FROM COMMANDS TO NATURAL FACTS: THE ARBITRARY NATURE OF MORAL ONTOLOGY

Edgar Kiliba (535745)

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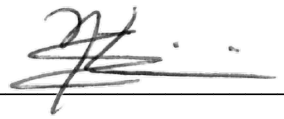
Abstract

Any comprehensive theory of the realist position in metaethics must be equipped with a version of moral ontology. Metaethical theological voluntarism, which purports that supernatural facts, i.e. commands issued by a divine being, determine moral states of affairs, has been accused for a long time of rendering morality 'arbitrary'. Implicit in this widely-accepted objection is the idea that a moral theory cannot have an arbitrary ontological foundation because then anything could have been right or wrong. This paper gives a detailed analysis of this objection that theological voluntarism is arbitrary and makes the case that a commitment to avoiding arbitrariness imposes constraints on the formulation of a moral theory. In particular, this paper argues that accounting for such a commitment decreases the significance that natural facts play for moral theories that maintain a naturalist account of moral ontology.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.



Edgar Kiliba

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Section I

Introduction

It is standard philosophical practice to distinguish between discussions within ethics and about ethics. Within ethics there is much discussion about moral theories which aim to give an account of which actions are right or which character traits or values are good. Theories concerning matters within ethics are sometimes described as *first-order* or *normative* moral theories and include theories such as utilitarianism, Kantianism, virtue ethics and many more. What these first-order theories aim to do is put forward a systemized account of which actions are right or wrong, what kind of considerations make a state of affairs good or bad or which characteristics make an individual good or bad. There is, of course, extensive disagreement within types of first-order theories (e.g. within consequentialist theories) let alone between the different types of theories but there is consensus that these first-order theories do fall *within* ethics. There is also agreement that discussions concerning whether or not specific actions or practices are right or wrong also fall within ethics and are typically referred to as applied ethics. I follow standard practice in referring to these two distinct areas within ethics as applied ethics and normative ethics.

The scope of these discussions are usually regarded as being distinct from the category of metaethics whereby metaethics involves discussions or questions *about*, as opposed to *within*, ethics. This includes questions such as: What are the truth conditions for moral claims? How can we gain moral knowledge? What is the metaphysical nature of moral facts? How can moral facts motivate our actions? Are there really such things as moral facts? If not, what are we really doing when we make moral claims?

One of the most important distinctions in metaethics is between the positions of *realism* and *antirealism*. There is, to be sure, much disagreement as to what exactly the realist position entails as any definition of realism will be subject to scrutiny. Even among those that would call themselves realists there is extensive disagreement about many aspects of the position. However, there is widespread agreement that what most realists are committed to is that there are moral facts and our moral claims are capable of being true or false to the extent that they do or do not

refer to moral facts (Brink, 1989; Sayre-McCord, 2006). Antirealism, therefore, is the position that there are no moral facts and our moral claims are not truth-apt. There is some disagreement between whether or not realism entails that moral facts exist independently of our beliefs or evidence for them (Brink, 1989, pg. 15; Sayre-McCord, 2006, pg. 41). For example, constructivist accounts, which theorize that moral facts are constituted by our beliefs, and relativist accounts typically do not view moral facts as existing independently of human beings but they are still, on certain interpretations, regarded as realist positions.

As I alluded to earlier, although all realists believe that there are moral facts, being a realist, in and of itself, does not entail that one subscribes to any particular set of ontological, semantic, epistemological, etc. commitments. One could be a realist but think that gaining moral knowledge is impossible or that we have no special reason to consider moral facts when deliberating actions. One particular debate within the domain of realism is the ontological or metaphysical nature of moral facts and this will be the main focuses of this paper. Moral ontology is concerned with the nature of moral facts and another way of putting it would be to say that it is concerned with what kind of stuff moral facts are made of or consist of. There are three competing views on the ontological status of moral facts and they are:

Moral Naturalism: Moral facts are natural facts.

Moral Supernaturalism: Moral facts are supernatural facts.

Moral Non-naturalism: Moral facts are non-natural facts.[1]

(Brink, 1989; Copp, 2006; Sayre-McCord, 2006; Sturgeon, 2006)

There is disagreement as to what exactly is meant by the phrase 'natural fact' but it is usually described as referring to facts which are the subject matter of scientific inquiry or which are consistent with a naturalistic outlook of the universe (Brink, 1989; Sturgeon, 2006; Horgan & Timmons, 1991). Non-naturalism and supernaturalism are similar to the extent that they both reject the view that moral facts or properties are natural facts or properties. For the

[1] In what follows, I simply refer to these as 'naturalism', 'supernaturalism' and 'non-naturalism' respectively.

supernaturalist, moral facts or properties are equivalent to supernatural facts or properties which are described as being divine or godly in nature. Conventionally, such facts or properties are understood as involving things like certain divine or godly actions or character traits and are associated with religion. Non-naturalism rejects that moral facts are supernatural or natural facts and instead states that moral facts are *sui generis* or unique (Moore, 1903; Ross, 1930).

