for

²⁷ Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 1788.

²⁸ Stephen C. Evans. *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 108.

²⁹ *ibid*, 108.

the pursuing of the highest good. It is clearly conceivable to pursue the highest good and have the belief that our moral actions will not be futile in the long run without believing in God. Personally, I don't find practical moral arguments very convincing nor valuable unless they are modified into theoretical arguments or if they include some kind of evidence and facts before appealing to the prudential reasons. Nevertheless, since they are very important part of moral arguments and the debate about them is ongoing, I felt the need to mention and elaborate on them as well.

1.3.4. Theoretical Moral Arguments

Theoretical moral arguments have different logical structure than the practical ones. The most apparent difference is in the conclusion, as theoretical moral arguments are not aimed at prudential aims. In this sense arguments from moral knowledge and arguments from human worth can be considered as various types of theoretical arguments, because there is no clear-cut distinction in their structure and the situation is pretty much the same when it comes to their starting point and conclusion. Although they might be put under one category of theoretical moral arguments, I still decided to give them a separate place, because they have an important role in academia and I think they deserve a separate explanation. Despite the fact that the distinction between practical arguments and theoretical moral arguments is more apparent and specific, still practical moral arguments can be transformed into theoretical ones, or one might infer theoretical argument from the practical argument. For example let's consider Kant's argument I stated in the section above. One can interpret this argument in a way that it implies God as the best explanation of why there are moral agents in the universe. It may be argued that it would be very strange and unexpected to have a universe which contains moral agents, but it is completely detached and indifferent towards moral ends. However, if we assume that God exists than strangeness dissolves or at least the universe becomes less unusual and easier to make sense of.

Theoretical moral arguments are usually stated in the following way: if objective morality exists, then God exists, objective morality does exist, therefore God exists. The recent defenders of the theoretical moral argument change the premise from the claim that objective morality exist to the claim that objective moral obligations exist. So the

argument states that if objective moral obligations exist, then God exists. The best-known representatives and arguably the founders of this view are Philip Quinn and Robert Adams.³⁰ There are segments in which I agree with Quinn and Adams, and they have been an important influence for the argument I am defending. However, there are some other features in the argument that are my own and which I believe make the moral argument more substantiated. The argument I am defending, which was stated in the introduction, is clearly theoretical in nature because it claims that God provides the best explanation for objective morality and that objective morality exists. In the next chapter, I will be discussing the second premise of my argument, namely that objective morality exists and it will include the nature of morality, defense of moral realism, objections to moral non-realism, defense of cognitivism, and arguments for objective morality.

³⁰ Philip L. Quinn. *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*. (Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), and Robert M. Adams. *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

CHAPTER II

METAETHICS

2.1. Objective Morality

Human beings are not startled when they hear that Nazis were wrong for systematically killing million Jews in Auschwitz concentration camp, where people were used as an experiment samples, gassed, worked to death, tortured by inflicting physical damage or starved to death. We are not surprised by this moral judgment as it seems very clear and self-evident that is the case. Humans also tend to think that they know helping poor and needy is a good thing to do and that stealing, lying for the individual and greedy purposes or torturing babies is bad and ought not to be done. In current times, if there is a nation or society that promotes inequality and considers members of other community less-worthy and advocates for discrimination and intolerance, then we hold this society mistaken and fundamentally wrong even if all individuals of this society believed it to be true. In the examples I gave above it seems that we usually take for granted that we can have a moral knowledge, because we think we know that some things like genocide are factually wrong. However, when it comes to justifying these claims, it is not very easy to accomplish this task. Although people are regularly in agreement that genocide is wrong, they are rarely able to answer how it is a fact that genocide is wrong and in what sense is it possible that genocide would still be wrong even if all of humans believed otherwise. The inability of common people to have a satisfactory and exceptional answer to these questions is not shocking or unexpected at all. In fact, even professional philosophers who deal with these metaethical questions have tough time to provide certain and indisputable solution. To claim that morality is in some sense real and that

moral properties or moral facts³¹ exist and they are independent of humans' beliefs and desires can be considered as an extraordinary claim which needs a strong justification. After all, morality is not similar to other things in the universe we experience as real. We can't bump into humility on our way to the market, we can't use veracity as a pen to write a paper nor can vanity or envy block our view of the moon the way that a stone wall does. While this is the case still, it would not be a sufficient argument and a good objection against the reality of moral properties. Ultimately, it would be very hasty to define reality in this way, because there are other things we consider as real which are not like pens or stone walls. For example neutrino, love, time, protons are just some of the things that we believe are real, although they are not like everyday objects we experience. This suggests that we need to change the way we define what is real and morality can be (at least I believe so) considered as a part of this realm of reality. The further issue for having a substantiated explanation for morality is the claim that it doesn't depend on people's beliefs. When explaining morality as being objective, one is faced with the following dilemmas: should we exclude people's beliefs completely when we formulate our answers? What if all the people disagree with our moral proposition, for example if we hold that abortion is wrong and all people disagree with us? Are we supposed to ignore all of them and if not, to what extent people have their share in discovering what is moral and what is not? My exact position on these issues will become clearer as this work progresses, but since one of the premises of my argument is that objective morality exists there are several implications which are very clear right away. One of them is that I defend the moral realism and the other is that I am committed to the cognitivism. The former is about the ontology of the moral properties and their reality, while the latter is about moral psychology or what is going on in the human mind when they are making a moral proposition. Moral ontology and moral psychology are two of the main fields of metaethical analysis with moral language, which can be understood as analysis of what humans have in mind and what they mean

³¹ Usually there is a distinction in the meaning of moral facts and moral properties. Moral properties are commonly used as a reference in moral statements in order to represent moral facts. For example moral properties would be *wrongness* of torturing babies or *rightness* to help poor. Then the moral facts can be represented from the following statements: " *it is wrong to torture babies*" or "*it is right to help poor*". This is only rough representation of the distinction between moral properties and facts. However, I will be using these terms as synonyms and interchangeably since my thesis is not affected by this distinction.

when they make a moral proposition or whether it is possible to define moral concepts and terms. Naturally, the second premise of my argument entails my involvement with all these fields. Another important point to mention here is that among these fields, I give a slight priority to the ontology, because I think that understanding the ontology correctly will resolve the questions present in moral language and psychology. However, this is not a necessary path that one must take in order to defend objective morality. One may as well give the preference to moral language as a way of resolving the issues in ontology and psychology. For example this is how George Edward Moore approached the problem, stressing the definition of the good as the most important issue in metaethics.³² Personally, I don't find the language as the priority mainly because of the problems regarding the analytical truths, but nevertheless I will still be engaged with it and with moral psychology as well. In the following sections I will discuss moral realism and cognitivism with their antitheses.

2.2. Moral Realism

As mentioned above, moral realism is a position regarding the ontology of moral properties and its defenders argue that moral properties do exist and they are like facts, which are not affected by people's beliefs. Therefore, killing civilians is wrong even if all people believed it is not the case. This proposition, which is allegedly a fact according to moral realists, contains both particular and universal descriptions of truth. So, one can claim that "Joaquín Guzmán was wrong for drug trafficking around the world" but one can also make a universal claim like "drug trafficking is morally wrong". Although moral realists agree on the existence of the moral properties, they are not united in what exactly those properties are and what makes the moral proposition true or false. When it comes to the nature of moral properties, with all the difficulties that morality carries with itself with the regards of what it means to be real, moral realists have taken different opinions on the matter. Moral properties could be corresponding or even identical to natural facts and entities. If this is the case, than we could claim that goodness is identical with felicity or pleasure and if so, then there would be no difficulties in knowing moral properties because it is not extraordinary to claim that

³² George E. Moore. *Principia Ethica*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 58.

pleasure is knowable. The moral realism of this type is called naturalism and I will discuss it in Chapter III as one of the alternative and competing explanations against theism. Other than naturalism, the moral realist can defend the position that moral properties are non-natural. However, it is important to mention that defending such position will not entail theism, because it does not follow that if one believes that moral properties are non-natural, then he is theist by default. It is possible to defend such a position without an appeal to God and one such example is Shafer-Landau, whom I will also discuss in Chapter III. Therefore, being moral realist does not dictate what position one will take with regards to the origin and the nature of moral properties. Another important thing to mention here is moral realist can defend the position that morality exists only because of the humans. However, this does not mean that humans can decide what is right and wrong according to their desires. For example it can be the case that God created moral properties for humans explicitly because of the special worth and dignity of humans, and these moral properties are not meant for other species. Additional significant point is that moral realists don't necessarily claim to know what is morally right and wrong just because they claim that moral properties do exist. It is logically possible and consistent for moral realist for example not to know whether euthanasia should be allowed, or is the death penalty wrong in all cases, etc.

2.3. Moral Anti-realism

Moral anti-realism can be defined as a negation or as an opposition of moral realism because the defenders of moral anti-realism are arguing that moral properties or facts don't exist. However, this does not mean that the defender of moral anti-realism will necessarily think that moral truth does not exist. This is a separate claim which is related to the nature of truth. For example, a moral anti-realist may deny truth-maker theory, which holds that there needs to be something outside of proposition, namely properties, in virtue of which proposition will be true. A moral anti-realist may embrace coherentism and argue that moral truth is still possible if moral beliefs are justified by being coherent with other beliefs that person has. With this being said, moral anti-realists can approach their denial of the existence of moral properties in different ways. For example, one may be a moral anti-realist in a sense that he accepts that moral

propositions are beliefs intended to be descriptions of reality (cognitivism), but ultimately they are all false because the moral properties don't exist and therefore there is nothing that makes the moral proposition true. So if one would state that "burning people for their beliefs is wrong", then this moral judgment would be false, because there is no such property as *wrongness* of killing people for their beliefs which is intended to be instantiated by the act of killing people for their beliefs. This kind of approach is categorized as an "error theory" which will be included in this chapter in the section of objections to objective morality. Another approach of being moral anti-realist is to deny that there is moral knowledge or to defend that moral propositions are not the expressions of beliefs but expressions of emotions or approval and disapproval toward some action (non-cognitivism). Therefore the moral proposition "burning people for their beliefs is wrong" is not true not because the moral properties don't exist, but because this proposition is not a state of belief and therefore it can't be either true or false. The reason for this is because emotions are not intended to describe reality nor they are meant to give us any new factual information about the real world and hence they are not *truth-apt*. One such position is "emotivism" which will also be discussed and analyzed as an objection to objective morality.

2.4. Cognitivism

Cognitivism is a philosophical view in metaethics which holds that moral propositions are genuine propositions and expressions of beliefs and not emotions. Propositions can be understood as thoughts we express with the language, but they are not equivalent to the statements which are purely linguistic. Propositions are the meaning of the statements and they transcend the language, which is the reason they are known as "truth-bearers".³³ The reason for claiming that they go beyond the language is because the truth is considered as culture-independent and language-independent. If it was the case that truth depended for example on language, then this would mean if language didn't exist then the truth would also not exist. Furthermore, the statements exist strictly in the language, but there is always something common between all those languages and that is the meaning, or what we named as a proposition. For example consider the

³³ Robert C. Koons and Timothy H. Pickavance. *Metaphysics: The Fundamentals*. (Wiley - Blackwell, 2015), 17-20.

following statements: “My hair is brown” and “moja kosa je smeđa”. These are two different statements from two different languages namely English and Bosnian. Although they have different symbols and are pronounced differently, they intend to represent the same meaning, which is that my hair is brown. This is what is meant by proposition; something that is common between the languages. There are various debates on what is and what is not the genuine proposition; whether all statements which give information, like statements about the future (“tomorrow will be a sunny day”) or statements about non-existing objects (“Pegasus is a winged-horse”) should be considered a propositions, or are self-refuting statements (“this statement is false”) a proposition, etc. I will not get into these issues because that is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, what is important here is to notice that propositions need to be representational, and if this representation of reality is accurate, then they will be true and if it not, then the proposition will be false.³⁴ So if proposition “my hair is brown” is accurate with reality, if my hair is really brown, then this proposition is true. Cognitivism holds that moral propositions are genuine propositions in a sense that they are intended to show the reality. That is why the defenders of cognitivism claim that when we make a moral proposition, we express a states of beliefs, because beliefs are firstly descriptive and aimed to represent reality, and secondly, they can be true or false, depending on if our proposition represents the reality accurately. Therefore, when one makes a moral judgment like “abortions are wrong”, this proposition is either true or false, in a similar way that proposition “my hair is brown” is either true or false. In another words this proposition and other moral propositions are *truth-apt*. In conclusion, it is important to understand cognitivism as a philosophical view about the *truth-aptness* of the moral propositions and not the view that all moral propositions are true, because it is possible to believe that moral propositions are *truth-apt* but ultimately false as in case of “error theory”.

2.5. Non-cognitivism

Non-cognitivism is an opposing view to cognitivism which holds that moral proposition

³⁴ *ibid*, 18.

are not the expressions of beliefs, but they are expressions of the non-belief mental states which can be emotions, prescriptions, expressions of pro and con attitudes or something else which is not a mental state of a belief. In this sense defender of non-cognitivism will argue that moral propositions are not the genuine propositions and they are not representational in a sense that they are intended to depict reality correctly. Consequently, moral propositions can't be true or false, or in another words they don't possess the truth value and are not *truth-apt*. it is important not to confuse "error theory" for the form of non-cognitivism. Although the defender of non-cognitivism will agree with "error theory" that moral properties don't exist, however the "error theory" still argues that moral propositions are expressions of beliefs. Therefore, "error theory" is not a form of non-cognitivism but a form of cognitivism instead. For non-cognitivist, the moral propositions are neither true nor false, because the emotions or prescriptions or mental states other than beliefs can't be true or false. So for non-cognitivist the proposition "committing genocide is wrong" can't be true or false. Instead, if one is to say "committing genocide is wrong" one would express disapproval towards genocide or his emotions. For that reason when one says "genocide is wrong" it is like saying: "Boo! Genocide!" (or something like that). Thus, if moral propositions are really like this, then it is clear why they can't be true or false, for emotions are not descriptive in nature and can't be true or false. Still, it is important not to confuse non-cognitivism as the metaethical theory about our mental states. For example, according to non-cognitivism if one says "torturing babies is wrong" one doesn't mean "I get angry or sad because of torturing babies". If one does this then he is cognitivist because cognitivism describes the mental states as it would be in this proposition. However, what is the case is not the description of something, but it is the *expression* of emotion or disapproval. Non-cognitivist can adopt different views in defending that moral propositions don't have truth value. One may argue that saying "torturing babies is wrong" entails a prescription and it can be reduced to the imperative statements. In this case, this proposition would simply mean "don't torture the babies".³⁵ There are other versions of non-cognitivism

³⁵ Rudolf Carnap. *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1937), 23-24.

but I will not go into the details, because all of them share the claim that moral propositions are not *truth-apt*.

After this short analysis of metaethical theories, I will explain what I mean by morality and to which metaethical theory my proposition belongs.

2.6. Meaning of Morality

From the second premise of my argument I stated in the introduction (objective morality exists), it is clear that I am a moral realist - I am defending a strong version of moral realism - and I am also a cognitivist. When I say objective morality exists, I am asserting the ontological sense of morality and moral properties about which humans could be mistaken or correct in their beliefs, depending on whether their beliefs correspond to the reality or not. However, before I go to the argumentation for the objective morality, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by morality. This section is intended for those purposes; to define morality, to mention its features and elaborate on them, to explain why I think that morality possesses those features. In order to give a somewhat proper definition of morality which will be understood, it is necessary to point out its features first, therefore I will begin with this task below, although it is not an easy task to accomplish. Despite the fact that almost all humans agree that morality is very important and essential in human life, including even those who reject the existence of it, like the error theory defenders and even moral skeptics, there is still much disagreement in the area of what actually is and what constitutes morality. For example, defenders of error theory and moral skeptics can justify moral practice not through its truthfulness but through its usefulness. This is not a strange conclusion, because it seems very intuitive that morality is useful and the societies which follow some moral codes are more likely to survive than those which don't. Sissela Bok offers one mind experiment to explain why living in a truthful society is important and more advantageous than living in one that isn't (although she is not a defender of error theory or moral skeptic). The experiment goes roughly like this: If we imagine a society where truthfulness was not a practice, would we ever be capable of believing what someone tells us or what we see on a television or read in a newspapers? The obvious answer is no and additional problem would be how is it possible to have a functional society, because if we lived in a society

which is not commonly truthful, then we would have a very rough time of learning anything about the reality of a world and according to Bok, it would not be possible for the social institutions to function: “Rather, trust in some degree of veracity functions as a foundation of relations among human beings; when this trust shatters or wears away, institutions collapse”.³⁶ I do recognize that morality is often advantageous and has benefits. However, I don’t think it can be reduced to the desirable outcome or benefit, or that it is an essential feature of morality. Instead, I think the essential features of morality are: Objectiveness, universality and normativity.

By morality being objective, I mean that morality is very similar to the facts which are independent from human desires and beliefs and just like facts, humans can be wrong about what they believe about those facts. To illustrate what I mean by morality being independent from human desires let’s consider a following example: I am doing my master degree in philosophy (at the moment of writing) and I really want to pass all the exams, defend my thesis successfully and graduate with the GPA 4.0/4.0. However, there were some exams where I got A- and therefore I can’t possibly graduate with GPA 4.0/4.0. But since I am a research assistant, I might have the access to the grading system and I can possibly change the grades. In this scenario although I have the ability to manipulate the grades and strong desire to have all A’s in my transcript, I will not think it is morally permissible for me to do so. The way we experience morality is that it is unresponsive and insensitive to our aspirations and desires, and it can’t be altered by them. In a scenario where we are not motivated by moral judgment³⁷ and suppose that I am caught by my mentor in changing the grades, he would not accept the explanation

³⁶ Sissela Bok. *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*. (Vintage Books, 1978), 31.

³⁷ I am externalist about motivation in a sense that I believe that person can be *amoralist* or he can be normal psychologically and make a genuine moral judgment but still fail to be motivated by that judgment. However, in the example I am giving, I am talking about the moral action and action should not be equated with motivation because they are different. For example, the person may be motivated to go to gym and lose some weight but still fail to actually go and do it. The externalism I am arguing for is not about action but about motivation. The opposing view is internalism about motivation and it holds that *amoralist* is not logically possible and that link between the reasons for action and moral judgment is necessary while in the case of externalism it is deemed as contingent. This is just a rough explanation as my thesis is not concerned with this topic. For more details about internalism and externalism about motivation see: Smith, Michael (1994): “*The Moral Problem*”, Zangwill, Nick (2003): “*Externalist Moral Motivation*”, Shafer - Landau (2003): “*Moral Realism: a Defence*”, Miller, Alexander (1996): “*An Objection to Smith’s Argument from Externalism*”, Sadler, Brook (2003): “*The Possibility of Amoralism: A Defense against Internalism*”.

that I really need to have a GPA 4.0/4.0 for my future career, because my desires do not affect and change the immorality of my act. When it comes to having a possibility of wrong and correct beliefs about morality, I mean that person can have beliefs that don't describe the moral reality accurately. For example if person believed that killing people for apostasy is morally required and permissible, then he would be wrong about it. Also, sometimes it can be the case that we mistake things that are good as necessarily normative moral judgments or where we mistake a good action for our moral duty, where we believe that we ought to perform certain action. For example, I may be in a possibility to give my kidney to a person that suffers from acute kidney failure and save her from the dialysis for the rest of her life. This is certainly a good thing to do but I would be mistaken if I believed that I ought to give my kidney and if I don't, I will be morally accountable. As it is seen from the examples, we can be mistaken about morality in different ways and that is why a good account of morality needs to explain how morality can be independent from our desires and how can people be mistaken in what they believe about it. With regards to the universality, I think that some basic moral truths and moral duties are experienced by normal humans³⁸ as universally applicable to all people regardless of their religion, culture, nation or geography. I do recognize that there are various differences in moral practices of diverse nations and cultures. For example, some individual from some imaginary tribe might show his care and respect towards his parents by carrying them to the mountain top on his back when they are very old and unable to walk, then throwing them from the mountain to their death. The explanation would be that he showed his respect by *easing* their suffering and sending them to the world of gods. However, most of us today in *civilized* areas show our respect differently: we don't kill our parents by throwing them from the high places when they are old, instead we try to look after them the way they looked after us when we were babies and unable to survive without them; we try to spend more time with them during holidays, buy them gifts on their birthdays etc. However, in this example both we and the imaginary tribesmen would agree that showing respect to your parents is a good thing and we ought to do it. Therefore, we would agree on the universal that showing

³⁸ By normal humans, I mean the humans who are psychologically normal and don't suffer from some psychological disorder such as psychopathy.

respect to parents is ought to be done but the way we do it, meaning the particular way of how we show this respect may differ with regards to our culture and the time we live in. This example might be too hypothetical and I am aware that there are real-life examples of differences in moral conduct throughout different cultures, where in some cases they contradict each other. I don't mean to deny these differences but still, I think that there are at least some basic moral truths that are understood as universal by all the people. Some basic moral truths are; killing innocent people is wrong, respecting parents is good, stealing is bad, helping your neighbors is good, telling truth is good, humans ought not to torture and rape civilians during war, etc. Therefore, even though I acknowledge the possibility that morality can sometimes be unique and specially related to some cultures or even individuals in some special cases, I still think that morality is universal in at least two senses: The first sense is that no human being is exempt from the morality as there is no one who is allowed to be overlooked when committing some immoral acts. No matter what status a person possesses, he is still accountable for his acts. The second sense of how morality is universal is that some moral propositions and judgments are incorporating all of humanity, in virtue of being human or simply in virtue of having life.³⁹ Consider the example of Radovan Karadžić, a former representative of Serbs in Bosnia who is convicted war criminal for genocide and serves a life sentence now. Again, consider being a Norway citizen during his reign and being aware of Karadžić's plans to exterminate Bosniaks and take their territory. Although you are a Norway citizen and you don't even know anyone from Bosnia, assuming that you know all the facts about the issue, you ought to try to stop the genocide or at least to condemn it and not support it and in this way, morality extends towards all humans. Therefore, a proper and strong account of morality needs to capture and explain the feature of universality as well.