The focus of this paper is to introduce and analyze arguments which have implications for at least two of these three second-order theories within the area of moral ontology, namely, naturalism and supernaturalism. What I will essentially be arguing is that a very powerful and highly influential objection to supernaturalism, namely the arbitrariness objection, can be equally levelled at, at least, naturalism. Briefly, the arbitrariness objection is one of the horns of the *Euthyphro Dilemma* which is applicable to a type of supernaturalism which can be referred to as 'voluntarism' or 'divine command theory' (DCT). DCT is the thesis that God's commands determine morality. What the arbitrariness objection argues is that if this is the case then morality is arbitrary because God could have no moral reason for issuing any of his commands and he could have commanded that any action is right. This means that intuitively immoral actions could have been right just in case God had commanded them (e.g. murder could have been right).

Since much of my paper revolves around this objection, the entire second section goes through it in great detail and also gives a detailed account of theological voluntarism which will be the token supernaturalist account used throughout this paper. In this section, I give a detailed account of how the arbitrariness objection is raised against theological voluntarism. This will include two distinct ways in which the objection can potentially be raised against the voluntarist position and will also include a discussion of a fundamentally important principle, namely, the 'arbitrariness principle', that must be accepted in order to make the case that arbitrariness is objectionable.

In the third section, I begin by explaining how certain authors can be interpreted as speculating that if arbitrariness is a problem for the voluntarist, then it is unclear why it would not be problematic for other moral theories. I follow this up by then introducing a consolidated definition of 'arbitrariness' based on how it has been used in the literature on voluntarism in the context of the arbitrariness objection. I conclude the section by arguing that, given this definition of arbitrariness, moral states of affairs, at the foundational level, must obtain necessarily and that this must be the case, not just for voluntarism, but for any theory of moral ontology.

The fourth and final section involves an account of how the arbitrariness objection can be levelled at naturalism. I use non-reductive naturalism, as opposed to reductive naturalism, to explain how one could argue that naturalism is just as arbitrary as supernaturalism. After going through how this argument could be made, I then offer what, in my opinion, would be the most likely response to such an argument and I also explain the ways in which this would introduce some constraints for any comprehensive moral theory which has a naturalist moral ontology. The paper is then concluded by an analysis of the differences between the naturalist and supernaturalist positions which make it such that the arbitrariness objection applies differently to each of them. I will conclude that the reason this is the case is that the nature of the dependency relation purported by the two theories makes it such that supernaturalism does not have available the same type of response to the arbitrariness objection that naturalism does.

Section II

Background on Divine Command Theory and Theological Voluntarism

The Divine Command Theory (DCT) is an ethical theory and its thesis is that God[2] is responsible for morality. At the very least, the DCT generally consists of the following claim: The moral status of an action is dependent on it being related in some way to the will of a divine being.

The DCT falls under the category of 'theological voluntarism' whereby what all accounts of theological voluntarism are committed to is the thesis that moral entities obtain their moral statuses in virtue of some feature of a divine will (Murphy, 2012; Quinn, 2006). On the one hand, entities could refer exclusively to actions such that actions are right or wrong in virtue of a divine will. On the other hand, 'entities' could be extended to refer to persons, events, etc. such that these things are morally good or bad in virtue of a divine will. There is disagreement as to whether advocates of this theory must hold that God's will is somehow responsible for this second category of entities.[3] There does seem to be consensus though that, at the very least, the

[2] I proceed with the traditional conception of a God or divine will that has the characteristics of being omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. Also, although the conception of God I proceed with is a Judaeo-Christian or western conception of a God, I follow common practice of not referring explicitly to any particular God.

[3] Mark Timmons (2002) thinks they should but Mark Murphy (2012) believes that this need not necessarily be the case. Phillip Quinn (2006) and William P. Alston (1990) also seem to agree with Murphy that voluntarism does not

voluntarist must maintain that actions obtain their moral statuses in virtue of a divine will. In contrast, it would appear that voluntarists need not necessarily be committed to the idea that a divine will is responsible for the moral statuses of other things (such as those second kinds of entities).

The various accounts of theological voluntarism can be distinguished by which divine action or property determines the moral status of entities and there are several candidates for this (Murphy, 2012; Joyce, 2002; Quinn, 2006). The DCT designates commanding as the relevant divine action and this makes the DCT distinct from versions of voluntarism which posit some other divine action or property as determining moral obligation. For example, in Plato's *Euthyphro* the relevant divine property is loving. Other divine properties that have been suggested are willing, intending and desiring. Keeping in line with the DCT I will, in what follows, take the act of commanding as being the morally relevant divine action when discussing voluntarism. It has been claimed, implausibly in my opinion, that the relevant action matters due to the fact that it will have implications for how effective the arbitrariness objection to voluntarism is against (Joyce, 2002). I reject this line of reasoning and do not think that it makes a difference. Therefore, I also do not think that it matters which divine action or property I focus on when presenting the objection. Although the arbitrariness objection could be formulated using any of the aforementioned divine actions or properties, I believe that using the act of commanding makes it easier for one to grasp the force of the arbitrariness objection and so I proceed using commanding as the relevant action.

Before further detailing voluntarism it will be useful to specify the different categories of action-types so as to make the thesis as clear as possible. I follow Phillip Quinn (2006, p. 70) in categorizing these action-types whereby an action can be morally right, wrong or obligatory. Morally right actions are actions which are morally permissible or actions which one is allowed to perform. In contrast, morally wrong actions are actions which are impermissible meaning that one is prohibited from performing such actions. The categories of right and wrong actions are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive to the extent that no action can be both right and wrong and all action fall into one of these two categories. Finally, morally obligatory actions are

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have to account for this second category of entities although, as we will see, they seem to want to restrict theological voluntarism to being strictly concerned with deontological properties because they believe this would enable it to better fend off one horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. This will be discussed in further detail below.

actions whose performance is morally necessary to the extent that failing to perform them would be wrong.[4] To the extent that the performance of these actions is morally required, they fall within the category of morally right actions. This implies that actions morally right actions can be either morally permissible or morally obligatory. All morally obligatory actions are morally permissible but it is not the case that all morally permissible actions are morally obligatory. For example, actions which are typically understood as going above and beyond the call of duty, sometimes referred to as supererogatory actions, can be categorized as morally permissible but not morally obligatory and still fall within the category of right actions.

I am now in a position to touch on the relation between God's commands and the categories of right and wrong action. It is easy to understand the concept that if God commands some action then it is morally obligatory to perform that action. Similarly, if God forbids – via a command – some action, then performing that action is morally wrong (e.g. thou shall not murder). As I mentioned earlier, there is a class of morally right actions which are morally permissible but not morally obligatory. This could include things like finding the cure for cancer or purchasing a chocolate bar. When it comes to voluntarism, morally permissible actions that are not morally obligatory may not necessarily be commanded or prohibited by God but this does not change the fact that they still derive their moral statuses from God insofar as they bear a certain relation to his commands (i.e. not having been forbidden nor commanded, or tending to promote values one could reasonably derive other commands).

An important distinction for my purposes is 'normative' versus 'metaethical' theological voluntarism (Murphy, 2012, pp. 2-4). A normative version of theological voluntarism is committed to the claim that "some normative state of affairs obtains—namely, the normative state of affairs *its being obligatory to obey God*." (Murphy, 2012, p. 3). The key difference between such a version and a metaethical one is that the latter kind is consistent with but not committed to any normative state of affairs 'obtaining' or being the case. The normative version claims that we are obliged to follow God's commands – it claims that this is the state of affairs in the actual world. So, for example, we can say that Christianity counts as a normative version of theological voluntarism. Such accounts would be in competition with other first-order moral theories.

[4] Inasmuch as failing to act constitutes an action.

In contrast, a metaethical version of theological voluntarism is not committed to there being such a normative state of affairs while maintaining that certain moral concepts, such as obligation, are or could be theological in nature. Put differently, the metaethical version is committed only to the claim that concepts such as moral value and moral obligation can be plausibly conceived of as being dependent on a divine will. Metaethical theological voluntarism only asserts that certain actions or properties of a divine will are capable of providing firm ontological grounding for morality.

Questions of whether or not theological voluntarism is plausible can be separated from the question of whether or not God exists (Murphy, 2012, pp. 3-4; Craig, 2006, p. 37)[5]. An advocate of normative theological voluntarism may claim that if there were a being that fits the description of 'God' then we are obliged to adhere to his commands while maintaining that there is no such being.[6] Similarly, a metaethical theological voluntarist may claim that concepts such as moral obligation can be understood as being dependent on divine action while, at the same time, denying that such concepts are applicable precisely because there is no God. As Craig (2006, p. 37) explains, "even if [theism is false], that wouldn't prove that God would not be a sound foundation for morality if theism were true".

Since I am concerned with moral ontology, in what follows I will focus on metaethical theological voluntarism, which I take to be a second-order moral theory falling under supernaturalism, and so this is what I refer to when I mention 'theological voluntarism' or, sometimes, just 'voluntarism'.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

One of Plato's dialogues, *Euthyphro,* is responsible for what has become a classic and perennial objection against the DCT – and theological voluntarism more broadly – which is typically

[5] The chapter I am referring to here is from the book titled *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?* (2006) and the chapter I am referring to includes contributions from both Paul Kurtz and William Lane Craig. While they both write portions of the chapter, they are separate and in opposition to each other. Therefore, what I have quoted exclusively represents what Craig argues for in one of his portions of the relevant chapter.