The third feature of morality, the normativity, is the one that puzzles all thinkers and it has even led some philosophers to reject the objective existence of morality. Shortly, the normativity is inherent "oughtness" in our acts, which gives us overriding reasons to act in a certain way or to refrain from certain action. So, this feature means that it is not only the case that the certain act is understood as good or bad, but it involves the motivation

³⁹ This may include some non-human species as well.

to do or refrain from doing that specific action, for which we can be held responsible and deemed blameworthy or praiseworthy. For example, if condemning the genocide is right then we ought to condemn genocide or if stealing neighbor's possessions is wrong then we ought not to steal neighbor's possessions. Therefore, morality is not limited only to the recognition of good and bad, but it has this normative "oughtness" which requires action. However, this normativity should not be reduced to action only, because it is also possible to defend that humans ought to develop and achieve certain character traits such as humility, truthfulness or other virtues. So, it may be the case not only that we ought to do good, but also that we ought to become certain kind of person, which does not involve other people necessarily. This is the main reason why I think "oughtness" in morality is not exclusively related to actions although the main area of it *is* in actions. The inherent "oughtness" I am talking about clearly belongs to the deontic concepts which comprise of judgments that are evaluative. These judgments are expressed in the sense of obligation, permission or prohibition.⁴⁰ If certain act is categorized as an obligation, let's say you are obliged to pay the taxes to your country, then this act is the one you can't refrain from doing or in another words it is forbidden not to do it (this is legal obligation which is not the same as moral obligation - see the distinction in the section below). If certain act is characterized as forbidden, like you are forbidden to kill innocent humans, then it is your obligation not to kill innocent humans. Lastly, if an act is permissible, it means you are free to perform it or not, because you are neither obliged nor forbidden to do it, like giving your old clothes to the charity.⁴¹

Here it is important to make a distinction between different types of "oughtness", because the obligations, permissions and prohibitions are used also in the fields external to morality like politics, social institutions, agreements and others. Consider the example I gave above, that you ought to pay your taxes. Although you ought to pay the taxes and you can be held responsible and even punished if you don't, this is mainly legal "oughtness" which can't be reduced to the moral "oughtness". In many cases the

⁴⁰ Miroslav Vacura. *Towards New Ways of Modeling Deontic Concepts in Ontologies*. (University of Economics, Prague, Czech Republic, 2019). Corpus ID: 209413440.

⁴¹ Another and maybe simpler way to understand these concepts is by the use of words *must*, *must not*, and *may*. Therefore, the obligatory action is the one that *must* be performed, permissible action is the one that *may* be performed and prohibited action is the one that *must not* be performed.

obligations overlap and correspond to each other, like in the example of paying taxes and telling the truth. Both of these actions are blameworthy and praiseworthy and we are responsible for them, and this is why we can easily mistake them as the same. However, it is not always the case that they are similar in this way, because there might be the cases where moral and legal “oughtness” contradict. Consider your country authorizing the law that all citizens must execute everybody who doesn’t possess that specific country’s passport or ID. In this case the morality is in clear conflict with legal law. The difference is that moral “oughtness” is superior in a sense that it provides not only a good reasons to act in a certain way, but the overriding reasons which are prevailing in case of conflict. This means that morality has certain kind of authority which can’t be challenged by the lesser authorities. Although there is a distinction, it is still helpful to use analogies between other types of “oughtness” with morality for easier understanding, because in many cases they concur, and I think that morality does incorporate and include certain kind of social interaction between at least two persons.

Morality possess the “oughtness” which gives the individual compelling reasons for acting in a certain ways which are, as I mentioned above, superior to others and overriding. What is meant here by overriding is not that morality offers only good or beneficial reasons to act and therefore it becomes action-motivating. If this was the case then morality could be grounded in a simple utilitarian way in the sense of maximizing the good consequences. However, I think this way of grounding morality is not sufficient, because it is not always the case that maximizing good consequence is good and ought to be done. The cliché counter-example is sacrificing one innocent person to save the whole community. There are responses to such counter-examples but they are not the only problem for grounding “oughtness” in good consequences. The main problem would be to explain this overriding character of morality, because there is a big difference between good reasons for acting and overriding reasons for acting. Consider the following example: Imagine that I do my thesis so well that it becomes recognized as the best work in ethics in 21st century (which I highly doubt it will), and I get selected as the winner for the Nobel Prize. I can get \$1 million and all I need to do is to accept the award and maybe give a speech during award ceremony. This is certainly a good reason for me to accept the award and make some money. However, consider the scenario

where I deny this award and I refuse to come and give a speech. As a result of this, I will certainly lose the money which was within my grasp. Now, people may consider me weird or even foolish, but still, they can't hold me morally responsible for not accepting the award. This is the case because we often have good reasons for action, but these reasons are not overriding in a sense that we are morally blameworthy or praiseworthy. We may say from the thought experiment above that I ought to accept the Nobel Prize, however this *ought to* would not be the moral "oughtness". The easiest way to understand the differentiation is to remember that we may choose not to act for the reasons which are non-moral even if they are good and powerful reasons, and sometimes we may contradict what we are held responsible for, if it is not in line with morality, like in case of a country ordering murder. The objectivity, universality and normativity are the main features of morality which include other lesser features which can be inferred from the main ones. From the feature of normativity we can understand that certain actions carry with it the binary value; for some actions we are morally responsible and for some we are not. However, this does not mean that all moral actions are binary. For example, what Kant calls "imperfect duties", which are volitional engagements bounded with practical limitations which are set by inclination and circumstances,⁴² do not have binary value. The example of imperfect duty might be that we ought to give a consolation to the family, mourning the death of their relatives, but it doesn't mean we must give the consolation to every mourning family we come across. However, the binary character of moral acts is the most obvious in "perfect duties": you must not kill the innocents, you must not steal, etc. In cases of perfect duties humans don't regard the consequences of an action, because when a person understands that he ought to do something, then the further speculation on whether the act should be done or not is ruled out. This is because of the nature of overriding reasons in morality that are superior to and rule out all other reasons for certain action. Furthermore, another feature that follows is that humans are responsible for moral actions and in this sense morality is very similar to the legal law, where person is held accountable and sometimes required for actions and if a person fails to accomplish them, he can be punished, although,

⁴² Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Ed. M. Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 452 - 454.

morality is not the identical to legal law as I have clarified above. Additionally, following the main features we see that morality is in one sense universal which extends to all human beings, although there are some exceptions like in the cases where duty is born from special relationship between at least two parties. In cases of promises, consent into interference, mutuality of restrictions and family ties, special duties and rights are born, where the rights and duties are conferred only to the persons involved in relationship and not to everybody.⁴³ One example of this exception can be found in special relationship between me and my mentor who agreed to read and control my thesis. In this case I have the right over my mentor, or in another words my mentor has the duty to accomplish this task, because he entered in this agreement voluntarily and thus the special duty and right was obtained by both of us. Therefore, my mentor has a duty to control only my thesis because of this agreement, but not the duty which extends to controlling the thesis of every other student. Now, the difficulty of my task in the second premise is apparent. If we consider the main features that morality possesses, it becomes very hard to prove the existence of such a thing. It is clearly not very obvious that objective, universal and normative things really exist especially the last feature is the most puzzling one. It is often taken as a futile effort when it comes to the defense of the realism of any such similar matter and regarding this Crispin Wright says:

If there ever was a consensus of understanding about "realism": as a philosophical term of art. it has undoubtedly been fragmented by the pressures exerted by the various debates - so much so that a philosopher who asserts that she is a realist about theoretical science, for example, or ethics, has probably, for most philosophical audiences, accomplished little more than to clear her throat.⁴⁴

I recognize all these difficulties and I am aware that having an undeniable proof for the existence of objective morality is not feasible. However, I think that our moral experiences have very important role for arguing for moral realism, although they are definitely not proof for it, they can still be used to formulate arguments which will show that belief in such a thing is not unreasonable and even to demonstrate that a position of

⁴³ H. L. A. Hart (. "Are There Any Natural Rights". In *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 2. (Cornell University, 1995), 183 - 188.

⁴⁴ Crispin Wright. *Truth and Objectivity*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1.

a moral realist is more rational than the alternatives. I think there are such arguments but before I go to them, I want to take a look at some of the most important arguments against objective morality and moral realism and analyze them as well as evaluate their success.

2.7. Arguments against Moral Realism

2.7.1. Error Theory

Defenders of error theory are cognitivists because they think that moral propositions have truth values. In this regard they disagree with non-cognitivists because, according to error theorists non-cognitivism is not capable to explain the special authoritative nature of morality and the explanation with an appeal to the emotions or other types of non-cognitive mental states can't really capture the overriding reasons in morality.⁴⁵ However, although error theorists are in agreement with moral realists about the *truth-aptness* of morality, they ultimately reject the existence of objective morality or moral properties. In another words, all moral propositions are false. This however doesn't mean that we can't make a proposition which consists of moral concepts and terms, which can be true.⁴⁶ The best known defender of error theory is J. L. Mackie and in this analysis I will be referring to his work "Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong".⁴⁷

Before Mackie offers any argument against objective morality he gives his account of the nature of morality or the meaning of it. In this regard my approach is very similar to Mackie's and it is understandable why it is so. The reason is obvious; if one wants to defend some idea or argue against it, he first needs to know what exactly he is arguing for or against. For Mackie the morality is composed of three elements or features: Firstly, morality is independent from what people believe. Secondly, it is epistemologically reachable or accessible in a sense that it is necessarily knowable by humans. Thirdly, morality provides overriding reasons for acting morally. The third feature is binding nature of morality which I have characterized as inherent "oughtness",

⁴⁵ Richard Joyce. "Error-Theory". In *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. H. LaFollette. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

⁴⁶ For example, according to error theorists the proposition "all moral judgments which claim that killing is wrong are false" would be a true proposition.

⁴⁷ John L. Mackie. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. (New York: Penguin, 1977).

while Mackie calls it *to - be - pursuedness*: “An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desire this end, but just because the end has *to - be - pursuedness* somehow built into it.”⁴⁸ After this account, Mackie forms two main arguments against objective morality, the first is from the queerness of moral values and the second is from the inability of moral knowledge.

By queerness of morality Mackie means that moral values would be very strange entities or qualities, which are completely or *utterly* distinct from anything that exists in the universe.⁴⁹ It is very important to differentiate strangeness from being utterly different here, because Mackie’s argument does not really rest on strangeness of morality. If it did, then his argument wouldn’t be very persuasive and powerful. Just because something is strange does not mean that it doesn’t exist. Strangeness of morality only strengthens his crucial point which is the argument from queerness of moral values or of morality being utterly different. This doesn’t mean being simply rare or unique because again, many things are like this. For example, we may consider a person unique but still this person would have many similarities with other persons: DNA, brain, metabolism, body, etc. However, if we take a look at the features of morality; independence, accessibility, *to - be - pursuedness*, we don’t really find anything similar to it in the universe, which contains all these features together. The key feature which creates the problem here is the normative nature of morality. We are certainly capable of thinking about some facts which are independent from what humans believe like that water is H₂O or that grass is green. Also, we can think that these facts are accessible and we are capable of knowing them. However, what kind of fact would have normative nature which gives us powerful and overriding reasons to act? According to Mackie, there are none, because we are either motivated by certain things because of our desires, like being motivated to go to gym to be healthy or having a good meal when we are hungry, and therefore they are not independent from our desires. Or, they are independent from us, like grass being green or water being H₂O, but they are not motivating and they don’t give us reasons to act like morality does. For this reason, Mackie argues that we

⁴⁸ *ibid*, 40.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 38.

have good ground for rejecting the objective morality because there is no such thing in nature which is motivating but at the same time independent from us.

The second argument against objective morality, the inability of moral knowledge, is related to the first one and it is actually the implication of the argument from queerness. Mackie argues that one necessary feature of morality is accessibility but considering the queerness of morality, we would not be capable of obtaining the moral knowledge in the way we obtain it about everything else in the universe. The only way to do it would be to have a special kind of moral faculty which enables us to obtain moral knowledge. However, Mackie rules out this possibility as insufficient and travesty.⁵⁰ Therefore, he argues that objective morality does not exist and even if it did, we could not possibly know it.

There are several problems with error theory in general and with Mackie's approach in particular. The first problem that is apparent is with the methodology of arguing against objective morality. Recall the way Mackie spoke about the nature of morality. He gave a significant importance of how the people experience morality and speak about it. However, Mackie didn't spend a lot of time to argue why morality is necessarily the way he thinks it is. Therefore, Mackie and other error theorists usually start with the human experience and talk. But this exactly is the problematic point in the methodology, because people also experience and speak about morality as if it is real. For example, we usually do believe that torturing babies is wrong and that crucifying criminals ought not to be done for the same reason. However, Mackie ignores human experience about moral realism here, but he grants it and starts with it in the case of explaining the nature of morality. So the first problem that needs to be solved is to decide on different methodology or to give a sound argument for why we should grant human experience about the nature of morality but ignore it when it comes to the moral realism.

Another problem with the Mackie's conclusion against objective morality is his presupposition of metaphysical naturalism. Therefore, according to Mackie only natural properties and entities exist and everything that is non-natural is ruled out of the possibility. This is one of the main reasons why Mackie rejects the existence of moral

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 39.

properties, because they would also have to be natural entities. But since we don't really find something like independent, accessible and normative in nature, we have a good ground to reject moral realism because moral properties would be too queer. There are two main problems here: The first one is ruling out the possibility that morality and moral properties are non-natural entities. In Mackie's case, he would have to defend metaphysical naturalism in order for his argument to be stronger. However, he only presupposes it without serious defense. The second problem is that even if Mackie was successful in his defense of metaphysical naturalism, I don't think it would rule out the possibility of moral properties being natural entities. There are naturalist accounts of morality which try to defend the existence of moral properties in a way to represent them as natural entities (I will give two such accounts in the next chapter). Furthermore, when it comes to moral knowledge, Mackie recognizes that it would be possible if we had some kind of moral faculty, but he simply rules this possibility out as an intellectual travesty without really explaining why. I don't see why it is so clear that appealing to moral faculty is a ridiculous idea, especially if we assume the truth of theistic worldview, then possessing something like a moral faculty would be expected because a good God would want us to become moral persons and thus, he would provide us with the ability to discern good from bad and right from wrong. Additionally, the existence of queer moral properties would not be strange, and they could be explained in a number of ways, which would not raise the problems like in naturalistic worldview.

An interesting objection to error theory has been raised by John McDowell. Recall that for Mackie one of the reasons for queerness of morality is that if moral values are real, they need to be independent from humans. McDowell argues against this proposition and claims that it is not necessary for moral values to be independent from humans in order to be real; they could be depended upon human minds but still be real.⁵¹ One example McDowell provides are contingent properties such as colors. In case of colors, we think they are real, but it would be farfetched to claim that they are independent from human minds. The reason for this is that we would really have a hard time defending the reality of colors without any reference to human perception of them. This doesn't mean that the grass would not be green if humans didn't exist, but it means that if humans do

⁵¹ John McDowell. *Mind, Value, and Reality*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

exist then they would judge that grass is indeed green. Therefore, colors seem to be mind-dependent because we have to refer to human mind but still, this doesn't affect their reality.

In conclusion, the error theory has some serious problems and challenges that need to be answered; the methodology needs to be changed or additional arguments need to be provided for granting the human experience in case of the nature of morality but ignoring it in case of moral realism. The defense of metaphysical naturalism is necessary because the whole argument rests on the presupposition of it; the cases where some things like colors seem to be mind-dependent but real need to be addressed, and it needs to be explained why morality can't be in this category. Unless this is done, the error theory will not be sound.

2.7.2. Expressivism

Expressivism is ultimately a non-cognitivist account of morality which encompasses various different theories about morality which can be described as moral anti-realist theories. In another words, the common point of all expressivist theories is that moral properties don't exist in a sense that moral judgments and propositions can't be truth-apt and express objective facts about the reality. The justifications for such claims are different in the way expressivist theory explains what exactly moral proposition is or what person expresses when he states a moral proposition. For example, if Sophie claims that "talking to people with respect regardless of their religious beliefs is good", then she is not expressing the state of belief and therefore her statement is not true or false because she is not describing something real. What she does express can be different states such as emotions, prescriptions of how people ought to act and behave, attitudes of approval or disapproval towards certain action, committed plans, etc. In case Alexander contradicts Sophie and claims that "talking to people with respect regardless of their religious beliefs is not always good", then this disagreement can be reduced to the approval or disapproval of talking with respect to people regardless of their beliefs, where Sophie would be *for* it and Alexander would be *not*.⁵² When considering the

⁵² Allan Gibbard. "The Reasons of a Living Being". In *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 62, (2002), 50.

soundness of the expressivism, I will be focusing only on A. J. Ayer's version of non-cognitivism, because I think all of them share the same problems of authority of moral statements and moral disagreements. However, there is one more sophisticated form of expressivism which combines many subjective mental states and finds a way around the usual objections. This metaethical theory is quasi-realism and I will dedicate a separate section for it. In this section, I will analyze emotivism developed by A. J. Ayer and discuss its soundness with the problems it has which are shared by other expressivist theories as well.

Ayer can be considered as the best known representative of the emotivism, the non-cognitivist theory which holds that moral propositions are the expressions of emotions. There are mainly two reasons why Ayer rejects cognitivism: if we are cognitivists we must either be naturalists or non-naturalists, but both options fail.⁵³ To understand this claim, it is very important to be aware of the principle of verification defended in his "Language, Truth and Logic". This principle is the central assumption of the logical positivism, which Ayer also argued for. The principle of verification states that the proposition is meaningful only and only if it is verifiable at least in principle or if it is analytically true. For example the proposition "Triangle is an object with three angles" is analytically true proposition because it is true by definition, and we know the meaning of what we are saying and therefore propositions like this are meaningful even if we can't empirically verify them. However, when it comes to the propositions that are not *a priori* and analytical, in order to be meaningful they have to be at least verifiable in principle. For example, if I say "There is life on Mars but we can't see it yet with our current technology" is a meaningful proposition, because it can be verified in principle. However, if I say "God is the greatest conceivable being" or "truth-makers exist", these are meaningless statements because they can't be verified in principle. So it is not the case that these statements are false, but they are actually nonsense and therefore are neither true nor false. Because of this reason Ayer rejects all theological and metaphysical statements as nonsensical.⁵⁴ Therefore, the proposition "God is the greatest conceivable being" is similar to the statement "I jump banana for my wedding blood"

⁵³ Alfred J. Ayer. *Language, Truth and Logic*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 139.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, 153.

with regards to the meaning. In another words, I don't actually say anything sensible. Therefore, if we say that *wrongness of killing babies* is the non-natural moral property, then we are talking nonsense because this statement is not verifiable. But what about if we say that *wrongness of killing babies* is the natural property? Would that solve the problem? Ayer thinks it would not and to prove his point he uses the "open question argument". Ayer relies on language and points out that the definition of the good and bad can always be questioned without logical contradiction. However, the natural things are not this way because if we know all the facts about some natural entity like chair or table and we define it, we are convinced with definition and it doesn't leave the open questions about it. However, moral propositions are not like this because we can always question the definition of good as it is not analytically true and nobody can give undeniable definition. Therefore, cognitivism is false whichever way it takes: natural or non-natural.

Now, granting the truth of the verification principle one would expect that moral propositions should also be meaningless because saying "helping poor is good" is not analytically true nor is it verifiable in principle. However, Ayer doesn't claim this, because if moral propositions are expressions of emotions, then we can make sense of them even if they don't pass the verification principle. In fact if emotivism is true, then they don't need to pass the verification principle, because moral propositions themselves would not be true or false nor would they intend to describe the reality. The problem of the verification is only applicable when one holds cognitivism as true. According to Ayer when we make a moral proposition we are talking differently from when we speak about some factual things, in a sense that we are not stating anything factual nor we are adding or describing something new to reality. In non-moral propositions it seems that we are describing the reality. For example when I say "my hair is brown" or "this table is clean", I am giving a description of something real in the way that those things, my hair and this table, have certain properties or features. However, when it comes to the moral propositions, Ayer thinks this doesn't work the same because moral proposition doesn't add anything new to the facts. Therefore, when if I claim "you are right for helping the poor", I am stating only factual thing which is "you helped the poor" while

the moral feature right is not showing a fact about the world.⁵⁵ What it indicates is non-cognitive state which is more specifically an emotion.⁵⁶ Therefore, when I state “you are right for helping the poor” I am not describing anything but rather I am expressing an emotion which is like saying “yay” when I like something.

Although, at first glance this theory seems weird, it does have certain attractiveness and advantages when compared to cognitivist theories. The first advantage is apparent when applying *Occam's razor* in a sense that it has a simpler ontology than cognitivist theories. This is the case because emotivism doesn't have the burden of explaining several things; what are moral properties, whether they are natural or non-natural, what is their origin and how they become apparent to humans or in what way they are knowable to us. In contrast the cognitivist theories have to provide the explanation and the answers to this type of questions and thus, they have more complex ontologies than the defenders of emotivism. The second and probably most important advantage according to the defenders of emotivism is that it can explain why our moral judgments are motivating. If I am angry at my friend for being rough while playing with cats, I will be motivated to stop him and if it makes me happy to help the poor I will be motivated to actually help the poor. Defenders of emotivism claim that beliefs are descriptions and therefore they can't be action-motivating, which is one of the fundamental characteristics of morality. For example, I may believe that helping poor is good and being rough with animals is bad thing to do but still fail to be motivated by these beliefs. Only if I have certain emotions with regards to these actions I will be motivated and this is what supposedly can't be captured by cognitivist theories. I am willing to grant the first advantage of emotivism with regards to the simplicity of the theory but not willing to grant the second one because I think that some beliefs indeed can be motivating. For example if we grant the truth of theism and we believe that God has issued a command to help the poor this would be motivating, but I will touch upon this issue in the chapter III. Now, I will discuss some problems particularly for emotivism and Ayer's version of it and then for all non-cognitivist theories.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 142.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 142.

The first and the most obvious problem is the verification principle employed by Ayer to rule out metaphysical and other non-verifiable statements as meaningless. The problem with the verification principle is that it is self-defeating. Recall that according to this principle the statement is meaningful if and only if it is analytically true or if it is verifiable in principle. However, this is proposition itself namely; “statement is meaningful only and only if it is analytically true or verifiable in principle” and thus it needs to satisfy this condition as well. In another words it needs to be analytically true or verifiable in principle. However, it is very clear that this statement is not verifiable and it is not really clear-cut or apparent that it is an analytical proposition. The proposition undermines itself as meaningless and even if we would be able to show that it has a meaning in spite of what principle says, it would still be a false proposition because there would be at least one statement that is not analytically true nor verifiable in principle but still meaningful. Another issue with verification principle is if we grant its truth, than maintaining the meaningfulness of moral propositions seems very strange. Ayer thinks that this issue may be resolved if we assume that moral statements are expressions of emotions and these emotions might be verified in some sense. However, this is very problematic and to my mind it is implausible because emotions are not consistent in corresponding to the moral propositions. The situations would not be better if we try to switch verification of moral emotions with our behavior for the exact same reason that there are no detectable *right, wrong, good, bad* or other moral terms that correspond with certain behavior. It seems very hard for the defender of emotivism to argue for meaningfulness of moral proposition with the affirmation of the verification principle.

Second issue related specifically to Ayer’s approach is his usage of the open question argument to rule out the possibility of having true beliefs about moral properties because *good* can’t be defined definitely without the possibility to question that definition and therefore leaving the open question. This argument was originally developed by G. E. Moore to show that any attempt to reduce goodness to something else would be a fallacy because to define something is to refer to its properties, but since every definition of good leaves an open question, it is impossible to define it and therefore good can’t be

reduced to something else.⁵⁷ The problem with the open question argument is that it begs the question because it is conceivable that one discovered the true definition of good but when he tells it to others, they are able to question it because they did not completely understand the definition. In this scenario open question argument doesn't demonstrate that it is impossible to define good, it only proclaims it without proof. There are other problems that rule out the open question argument. Including the issue of begging the question Andrew Fisher mentions two additional problems which are sufficient for rejecting the open question argument: It "relies on incorrect notion of analysis and depends on the false claim that all true definitions are true in virtue of meaning of the terms involved".⁵⁸ Therefore, Ayer can't employ the open question argument to rule out the cognitivism.

The next problem is shared by almost all expressivist accounts of morality except quasi-realism and it has been a common objection against non-cognitivist theories. The problem in question is that expressivist accounts don't allow the genuine moral disagreement and thus they reject the moral truth. The same goes for emotivism as Ayer states that moral propositions "are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood."⁵⁹ This is the entailment of emotivism because it would be nonsense to ask whether *disgust* is true or false, because the feeling of *disgust* is not meant to describe the reality. Another direct implication of this approach is that the genuine moral disagreement is not possible because there is nothing to disagree about because our moral statements are not descriptions of something real. Therefore, when I say "stealing is wrong" I am not making a claim about anything and if I think that abortion is wrong while Kelly claims it is not, we are not disagreeing about some fact but it is the case that only our emotions are being conflicted. The justification for such counterintuitive claim Ayer finds in arguing that when such disagreement takes place, we are not actually disagreeing about moral facts, rather we can always trace moral disagreements to some other *real* facts. For example, if I claim that revolt against the unjust state is right thing to do while my father thinks it is not, our disagreement

⁵⁷ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 58.

⁵⁸ Andrew Fisher. *Metaethics: An Introduction*. (Acumen Publishing Ltd, 2011), 21.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 144.

could be traced to the fact that I think revolt would make my country prosper and increase the quality of life, while my father thinks the opposite. Hence, all supposed moral disagreement is actually disagreement about something else and not morality. However, this is very problematic claim because it is very hard to reduce all moral disagreements to disagreements about something else. There are certainly situations where a person who makes the moral proposition doesn't have other reasons than the moral ones involved in his claim. Consider the example where person claims that it is morally wrong to kill one innocent person in order to save the whole village. It is clearly possible, and I would say expected, that the person claims this only because of moral reasons and not something else involved. When we are uttering moral statements we experience this talk as if we are referring to something real in the same way when we are saying "the wall is white" or "the cup is on the table". It seems as if our statement is intended to describe something real and if emotivism is true, then we are utterly wrong in our experience of moral talk. However, I don't see a good explanation for such claim in emotivism or in any other expressivist account. Furthermore, as Peter Geach argued, we can use moral propositions in logically valid arguments which should not be possible if they didn't really have objective truth values.⁶⁰ Therefore, moral disagreement requires further explanation, otherwise the claim that there is no genuine moral disagreement would be begging the question. The attempt to answer this objection was developed by quasi-realism which will be discussed.

Another problem related to all expressivist accounts that I will mention is the problem of authority which morality has as one of its features. Recall that morality is normative and it possesses the overriding reasons for action which are superior to all other reasons. If legal law contradicts the morality, then the morality is superior and the reasons for acting morally in spite of what legal system says are greater than legal ones. However, this feature can't be explained nor captured by any of the expressivist accounts. Let's say that we grant the claim that only expressivism can explain the link between motivation and moral action, the question that is being produced here is; even if our moral judgments are motivational why is it a case that morality and moral propositions have the authority and reasons for action superior to all other reasons? In another words

⁶⁰ Peter Geach. "Assertions". In *Philosophical Review* 74, (1965), 449-463.

why should one care what I am claiming about stealing or helping the poor, if my proposition is not true or false? Consider that emotivism is true and there is no moral truth or reality and my moral propositions are expressions of emotions. Now consider my imaginary friend Jasmin who wants to steal the money from the market cash desk in the market. I know his intentions and on the way to the market I tell him “it is wrong to steal money”. Granting emotivism, I am not stating something that is related to truth or reality, it is only the expression of my disapproval towards stealing. If this is the case, than why should Jasmin care about what I say? If my statement is only the emotion, then how could this emotion possibly generate an authority or “oughtness” that morality is supposed to have? It seems that the “oughtness” can’t be generated by simple emotion or any other non-cognitive state which is not capable of nor intended for describing the reality. The “oughtness” in stealing or any other act related to morality can’t be grounded in emotions or other non-cognitive states even if we attempt to ground it in the emotions, prescriptions or attitudes of community. If it was the case, then it would be impossible to morally consider or criticize the community in question. Therefore, expressivism is unable to account for “oughtness” and the authority of moral judgments.

The last problem for non-cognitivist theories which was considered as the nail in the coffin for expressivism is Frege-Geach problem and it was slightly mentioned in one of the previous sections that we can use moral propositions in valid arguments. However, this problem is much deeper and creates the serious confusion for the defenders of non-cognitivism. In the following discussion I will be relying on Mark Schroeder’s review of this problem.⁶¹ Peter Geach developed this challenge by showing that non-cognitivism entails that the meaning of moral proposition is not stable, and it changes if it is used in asserted and unasserted contexts in the argument. However, meaning ought not to change with regards to assertion and if this is wrong, then we are fundamentally mistaken what we believe when we are making propositions. This is not the case when it comes to the non-cognitivism because according to it, if we make moral assertion, then we are expressing non-cognitive state but if it is not an assertion, then it is not a non-cognitive state. This means when I say “stealing is wrong” I am expressing non-cognitive state, because this is an assertion, but if I say “if stealing is wrong, then Jasmin

⁶¹ Mark Schroeder. “What is the Frege-Geach Problem?”. In *Philosophy Compass* 3(4), (2008), 703-720.

is wrong for stealing money” I am not expressing non-cognitive state because this is not an assertion. This means that meaning of the moral terms changes according to the context and situation is the same when it comes to the questions or disjunctions. However, this is very strange and it becomes much more apparent when we use moral terms in the arguments which have asserted and unasserted propositions together. Consider the following argument: “If stealing is wrong, then Jasmin is wrong for stealing money. Stealing is wrong. Therefore, Jasmin is wrong for stealing money.” If non-cognitivist theories are right, then “stealing is wrong” in the first and the second proposition has a different meaning because in the first proposition it is not asserted, while in the second it is. Therefore, non-cognitivist is committed to defend that this argument is not valid although it clearly seems as it is. Usually, the deductive arguments like *modus ponens* I stated above are considered to be indifferent to the topic where only the valid form is important. However, it seems that for non-cognitivism this is not the case, because the meaning of the moral terms is not fixed and therefore the argument will not be considered as valid. This means that whenever we have moral terms in the unasserted propositions of the argument, we are committing *equivocation fallacy*, where we combine different meanings for the same terms. Then the argument with moral terms would be the same as the following argument: “Love is an emotion. God is love. If love is an emotion, then God is an emotion. Therefore, God is an emotion.” Here we mixed the meaning of love and thus committed the *equivocation fallacy*. However, this doesn’t seem to be the case with the arguments that involve moral terms and based on this we can rule out standard non-cognitivist theories.

In conclusion, expressivist theories are not good accounts of morality because they can’t explain the normative nature of morality, they have to rule out the possibility of genuine moral disagreement and they are unable to account for Frege-Geach problem. More specifically, Ayer’s emotivism is lacking because it rests on self-defeating verification principle and the open question argument which is intended to rule out cognitivism. This being said, there is one more complex and sophisticated account of expressivism which attempts to answer these charges and that is quasi-realism.

2.7.3. Quasi-realism

With the serious objections and questions that regular non-cognitivist theories have faced, the answer and explanation to all of them was extremely needed. The supposed answer was to be found in another non-cognitivist position called quasi-realism which was developed by Simon Blackburn firstly in his work “Spreading the Word”.⁶² Quasi-realism is meant to explain how it is the case that morality seems to be real while in fact it is not. The way he does it is very much related to the name of quasi-realism; morality is only a simulation of realism which is capable of mimicking or simulating it, while in reality it is not real. Therefore, quasi-realism is meant to explain why morality and moral practices seem real, although they are not, and to give us a reason to prefer non-cognitivism instead of cognitivism. Here Blackburn is willing to grant all the features that morality seemingly has but still uphold non-cognitivist theories as the better position to hold for those features. In Blackburn’s words the defender of quasi-realism is the one who starts “from a recognizably anti-realist position, finds himself progressively able to mimic the intellectual practices supposedly definitive of realism.”⁶³ The main suggestion of quasi-realism is that although moral propositions are not genuine propositions which can describe reality and be *truth-apt*, they still look like genuine propositions because this was necessary in order for moral language to be useful. In another words, our moral language looks like realist for pragmatic reasons and if it wasn’t the case, we wouldn’t be able to use it. Therefore, it is not really a strange fact that our moral propositions seem like they are descriptions of reality while they are actually our inclinations to extend our non-cognitive states such as attitudes or emotions to the real world.

Quasi-realism does not suffer from the same issues as it is the case with the standard non-cognitivist theories, in fact other non-cognitivist theories may use quasi-realism as an explanation for the issues I have raised in previous sections. Additionally, quasi-realism may not be considered as an independent theory, but only as an explanation for the features of morality which will be used as a support for other non-cognitive accounts. Blackburn has also addressed the Frege-Geach problem offering various

⁶² Simon Blackburn. *Spreading the Word*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁶³ Simon Blackburn. *Essays in Quasi-Realism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15.

responses of how non-cognitivist may be able to respond to this seemingly grave problem. One of his answers is formed by an appeal to sensibility, which is basically a disposition of reacting to certain instances. For example, I get angry at the instance of seeing a person x stealing the money and I get extremely sad when I witness torturing the people and these are some of my dispositions. To solve the Frege-Geach problem, these dispositions must be consistent in order to be valuable and accepted by other people. If we have sensibilities that are not consistent and clash with each other, then these sensibilities ought to be ruled out and rejected, because they are *fractured* sensibilities.⁶⁴ In this way Blackburn can answer how the argument I made about wrongness of stealing may look like a valid argument, while in reality it is not. This is one way of answering the Frege-Geach problem for non-cognitivists. Therefore, since the defender of quasi-realism can seemingly answer to all the raised issues and still hold some of the non-cognitivist theories, he can have all the benefits and strengths of non-cognitivism while being able to answer the objections.

This being said, quasi-realism is also not without weaknesses and even Simon Blackburn has been changing and refining his views over the years. Some of the problems are very technical in nature and include the exact clarification of what it means to express non-cognitive state, the problem of accepting the minimalism about truth and with the acceptance of it, undermining the main claim of non-cognitivism, the claim that moral propositions are not truth-apt.⁶⁵ I will not get into these technical issues but I will raise another more obvious problem for quasi-realism.

I will grant that quasi-realism does provide the explanation to the questions that other non-cognitivist theories couldn't, however, this explanation does not seem as a genuine solution for the problem. The main issue is that quasi-realism requires us to segregate the beliefs about our moral tenets or convictions and our beliefs about the reality of morality. This problem becomes apparent in the moment one starts to believe in the truth of quasi-realism. Let's say I become aware that objective morality does not exist, moral properties are not real and the reason why I talk and experience morality as if it was is

⁶⁴ Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 195.

⁶⁵ Crispin Wright. "Realism, Anti-Realism, Irrealism, Quasi-Realism". In *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, (1987), 35.

because of my natural inclinations to extend my emotions or some other non-cognitive states to objective reality. In this scenario and in every other scenario where the person actually knows the truth about morality not actually being real and that it is merely our illusion, it becomes very hard to explain why such an aware person would still believe that morality is normative and that it possesses certain authority which has overriding reasons for acting in a certain way. This would not be the problem for the person who is unaware of the truth of quasi-realism, because he would still experience morality as real and talk about it as if it was genuine in existence. However, the situation becomes harder if one is embracing quasi-realism. It might be even necessary to forget what we know about morality in order to still experience it the way we do, or we may pretend that we talk about morality as being objective while knowing that is not actually the case. This seems a very questionable and self-deceptive way of explaining the morality and this is what creates the strangeness of quasi-realism. The good example of illustrating the problem is presented by Stephen Evans where he draws analogy of moral and legal obligations given the truth of quasi-realism.⁶⁶ Evans gives the thought experiment of the territory which no longer has a state and government and thus, there are no legal obligations that the community of this territory has to follow. However, this community still believes that there are legal obligations for the reason that it is beneficial for the community to believe it. In this case the people extend their emotions or attitudes to state which is non-existent and for that reason they still uphold the legal obligations. So when someone says that they have legal duty to do something, all he is doing is expressing the attitude of approval for this action. However, if we consider that one person leaves the territory in question and goes to another country and then learns that the state doesn't exist in the place he lived and thus, there are no legal obligations and all they did when referring to the legal obligations was to express their attitudes, it is very hard to argue that this person will continue to have his realistic attitude towards legal obligations and consider it as rational and justified. I think that this analogy and thought experiment from Evans demonstrates one of the fundamental flaws of quasi-realism and it gives the sufficient reason to highly doubt this explanation.

⁶⁶ Stephen C. Evans. *God and Moral Obligation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 128.

2.7.4. Relativism

In general terms relativism can be understood as a philosophical view which holds the opinion that the objective truth is non-existent because the truth always depends upon the views or beliefs of the people or the certain context in which the proposition has been asserted. For example if I say “Sarajevo is a beautiful city”, it is true for me, but it might not be true for Dimitry who lives in St. Petersburg, which is arguably one of the most beautiful cities in the world or more accurately, it is the case that *for* Dimitry it is the most beautiful city in the world but not necessarily for others. When speaking about relativism in ethics, it can be characterized in the same way; there is no objective and universal morality and the moral judgments can't be objectively true in a sense that one person might be more correct in his moral judgment than the other person. For example, Muslim families believe that circumcision of the males while they are young is morally right, while some secular families may believe that it is not. According to moral relativism, neither of these two propositions is more correct or more truthful, because they have different contexts and beliefs involved. Simon Blackburn has characterized and defined moral realism as view that:

ethical truth is somehow relative to a background body of doctrine, or theory, or form of life or "whirl of organism". It is an expression of the idea that there is no one true body of doctrine in ethics. There are different views, and some are "true for" some people, while others are true for others.⁶⁷

Looking at the example of circumcision in light of Blackburn's definition of moral relativism, both families' moral views are true. The Muslim family thinks this practice is not only morally acceptable but recommended, because it is the practice passed down from the prophet Mohammad who was the prophet of God divinely inspired and thus, if this practice was not morally acceptable, it would be forbidden and not recommended by the prophet. However, for the secular family this is morally wrong practice because it ignores the free choice of the young boy who is unable to choose by himself in such young age whether he wants to be circumcised or not. After all, it might be the case that in the age of reason, this boy will not believe in the religion of his parents and he might

⁶⁷ Simon Blackburn. "Relativism". In *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, ed. Hugh Lafollete. (Blackwell, 2000), 1.

choose not to get circumcised. According to moral relativism, this clash of moral judgments occurs because the moral framework of Muslim and secular families differ. It is important to notice here that moral relativism is not the view that anybody can do whatever he wants and always be true. The truthfulness or the rightness of moral action will depend upon context and moral framework of the person. Therefore, the Muslim family can't suddenly decide that it is wrong to circumcise young boys because this would be against the Muslim moral framework. The reason of the conflict between the two types of families is because the truth of their moral proposition depends on different moral frameworks. However, this is only the rough representation of the moral relativism because there are many different versions of moral relativism. The scope of this thesis will not allow me to go into all of them, and therefore, I will consider only one form of relativism which is *speaker relativism*.⁶⁸

Speaker relativism holds that the moral propositions are true in virtue of the speaker's moral framework. If this is true, then the truth of the moral propositions would depend on the moral framework of the speaker. For example, if I look at the dispute between the two families with regards to the circumcision and I am a Muslim, I would argue that Muslim family is right because this judgment would be related to my moral framework as a Muslim. However, if we are moral realists and Muslims, we wouldn't think that the truth of my moral proposition depends on my moral framework but it would still be true even if I wasn't a Muslim, because the truth of the moral proposition doesn't depend on anybody's beliefs or moral frameworks. Just as I mentioned for moral relativism in general, speaker relativism is also not a position that anything a person says about morality is true, because the truth still depends on the moral framework of the speaker.