[6] This is a very unintuitive concept to grasp but Murphy (2012, p. 3-4) explains it in the following way. It may be the case, due to some administrative error, that there are currently no generals in the army but it would still be true that a private ought to listen to his/her generals. In the same way, it may be the case that there is God does not exist but it still follows that we would be obliged to adhere to his commands if there were one.

referred to as 'The Euthyphro Dilemma'. The relevant part of the dialogue occurs where Plato (1981, 10a) says the following: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" Here Plato is questioning the nature of piety but his question has implications for voluntarism. The contemporary interpretation of these implications is: either (1) the actions that God commands are morally obligatory *because* they are commanded by God or (2) they are commanded by God *because* they are morally obligatory. This is said to be a dilemma because both options, (1) and (2), pose problems for voluntarism.

If the voluntarist goes for (1) morality consequently becomes 'arbitrary' due to the fact that any action commanded by God would be (and could have been) morally obligatory. This includes actions which are seemingly immoral. For example, if God were to command that all husbands physically abuse their wives at sunrise then all husbands would be obliged to physically abuse their wives at sunrise. Option (1) would make this counterfactual true because "there [would be] nothing more to an act's being good than that God commanded it" (Anthony, 2006, p. 71). There would be no limit or restriction with regard to actions which one could possibly be obliged to carry out. The arbitrariness ensues from the idea that God could have no moral reason for commanding the actions that he commands (Alston, 1990, p. 305). An action only becomes morally obligatory once it has been commanded by God so he cannot appeal to the action's being morally obligatory as a reason for why he commanded it.

In addition to this, the problem of arbitrariness is said to be compounded by the concern that if (1) is opted for then for God to be morally good is for him to instantiate values that he has himself decided are 'good' (via his act of commanding) (Alston, 1990; Quinn, 2006; Joyce, 2002). The problem is that this seems to imply a very unintuitive notion of divine goodness. This is because it suggests that God is not morally good because he exemplifies traits which are, in and of themselves, morally desirable such as being caring, merciful, just, etc. Instead his moral goodness would ultimately be determined by the fact that he adheres to a standard he has himself set. Put differently, God would be good because he practices what he preaches as it were.[7] An example may help illustrate this. If God commands that we are morally obliged to love our neighbours this seems to entail that being loving is a morally good characteristic. Hence, if we were to then conceive of God as being benevolent it would mean that he possesses characteristics

[7] This is not to say that it isn't a good thing, *ceteris paribus*, to practice what you preach. The problem is just that this is not what is typically meant by 'God is good'. It leaves us with an incoherent notion of divine goodness.

such as these. The problem is that the only reason that these characteristics, e.g. being loving, are 'morally good' in the first place is due to his act of commanding and this does not seem like what we mean when we say that God is good.[8] In what follows I refer to the implications of (1) as the first horn of the dilemma or the 'arbitrariness objection'.

Option (2) would result in two problems for the voluntarist. Firstly, it would imply that there is an objective moral standard on the basis of which God's commands obtain their moral status (Quinn, 2006; Joyce, 2002). If God commands certain actions *because* they are morally obligatory then it follows that moral obligation is not dependent on God since this would imply that actions are right or wrong independently of him. This is problematic because it would directly contradict the voluntarist thesis that a divine will is or could be the foundation of morality. A second, related, problem is that if (2) is opted for and morality is not dependent on God's will then his omnipotence or sovereignty over all things would be undermined since there would be something which he is not responsible for or does not determine (Austin, 2006). I refer to the implications of (2) as the second horn of the dilemma.

In the context of voluntarism, I will primarily be concerned with the arbitrariness objection and so the remainder of this section will be devoted to developing a more detailed understanding of it. I begin by clarifying how the thesis of voluntarism should be understood. After this, I briefly define 'arbitrariness' before explaining how the arbitrariness objection could involve either God's commands being arbitrary or the structure of morality being arbitrary. This will be illustrated by putting both versions of the objection into standard form. Following this, I will complete my discussion of the arbitrariness objection by introducing what I will be calling 'the arbitrariness principle'. This principle completes the argument because it establishes that arbitrariness is objectionable.

[8] This is one of the objections that Murphy (2012) believes can be avoided by the voluntarist by limiting the moral properties that God is responsible for such that he is only responsible for obligation and other normative properties (e.g. the moral status of beings) are determined in some other way.

Framing the Discussion

I would like to first of all frame the discussion by explaining how I will be using the term 'moral state of affairs'. A 'moral state of affairs' (henceforth 'MSA' or 'MSAs' for moral *states* of affairs) is a set of circumstances which has a moral status and, thus, has some normative content. It can be understood both as 1) being comprised of various moral and non-moral facts and 2) itself being a non-moral fact. In what follows, whenever it is said that a moral state of affairs 'obtains' this will mean that it exists or it is the case. A widely accepted and uncontroversial example of a moral state of affairs is the state of affairs that 'it is morally impermissible to torture babies for fun'. For this state of affairs to 'obtain' would be for it to be the case, thus, implying that *it is* impermissible for one to torture babies for the sake of one's enjoyment. This MSA would consist of various moral facts, e.g. that it is wrong to inflict pain on an undeserving being, and non-moral facts, e.g. that babies experience pain and cannot defend themselves, etc. It would also be itself a moral fact when considered as the conjunction of all of the moral and non-moral facts that it consist of.[9] This example is concerned with moral obligation but moral states of affairs may also signify moral value. For example, the state of affairs that '*ceteris paribus*, being forgiving is good' designates that being forgiving is morally valuable while the state of affairs that '*ceteris paribus*, being dishonest is bad' designates that being dishonest is morally bad. As necessary, I will clarify when I am referring to those which constitute moral value and when I refer to those that constitute moral obligation.