One of the main arguments which make moral relativism an attractive position to hold is the argument from moral disagreement. Incidentally, moral disagreement is also a well-known argument for moral realism, but the way it is used differs because realism and relativism accept different theories of the truth. Speaker relativism sees the moral disagreement as a reason to adopt relativism because it is normal to conceive that people would disagree about certain moral practices no matter how much facts they would

⁶⁸ I chose speaker relativism because it is one of the broadest versions of relativism which covers numerous common issues present in all versions of relativism.

know about this practice. Let's consider the two families I mentioned in the beginning and their disagreement on circumcision. It would not be a stretch of imagination to say they would disagree no matter how much new information or how many new facts they would learn with regards to abortion. The moral relativist would argue that this is not a strange situation if we grant the truth of relativism; which means that there are no moral properties that are independent from human beliefs and that the truth of the moral proposition depends upon speaker's moral framework in the case of speaker relativism. If there are moral properties such as *wrongness/rightness of circumcision* we would expect that people should agree on this issue unless these properties are not discoverable by us or that we have a deficient reasoning. However, we see that in the issue of circumcision and other various issues people don't come to universal agreement and this is because their moral frameworks differ and clash with each other. This doesn't mean that every person would have his own moral view which will never be in agreement with other persons because it is possible to have certain agreement of many people who share the same moral framework. This is how all Muslims would agree that circumcision is a morally right practice. Therefore, relativism allows for moral disagreement and agreement to a certain degree, but not in the sense that there are certain moral facts or properties to agree or disagree about, but in a sense that agreement and disagreement are possible in relation to the same or different moral frameworks.

There are number of issues with moral relativism and various ways to object to this theory. One of the problems with speaker relativism and other versions of relativism is it assumes that the universal moral agreement is not possible, because agreement is only possible to the extent that people share the same moral framework. In this sense speaker relativism is begging the question and pointing to moral disagreement is not enough to establish or substantiate this assertion. It is clearly conceivable that people agree upon some moral practices regardless of their religion, culture, geography or particular moral framework. In fact this can be empirically defended in the way that there are some basic moral truths which are agreed upon by virtually all the people regardless of their background. For example, virtually all religions and cultures have accepted the golden rule and saw the preservation of human life as something good. Therefore, if there is agreement at least in some moral questions regardless of what is the background of the

people, then one of the main assertions of the relativism would be falsified and they would need some kind of explanation for this agreement. I think there are certain moral truths agreed upon by all the people, and I will use this as one of the arguments for moral realism later.

Further problem with speaker relativism is its inability to explain the moral authority when it comes to reasons for action in the same way quasi-realism faces this problem. We may explain the normative nature of morality and the way we experience it by saying we experience it that way because we belong to a certain moral framework. However, this is not a complete explanation because if we accept moral relativism as true, then we realize that there is no objective truth of any moral judgment and all we do when we say “stealing is wrong” is referring to the set of moral rules present in the moral framework we are committed to. But if we realize this *fact*, then it becomes very strange to continue experiencing morality as normative. It is expected that knowing this truth about morality would most probably change the way we experience it and it would be strange for this experience to remain. Furthermore, it would be unusual to hold people accountable for their actions like we normally do in case of Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden, Pablo Escobar and others, because some may very well claim what Nazis did to Jews is not wrong because their actions were in accordance to their moral framework. Therefore, the normative nature of morality in the sense that we hold people responsible for their actions would still remain unexplained. An additional point that increases oddity of speaker relativism is the fact that we would be mistaken in what we mean when we make a moral proposition. When I say “killing innocent people is wrong” I don’t mean to say “killing innocent people is wrong is true for me while it may not be true for you”, yet if speaker relativism is true, then this is exactly what my proposition means. This makes speaker relativism very counter-intuitive because although I mean something when I make moral proposition, ultimately it is not true because my proposition means something else. In this sense there is no difference between speaker relativism and error theory, because according to error theory all our moral judgments and propositions are false. This is so unless there is a distinction between the meaning and the truth in a sense that although we don’t mean “stealing is wrong” is relative, the

truth about this proposition *is* in fact relative. This is the case for speaker relativism which is apparent in the usage of moral disagreement.

With regards to moral disagreement as the main argument for moral relativism, there is a couple of issues to be mentioned. The first one is that moral disagreement does not entail the falsity of moral realism. Even if all people would disagree about some moral practices and judgments, it wouldn't follow that objective morality or some kind of moral properties do not exist. However, moral disagreement can be used as the best explanation and what one would expect to be the case given the truth of moral relativism. But even in this form there are big issues for moral relativism. For example, if we consider that speaker relativism is true, then when a Muslim says "circumcision is morally right" and a secular says "circumcision is morally wrong", they are not actually disagreeing. Because these two propositions don't have the common meaning; for a Muslim it means "circumcision is morally right for me" while for secular it means "circumcision is morally wrong for me". However, in order to disagree about something with someone, the meaning of the proposition must be common. If I claim that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the president of Turkey while my friend Dimitry claims that this is not true and that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is in fact president of Turkey, we are having a genuine disagreement because we don't mean Erdoğan or Kemal is the president of Turkey for me. However, if Dimitry says "God is love" and I disagree with him because love is an emotion, there is actually no disagreement here. Once we discuss this matter and realize that by "God is love" Dimitry means that God is the source of all love, we stop thinking that there is a genuine disagreement because our propositions have different meaning. If speaker relativism is true, then the meaning of moral propositions varies in the same way and therefore the main argument for speaker realism, moral disagreement, disappears because meaning of the propositions must be common in order for disagreement to be possible. The only way of going around this problem for speaker relativism is to make a distinction between the meaning of the proposition and the truth. This means that when we have a moral disagreement, it is possible to have a common meaning while the truth will still remain relative to the moral framework of the person. However, I believe that this is not possible because I think that truth depends on the meaning of the statement; if the meaning of the statement corresponds to reality, then the

proposition is true⁶⁹ and I will come back to the issue of moral truth in the discussion of the arguments for objective morality. Therefore, the defender of speaker relativism must demonstrate that it is possible to split the meaning and the truth.

In conclusion, I think that the speaker relativism is not a good theory because it faces several issues: It begs the question with regards to the impossibility of universal moral agreement regardless of one's moral framework, it is unable to completely explain the moral normativity and how we could experience moral authority given that we accept speaker relativism; it is counter-intuitive because what we mean to say is different from what we actually say, and it needs to demonstrate how meaning can be separate from the truth. Now I will discuss the arguments for objective morality and analyze the reasons for accepting the truth of moral realism.

2.8. Arguments for Objective Morality

Up to this point I attempted to capture and explain the nature of morality, and I aspired to specify the main features of morality which could be used as a means to define what morality is. I stipulated what I mean are the main three features; objectivity, universality and normativity, which encompass and contain other minor features. Later on, I discussed some philosophical theories and views, which I found to be the most popular and the most vigorous ones that argue against the objective morality, and I raised the issues in such theories and posed some challenges and I believe that with these issues and challenges, I demonstrated the theories in question; error theory, all regular versions of expressivism, quasi-realism and relativism, fail to establish the falsehood of the second premise of the argument. Unfortunately, showing that counter-theories and views fail to prove that moral realism is false is not enough to establish the truth of moral realism, although this fact can be used to strengthen the proposition. However, for moral realism to be considered as justified position to hold and a better view than the opposites, the further argumentation is necessary. Human beliefs and their intuitiveness is not enough for this task, although they can be very important, because in many cases intuition plays an important role in discovering the truth of the matter and if certain

⁶⁹ David Lewis. "General Semantics" In *Semantics of Natural Language*, eds. D. Davidson & G. Harman, (Dordrecht: Dordrecht, 1972), 173.

position is not intuitive, it requires a stronger and powerful argumentation in order to be substantiated. This being said, the intuition can also be wrong and in order not to be misled by intuition, we require certain training like in case of recognizing the validity of the arguments without the need to test them using formal logic. In the following sections I will be arguing that there are good reasons and arguments in support of moral realism but one should not expect the proofs which leave no reasonable room for doubt. The arguments I will offer below are fundamentally assumptive and as such, the best I can hope to achieve with them is to show that moral realism is the better explanation for certain facts. I will attempt to accomplish this by appealing to some empiric data, logic, moral experience, phenomenology, and moral language. Lastly, with regards to the nature of morality and its features, I am well aware that there might be some objections and criticisms of my position by pointing out some possible errors in my characterization of the nature of morality or by displaying that my account lacks certain feature. Nevertheless, it was necessary to specify what I mean by morality in order for the reader to know what it is exactly that I am talking about. With this clarification aside, I can now begin with the arguments for objective morality.

2.8.1. Moral Truth

The argument from moral truth will depend upon truth-maker theory or correspondence theory of truth which includes the existence of truth-makers. In the discussion of cognitivism I touched a little bit upon the correspondence theory of truth in clarification of the propositions. I mentioned that propositions are the meanings of the statement which needs to be representational and in the case they represent the reality accurately, then they are true propositions. However, this does not mean that the proposition needs to represent the whole reality accurately but only the parts of it which are conveyed by the proposition. For example, if I say “the cup is on the table”, my proposition is aimed at certain parts of the world and not at its totality. Therefore, there is a sentence or a statement of belief specific to certain language, which is used to express the meaning of the statement/proposition common to all the languages, which is aimed to correspond to reality or to describe it accurately. In the proposition “the cup is on the table”, given the truth of correspondence theory of truth, it is possible to notice that there is seemingly

necessary connection between the meaning of the statement and the truth. If and only if the meaning of the statement “the cup is on the table” represents the parts of the world accurately, if there is really a cup and the table and if the cup is on the table, then this is true. Therefore, it is necessary for something to exist outside of the proposition in virtue of which the proposition will be true. At this point we arrive at the truth-makers because they are this something outside of the proposition necessary for it to be true. In the words of David Armstrong “any truth, should depend for its truth on something “outside” it, in virtue of which it is true”.⁷⁰ Therefore, the truth-makers are the parts of the reality in virtue of which the meaning of the statements are true. To be more precise, the truth of proposition depends on the existence of the truth maker. For example, if I say “this tea cup is green” and if it is true, then it is reasonable to think that this green tea cup exists and my proposition expresses this accurately. The fact that this tea cup is green is the truth-maker for my proposition “this tea cup is green”.

If we accept the truth-maker theory as true, how can it be related to the objective morality and in what sense this theory can be used as an argument for it? The easiest way to relate morality to the truth-maker theory is to consider the proposition which involves moral terms and then explain by analogy with different propositions. If we say “killing innocent people is wrong” and “treating people equally is right”, assuming the truth of truth-maker theory, there needs to be something outside of these two propositions which would make them true. This factor which makes the moral propositions true is arguably best explained by the existence of moral properties. Therefore, if the proposition “killing innocent people is wrong” is true, there needs to be the property of *wrongness* of killing innocent people and if the proposition “treating people equally is right” is true, then there needs to be the property of *rightness* of treating people equally. Similarly, in the case of the proposition “this tea cup is green”, the moral propositions would have something outside of them in virtue of which they would be true. However, for this to be the case the assumption of the truth-maker theory alone is not sufficient and further assumption is necessary. In order to defend the argument from moral truth one must assume cognitivism, the position which I already discussed and which holds that expressions of moral propositions are expressions of

⁷⁰ David M. Armstrong. *Truth and Truthmakers*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

beliefs, which are intended as the descriptions of reality and therefore can be true or false. So, if one wants to defend the argument from moral truth, he needs to justify cognitivism and then give the arguments for the truth-maker theory. With regards to the cognitivism, one can defend this position by showing its rival view, non-cognitivism, as false and incomplete. When I criticized expressivism, the objections I mentioned there are also applicable to non-cognitivism, because expressivist accounts are basically non-cognitivist accounts. As I mentioned before, non-cognitivist accounts have a serious flaws because they can't explain the normative nature of morality and its authority. Furthermore, they don't allow genuine moral disagreement and have major difficulties when confronted with the Frege-Geach problem. The one explanation offered by the quasi-realism is not enough to solve all of the questions. However, cognitivist theories have no such issues in dealing with moral experience, although there are different cognitivist theories and all of them can't be true at the same time.

The soundness of the argument from moral truth depends on the soundness of the truth-maker theory and the acceptance of this theory requires additional argumentation and reasons that would be sufficient as a justification for this position. There are plentiful reasons for accepting the truth-maker theory but the most famous are the following three; ability to catch metaphysical cheaters, ability to distinguish theories ideologically and ontologically, and the intuitiveness of the truth-makers given the truth of the correspondence theory of truth.

Acceptance of the truth-maker theory enables us to catch metaphysical cheaters, who are the philosophers holding the truth of certain propositions about the reality and the world but who are unable or unwilling to ground the truth of their propositions. One example of metaphysical cheating can be given in case of John Stuart Mill's phenomenalism, where objects must be perceived in order to exist. The defender of phenomenalism faces the problem when asked "what is the truth-maker of this proposition and what is the justification for the claim that objects do not exist unless they are perceived?" It seems this question remains unanswered and therefore the defender of this position can be considered as a metaphysical cheater, who uses correspondence theory of truth but is unable to ground the truth and show what his proposition corresponds to. Of course it

can be the case that the defender doesn't know the truth-maker and cheater wouldn't be a good description of him. Another reason to accept truth-maker theory is because it enables us to differentiate propositions ideologically and ontologically and thus it helps us differentiate the scientific theories. For example, quantum mechanics and Newtonian physics have different predictions, that is why they have ontologically different propositions and therefore they are two different theories, whereas quantum mechanics and Schrodinger's wave mechanics have different methods and different language, but they have same predictions. This in turn makes them not ontologically different but ideologically different theories. This differentiation is made easy by the truth-maker theory and without it we would have a hard time in differentiating the scientific theories. Lastly, truth-maker theory is very intuitive if we accept the correspondence theory of truth, and the existence of truth-makers is directly motivated by the correspondence theory of truth.⁷¹ Using these arguments for truth-maker theory strengthens the argument from moral truth and makes the case for moral realism and objective morality more sound and convincing. But as I mentioned before, this argument alone is not sufficient to show the undeniable truth of moral realism, rather it should be evaluated as presumptive argument in favor of moral realism.

2.8.2. Moral Experience

It is not unreasonable to assert that all individuals who possess properly functioning reason, excluding lunatics and psychopaths, experience certain things and actions as good or bad in a way that they seem to be objective. Furthermore, we also experience a normative nature of morality when we have certain duties and obligations to fulfill. For example, I am obliged to pay the monthly rent to the landlord every month and the payment includes the last month of my stay as well. Now, my temptation not to pay this last rent might be very attractive, because I will be leaving for Bosnia and I will probably not come back to Austria but even if I do, I will probably never meet the landlord. However, despite this temptation I will still not justify this sort of action because I experience that I ought to pay the rent and even if I end up not paying, I will feel as I know that I did something wrong. More interestingly, there are moral

⁷¹ Robert Koons and Timothy Pickavance discuss these three arguments more carefully together with some problems and answers for the truth-maker theory in the "Metaphysics: The Fundamentals", 21-34.

experiences which can affect our lives in much greater and distinct way so far that we completely change our moral view with regards to the certain actions and practices. What is significant for these *transformative moral experiences* is that these types of experiences we are having are making immediate, sudden and instantaneous development or realization of the moral truth in our consciousness. In this case the person who held certain moral proposition as true can be unexpectedly affected by these types of experiences, so much that this person changes the value of the proposition in that moment of experience. Consider the example of my cousin (C) who was born in a traditional Islamic family who practices *eid al-adha*, which is a religious duty of sacrificing an animal and then delivering the meat to the poor. For years (C) believed that this religious sacrifice was morally right and praiseworthy. However, after participating in the rite himself and seeing the dying animal, (C) experienced transformation in his moral beliefs and he instantaneously came to believe that sacrificing animals is wrong. He does not experience this as his subjective feeling and preference but he genuinely believes it as objectively true and continues to live as a vegan to this day. However, experiencing morality as objective is not sufficient to prove that it indeed is, although I believe that it is a good starting point to argue for objective morality but fundamentally, an additional argument is necessary.

The further argumentation of the reliability of moral experiences can be found in Thomas Reid's defense of moral realism. Reid argues that moral realism is presupposed by our experience and that the best option is to accept this experience as reliable. Reid's first assumption begins in the similar way I began this section: We have moral experiences and in his argument it is mentioned that we have experience of moral qualities in the people who are kind, affectionate, loving, selfish, etc. However, what is significant here is the way we do it because we perceive these moral qualities on a basis of non-moral traits people exhibit like perspicacity or vigor. Therefore, if we are to dispute the reality of moral traits, then we also need to doubt non-moral traits because they are not more reliable than the moral ones.⁷² A further point Reid makes is that humans are subject to moral obligations when they make promises, and they believe that

⁷² Thomas Reid. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Ed. Derek Borke. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), 503.

they are responsible to fulfill the promises. If humans didn't believe in the moral obligations, then making promises would be meaningless, because it would be very strange to intend to do something which will put humans in the state they don't believe exist.⁷³ Moral realism makes sense because it seems we are able to understand and recognize moral properties in the same way we recognize the properties of other things in the external world or in a way we understand logical truths and relations.⁷⁴ Also Reid mentions that doubting our general faculties is not reasonable, and therefore, it is reasonable to trust in them also when we acquire moral experiences.⁷⁵

Reid's argumentation seems reasonable to me and if it is indeed a sound argument, then it seems plausible to accept our moral experiences as reliable sign that objective morality does exist. If moral realism were true, then the transformative moral experiences would not be strange occurrences, and they would be easily explainable in light of moral properties. If the moral properties in virtue of which moral proposition would be true or false really exist, then it could be argued that my cousin (C) has become aware of those properties through his intellectual faculties and thus changed his moral judgment on sacrificing animals. If moral realism is false on a basis that we can doubt our moral experience, then we would need an explanation why other non-moral traits are not doubted and we would require clarification on why transformative moral experiences do occur, or we could simply acknowledge the implications and embrace skepticism. If we don't favor skepticism it doesn't mean that we must defend that our experience of what is right and wrong will be always be true. In fact, we might argue that we can be very well mistaken in what we believe with regards to certain action. Because, if morality is objective than our beliefs will not affect it and they can only be true or false depending on whether they are accurate representations of reality. This is why (C) may be wrong in his beliefs and we need the reasons and arguments to show why this is the case. Accepting Reid's argument leads us to the position that we have no reason to doubt our experience of morality as being objective, unless we are shown the evidence that truth is otherwise. If this was the case, then we would have the defeater for our position but if

⁷³ Thomas Reid. *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*. Eds. Knud Haakonsen & James Harris. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 327-344.

⁷⁴ Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 179.

⁷⁵ Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 180.

there is no such defeater, then it is reasonable to accept the reliability of moral experience in the same way and degree that it is reasonable to accept our experience about the external world. This is what is commonly called the *principle of credulity*, and I don't see the reason why it should be disputed. Therefore, this argument is also not decisive on its own but it can be used to show that belief in moral realism is reasonable and it can be used as a support to other arguments defending moral realism. Furthermore, if we assume the truth of theism, then the reliability of moral experiences would be even more justified. If God the Creator really existed and if He is essentially good, then it would be expected that He would want humans to behave morally and to do good and stay away from the evil. One way of achieving this is to enable humans to learn what is good and bad in different ways and one way can be through moral experience by our intellectual faculties. Although it is not necessary to accept theism, I do believe that it makes this argument from moral experience stronger and I will come back to this issue when I discuss God as the best explanation for objective morality.

2.8.3. Moral Agreement

The argument from moral agreement is maybe the most popular argument for objective morality since ancient times and it is still widely used today. The simplest form of the argument states that there are objective moral values, because it is evident that certain moral values are agreed upon by all cultures, societies and nations. The values in question are; justice is good, stealing is bad, showing gratitude to parents and elders is good and ought to be done, saving life is good, killing innocent people is bad etc. It is arguable that no matter the time or place, the people from different geographies and communities have been in agreement with regards to certain moral values. However, it is easy to notice that just because people agree upon something it doesn't necessarily mean that it is true. For example, if all the people in the world today agreed that the color green is the most beautiful color, would that be a proof that it is actually the case? What about if all the people agreed that the lives of the African people are less valuable than the lives of western people? It doesn't follow necessarily that universal agreement is guarantee of the truth of certain propositions. Furthermore, there are other ways one can criticize this form of argument. The famous Islamic theologian Al-Ghazali rejects the

idea that universal moral rules are absolute and necessarily true. He does this by taking some generally accepted moral judgments like telling truth is good, then he gives the counterexamples where telling the truth might not be good. Additionally, Al-Ghazali gives a thought experiment where he intends to demonstrate that moral truths are not necessary as is the case for logical truths:

If we imagine ourselves just coming into existence, and being a part of no community and having no prior knowledge of how human beings live, it would be possible to doubt that norm, or even deny it is true. Yet this would not be true of statements like “two is greater than one” or “a statement cannot be both true and false”⁷⁶

Al-Ghazali can be characterized as the representative of ethical voluntarism and his works are very important sources when it comes to the topic of *husn and qubh*⁷⁷ in Islamic ethical debates. When it comes to the issue of *husn and qubh*, Al-Ghazali is defending the *Asharite* position which maintains that the reason alone cannot know what is right and wrong without the revelation and therefore person can't be held responsible if God has not revealed his commands and prohibitions. The other mainstream theological school, the *Maturidites*, regarded reason as capable of discovering what is good and bad without the revelation, but if this was the case, then the individual would not be responsible for his actions. The complete opposite of *Asharites*, the *Mutazilates*, argued that reason is not in need for the holy text in order to discover the moral truths and reason is superior where the scripture is used only to confirm reason. Therefore, all humans are responsible for their actions because the moral and other truths are reachable by reason. For example Qadi Abd al-Jabbar argued that good and bad are not possibly, but necessarily knowable, because the things are good or bad by their nature and that is why they are commanded or prohibited by God.⁷⁸ I don't find any of the schools completely correct with regards to this issue. However, I am closer to the *Mutazilate*

⁷⁶ Oliver Leaman. *An Introduction to Arabic Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162.

⁷⁷ “*Husn and Qubh*” can be translated as *beautiful and ugly* or *good and bad*, and it is related to the opinions and discussions of Islamic schools of thought on moral epistemology. This issue can be found in any introduction to Islamic theology or the books related to the sects in Islam. The main question that was addressed and the central dispute in this issue was/is whether an individual can know the moral obligations, good and bad without the revelation and whether he can be held responsible for his actions if the revelation didn't reach him.

⁷⁸ Qadi Abd al-Jabbar(1968). *Al-Mugni fi Ebwabi't - Tawhid ve al-Adl*. (Cairo, 1968), t:6, p:6-7.

opinion, because I believe that at least some moral truths are discoverable by human reason or some other faculty, without the need to the specific revelation by God. I don't mean to render the revelation as completely unnecessary because I believe that revelation can make the difference when there is a moral dilemma in some particular moral questions, but I think that there are certain basic moral truths that don't require special revelation. One way to defend this position is exactly by an appeal to the moral agreement in some moral judgments.

However, with the problems I already mentioned why should moral agreement be considered as an argument for moral realism and objective morality? After all, it is logically possible that all people agree upon something which is utterly erroneous. However, although moral agreement can't be used as a proof for moral realism, it can be used to argue that moral realism is the best and the most probable explanation for this agreement. Again, it is possible to draw analogy of how we explain the agreements in non-moral questions and then apply it in the moral realm. Therefore, given the fact that people agree on certain moral values, we need to ask what the best explanation for such phenomenon is. Could it not be the case that the reason for universal agreement is that there are certain moral properties, like *goodness of showing respect to parents* or *wrongness of genocide*, which can be known and identified by all the people no matter what is their culture and geography? I think this explanation seems more plausible than the one which claims that the agreement is due to sheer luck or chance. Let's consider the following thought experiment: Imagine we have 1 cup of milk which we got from a cow, and we visited 99 professional chemists separately in the labs, then we gave them the cup and asked them to tell us everything they can about the cup of milk they received. Undoubtedly, there would be an agreement in their assessments. The composition of the milk is 87,5% liquid, 4% fat, 3.5% proteins, 4.8% lactose and 0.7% minerals. Considering this situation, how are we going to explain this agreement? Certainly, saying that it was a chance will not do. Arguably, the best explanation would be that the milk had certain properties and that is the reason why the chemists recognized those properties; they recognized that milk has 4% of fat because the milk has the property of being 4% fat, and that is why they agreed regarding the milk. Using this example as an analogy it is possible to argue that moral values have certain

properties which can be recognized by people, and that is why there is a widespread agreement on certain moral values in the world. I am well aware that this explanation is not the only player in the game, because one can defend a social contract theory, where morality is mainly a social construct made by humans for their own benefit. We agree that it is morally right to be good towards our elderly parents because one day we will also be elders and we will need to be taken care of, it is bad to lie because the society where the truth is dominant habit is more suitable for living and more beneficial to everybody in the long run. There is certain amount of truth to this reasoning, because in most cases morality is beneficial. However, there are many problems with social contract theories. One such problem is even if we explain the way humans started to uphold moral rules, it does not rule out the objectivity of morality. Furthermore, social contract theory can't really capture the whole nature of morality, especially the "oughtness" or the binding nature of it. Usually, when we are thinking about moral rules we don't always link it to the benefit or a social contract. If certain society made the contract that normalizes discrimination of other races, there would be no universal agreement that it is a good thing to do. Although, it seems that morality has some relation and overlaps in certain points with social agreement, it is still independent from it. Considering all things together, I believe that moral agreement provides a strong support to other arguments in favor of moral realism.

2.8.4. Moral Disagreement

Moral disagreement is usually the main argument against moral realism. I showcased how emotivism rules out the possibility of genuine moral disagreement by reducing it to the non-moral facts, which means that all supposed disagreements on moral questions are actually disagreements about facts which are hidden in the ethical propositions and can be found upon impartial analysis. If Hasan, who grew up in traditionalist Muslim family argues that euthanasia is wrong and ought not to be practiced while Finn, who was born in secular family in Netherlands, argues that euthanasia is right and can be practiced, then according to emotivism this disagreement is not actually about morality but can be reduced to *real* facts about the world. For example, Hasan believes that euthanasia would lead to a greater murder rate and it would be used as an excuse and

good cover for a felony, whereas Finn thinks it is not the case that this would happen. Relativism treats disagreement differently by explaining that disagreement happens not because some non-moral facts involved but because Hasan and Finn share a different and contradictory moral framework. I showed the problems of both accounts; emotivism is begging the question with regards to the impossibility of genuine moral disagreement, while following the explanation of relativism, disagreement is not actually disagreement, because the meaning of the propositions differs in relation to moral frameworks.

However, moral disagreement doesn't have to be explained in light of emotivism and relativism and it still can be an argument against moral realism. For example, one may compare the disagreements in science and in the moral realm. It is not the case that scientists always agree with regards to certain theory and they usually do disagree about many things. However, when all or a significant amount of new scientific data becomes available, the disagreement is usually solved by accepting one of the theories or creating a completely new theory. For example, there were different theories about the temperature and why the metal expands when heated. The kinetic theory of gases explained it in terms of the motion of the atoms and molecules, which start moving more when they are heated and as a result they take more space. In contrast, the liquid theory maintains that temperature is some kind of liquid and this is the reason why metal expands. The theories were not in agreement but once it was understood that liquid theory could not explain everything, the kinetic theory of gases was accepted. However, one may argue that this is not the case in moral disagreements and he may claim that even if all data about morality is revealed and Hasan and Finn reasoned correctly, they still wouldn't achieve the agreement about euthanasia. On this ground, one may claim that moral realism is false because disagreements like this one would not be expected. Leaving aside the question-begging that moral disagreement would still occur even if all data about moral issue was discovered, this conclusion about moral realism would still be too hasty because it might be the case that disagreements can be explained within the moral realism and even be expected and regarded as an argument for it.

There are many ways to object to moral disagreement as the argument against moral realism and David Enoch dedicated the whole chapter for this in his famous book

“Taking Morality Seriously”.⁷⁹ Moral disagreement is not powerful even as the best explanation against moral realism because the explanations for it within moral realism are very simple to come by. For example, we may explain moral disagreement as a disagreement not about moral values but about the particular realizations of those values. It also might be the case that people actually don’t reason carefully enough and thus make the mistakes in moral judgments. Furthermore, it is possible that we have been tricked and influenced by wrong opinions about morality, where the facts about moral truth have been distorted and represented incompletely. Enoch mentions self-interest as one conceivable and particularly strong explanation on why moral disagreement occurs and he thinks that it can also explain the scope of disagreement in other areas as well.⁸⁰ Let’s consider the following moral proposition: “Eating animal products is morally wrong and anyone who is well-educated and aware that he can survive without consuming animal products but still does eat them is immoral and despicable.” It may be the case that this proposition is not true but it is undeniable that it would and it does often meet dismissal without providing any sort of an argument against it. One of the main reasons is actually self-interest because we love the taste of meat and more significantly, accepting this proposition would mean that we accept the fact we have not been as moral as we thought we have. Here disagreement is explained by psychological reasons and it is the case that in many moral disagreements we tend to look for our psychological benefits and this is how disagreement can be powerfully explained without appeal to moral non-realism.⁸¹ Another reason why this explanation is powerful is because it can explain why the disagreement in moral domain differs from the disagreement in mathematics or in some scientific question. Usually in mathematics or logic we don’t have our character at stake. Therefore, given this explanation, moral disagreement would be expected and what would be strange is to actually find the widespread disagreement against self-interest. Now it is clear that moral disagreement is not a decisive argument against moral realism and it has many competing explanations which don’t require the rejection of moral realism. Given that other equally strong or

⁷⁹ David Enoch. *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 185-214.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, 193.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 193.

even stronger explanations can be found, moral disagreements as an argument against moral realism is additionally weakened by the fact that explanations are evaluated in consideration with other assertions and prior beliefs.⁸² If moral disagreement stands alone in this regard it would be very insignificant, because there are other arguments for moral realism that don't depend upon the explanation of moral disagreement. Therefore, if there are no other good arguments in favor of moral non-realism, then it wouldn't be reasonable to accept this theory because moral realism does have the arguments in its favor and it does have the explanations for moral disagreement. If this was indeed the case, then I don't really see any strong or sufficient reason to abandon moral realism because moral disagreement would not pose any serious threat.

There is other much significant concern for moral disagreement as an argument against moral realism and it is that it appears to be self-defeating. The reason for this is that disagreement is extensively present in other fields as well, including not only questions in morality but also question about morality, which means philosophers disagree even in the question on how to do metaethics. Given this, if one takes a disagreement about certain issue as a ground for rejecting the issue, then it follows that he will also need to reject arguments about moral disagreements as well, because they are also not agreed upon and opinions vary in approach, methodology, strength of the claim, etc. and as David Enoch notices:

If an argument is constructed with the conclusion that apparently rationally irresolvable disagreement gives rise to a denial of a unique truth-value, then given apparently rationally irresolvable disagreement about this very argument and its conclusion, the proponent of the argument cannot consistently defend the truth of his conclusion.⁸³

In conclusion, I am positive that it is conceivable to have a meaningful disagreement about moral issues without reduction to the non-moral matters. Also, when people experience the disagreement about some moral question, more often than not, they don't have in mind non-moral issues and underlying foundation for their disagreement. When Hasan and Finn disagree on euthanasia, their intention is directed mainly towards the *rightness* or *wrongness* of this practice, and not solely on consequences of such an act.

⁸² *ibid*, 194.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 216.

This does not mean that consequences are not considered at all, however they are not the basis and foundation of the disagreement. Additionally, using moral disagreement as an argument against moral realism is not sufficient and it faces numerous problems.

Finally, given that it is possible that at least some moral disagreements are solely morality based, then it is plausible and intuitive to believe that not both Hasan and Finn can be right about their judgment, which would mean that one of them has made a mistake. Considering the truth-maker theory which was the first argument for moral realism, it is reasonable to accept at least some moral actions have the property of either wrongness or rightness, and Hasan's and Finn's proposition's truth will depend on the correspondence of their propositions to the property of either wrongness or rightness of the practice of euthanasia. This is best explained by the existence of objective morality and moral properties, because there are ways to explain why such disagreements occur without facing the problems argument from moral disagreement against moral realism faces. Finally, the disagreement would not be strange and unexpected and moral realism would explain why Hasan and Finn can't both be correct in their judgment.

2.8.5. Moral Autonomy

Whenever we make some moral judgment and hold a certain belief with regards to some moral proposition like "stealing is wrong" or "helping the poor is good", we experience these assertions as if our beliefs and desires don't affect them and that they are independent from them. Usually, when we have a strong belief about some moral issue, we don't let our ambitions and attractions affect our beliefs and it seems that moral judgment about some moral issues is independent from what we would like to be the case. To illustrate this point, consider yourself on the streets of Vienna and while you are walking you see the stand selling the famous *sachertorte*. Suddenly you realize you have a really strong desire to eat this delicacy, with stunning chocolate layers and almost irresistible apricot jam which is topped by chocolate icing. However, you find out that you forgot your wallet in your apartment and you don't have enough money to buy this sensational dessert. But you notice that there is a big crowd surrounding the stand and you are able to easily snatch one piece without anybody noticing you. Whether you steal the piece of delicious cake or not will not affect your moral judgment about stealing

being wrong, because I believe that it is possible for one to hold a certain belief about some moral action but still fail to accomplish that action. In case you really did steal the cake, you might try to defend the particular situation you found yourself in; you forgot the money, you will pay the merchant later on and bring similar justifications, but you would not attempt to defend the permissibility of stealing in general. One may argue, using Thomas Reid's argument, that experiencing morality in this sense gives a good ground for believing in the moral autonomy unless there is a defeater for this belief. However, if it is possible to have additional argumentation, it would certainly make the argument stronger and more substantiated. Luckily, it is not the case that the argument from moral autonomy depends solely on this example.

Moral autonomy can be demonstrated if we compare genuine moral disagreements with disagreements about taste and preference, and the difference in the way we behave and how we ought to behave in these two distinct types of disagreement. When our tastes clash, our action and beliefs vastly differ from the situations when there is a clash between our moral beliefs and convictions. This is again discussed extensively by David Enoch and the difference of the way we behave and ought to behave in these two types of disagreement is related to *the principle of impartiality*.⁸⁴ According to Enoch the principle of impartiality works in the following way:

In an interpersonal conflict, we should step back from our mere preferences, or feelings, or attitudes, or some such, and to the extent the conflict is due to those, an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for. Furthermore, each party to the conflict should acknowledge as much: Standing one's ground is, in such cases, morally wrong.⁸⁵

Following the principle of impartiality, when two parties have the disagreement about the taste, it is important that both of them recognize that it is the conflict of desires and given that both parties are equally morally important, with all other things being equal, their preferences ought to count equally. Consider the example where Umar and Mary have disagreement on what they are going to have for dinner because they can choose only one type of main dish. Mary wants to eat *Vienna Snitzel* while Umar wants to eat *doner kebab*. Now, since this disagreement is only about the taste and given that all

⁸⁴ *ibid*, 14-24.

⁸⁵ *ibid*, 20.

other things are equal, both Mary's and Umar's desire are equally counted, and Umar can't really blame Mary because she wants to eat snitzel instead of kebab. The way to resolve this conflict of desires is for both of them to step back and view this disagreement just as a clash of two persons' tastes and they need to treat their preferences for food like just preference among several.⁸⁶ If Umar is stubborn and decides not to step back and decides to insist that they have a kebab for dinner, then he would knowingly dismiss Mary's preference and he wouldn't treat it as equally important as his preference and this would not be a rational nor a moral thing to do. If the impartiality is upheld, the various ways could be found to solve this conflict. They could decide to have snitzel one night and the other night kebab, or they could draw a lot or flip a coin to decide which dish to have.

When there is a disagreement about the taste, it is reasonable to make a decision relying on pure luck or even giving up one's desire, if there are no other sufficient reasons not to. If Mary and Umar flipped the coin and Mary won the bet, Umar can't really blame Mary and be angry with her and claim that he is rational. However, the situation is vastly different when there is a moral disagreement about some *deep* issue. If there is a moral disagreement on some issue where one side is obviously wrong in his belief, then one ought to persist and hold fast to his opinion and being impartial in this case without any justification would be immoral.⁸⁷ Think about the situation where Umar and Mary walk down the street and find the wallet full of money. Umar thinks that they should keep the money because they found it, while Mary strongly disagrees and thinks that they should go to the police and report the loss. This disagreement is fundamentally different from the disagreements about the taste and Mary certainly wouldn't be happy to decide this matter by drawing the lot or some other method which involves luck. If Umar reasoned that they need the money to pay the rent for this month and this wallet was a *gift* from God, Mary's belief about the immorality of taking the wallet that doesn't belong to her would not change even if what Umar told her was true. If Mary was manipulated to take the wallet after all, this action would be immoral. It might be possible to come with the

⁸⁶ *ibid*, 19.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, 24.

situation where one would be justified to take the wallet but there are also *deeper* moral issues where the disagreement may occur like torturing animals or hunting for fun.

Given that the difference between moral disagreement and disagreement about preferences is evident and morality seems autonomous from our desires, moral realism provides very good explanation for this. If we assume that moral realism is false, then we would have a hard time explaining the differences in disagreements and our moral experience of the moral autonomy, which is one argument that is not isolated but strengthened by other arguments for moral realism.

2.8.6. Moral Progress

Maybe the most frequent and prevailing objection against objective morality one can encounter is that moral practices are in constant change over time. This kind of objection is widely used by the common people, young philosophy students, but also by experienced philosophers and various groups of theologians who put this objection in the systematic argument. The argument against objective morality is empiric one and it states that morality is evidently not objective because the moral understandings and practices of different societies have been changing over time. If something is objectively true, then it should not be affected by the temporal lengths of certain events or influenced by some entity's existence and ought not to be relevant to the cultural practices. The claim is that objective truth implies stability without change. However, we can see that the moral practices of humanity have been constantly changing. For example, the majority of the time homo-sapiens' existence on planet Earth, slavery as phenomenon and institution was well-accepted and practiced in many nations and cultures, including hunter-gatherer type populations like ancient Sumerians, Egyptians, Greece, Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire etc., and more often than not, it was supported by the dominant religion of the time. Today however, we find slavery to be unlawful and repugnant because of the human rights. Furthermore, today we defend equality before the law as justice, while in ancient times the concept of justice had nothing to do with equality. Additionally, today we find killing people for apostasy wrong and beating or physically punishing women reprehensive. Therefore, morality can't be objective since it is always changing and it has always been unstable and dynamic. Not long ago,

slavery was deemed as an appropriate and legitimate practice, today we look at it as abominable practice and ask ourselves how could have we done it for so long, and maybe in 100 years we will have the same opinion about eating meat. Nevertheless, these types of objections are understandable but they have several important things they ignore or fail to realize.

The first and the most obvious problem of this argument is that conclusion doesn't follow from the premises. Even if moral understanding and practices have been constantly changing, it does not follow that moral truth has been changing and therefore it does not exist. It is conceivable that the moral truth does exist, but it is not epistemologically reached yet. Furthermore, from our moral practices and beliefs, one can develop a presumptive argument for the objective morality in light of moral progress that was made by humanity in history. It is counterintuitive to deny that this progress in morality has been made and it seems that this moral improvement indicates that humanity is advancing in direction of the truth of how the moral practices and the world ought to be. But how can one argue for the existence of objective morality from the supposed fact that humans made moral progress? The argument can be constructed in analogous way of the Thomas Aquinas' *fourth way* in proving God's existence. Fourth way is commonly known as an *argument from gradation* and Aquinas puts it roughly like this: It is evident that there are different degrees of goodness in things and there are also different degrees of being in things, and the more something has a being the more goodness it will possess. However, it is not possible to have degrees at all unless there is something that has a being at maximum degree. Therefore, there must be something that has the being at maximum degree and that is God.⁸⁸ Evidently, this argument is by no means proof for God's existence nor was it intended for such purpose. Leaving aside whether this argument makes the existence of God more probable, it does show something important and that is; we need a certain basis or standard when we compare or grade things. Therefore, it is possible to argue in the following way: If moral progress is real, then in order to judge certain moral practices as better we must have some sort of moral basis or standard according to which this judgment will be meaningful and possible. If one accepts this reasoning, then it seems like the moral realism is the best

⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1984), Q:2, A:3.

option because in the case of moral realism the existence of some moral standard is expected.

One way to counter this argument is to deny that moral progress is real and argue that it is just the language game and relative to the cultures while in fact a moral standard doesn't exist. While this explanation is indeed logically possible, it is very unlikely to be true. I have already dealt with relativism and other forms of moral non-realism and most of the objections I posed would be applicable here as well. Also, this argument is not isolated and the reality of moral progress is supported by our experience. One may point out that it is not the case that humanity made progress in all segments and therefore it is not true that the world is advancing towards the truth of how the world ought to be. We became more selfish and respecting the parents and fulfilling our duties towards them came to be less important when compared to past. We became crueler and colder towards the animals which we use for fulfillment of our low desires towards eating meat, we separate the young animals from their mothers in order to extract more milk and humans pluck the feathers from birds still alive for down etc. When we consider all the atrocities we commit today, how can anyone say that humanity made moral progress? Unfortunately, it is true that in certain areas we might be worse than before, but does this fact undermine the argument? I think it doesn't, because it is still true that at least in some area we made progress like in cases I already mentioned. Furthermore, saying that humanity is worse than before and that there is no moral progress but decline and failure actually presupposes the moral basis. In order to make a moral judgment we still need some kind of moral standard according to which we will be able to conclude that we are morally worse than before. Therefore, this objection doesn't pose a serious threat to the argument.