Moral states of affairs can be contrasted with non-moral states of affairs. A non-moral state of affairs is one which lacks the status of being moral and an example could be the state of affairs that 'the earth rotates around the sun' or that 'Wits is an academic institution'. Even though non-moral and moral states of affairs can be distinguished from one another it is still the case that at least some moral states of affairs will involve some non-moral states of affairs (Murphy, 2012, p. 38). For example, part of the reason why it is wrong to torture babies for fun (moral state of affairs) is, presumably, that babies experience pain when under the conditions of torture (non-

[9] It is kind of like how a triathlon is itself an athletic event but consists of three distinct athletic events.

moral state of affairs). As I develop the arbitrariness objection I will expand on the relation between moral and non-moral states of affairs.

I will now clarify what voluntarism attempts to 'explain'. Taken in its metaethical form, theological voluntarism is a thesis concerning moral ontology. It says something significant about the nature of morality and is not to be mistaken for a thesis on how or whether or not one can come to gain moral knowledge. It is easy to confuse the two, especially given some of the literature on the arbitrariness objection. Theological voluntarism cites God as the foundation of morality. In its most minimal form, it claims that if a divine will does exist then it could sufficiently explain why/how moral value and/or moral obligation exist.[10] It offers an account of morality whereby the existence of moral value and/or moral obligation is determined by the commands of a divine will. It does not offer an account of how we can come to know that some property or characteristic is good. Nor does it offer an account of how we can come to know whether or not we are obliged to perform or refrain from performing certain actions. It offers an account of what would make some property morally valuable or what would make some action morally obligatory or impermissible. If (1) the voluntarist position is correct and (2) God does exist, then moral value and moral obligation exist in virtue of God's commands regardless of whether any individual believes that this is the case.[11]

The literature on voluntarism and the arbitrariness objection specifically, can sometimes make it ambiguous what is meant by 'justification' or 'reason'. This is because the overall thesis of voluntarism, put one way, is that God's commands can sufficiently *justify* moral states of affairs. This may be confused by the claim that what justifies one in *believing that* a moral state of affairs is true, is that it has been commanded by God. However, voluntarism as I will be discussing it is silent on the role played by beliefs. The nature of justification that will be used is ontological.

For example, that God commands 'Thou shall not commit adultery' sufficiently justifies the moral state of affairs that 'One is obliged to refrain from committing adultery'. This is what the voluntarist would have us believe, i.e. being contrary to the commands of God is what makes the act of adultery wrong. Voluntarism, in its most minimal form, is silent on the role played by our

[10] I say 'and/or' because, as I alluded to earlier, not all versions of voluntarism claim that moral value is explained by the commands of a divine will.
[11] To reiterate, whether or not God exists is a separate question and does not impact on the validity of voluntarism in its metaethical form. I mention the possibility of God's existence in this subsection for illustrative reasons.

individual beliefs (Kurtz & Craig, 2006, pp. 25-46; Westmoreland, 1996, p. 16). If God does exist and he does issue such a command then what makes both the atheist and theist wrong in committing adultery is that such an action is contrary to the commands of God.

Even if voluntarism is true and what makes adultery wrong is that it is contrary to the commands of God, it does not necessarily follow that one could not have some other acceptable reason for believing that adultery is wrong.[12] Furthermore, even if the voluntarist accepts that some alternative reason *would* sufficiently justify such a belief she could still maintain that what *makes* adultery wrong or what *explains* the wrongness of adultery is that it is contrary to the commands of God.

Therefore, voluntarism is about what justifies moral value and moral obligation to the extent that it offers an account of what makes an action right/wrong or what makes a characteristic good/bad. It is not a thesis about how we can be justified in believing that some action is right/wrong or that some characteristic is good/bad. As such, what objections to voluntarism attempt to do is undermine the claim that some property of a divine being can make states of affairs 'moral'. The arbitrariness objection attempts to do this by arguing that such a conception of moral ontology is flawed because God could have no moral reason to command some action rather than another – his commands would be arbitrary. The fact that the purported arbitrariness involves the notion of a 'moral *reason*' may also leave open the possibility for further ambiguity which could potentially lead to confusion. A better understanding of 'arbitrary' will be helpful.