However, if everything I told about the need for moral basis so far was true, there is still one open question and it is; what is actually a moral basis and standard according to which we can judge moral degrees? I would argue that theism can answer this question but this sentiment is not shared by all. For example, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong claims that even though we clearly need a standard and we use it for moral judgment, this standard can't be God. The reason for this is God's nature which is supposed to be

transcendent and given that this is true, then we can't use God's nature as a standard because it transcends our cognitive comprehension. According to Sinnott-Armstrong, the better explanation for moral standard would be the secular foundation based on the principle of harm.⁸⁹ I don't think that God's transcendent nature makes grounding morality on this basis impossible and I don't think that the principle of harm is capable of giving the complete explanation of objective morality. Leaving this objection for chapter III, it is still important to notice that the appeal to a moral standard is reasonable because it seems we all use some kind of standard. This gives us an additional reason to defend moral realism because if it is true, then the existence of a moral standard is expected whatever that standard may be.

With this argument I conclude the cumulative case for moral realism. Taking all things into consideration, I think these arguments definitely aren't sufficient to be considered as a proof for moral realism. However, examining them together and considering each argument as one part of the chain of arguments, I think they make the case for moral realism strong and more probable than the non-realism. Therefore, the conclusion is not that moral realism is undoubtedly true, but that it is more reasonable and thus more likely to be true than not. Since I believe the likelihood of the second premise of my argument has been established, it is time to go to my first premise which asserts that God provides the best explanation for objective morality and analyze it together with considering the alternative explanations and possible objections.

⁸⁹ Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. "Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality". In *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?* Eds. Robert K. Garcia & Nathan L. King. (UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 101-115.

CHAPTER III

FOUNDING MORALITY ON GOD

3.1. God as the Best Explanation for Moral Realism

The defense of moral realism is a tough quest in itself which requires a lot of work, argumentation, and consideration of alternative views about the moral properties and reality. However, even if my argumentation for moral realism is accepted as sufficient and adequate, the main task of this thesis is far from over. The most obvious way to argue against my argument is to attack the first premise which claims that God is the best explanation for objective morality if such a thing really existed. One way to do this is to argue that there are other alternative explanations which are arguably better and therefore objective morality doesn't require God at all and thus involving God into the equation would be an unnecessary hypothesis which makes the theory needlessly complicated. One way of doing this is by identifying moral properties with natural properties. This means that it would be possible to explore moral properties and explain them in a way we explain other natural properties with natural sciences. If this strategy is successful and the defender of such view was capable to demonstrate for example that *wrongness of torturing people* was identical to some natural property, then this would enable him to explain why there is universal agreement when it comes to certain basic moral claims and how people are actually capable of experiencing and knowing these properties. However, there must be a way to justify the claim that moral and natural properties are identical. There is a vast scope of naturalistic explanations and they are usually efforts to ground morality in some objective facts of nature like biological or psychological facts grounding the source of morality in evolution, pleasure, self-interest, etc. However, grounding morality in natural facts is not the only way to object to the

first premise of the argument. It might be the case that moral properties are not natural properties but this would not necessarily mean that God is necessary to explain such fact. After all, it is possible to assert that morality doesn't even need a grounding and it should be seen as *brute fact* which can be known without the need for explanation. This is not as controversial an explanation as it might seem at first (there is hardly any explanation in philosophy that is considered controversial). Majority of Muslims like myself and other theists believe that God's existence does not require an explanation. If we follow the reasoning of medieval philosophers and theologians like Ibn Sina and Thomas Aquinas, we would argue that God's essence is His existence. Since the existence or in some versions being is the simplest term, then it can't be explained or justified by other terms. The reason for this is that all other terms or concepts include the existence as their property and thus none of them can be used to explain the existence because the terms are explained by the simpler terms. Since there is almost no one who denies that there are at least some things that don't need an explanation, it is possible to claim that morality is one such thing. It is very hard to do the justice to all alternative theories but I will try my best to consider some of the best-known and according to me, the strongest naturalistic explanations. Also, I will analyze the ethical non-naturalism, specifically the Shafer-Landau's version and consider whether his theory has problems and should it be seen as the competitive view to my argument. Additionally, it is necessary to discuss the claims that morality needs no grounding or foundation. I believe that evaluation of these views is essential and required because I need some sort of comparison between the theories in order to conclude whether God's existence is really the best explanation among them.

3.2. Moral Naturalism

As it was mentioned earlier, one way of defending moral realism and explaining our moral experiences is to identify moral properties with natural properties. This attempt of identifying moral and natural properties can be done in two ways; analytically or by *a priori reasoning*, and synthetically or by *a posteriori reasoning*. For example, Frank Jackson attempts to identify moral properties with natural properties through *a priori*

analysis.⁹⁰ Jackson believes it is possible to give a definition of morality and moral terms by Ramsey-Lewis method where morality will be reduced to a definition which doesn't contain moral terms. The Ramsey-Lewis method is a way to define fundamental physical particles or objects by explaining their function without mentioning physical terms in the explanation.⁹¹ Jackson attempts to do the similar thing with moral terms analogically with physical terms. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to record the truths related to moral terms and these truths ought not to be taken from common people who haven't done serious reasoning and discussion of their moral beliefs and practices. Once the truths related to moral terms have been collected from the morally mature people, they need to be expressed in terms of properties. After the completion of this task, the last step would be to replace moral terms with other variables which will signify the function of this term and anything that fulfills this function will be identified with the moral term to which this function is related. However, it must be stated that we have to be able to choose only and only one property which satisfies the function in question. Therefore, *goodness* is the property which uniquely satisfies the function of *x* and *wrongness* is the property that uniquely satisfies the function of *y*.⁹² In case there are still people who think that reductive definition is not conclusive even after it was argued and accepted by morally mature people, this doesn't mean that the definition is unsuccessful and that it leaves the open question. According to Jackson this is "nothing more than a hangover from the platonist conception that the meaning of a term like 'right' is somehow a matter of its picking out, or being mysteriously attached to, the form of the right."⁹³

Another way of identifying moral with natural properties is not by *a priori* analysis but with a scientific method which heavily involves induction, forming hypothesis and theories, assuming the existence of unseen mechanics or objects which best explain observable phenomena, etc. One example of such theory is the germ theory of disease which explains *why* we become sick and which gives us the certain predictions that should be realized if the theory was true. Aside from prediction there are certain physical

⁹⁰ Frank Jackson. *From Metaphysics to Ethics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁹¹ David Lewis. "How to Define Theoretical Terms". In *Journal of Philosophy* 67, (1970), 427-46.

⁹² Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction*, 63.

⁹³ *ibid*, 151.

objects and particles that can't be directly observed but whose existence is inferred from the effect observable in nature. One such particle is neutrino which is a particle with no mass or electric charge and which are very hard to detect. One way of detecting their effect is when they interact and produce other particles which give off light when they travel through the ice. Neutrino is important because it helps to explain certain natural processes and because of its explanatory power and observable effects, it is reasonable to conclude that such physical particles actually exist. In case neutrino did not exist certain important parts of the physical world would remain unexplained. Again, in *a posteriori* reasoning, it is possible to use analogy with science and defend moral realism in a way to claim that asserting the existence of moral properties explains various phenomena better than in the case where moral properties don't exist. However, it is not enough to only claim that moral properties explain the reality better but a "moral realist who wishes to benefit from this stratagem must show that the postulation of moral facts similarly can have an explanatory function."⁹⁴ Therefore, in order to gain the right to speak about moral properties as the best explanation, asserting their existence must indeed explain certain facts and experiences better than their non-existence. The reason for this condition is pretty obvious because inferring the existence of physical particles works in the similar way.

Both *a priori* and *a posteriori* method have their benefits and both of them can explain numerous experiences humans have as moral agents. Take the example from the argument from moral disagreement and moral autonomy. If moral properties were identical to natural properties, then they could be objective regardless of what people believed about them and just like in the case of natural facts, humans could obtain false beliefs about moral facts and this might be the source of disagreements between them and we could reasonably claim that if two persons hold contradictory moral beliefs, then one of them is wrong. The similar thing could be said about the moral experiences, because if moral properties were the same with natural properties, it would be expected that we get to know them because of our interaction with them in the same way we get to know scientific and natural properties from the interaction with them in the natural world.

⁹⁴ Peter Railton. "Moral Realism". In *Philosophical Review* 95(2), (1986), 172.

Identifying moral properties with natural properties is not the explanation that necessarily excludes God's existence and as far as I see it, theism and naturalism are two compatible views. The theistic theory which is closest to naturalism is arguably the natural law theory and the *a priori* and *a posteriori* method I explained above could be considered as different variations of the natural law theory. However, this will be the case only if we believe that ultimately God is the creator of everything which includes the moral properties. The reason for this is because it is usually the case that the defenders of natural law theory claim that moral values are discoverable by reason alone because they are somehow grounded in the observable world. The *Maturidi* view is exactly like this and it is well-known by almost all students of Islamic theology that Abu Mansur al-Maturidi argued that humans have the capacity of discovering the truth of God's existence and simple moral truths of good and bad without the revelation. However, identifying moral and natural properties does leave the open space to exclude God in the same way He is excluded in the scientific theories. For example, theist scientists do think that God played a role in the beginning of universe and its formation but this is not a necessary explanation as atheist scientists can discover the same facts about the universe through scientific inquiry without the appeal to divine being. In the end, what will make the difference and one explanation preferable to the other, is going to be the strength of an explanation that the view offers. Although moral naturalism and theism are compatible, I am not subscribed to moral naturalism because I believe it doesn't offer a complete explanation of morality and it doesn't capture all of its features.

The main problem I have with all naturalistic accounts of morality is the normative nature and the intrinsic "oughtness" morality possesses. Although naturalistic accounts of morality can provide the explanation for almost all the arguments for moral objectivity I have presented, they are still not sufficient to account for the normative nature of morality. If what I have shown about morality is true or in other words if moral properties need to be normative or must have "oughtness" built into themselves which will give us not only good and strong reasons but overriding reasons to act morally, as well as make our actions blameworthy or praiseworthy, then a naturalistic account is not adequate. If moral realism is true and moral properties exist, then they also must be motivating, justifying our actions, making us responsible for those actions, which will be

true irrespective of what we desire or what our psychological state is. If insulting people has the property of wrongness, then this gives me the overriding reason not to insult the people who are irritating me although I have a strong desire to do so. However, I believe this is not how the natural properties are because when we become motivated by something natural, our motivation is guided by our desires and not independent of them. If my running shoes are in a chaotic state because I just came back from the tracking a mountain while it was raining, it is safe to claim that my running shoes have the property of being dirty and this property may motivate me to clean them. It seems that natural properties can be motivating and provide reasons for action but this example is vastly different from the previous one. While the natural property of dirtiness is giving me the reason to clean my shoes, it doesn't give me the overriding reasons and my action is motivated by my desire to have clean shoes. But this is not the same in the case of moral properties, because they seem to be irrespective of what we desire. Although I would like to insult the people who irritate me, I still don't claim that this desire provides me the sufficient reason to act in this way. Thus, identifying moral and natural properties may be facing a grave problem and the question of normativity has led many thinkers to actually reject naturalism. This rejection led some philosophers to deny objective morality altogether, especially those who are metaphysical naturalists like Mackie. As we have seen in the discussion on the error theory, Mackie rejected objective morality because values must have an intrinsic reason-giving feature which makes moral values utterly different from anything in the natural world. Since everything that exists is natural and all real properties are natural properties, then this gives us a good reason to claim that moral properties don't exist. Not all philosophers who doubt moral naturalism reject objective morality and the existence of moral properties, however, they share the opinion that naturalism ultimately fails because of normative nature of morality. In relation to moral and natural facts David Copp says: "There remains a stubborn feeling that facts about what is right or wrong, what is good or bad, and what we have reason to do have something distinctive in common, and that this common feature is something that a natural fact could not have."⁹⁵ The "common feature" Copp is talking about is

⁹⁵ David Copp. *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 136.

normativity. There are other problems with two particular approaches of naturalism like Jackson's claims about morally mature people and his response to the possibility of the open question, success of reducing the definition of moral properties to non-moral terms, etc., but I will not go into these problems because I believe that the problem of normativity is sufficient for discrediting and rejecting moral naturalism.

3.3. Social Agreement as a Foundation for Morality

Explained in simple terms, social agreement theories can be understood as accounts which argue that morality is founded in social agreements which are the outcomes of human enterprise and activity. In this sense social agreement theories are fundamentally constructivist accounts of morality because constructivist accounts hold that morality is not based upon natural or some other fact, but it is based upon human interactions. Therefore, unlike naturalistic theories, constructivist theories have some kind of explanation for the normative nature of morality; the moral "oughtness" is a product of our interactions. Although some constructivist theories are fundamentally relativistic accounts, some versions of social agreement theories can explain the objective nature of morality in a sense that humans can be mistaken in their beliefs about what is moral and what isn't or what humans ought to do and what they ought not to. One important distinction in social agreement theories is related to the nature of the agreement in question. The agreement can be actual or ideal and hypothetical. I will not discuss the actual agreement theory which is notably defended by Gilbert Harman.⁹⁶ The reason for my dismissal is based on the fact that actual agreement theory is in my opinion a completely relativistic account of morality and the most of my objections to relativism in chapter II are still valid in the case of actual agreement theory. Furthermore, this account has some serious issues in explaining the nature of morality and it faces some difficult questions. For example, why should actual agreement be universally binding considering that there are some people who didn't agree on some rules and patterns of behavior? If this is somehow explained, then is it necessary to think that there is only one such agreement and if it is not, then how can it be the case that different societies and cultures have come to make numerous agreements with the same content and rules? It is more

⁹⁶ See Gilbert Harman. "Is There a Single True Morality?". In *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77-103.

probable to think there are more than one and different actual agreements because we are constantly witnessing such occurrence. Likewise, all actual agreements are temporary and valid only for a certain amount of time. Given this fact, how can it be the case that there are some moral values and duties that are considered as timeless in a sense that they are valid in all times and places? These are some of the reasons why I won't consider the actual agreement theory as a serious contender for an explanation of the moral features.

I think ideal social agreement theory fares much better in comparison with the actual agreement theory although it too seems incomplete and problematic. I understand ideal social agreement theory as an account which holds that morality is based on theoretical agreement which didn't actually take place but it *would* take place if it was up to humans to determine moral rules and duties. This position opens one obvious question; why *would* people make such agreement? What is being asked here is what is the source and on what grounds people would enter this agreement? Therefore, one needs moral theory in order to explain the reasons for this agreement. One strength of an ideal social agreement is that it gives different possibilities for moral theories and it is not necessarily restricted to only one theory. For example, one may defend ideal social agreement theory and be a moral naturalist or even relativist at the same time. However, I will discuss one option that I didn't consider earlier and which doesn't need God as an explanation. Maybe the most popular approach is to explain this ideal agreement on the grounds of self-interest or the general well-being. This self-interest is not to be understood as the short-term desire for the fulfillment of the selfish individual aspirations, but the interest in the long run which will benefit not only the individual but the community as a whole. This line of reasoning is very intuitive because it seems like self-evident fact and pretty clear that the community which is behaving morally and respects some moral rules has greater chances to survive than the communities that are not. This doesn't mean that the self-interest should be reduced to the evolutionary explanation where morality is considered as the product of our various desires for benefit of the species. Although, evolutionary explanation can ground the morality in some natural facts like DNA, it still has many problems in capturing other features of morality like normativity. Account that explains only the reasons why humans behave

morally is not enough to explain why humans ought to behave morally. However, the defender of ideal social agreement is not necessarily committed to the evolutionary explanation as he can defend the self-interest in the long run in different ways. One way to argue for ideal social agreement based on the long-run self-interest and well-being is by appealing to John Rawls' "veil of ignorance". In his "Theory of Justice", Rawls offers a thought experiment where the person is ignorant about everything concerning his race, family, wealth, social status, physical abnormalities or the place of birth. If this was the case, Rawls asks, what sort of society we would choose to live in? If it was possible that the owner of Microsoft Corporation would not know that he will be rich, or the president of USA might as well be born in some poor African tribe with the lack of food and water, then after one conceives himself in this state of ignorance, he already knows what ought to be changed and fixed, because we all know what kind of society we want to live in.⁹⁷ For example, we want education to be free, we would want to have a health insurance even if we are poor, we wish to be treated equally in front of the court, we all desire to have the capability for owning a decent house etc. Similarly, one may argue that we would choose to enter the agreement which binds us to behave morally because there is no guarantee that we will be in the position to acquire and fulfill our own selfish desires at the expense of others.

Taking all things in consideration, it does seem that ideal social agreement theory has certain advantages over actual agreement theory. If humans were to make rules applying the "veil of ignorance", it is safe to assume that we would want to live in a moral society and thus we would be safe from the possibility of partial moral rules which would favor one group over the other. Furthermore, morality is necessary to keep order and to prevent us from harming each other, especially if we think like Thomas Hobbes that human nature is essentially vile and that in the state of nature we would be in "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man (would be), solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."⁹⁸ Although, ideal social agreement is safe from relativism, it still has its own share of issues. It is undeniable that human interactions can generate certain

⁹⁷ John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005), 136-142.

⁹⁸ Thomas Hobbes(1996). "Leviathan". In *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89.

duties which we normally don't have. Following what has been said in chapter II about moral features, promises are one such example where the moral "oughtness" has been generated from human interaction: If I promised to my mentor to give a presentation of my thesis and entered this agreement by my choice, then I ought to give a presentation. However, it is hard to see why the human interaction alone would be the sole reason for generating moral duty if there was no independent duty, namely *oughtness of fulfilling promises*, upon which the duty to fulfill promises has been based on. But this is not the main issue with ideal social agreement theory. In my opinion, the greatest difficulty for ideal social agreement lies in the link between its hypothetical nature and generating the actual moral "oughtness" or duties. In other words, how is it possible that something which is entirely hypothetical can generate something actual, especially something which possess the normativity and overriding reasons for acting in a certain way like morality? If ideal social agreement is correct, then humans are responsible for their actions because they *would* agree to be responsible had they entered such an agreement, but in reality, they didn't actually enter such agreement and the conditions that would be the reason for generating duties are not actual. To illustrate the oddity of this implication, consider the following example: If I join the "Islamic Philosophy Reading Club" at my university, and they announce that in order to successfully continue their work, they need someone who will translate several texts from Arabic language. Because I am fluent in Arabic, I would promise to translate the texts and in case I actually made the promise, it is reasonable to claim that now I ought to translate the texts. However, it is very strange to claim that because of this hypothetical possibility and the fact that I *would* make the promise, I *actually* have the duty to translate the texts even if no actual promise has been made. I might have a good reason to translate the texts like being appreciated by professors or even getting good payment, but this is not enough to generate actual moral "oughtness" and duties with overriding reasons. Therefore, using the "veil of ignorance" to show what hypothetical people in hypothetical conditions *would* do is not enough to produce moral obligations for actual people in actual conditions.

Beside this problem, there are other questions for defenders of ideal social contract theory. One such question is which moral theory needs to be presupposed for this ideal

agreement that needs to bind people and make them accountable for their actions? At least to me, it seems necessary to presuppose a moral theory, because if one argues that no theory of good is needed, then this will undoubtedly create numerous complications. If this was the case, then according to what are we going to decide what is right or wrong when even the hypothetical people had no such theory? Even if there are some rules, how they can be binding and generate “oughtness”? It seems that moral rules would be arbitrary and thus uncertain and questionable. The most wide-spread moral theory in social agreement theories is the theory based on the long-term self-interest. It is not a coincidence that this theory of good is popular in social agreement theories because it fits such theories very well. However, the morality based on self-interest is notoriously full of difficulties. If morality is really grounded in self-interest, then it is very easy to find a scenario in which one may not act virtuously. For example, if stealing was wrong only because we may be punished or ostracized by society and because it would go against our self-interest in a long run, then it would open the possibility for people to only partially apply this moral rule and they might be motivated to steal when there is no high probability to be caught. However, this clearly goes against the objectiveness of morality which should not be affected by our desires. Therefore, ideal social agreement is not sufficient to explain and account for all moral features because it can't explain the link between hypothetical agreement and actual duties, and it needs the moral theory which grounds morality in something else other than self-interest.