Defining Arbitrariness

Steven Luper-Foy (1990) discusses arbitrariness as it applies to actions and beliefs. For Luper-Foy (1990, p. 39), a belief or action is arbitrary if it is "not based on a reason". So a belief which is adopted for no reason is an arbitrary belief and an action that is performed for no reason is an arbitrary action. Arbitrariness, therefore, involves a lack of justification. If I have no reason to believe that *p* but I, nonetheless, believe that *p* then this would be an instance of an arbitrary belief – I lack any justification to believe that *p*. Similarly, if I have no reason to perform action *x*

[12] For example, he may think that adultery is wrong because it tends to lead to divorce or that it's wrong because it involves the breaking of a promise, etc.

but I, nonetheless, perform action *x* then this would be an instance of an action being performed arbitrarily – there was no reason why I performed action *x*.

Luper-Foy posits this definition in the context of what he calls 'theoretical skepticism'. Though such a context does not deal exclusively with moral belief or moral obligation, I believe that his definition is just as applicable to the context of theological voluntarism. This is clear because the arbitrariness objection is specifically objecting to a divine action. Remember, voluntarism asserts that some divine action/property is what is responsible for, at the very least, moral obligation. So, if an action only becomes morally obligatory once it has been commanded by God then there is no moral reason that God can appeal to in deciding what to command – God lacks any moral reason to prefer one set of commands rather than another (Murphy, 2012; Alston, 1990). Since there is nothing moral that determines which set of commands God ends up issuing it follows that his act of commanding is arbitrary. The lack of moral reasons involved in his commands is what makes it such that he could have commanded anything.

Additionally, it is important to point out that it is not that God could have no reason whatsoever, it is just that he could have no *moral* reason. His reason could only be that it pleases him to issue the set of commands that he issues rather than another set. The objector is therefore arguing that God's commanding activity is inadequate because, as Rooney (1995, p. 164) puts it, "there is nothing particularly moral about all this". It may, therefore, actually be more accurate to claim that God's commands are *morally* arbitrary rather than to claim that they are arbitrary *simpliciter*. The main point is that what is arbitrary here is a divine action/property. After I have developed the objection in more detail, I will return to the definition of arbitrariness in Section III and go through it in more detail.

What is accused of being arbitrary?

This brings us to Murphy's (2012, pp. 36-40) distinction of what exactly this objection could be arguing is arbitrary if voluntarism is true. One version of the objection is that voluntarism entails that God's *commands* are arbitrary and since, under voluntarism, moral states of affairs are ontologically dependent upon God's commands then they are, in turn, arbitrary. This is essentially what I have spent the previous subsection discussing and is also, in my opinion, the

traditional formulation of the objection.[13] Murphy (2012, p. 36) argues that a distinct objection is that voluntarism entails that the *content* of morality is arbitrary because an essential feature of morality is that it displays "a certain rational structure" which it cannot be said to display if voluntarism is true. I will explain each of these versions of the objection in turn.

A1: (P1) TV[14] implies that:

(P1.1) Moral states of affairs obtain in virtue of God's commands.

(P1.2) God has no moral reason(s) for his commands.

(P2) If God's commands are made for no moral reason(s) then they are arbitrary.

(P3) If TV implies that God's commands are arbitrary then TV implies that moral states of affairs are arbitrary.

(C1) Therefore, TV implies that God's commands are arbitrary.

(C2) Therefore, TV implies that moral states of affairs are arbitrary.

Argument A1 can be broken down as follows: P1 states firstly, in P1.1, that if TV is true then morality, i.e. moral states of affairs constituting both moral value and moral obligation, is dependent upon God's commands. Secondly, it states, in P1.2, that God's commands are made for no moral reason if theological voluntarism is true. The motivation for P1.2 is that, as previously explained, voluntarism entails that God's commands are made logically prior to there being any moral reasons. P2 stipulates a sufficient condition for God's commands to be arbitrary. Similarly, P3 stipulates a sufficient condition for moral states of affairs to be arbitrary under TV. According to P3, since TV asserts that moral states of affairs obtain in virtue of God's commands then it follows that if God's commands are arbitrary then the resultant moral states of affairs are arbitrary. This is because the arbitrariness is transmitted from the commands to the moral states

[13] I base this on what authors discussing voluntarism have written. See, for example, Rooney (1995), Alston (1990), Austin (2006), Westmoreland (1996), Antony (2006), Quinn (2006) and Sinnott-Armstrong (2006).
[14] TV denotes theological voluntarism.

of affairs. C1 is entailed by P1.2 and P2. C2 is implied by P1.1, P3 and C1. To be clear, C2 claims that moral states of affairs are arbitrary insofar as they obtain for no moral reason.

As I alluded to earlier, some have argued that the strength of this objection depends on the number of normative properties that the voluntarist attributes to God.[15] If all MSAs are determined by God's commands then it will be the case that all MSAs are arbitrary because he lacks moral reasons for issuing any of the commands that he issues. However, if the voluntarist claims that only some MSAs are determined by God then, although there may still be *some* arbitrariness in which set of commands God opts for, he could be said to appeal to moral reasons in the issuing of his commands (Murphy, 2012, pp. 37-38). For example, if only moral obligation is determined by God's commands then there may be a distinct, axiological category of MSAs that guide his commanding behaviour. This would amount to there being moral reasons prior to God's commanding behaviour and so the voluntarist could claim that he commands us to perform and refrain from performing one set of actions rather than another because the former set is, for example, more loving, more just, etc. A version of voluntarism which purports that a divine will is responsible for only moral obligation will henceforth be referred to as a 'limited version/account of voluntarism'.