3.4. Moral Non-naturalism Combined with Defense of Morality as a Brute Fact

Moral non-naturalism is a form of moral realism which argues for the existence of moral properties and their reality where moral properties, according to which moral propositions are true or false, are not natural but non-natural features. The main motivation for such an approach is related to the issue of normativity which is the main problem of the realist accounts that presuppose metaphysical naturalism and treat moral properties as natural features of the world. Russ Shafer-Landau, the most impressive defender of moral non-naturalism I came across, thinks that natural sciences can't capture the normative nature of morality because moral facts “tell us what we ought to do; how we should behave; what is worth pursuing; what reasons we have; what is

justifiable and what not. There is no science that can inform us of such things.”⁹⁹ Therefore, defenders of moral non-naturalism argue that moral properties must be non-natural because of their inherent normativity. Shafer-Landau defends his position by making a distinction between the natural and social sciences and other disciplines. The main difference is that natural sciences come to know their principles through *a posteriori* methodology while there are some disciplines which discover their principles *a priori* and one of those disciplines is ethics, which discovers moral truths *a priori*.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it follows that the true moral propositions are necessary. In order to justify this claim, Shafer-Landau follows the methodology of non-reductive philosophy of mind and he points out three similarities between it and moral properties: *Multiple realizability*, which means that moral properties can be realized in a broad number of ways just like the mental states. For example, we can realize that saving innocent lives is good in all situations and this act would remain right even if the government forbid us to do so. *Property dualism*, which means that moral and natural properties are distinct but non-natural moral properties still can be the properties of natural substances. *Anti-reductionist accommodation of supervenience*, which means that moral properties supervene on natural properties and as a result there can't be the change on moral properties without the change on natural properties. However, this doesn't mean that moral properties are necessarily reducible to natural properties. According to Shafer-Landau, it means even if something is highly constituted of something else, like mental states being constituted of physical states, it is not necessary that they are reducible to their constitutes. Therefore, even if moral properties are vastly constituted by natural properties, they are not reducible to them and they supervene on them.¹⁰¹

Moral non-naturalism is not necessarily contradictory and opposed to theism and they are compatible to go together. In fact, the version of theism I am defending also supports moral non-naturalism. There is one significant difference, however, in Shafer-Landau's version of non-naturalism, and it is related to his *property dualism*. Namely, in Shafer-

⁹⁹ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Russ Shafer-Landau(2007). “Ethics as Philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Nonnaturalism”. In *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, eds. Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 65.

¹⁰¹ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 71-77.

Landau's account moral properties which are non-natural are the properties of natural substances while in the version of theism I am defending, they are non-natural properties of non-natural substance. Although Shafer-Landau's version is simpler in ontology than my version of theism, I don't think it is a better theory as a whole because theism have certain advantages which I will mention later on. Additionally, the claim that there are some moral truths which are necessary is also not necessarily problematic for theism. If the God described in Abrahamic religions exist and He is omnibenevolent, then it is reasonable to believe that some or even all of His commands will be necessary. In this sense, theist can agree that some moral truths are *a priori* and necessary.

Even though moral non-naturalism is not necessarily contradictory to theism, it can be viewed as competing theory if one combines it with the claim that moral properties are brute facts which don't need grounding or additional explanation. One such approach can be found in Erik Wielenberg's arguments where he defends the view that some moral truths are the brute facts of the universe.¹⁰²

The view which holds that morality needs no grounding might be the one which is hardest to counter, because such belief contains no contradiction and is perfectly coherent. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, almost everyone accepts that there are some things which don't need grounding or explanation, and it is the same situation with theists who believe that God's existence need's no grounding. Therefore, one might claim that because moral truths are *a priori* and necessary, they need no explanation and they just *are*. However, something being necessary does not mean that it can't or shouldn't be explained by something else which is also necessary. Stephen Evans gives the example of the proposition "It is false that every prime is odd" being necessarily true, which is explained by other necessary truth; "number 2 is both even and prime".¹⁰³ This is especially apparent in moral propositions and Evans uses the following example: "It is wrong to torture innocent humans for fun" is necessarily true but it can be explained by other necessary truth like "torturing humans for fun is not

¹⁰² Erik J. Wielenberg. "In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism". In *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (1). (2008), 23-41.

¹⁰³ Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 152.

respecting them as ends in themselves”.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, something being necessarily true doesn’t entail that such proposition doesn’t need an explanation or grounding in some other proposition, and just as there are contingent moral truths that are grounded in necessary moral truths, it is in the realm of possibility that there are also some necessary moral truths grounded in other necessary truths. Views such of those of Erik Wielenberg are not easily disproved, in fact it might be impossible to actually refute such claims because they don’t involve argumentation, however, what can be done is to compare such theories with competing views and see which theory is more reasonable and makes more sense. Is it really the case that morality and moral properties, which are supposedly objective, universal and most importantly normative, are just brute facts that need no explanation? At least to me, this seems highly unlikely and this claim can be supported by the views of numerous metaethical theories that argue against objective morality like emotivism, error theory, quasi-realism, relativism and others. Additionally, if we assert that moral non-naturalism is true, then the claim of ungrounded necessary moral truths becomes even more extraordinary. Particularly considering the normative nature of morality and its inherent “oughtness”, which makes morality *queer* and utterly different from anything in the universe, indicates that if there really are necessary moral truths, then they need an explanation. This is especially true, if we think that the universe is the way Bertrand Russel described it: “...the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms...”¹⁰⁵ If the universe was really like this, then the objective, universal and normative morality will make little sense, and it will arguably make the issue even more mystical and complicated. However, I think if theistic worldview is true, then the morality with all its features will make more sense and this is what I will be arguing for in the following sections.

3.5. God and Morality

Another very important premise of my argument is “if objective morality exists, then God’s existence is the best explanation for it.” God’s existence provides, I believe, a solid explanation for objective morality and is capable to capture all features of morality;

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, 152.

¹⁰⁵ Bertrand Russel. “Free Man’s Worship”. In *Russel on Religion: Selections from the writings of Bertrand Russell*, eds. Louis Greenspan and Stefan Andersson. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 32.

objectivity, universality and normativity. Although, there are other alternatives for grounding morality, I think that they ultimately fail to provide a successful and complete account which will include all the features I have mentioned. I disagree with Sinnott Armstrong that morality doesn't require God at all and that it just clearly exists.¹⁰⁶ I am not suggesting that leaving God out of the picture would result with complete disappearance of objective morality but I think that alternative accounts, including the opinions similar to Armstrong's, are incomplete and miss something essential and important. It is important to keep in mind that premise in question speaks nothing of moral epistemology and belief in God. I clearly believe that a non-believer can discover and come to know what is objectively good or evil, they can lead a praise-worthy life and develop a virtuous character without any reference to God. It naturally follows from this that significant portion of moral knowledge doesn't depend upon specific religion or revealed text. The argument I am discussing definitely allows the possibility for knowing moral values, virtues, and some obligations without the necessity of the appeal to divine text. It is without a doubt conceivable that a person can achieve moral knowledge through conscience, reason, intuition or by other means even if he didn't believe in God. I also find the idea that God may create a special kind of moral faculty, by which humans are able to recognize objective morality independently of their belief in God, plausible and coherent within the theistic framework. If God exists and wants humans to behave morally, then it seems reasonable that He would enable humans to discover moral truths and develop a desire for virtues by means other than specific revelation. I will discuss in separate sections what are these other possible means by which we can achieve moral knowledge and why it makes sense that this knowledge is possible even without the belief in God. Furthermore, I don't want to argue that if God doesn't exist, then morality would be necessarily relative, arbitrary and baseless. As a matter of a fact, I already recognized that it is possible to ground morality in something else other than God, however what I argue is that these alternative grounds don't have the explanatory power when compared to the version where God's exists. This doesn't mean that God's existence will be proven by default but the essential assertion of the argument is if such thing like objective morality really existed, then it is best explained

¹⁰⁶ Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. *Morality Without God*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.

by grounding it on divine being like God. The premise is therefore concerned with ontology and it offers a God as the explanation for all moral features. In the following sections I will explain how God's existence grounds moral goodness and captures moral "oughtness". Furthermore, I will point out some possible ways to know moral values, virtues and duties without reference to revelation. Finally, I will discuss different objections of my account and conclude the thesis.

3.6. Moral Values Grounded in God's Existence

Admittedly, the claim that moral values are explained by God's existence is vague and can have more than one meaning. In a nutshell, what I mean by this claim is that moral values like justice, honesty, truthfulness, kindness, love, etc. are identifiable with specific attributes of God. When it comes to the question of God's nature and His essence, I share the opinion with the classical Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina, which argue that unlike other beings, where the essence and existence are separable, God's essence *is* His Existence. Additionally, God is "wajibul wujud" or necessary being, which means that God can't fail to exist and because He is necessary being, He exists in every possible universe. Since God's attributes are included by His essence, humans are capable of explaining God to a certain degree by His essential attributes which are unchangeable and stable. Although some divine actions may seem contingent to us like God being angry, this stays in the realm of action and God is not explained by these changing states. I don't think that divine attributes are different *from* or superadded *to* God's essence but they are rather identical and indivisible from His essence. This doesn't mean that the attributes don't really exist, they certainly do, but they are not separable from God's essence. Because of our limitations, we humans make conceptual distinctions in order to better understand God's nature. Therefore, there are several essential attributes of God that are necessary and free from contingency because they are essential attributes of the necessary being. One of the essential attributes of God is that He is essentially good. I don't find this opinion problematic since Islam views God as the greatest being, as a matter of fact the main slogan of Islamic religion is "Allah is the Greatest", and this should not be controversial in Christianity as well, because it is very comparable and to a significant point identical with Anselm's definition of God: "A

being than which no greater can be conceived". Since God is the greatest conceivable being, it follows that He is necessarily good. This is evident from the fact that a being which is necessarily good is certainly greater than a being which is only contingently good. If all of this is true and theistic God exists, then we can see how we are able to identify some moral values with God's attributes and furthermore, we have an adequate moral standard or basis according to which certain acts are good or bad and according to which we can judge whether we made a moral progress or not.

However, having an explanation for moral standard or being able to identify moral values with the attributes of God says little about the existence of those values and the reality of moral properties and how they come to be. One way which theist could take explaining the reality of moral properties is Platonic explanation of moral truths, where the good and beautiful in itself would need some kind of explanation and God could fulfill that role. Similarly, the theist can defend a Neoplatonic version which was in fact favored in the works of Medieval Islamic philosophers. Moral properties could have come into existence by the process of emanation from God or "the First". In this version, everything that exists comes into existence as the effect of the God who is essentially the disembodied mind that "intelligizes" the Intelligible (Itself).¹⁰⁷ This process of "intelligizing" causes other existents to come to be by the process of emanation. If this is true, then it is also the way moral properties and values could have come into existence and the way they continue to exist. Since God is morally perfect being and essentially good, the property of goodness or rightness would naturally flow from His nature. This could be the explanation of how it comes that we tend to experience moral properties as real. However, the other side of the coin would flow as well, namely evil and wickedness. But this could be explained in a way that evil is "less real" from the good, because it is completely different and far away from God's nature. The more we resemble God, the better moral character we obtain. Similarly, the more humans get away from resembling God, the more wicked they become. Although this version of theism can be perfectly coherent and explain many things with regards to the features of morality, it can seem very strange and counterintuitive to many including myself.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Farabi. "On The Perfect State". In *Great Books of the Islamic World*, ed. Seyyid Huseyn Nasr (Chikago: Oxford University Press,1985), 57-99.

However, there are other approaches which are arguably simpler like Aristotelian or giving God the role of directly creating moral properties like He created everything else. If this was the case, then it wouldn't be strange to claim that moral properties are non-natural since they come from the non-natural substance. This creation is compatible with the natural law theory where God can create everything with suitable nature for it, or it can be viewed as the active creation, like *Asharites* and *Maturidites* hold, where God creates constantly and every moment of reality and what we experience is depended upon and thanks to the active creation of God. If we assume the truth of this view, then it is not surprising to believe that morality is objective. Furthermore, one level of normativity could be captured, because God is omnipotent and as such, He is capable of creating the moral properties which would have "oughtness" and it would be expected for such utterly different *thing* to be non-natural and have a non-natural origin. Furthermore, as it has been mentioned that God necessarily exists in every possible world, this means that all His essential attributes are also necessary. Therefore, it follows that some moral truths would be necessarily true in every possible world and they would be explained by God's existence. In my opinion this account does a pretty good job with the explanation but I don't think it is complete because there are some other elements in moral features, particularly in the normative nature that haven't been addressed with this explanation. For example, it is still an open question why are we accountable for our actions and how come some moral duties are universal? What is the source of moral authority and how it arises? Is this really the entire story for the explanation of all moral features and their specific contents? I think the further explanation is necessary in order to capture all details about morality. Luckily, there is a theistic account which can be combined with the version I considered now. The account I have on my mind is modified divine command theory which, I believe, is capable of providing a sufficient explanation for all moral features that other accounts couldn't entirely succeed to complete. In the following section I will explain which version of divine command theory I am referring to and why is it different from traditional approach.

3.7. Divine Command Theory

Divine Command Theory (DCT) is an ethical theory of moral duties and obligations that is understood as whatever God commands is right and whatever He forbids is wrong. As such, DCT is usually conflated with theological voluntarism and this fact is not surprising because DCT works pretty well combined with voluntarism. For example, the majority of medieval Muslim theologians defended this view, because accepting moral values and duties as objectively true would mean that there is something independent from God, making revelation unnecessary as we could follow moral rules without the need for God and religion. Furthermore, this would also be against God's divine attribute of omnipotence because we could infer right and wrong from our independent reason. I will address these charges with other objections but for now it is important to mention that DCT doesn't entail theological voluntarism. Although, both positions stress the importance of God's will as the main standard in determining what is right and wrong, DCT doesn't have to hold that God's will is completely arbitrary. There are other important differences as well but I will not ponder upon this issue as it is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹⁰⁸ DCT that I find substantial and persuasive is a modified version which doesn't attempt to extend the ethical theory, and it is not intended to cover all ethical issues and provide a reductive answer based on one principle. I think that DCT is not necessarily opposed to other ethical theories, like virtue theory or natural law theory, but perfectly compatible and consistent. I base this claim on Stephan Evans' argument from chapter III of his book "God and Moral Obligation". Evans demonstrates how it is possible that DCT presupposes a certain theory of good, like natural law theory, and how it can also point towards the virtue theory, therefore eliminating the assumed contradiction and rivalry of these theories.¹⁰⁹

So, what exactly is the modified DCT that I am talking about? Just like the traditional version, modified DCT holds that right and wrong are identifiable by God's commands and prohibitions. The main difference in modified version is that God's commands are

¹⁰⁸ For a helpful explanation related to this topic see Mark Murphy's (2019) "Theological Voluntarism" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/voluntarism-theological/>.

¹⁰⁹ Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 53-87.

not arbitrary. Which means that God is in some sense limited. However, this is not the problem because the source of this limitation is God Himself, because it is His nature that is limiting Him and what he commands. If we accept what has been said about God's essential attribute of goodness, then this makes sense because if God is necessarily good, then everything that comes from Him is in accordance to His divine nature and thus it is necessarily good as well. Since God's commands come from his nature as well, they will necessarily be in accordance with His nature and therefore based on and directed towards good. This version of DCT is developed specifically to answer and explain the normative nature of morality. One way to explain "oughtness" of morality is to identify moral obligations with divine commands. This must not be confused with the theory of objective moral values because although normativity is related to good, it is not reducible to it, and as I already mentioned earlier, this version of DCT needs to presuppose some moral theory and it covers only moral "oughtness". Recall what has been said about the normative nature of morality: It possesses a certain kind of authority and responsibility where we can be blamed or praised for our actions. Furthermore, the normative nature of morality and the moral "oughtness" is superior to other fields like law. In another words, the moral "oughtness" means that we have overriding reasons for acting in a certain way and one of the main strengths of DCT is the ability to explain this overriding character of morality, because as I have already elaborated, there is a big difference between good reasons for acting and overriding reasons. Recall that moral oughtness can't be reduced to other any other type of duty but there is a significant portion that overlaps with them. Some duties arise from our voluntary interactions with other people, like in the case of agreements and promises, and some are generated by our participation in certain social institutions. A *cliché* of such relationship is the institution of family. In the family all participants have certain rights and duties. For example, the parents have the right to name their children, to provide them religious upbringing if they want it, to choose which primary school their children will go to, etc. Likewise, the parents have numerous duties to fulfill because of their role, like the duty to feed the children, provide the food and clothing, to protect them from harm, financial support, etc. Now, it seems that sometimes a certain participation in certain social institution gives raise to the "oughtness" which doesn't

depend upon participant's free will. This "oughtness" significantly overlaps with the moral one. However, what is the source of this normativity and authority that morality claims for itself? The defender of DCT will respond that it originates from divine commands. The moral "oughtness" will possess overriding reasons because it comes from the highest possible authority, God Himself. Furthermore, moral propositions about moral duties would be true or false and the truth value would be determined by the correspondence to divine commands. I consider this version of DCT explanatory powerful and more compelling than the alternative accounts I discussed so far.

3.8. Advantages

As mentioned above, certain social institutions can give rise to moral duties because of the social interactions. If theism is true, then God is an actual person who is the Creator and as such He participates in a social relationship between Himself and creation. Just as the duty of a child to be grateful to his parents arises from the moral truth that one ought to be grateful to his supporter and protector, the duty of being grateful to God would have been generated from the fact that He created us and gave us numerous blessings and favors and as it is stated in the Qur'an, God's blessings are innumerable: "If you tried to count Allah's blessings, you would never be able to number them. Surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful."¹¹⁰ If this is true, then it seems obvious humans ought to acknowledge all the blessings God gave them and be grateful to Him as well as recognize the importance of the relationship with God. Therefore, this account can capture the source of moral authority originating in God. I used the analogy of a child being grateful to his parents because parents give their children a lot and thus deserve gratefulness. However, if theism is true, then God's rights far surpass the rights of parents because He gave us a whole lot more than any parent could possibly have given. This is why gratefulness to God ought to be greater than the gratefulness to any other human beings, because they were also created and their life preserved by God. This authority is not based on God's command and it would be true even if God didn't command humans to be grateful to Him. Furthermore, it is reasonable to claim that if God is the creator of everything, then He would have the right over everything. If the

¹¹⁰ Qur'an, 16:18. <https://quran.com/16/18>.

labor theory of property is true and we have a natural right to claim the property which we have mixed our labor with¹¹¹, then God, by virtue of bringing everything into existence without using the labor that belongs to somebody else, has a right to claim everything He created. If all of this is true, then God could provide a good explanation of the source of moral authority as He would be that source and He would have a justified claim on that authority. This is why God has the rights to impose certain duties on humans which might not be obvious moral truths discoverable by our reason like the content or form of a prayer. It is clear from what I mentioned above that there are some duties that are not depended upon explicit command of God, like being grateful to God. However, a modified version of DCT includes other types of duties as well which gain their status through God's rulings. If theism is true, then the moral authority would be explained with God as its source.

Beside capturing authority, the account I am defending is able to explain other normative features of morality like overriding reasons and motivation for moral action. Recall that there are different types of "oughtness" and that having good reasons to act doesn't necessarily mean that person therefore has overriding reasons to act. Moral reasons are superior to other reasons which is obvious by the fact that we have the duty even to resist or at least disapprove of legal rules if they contradict morality like in the case where state orders a genocide or racism. However, how can these overriding or ultimate reasons for action be explained? If theism is true and God created humans who are participants in social relationship with God, then this relationship is the most important and the most valuable relationship that humans can possibly have. As such, having a good relationship with God would be utterly important to humans and this is realized by obeying God's commands who, by the virtue of being our Creator and Sustainer, rightfully deserves to be obeyed. Therefore, this gives humans not only good reasons to maintain the good relationship with God but overriding reasons with overriding importance. Furthermore, this account is capable of explaining how can morality be motivating. It is important to distinguish between motivation for action and overriding reasons because it is possible for one to have good reasons to act but still fail to be motivated to complete the action, although moral reasons usually do motivate us.

¹¹¹ John Locke. *Second Treatise of Government*. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 22.

Therefore, in order for an account to be complete, it needs to explain this feature as well. Generally, non-cognitivist accounts like emotivism claim that they capture this feature better than cognitivist accounts. The main assertion is that there is a necessary link between moral judgment and motivation. However, if cognitivism is true and moral judgments are expressions of belief, then it can't explain this feature well. If I have a true belief that my neighbor has no food and is hungry, presumably this belief will not motivate me to give him food. However, if I know that my neighbor is hungry and I am sad because of it, it is more likely that I will be motivated and act accordingly. Now, it is clear that non-cognitivist accounts like emotivism can explain the motivating nature of morality but I think the assertion that beliefs can't be motivating is false. I think it is evident that humans are not always motivated to do what is right and morally good and they can act selfishly and sometimes even viciously and this is what a powerful account needs to explain as well. I think the account I am defending does exactly that. Firstly, it can explain why beliefs can actually be motivating. If I believe that omniscient and omnibenevolent God exists and that He has laid down certain requirements for humans to fulfill, then, because God deserves gratefulness and obedience and we owe him everything, I would be motivated to fulfill those requirements and improve my relationship with God. Secondly, there are numerous reasons why a person can fail to be motivated to act morally. For example, one may frequently lie and deceive others for his short-term benefits because he fails to understand that God has commanded us to be truthful. This doesn't imply that the only way of knowing moral duties and being motivated to accomplish them is by knowing that they are God's commands. It is conceivable that moral duties are recognizable by conscience or reason without realizing that they are in fact God's commands. Instead, what this shows is that this account allows for a range of possibilities with explanations to those possibilities. Therefore, my account's explanation of why morality is motivating doesn't mean God didn't provide all humans with other means, like moral faculty or simply mental constitution, which would cause humans to feel delight and happiness while doing something good whereas it would cause the feeling of sadness and guilt while doing something bad. Hence, claiming that there are moral non-believers will not be an argument against this account. The modified version of DCT allows for these possibilities and therefore it is capable of

explaining the normative nature of morality quite well when compared with the rival accounts.

Another advantage of this account lies in its ability to explain why morality is universal in a sense that no one is exempt from it and why it incorporates all of humanity simply in virtue of having life, which is clearly lacking in some other accounts like all forms of relativism social agreement theory. Firstly, we can understand and explain why we experience some moral truths as universally applicable. If theism is true, then this experience makes sense because God is essentially good and He wants people to be good and act rightfully and for this reason it is very likely that God would give humans the ability to discern right from wrong and given the truth of theism, experience of universal moral truths would be unsurprising. Secondly, given the truth of theism, God is the creator of everything including humans and He has the authority to give commands which would encompass all of humanity. Therefore, if God has given a general command intended for all humanity, then all humans, since they are participants in the social relationship with God, have a duty to fulfill those commands. In Islam there are many commands of this type like the command not to cause chaos on earth: “Do not spread corruption in the land after it has been set in order. And call upon Him with hope and fear. Indeed, Allah’s mercy is always close to the good-doers”¹¹² or a command to help the poor, be kind to parents and neighbors: “Worship Allah alone and associate none with Him. And be kind to parents, relatives, orphans, the poor, near and distant neighbors, close friends, needy traveler...”¹¹³. Furthermore, in an Islamic version of theism there are various divine commands which are directed towards building up and developing a virtuous character like command to be sincere and trustworthy, or the command to be just, patient, modest, etc. If God has commanded all humans to be virtuous, then it is a moral duty that every human being is subject to. This doesn’t mean that being kind to parents and neighbors ought to be done only because God commanded so and if He commanded that we treat others in a vile manner, then this would be the right thing to do. Firstly, since God is essentially good, some commands are issued necessarily and they are those commands which are based on necessary moral truths

¹¹² Qur'an, 7:56. <https://quran.com/7/56>.

¹¹³ Qur'an, 4:36. <https://quran.com/4/36-37>.

which originate from God's nature. Therefore, it is logically impossible for omnibenevolent God to command evil and only God which commands good ought to be obeyed. Secondly, being kind to parents is good and it would remain good even if God didn't explicitly command it. However, God's command further confirms this truth and it adds something new to it which it didn't possess before. It adds the importance of this truth and it further generates the overriding character to it, and this answers one feature of normativity as well.

Another important attraction of this account is that it can explain objectiveness of morality in a sense that morality would be unaffected and irrespective of what humans believed and desired. As such, this account is in its entirety a cognitivist account which defends moral realism. It is a cognitivist account because it allows humans to have a belief about morality and when they express moral proposition their belief is either true or false. Furthermore, it argues in favor of moral realism because since moral values depend upon God's nature, they are objective because God's nature is objective. Also, if God commanded us to be kind to our parents, then we ought to be kind to our parents, and this moral duty would be unaffected even if all humans believed otherwise. Therefore, moral values and duties would exist objectively and autonomously of human desires. It is very important for the account to allow the possibility of people being mistaken in their moral belief unlike non-cognitivist theories. Recall the example from the section about the meaning of morality in chapter II, where there is a sick person in need of a kidney and I can save that person by donating one of my kidneys. This is certainly an objectively good thing to do; however, it is arguably a mistake to claim that I have a duty to donate my kidney. The account I am defending allows for the distinction between the good and duty and it allows for the possibility for humans to be mistaken about both or only one of them. This is significant because some people tend to be hypersensitive and for this reason, they might acquire a belief that they have an obligation to do certain thing while in fact they don't. The example about kidney donation is dubious and one might reasonably defend that they ought to do it so let's consider clearer example. Today was my cousin's funeral (25.02.2021) who passed away due to Covid-19. I didn't go to the funeral because I have all symptoms of Covid-19, and I was recommended by doctors to be in isolation until I recover and test

negatively. However, my father was disturbed because of the fact I didn't go to our cousin's funeral and he claimed that it was my duty to do so and I am morally wrong for not going. Therefore, we had a moral disagreement about this issue. Now, I think my father had a belief which is clearly mistaken on several levels. Firstly, if we grant the truth of my account, then he was mistaken about the claim that I had a duty to go to the funeral because God's command to perform funeral prayer is not encompassing all Muslims from the community. Funeral prayer is from the category of "fard kifayah", which means if there is a group of people who perform the prayer the rest are exempt from this duty. Therefore, my father's belief about moral duty was not corresponding to God's commands and this is why it is false. However, even if there was no clear ruling on this issue, I think that my father's belief would still be false. The reason for this lies in the fact that we *ought not to risk and harm human* life and since I have all the symptoms of Covid-19, my going to funeral would risk the lives of other people who came to perform the funeral prayer of my cousin who passed away from the same virus. The mistakes don't have to be always like this one and they can be diverse like in a case where we might have a moral duty to do something but we fail to recognize that it is the case. Nevertheless, the account I am defending allows for all other possibilities. Again, being a non-believer is not an argument because it is conceivable that even when a non-believer makes a moral proposition, he is referring to God's commands without realizing it. The reason for this might be God's intention to be partially hidden and not provide definite proof of His existence in order to ensure that humans would worship him freely. God's commands are not necessarily restricted to specific revealed text but they can be revealed in generic or universal way, where all humans, believers and non-believers, would be able to reach the truths about moral "oughtness" without realizing they are actually God's commands.

Hence, this account is able to capture all main features of morality and provide the explanation for them. I argue that these advantages are what make this account a better explanation than the alternatives. Of course, this being the best explanation doesn't mean that God necessarily exists. However, my first premise says nothing about God's existence and it is restricted to the claim that God best explains objective morality. Furthermore, it is important to notice that I always speak in conditional statements

where I claim *if* theism was true, *then* certain things like objective morality would make more sense. Obviously, there are numerous ways to object to this account and now I will consider some objections with my responses.

3.9. Objections and Responses

During my presentations of how I planned to promote my account while this work was still in development, I received numerous feedbacks and criticisms of it, out of which some were very strong and I was required to ponder upon those issues as I didn't have a proper response at that time. In this section, I will mention and discuss three criticisms I considered to be the most important and problematic for my account.

3.9.1. Humans are Free and Can't be Owned by Anyone

This objection is a way to attack my claim that God, as a creator of everything including humans, has the authority to set the rules which humans then ought to follow. I mentioned if something like the labor theory of property is true, then God has justified reasons to claim His possession over everything where all that exists would be God's property. The objection then states that there is a vast difference between property and human beings because we presumably have free will and unlike things with which you can mix your labor and then claim them as your property, human possess autonomy. Therefore, this autonomy proves that humans can't be owned like things and this is universally true which includes God as well. Furthermore, to accept my account is to conceive of humans as slaves and owning human beings is morally wrong and thus my account degrades the freedom which is the fundamental value human beings possess.

There are several problems with this objection. Firstly, the claim of human value being degraded by the fact that humans are subject to God's rules and thus slaves is mistaken. This is because God is essentially good and therefore all his commands are necessarily directed towards the good. Furthermore, God needs nothing nor does he benefit a single bit from human obedience. This is obviously stated in the Qur'an: "O humanity! It is you who stand in need of Allah, but Allah alone is the Self-Sufficient, Praiseworthy."¹¹⁴ However, the situation is completely different when compared to human owning another

¹¹⁴ Qur'an, 35:15. <https://quran.com/35/15>.

human being as a slave. Humans are not essentially good; they didn't create other humans, and a master consistently profits from his slave either through cheap work-power or simply by selling the slave to another master. This is why human slavery is downgrading and morally wrong because human owning another human being is always unjustified claim. Even the parents who benefit their child and give him a great deal, don't have the right to possess the child because essentially, they are not the creators of that child and they are also indebted to God for their own existence. Hence, to be the slave of God is not the same as to be the slave of human with the important difference where God doesn't benefit anything from humans and because God is essentially good; He wants only good for His creatures and this is why His commands are always directed towards good. Secondly, if theism is true, then one can have a good reason to claim that human slavery is wrong because humans are claiming something which doesn't rightfully belong to them but to God. Therefore, claim that humans can't be owned by anyone including God only begs the question because there is a big difference between God owning humans and humans owning other humans. Lastly and most importantly, the supposed fact that humans have free will and autonomy doesn't invalidate or abolish God's authority he has over everything if theism is true. It is certainly conceivable and consistent that God can create humans as free agents who are capable of resisting His commands and rules even if they are directed towards good. Hence, the ability to choose for themselves can be seen as a gift and a privilege of humans from God so they are not forced into obedience and their choices are more significant and meaningful, and this privilege bestows a greater responsibility of humans for their actions for which they can be held accountable. Therefore, freedom doesn't abolish God's authority and I think this is why the objection ultimately fails to undermine the account I am defending.

3.9.2. Limiting God's Power and Freedom

One part of this objection comes from those who subscribe to *Asharism*, who are commonly ethical voluntarists and who argue that morality is just a set of codes or rules and something being moral means only that it is approved by God and something being immoral means it is disapproved by God. To claim otherwise, they argue, it would lead to denial of God's power because then we would also be able to judge God's actions as

moral or immoral. This means that if God's commands only confirm the moral truths, then there is at least something independent from God which exists objectively and to which God Himself would be subjected. Furthermore, to suggest that objective morality exists is to contradict the Qur'an which on numerous occasions stresses the importance of God's power. Also, it is usually stated by *Asharites* that there is no objective morality because it is not convincing to ascribe the actions with predicates of rightness or wrongness. For example, stealing is just a set of movements of human hand and there is no other quality to be perceived there. In this regard, they share a similar opinion with error theory. Another portion of objection comes from the logical problem of incompatibility of divine attributes. In classical theism, God is understood as possessing several essential attributes like omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience. If God can't command evil and if His freedom is limited, doesn't this contradict the divine attribute omnipotence because there is at least something that God can't do?

These objections have some force but they also contain several misunderstandings and errors. Starting from the *Asharites* and the claim that the existence of objective morality clearly contradicts the Qur'an is too hasty and I believe fundamentally mistaken. There are numerous verses that allow for the interpretation of moral values as objective. For example, the verse where God informs the people that he loves justice and forbids evil could be interpreted in the light of moral objectivity: "Surely Allah enjoins justice, kindness and the doing of good to kith and kin, and forbids all that is shameful, evil and oppressive. He exhorts you so that you may be mindful."¹¹⁵ Another verse that arguably makes more sense if objective morality is asserted: "And it is said unto those who ward off (evil): What hath your Lord revealed? They say: Good. For those who do good in this world there is a good (reward) and the home of the Hereafter will be better. Pleasant indeed will be the home of those who ward off (evil)."¹¹⁶ These are not the only verses which could be interpreted in a way that morality is objective. George Hourani mentioned a plentiful number of verses which according to him don't make sense and can't possibly be interpreted in support of voluntarist theory.¹¹⁷ I disagree with Hourani

¹¹⁵ Qur'an, 16:90. <https://quran.com/16/90>.

¹¹⁶ Qur'an, 16:30. <https://quran.com/16/30>.

¹¹⁷ George F. Hourani. "Ethical Presuppositions of the Qur'an". In *The Muslim World*. Vol. 70, Iss. 1, (1980), 1-28.

on the claim that the verses he mentions can't be interpreted in a voluntarist way but what I am convinced of, is that in no way whatsoever can verses of the Qur'an clearly claim that morality can't be objective. When it comes to the arguments against objective morality from reason, they provide nothing new and they are similar to the theories I have already discussed especially error theory. Since I showed why such theories fail short in their criticism and since I provided good reasons to believe that morality is indeed objective, there is no need to go into this issue. Concerning the claim that objective morality undermines God's power and makes Him subject to moral rules, I don't find this accusation problematic at all. Firstly, if we accept that God is omnipotent, then I don't see the reason to object to the proposition that God is capable of creating moral properties which would be objective and according to which moral propositions would be true. Moral values could be objective but still owe their existence and depend upon God as everything else. Secondly, to claim that it is impossible for objective morality to exist is to actually undermine God's power, because this would imply that God is unable to create such a *thing* and it would be very problematic unless it is possible to demonstrate that creating objective morality is somehow logically impossible for God. Therefore, I don't think that objections of the *Asharites* have significant force when they are carefully examined.

With regards to the later objection concerned with the logical problem of limiting God's freedom and supposed contradictions between His divine attributes, I think there is just a slight misconception about the definition of divine attributes. God's omnipotence means that God is capable of performing every logically possible action for God. In the version of theism which I am defending, God being omnibenevolent includes the fact that He is essentially good and therefore His commands are necessarily directed towards good. This means that it is logically impossible for God to order evil things. Therefore, if God is the greatest conceivable being, then it is impossible for God to order things such as genocide, theft, racism, torturing the babies, etc. It is important to mention that some commands might appear to be strange or immoral because of our limited knowledge and because God might have morally sufficient reasons to command something, however, we are usually capable of discovering basic moral truths and if some command of God would contradict that clear knowledge, then such a God ought not to be obeyed because

He is not the greatest conceivable being and only omnibenevolent God deserves to be worshiped and surrendered to. Therefore, it is not problematic to say that God is not capable of ordering evil because this is a logical impossibility and this is analogous to saying that God is not capable of making that $2+2=5$ or that God is not able to create a squared circle or triangle with 4 angles. If one persists that modified version of DCT necessarily involves counterfactuals that God can command something horrible like torturing babies and if He ordered a such thing, it would be right, then this is the same as claiming it allows for a proposition $2+2=5$ to be true. This seems very counterintuitive to me and even if I granted the truth of this proposition it could be used against any moral theory in the same way and it would prove every ethical theory to be false. Lastly, with regards to God's freedom being limited, it is important to clarify that God is completely free in a sense that He is not forced or bound by something else outside of Himself. He is bound by His existence and nature which is essentially good and this is not problematic because nothing outside of Him is forcing Him to command or do something. Hence, these objections are also not fatal when it comes to my account of morality.

3.9.3. The *Euthyphro* Dilemma

The *Euthyphro* dilemma is probably the most famous objection directed against classical divine command theories and it is formulated from one of the Plato's dialogues "Euthyphro". In this work Plato illustrates Socrates who is on the way to court to answer for the charges of impiety and who meets Euthyphro. In their conversation Socrates asks the central question: "Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?"¹¹⁸ Although the question is not directly related to morality, it can be transformed into the moral dilemma especially for ethical theories like DCT which give God a significant role when it comes to grounding morality. Then, the moral question would be: Does God command something because it is good/right, or is it good/right only because it is commanded by God? The question posits a dilemma because if the answer is that God commands something because it is good, then there is some standard independent and outside of God and to which God is also subjected.

¹¹⁸ Plato. "Euthyphro". In *Plato Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 9.

However, if something is good only because God commands it, then it seems that morality is arbitrary and if God commanded torturing babies, it would be a good thing to do.

At first, the question seems to pose problems to both answers although *Asharites*, who are ethical voluntarists, would gladly bite the bullet and choose the later answer because there is no objective good and bad and in case God commanded torturing babies or decided to let murder and a non-believer in paradise while taking the obedient believer to hell, it would still be just because God can't be bounded by anything including morality. God is the one who sets the standard which is arbitrary to His will. This answer will not help my account and it doesn't seem like a very attractive response to me. Nevertheless, I think that Euthyphro dilemma is not problematic for the account I am defending because I already mentioned that God's commands are not arbitrary and they are necessarily directed towards the good. This means that my account presupposes some theory of good and a modified version of DCT is not intended as the reductive ethical theory which intends to explain all aspects of morality, rather the DCT is only meant to cover significant part of normative nature or "oughtness" of morality. In this regard, the theory I am supporting is very similar to the accounts developed by Stephen Evans, Robert Adams, Philip Quinn and others. Therefore, if I am asked whether something is good because God commands it, I would answer with yes. To answer positively is not a problem because everything that is based on God's nature is objective and since His nature is essentially good, and since His commands also come from His nature they would be based on His nature and therefore they would be necessarily good and directed towards goodness. Hence, the problem of arbitrariness is avoided. When it comes to the problem of God being subjected to morality which exists independent of Him, I have already dealt with this issue in answering the objection of limiting God's freedom and power. The morality doesn't exist independent from God, but it is a direct result from God's nature.

Undeniably, there are other possible ways to object to my premise of God being the best explanation for objective morality. However, I addressed only the three particular objections that were raised during the presentation of my work and to which I did not

have an adequate answer. Unfortunately, the scope of this work doesn't allow me to go deeper and mention other objections that come to my mind but this can be done in the near future. For now, I think I provided satisfying answers to the three objections that I struggled with in the beginning. Therefore, I conclude that objections raised here are not sufficient to undermine my first premise.



CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Throughout this work I attempted to show how morality and God can be related by forming an abductive argument in favor of God's existence. As noted in the introduction the argument I defended consists of two premises and a conclusion: "If objective morality exists, then God is the best explanation for it. Objective morality exists. Therefore, God is the best explanation for it." The argument involved two critical premises out of which the second one was more controversial and it required profound endeavor to show that it is a justified proposition that doesn't beg the question. This proposition alone covers a wide area of discussion and the attempt to justify it obliged me to a vigilant and careful research as there are many metaethical theories that object to my claim. As for the other proposition, which holds that God is the best explanation for objective morality, the task was less difficult but still demanding because I had to cover the alternative accounts and show how they are lacking when compared to mine.

In chapter I, I discussed the issue of God's existence as one of the main issues in philosophy of religion as well as the general goal of the arguments for God's existence. I mentioned and briefly reviewed some of the most important arguments for God, including ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, teleological arguments, and moral arguments for God. This chapter served as an important introduction to my work because it included the purpose of my own argument as well as show the way my argument can be related to and used as a support to other arguments for God. In chapter II, the discussion switched directly to metaethics which is essential for my second premise where I claim that objective morality exists. I elaborated on the most important terms included by this topic like cognitivism, non-cognitivism, moral realism, and moral anti-realism. Furthermore, I specified the main features of morality as objective, universal and normative. Afterwards, I analyzed the moral anti-realist theories and their

arguments against objective morality. In the last section of chapter II, I provided the cumulative case for objective morality which consists of six arguments. In chapter III, I shifted towards defense of the first premise. Firstly, I examined the alternative accounts for moral realism and raised some question and issues that these accounts face. Secondly, I provided my account and explained how God explains morality and what are the advantages my account has when compared to the alternatives. Lastly, I mentioned the three objections and evaluated their success. When it comes to the results, there are several most significant points that have been established:

1. The existence of objective morality and moral properties is not, and probably can't, be proved in a sense of offering the "proof" or a conclusive argument with premises which are so certain that they can't be reasonably doubted. Although the theories which reject the existence and reality of moral properties like error theory, expressivist accounts, quasi realism, and relativism fail to demonstrate their claims together with the fact that some of them possess internal inconsistencies, this doesn't suffice to show that moral realism is true by default nor does it make moral realism a default position. In order to achieve it, I showed that the further argumentation was necessary because the existence of objective morality can be reasonably doubted. However, the cumulative case of six arguments I provided in chapter II are giving good reasons for one to accept moral realism. Therefore, it is possible to say that moral realism is a more rational position to hold than moral anti-realism.

2. Since moral realism is a more rational position to believe in, it follows that cognitivism is more reasonable and more likely to be true than non-cognitivism. I demonstrated that non-cognitivism, the position which holds that moral propositions are not the expressions of beliefs but the expressions of non-cognitive states like emotions, is counterintuitive, and it has the problem in explanatory power as it lacks the explanation for some of the main features of morality. Furthermore, I showed that the main attraction of such theories, the ability to capture the motivating nature of morality while cognitive accounts can't, is actually false because the account that I have provided captures this feature as well and it is a cognitive account.

3. While my argument is very minimalistic in a scope of what it tries to demonstrate and it doesn't show that God necessarily exists, it still can be used as the additional argument supplementing other arguments for God like fine-tuning or kalam cosmological argument. It is safe to assume that the idea of God playing a significant role in morality is not begging the question and this is evident from the opinions of some moral sceptics like Nietzsche, who rejected the existence of objective and moral values and the existence of God, but still thought that God would be important for morality had He existed. Furthermore, since my account can capture all features of morality and I have responded to problematic objections, assuming there is no other significant objection that can definitely demonstrate the failure of my account, it is safe to conclude that my argument is successful in what it attempted to establish.

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