Even if this limited version of voluntarism is accepted, there may still be some traces of arbitrariness for it may be argued that God's commands are not *completely* determined by moral reasons (Ibid.). This rejoinder claims that even if God's decision, regarding which set of commands to issue, is guided by the presence of moral reasons it still follows that these moral reasons probably do not *fully* determine his commands. The idea is that although the axiological domain of morality is already determined and is understood as, somehow, *not* being dependent upon God's commands this does not mean that there is only one set of commands that God is at liberty to issue. For example, there could be one possible world where God chooses to command that all acts of abortion are permissible, another possible world where he chooses to command the opposite and a third world where the issue of abortion is not even mentioned in his commands. The idea here is that if this is the case, then it seems like some of God's commands may still be arbitrary because despite the moral reasons being held constant, the commands he issues across

[15] This includes Murphy (2012, pp. 37-38), Alston (1990, p. 306), Quinn (2006, p. 76).

possible worlds need not be identical. Moral reasons do not necessitate his commands and so he still has no moral reason to choose one set of commands over another.[16]

We must remember that under the full version of TV God's commands are responsible for *all* of morality and so there is no axiological domain that could guide his commanding behaviour. However, under a limited version of TV, the presence of the axiological domain guides God's commanding behaviour and this, presumably, blocks off some morally bizarre scenarios such as all husbands being obliged to abuse their wives at sunset. Although these morally bizarre scenarios are not possible under this limited version of TV there will now be, according to Murphy, some wiggle-room for God to decide which actions he commands. It's like God has the diagram for how to build a car and this guarantees that the car he builds has an engine, four wheels and other core components but he can still add a spoiler or decide how many seats he wants the car to have and there is nothing on the diagram determining these decisions. Hence, the rejoinder is saying that although the set of commands issued by God in any particular world will be guided by the same moral reasons he still has divine discretion with respect to some of the commands that are issued in any possible world.

It is important to note here that, at least on my interpretation of Murphy, this axiological domain is held constant. This means that, out of the infinite number of possible worlds that God might create, he is using the same set of moral background facts as it were. This is important because one might think that if there was some action that he failed to command in world one but commanded it in world two then surely that must mean that something about those two worlds is different and that explains the discrepancy. The point that I think Murphy is trying to make is that this need not necessarily be the case. Assuming that there are two similar worlds with identical axiological moral domains, laws of nature, biological facts, etc. then it could still be the case, due to God's divine freedom, that the two worlds differ in terms of their moral facts and that there is nothing that this difference can be traced back to (e.g. no moral or non-moral fact). In this sense, certain moral facts would be arbitrary because they were not guided by any decisive reason and could have been otherwise.

[16] Murphy (2012, p. 38) does not seem to believe that this implication is as problematic than the one in the original objection, i.e. that all of his commands are arbitrary.

Murphy (2012, p. 38) claims that the arbitrariness entailed by the limited account of voluntarism is what makes possible the second version of the objection and this can be seen where he states that "Allowing for such pockets of divine discretion does not provide backing for this version of the objection from arbitrariness [sic.] [i.e. A1], but rather offers a premise for the other version of the objection from arbitrariness [i.e. A2]."

A2: (P1) A limited version of TV implies that:

(P1.1) The category of MSAs consisting of moral obligation obtain in virtue of God's commands.

(P1.2) Some of God's commands are unjustified and contingent.

(P2) The structure of morality is arbitrary unless all moral states of affairs are justified or obtain necessarily.

(C) Therefore, a limited version of TV implies that the structure of morality is arbitrary.

Regarding P2, Murphy (2012, p. 39) writes, "The claim that the structure of morality is not arbitrary is…the claim that every obtaining moral state of affairs either has a justification or is necessary." So, this is what is required if the structure of morality is to be non-arbitrary: every obtaining moral state of affairs must be justified or must obtain necessarily. With respect to justification, a MSA, call it M1, is justified if it is entailed by a distinct MSA, call it M2, conjoined with some non-moral state of affairs (Murphy, 2012, p. 38).[17] For example,

M1: murdering an innocent person is wrong.

M2: deliberately ending an innocent person's life is wrong.

Non-moral state of affairs: murder involves deliberately ending an innocent person's life.

[17] We must remember that the 'justification' being spoken of is not epistemic in nature. Rather, M2 and some non-moral fact 'justify' M1 to the extent that they explain why M1 obtains.

The problem then becomes the fact that M2 would have to be justified by some M3 which would have to be justified by an M4 and so on. Since, for any MSA, there cannot be an infinite chain of distinct MSAs justifying it there must be a stopping point and, therefore, there must be some MSA that is not justified by another MSA. I follow Murphy (2012, p. 38) in calling MSAs that fit this description "basic moral states of affairs". With this in mind, in order for the required rational structure of morality to be maintained all basic MSAs must be necessary which means that they must obtain in all possible worlds.

Thus, P2 claims that if any obtaining MSA is both not justified by a distinct MSA and is contingent then it follows that the structure of morality is arbitrary. P1 claims that there are MSAs that are both unjustified and contingent under theological voluntarism. Since this argument employs a limited account of voluntarism, only the moral states of affairs which consist of moral obligation could fall under this category.

I have several problems with a limited version of theological voluntarism and will now briefly digress to explore some of those problems. The first is mentioned by Murphy (2012, p. 41) himself:

> [I]f you are willing to hold that all moral properties other than those in the obligation family are to be understood in non-theological voluntarist terms, what is to stop us from holding that obligation is to be understood in non-theological voluntarist terms as well? If we are willing to give up theological voluntarism in some moral domains, why not in all of them?

The limited version of voluntarism suggested by Murphy appears to be unable to account for this worry. If the voluntarist maintains that there are moral reasons prior to God's commands and that God's commands only determine moral obligation, then I believe that God's role becomes superfluous or redundant. Surely, the conjunction of these moral reasons that God appeals to and certain non-moral facts (e.g. facts about the empirical world, the psychological make-up of rational beings, the laws of nature, etc.) determine whether or not an action is morally right or wrong. The only relevance God would then have, as I see it, is in his creating activity – his decisions as to which non-moral facts obtain will clearly have implications for which actions fall

under the category of being morally permissible or impermissible.[18] However, if the moral reasons that he appeals to in issuing commands obtain independently of him then his creating activity is only indirectly responsible for moral obligation.[19]

This concern essentially embodies the second horn of the dilemma as admitting that there are some elements of morality, especially the axiological domain, that are not dependent on God really does threaten the dependency that is purported by voluntarism.[20]

The arbitrariness principle

Having established what exactly is accused of being arbitrary I want to point out that neither A1 nor A2 are, in and of themselves, objections to voluntarism. The conclusions of A1 and A2 both, in their own ways, accuse the voluntarist position of rendering morality arbitrary but an additional premise is required in order for such a rendition to be considered an objection. Such a premise would amount to a principle of sorts which would look something like the following:

Arbitrariness Principle 1 (AP1): Moral states of affairs cannot obtain arbitrarily.

Or,

Arbitrariness Principle 2 (AP2): Moral states of affairs do not obtain arbitrarily.

Interestingly, this kind of principle is never really discussed in the literature but is always implicitly present in any arbitrariness objection for if it were not then there would be no reason why arbitrariness would be objectionable in the voluntarist context. If it is okay for a moral state of affairs to obtain arbitrarily then to show that some moral theory entails that morality is arbitrary would not be to show that such an account is problematic or false. Based on what I have come across, Murphy (2012) is the only one who really mentions something akin to AP1 and AP2 but even he only dedicates a few sentences to it. He justifies some version of the

[18] For example, if he had designed humans to be such that they were incapable of feeling pain then one could reasonably assume that this would have at least some implications for moral obligation.
[19] Even if we say that he issues commands for epistemic purposes (such that we may know what to do and not to do) this would not negate the limited metaphysical dependency that I have suggested. Also I think it's clear that, given God's divine nature, he could do a better job of carrying out this goal.
[20] Adams (1979) and Alston (1990) employ the same strategy, i.e. limiting the number of moral states of affairs that God is responsible for.

arbitrariness principle by claiming that "when we say that some moral state of affairs obtains, we take it that there is a reason for that moral state of affairs obtaining rather than another. Moral states of affairs do not just happen to obtain." (Murphy, 2012, p. 36). In the same paragraph, he writes "it cannot be that morality could wholly depend on something arbitrary; and so theological voluntarism must be false" (Ibid.). This is very ambiguous and makes it unclear whether or not AP1 or AP2 is in play because the first quote seems to imply AP2 while the second seems to imply AP1.[21] The matter becomes even more complex when it's acknowledged that these two quotes only apply to argument A1.

To recap, A1, which is concerned with a full account of voluntarism where God is responsible for all moral states of affairs, concludes that God's commands are arbitrary and, therefore, morality is arbitrary. On the other hand, A2, which is concerned with a limited account of voluntarism whereby God only determines moral obligation, concludes that the structure of morality is arbitrary. This means that a distinct principle is needed for argument A2 since the conclusions of A1 and A2 are different. This may, therefore, require one of the following:

Arbitrariness Principle 3 (AP3): The structure of morality cannot be arbitrary.

Or,

Arbitrariness Principle 4 (AP4): The structure of morality is not arbitrary.

Murphy (2012, p. 38) claims that "moral states of affairs exhibit a certain rational structure that they would not have if theological voluntarism were true". This seems to lean towards AP4. He does not offer any real justification for AP4 and dives straight into explaining what he means by 'rational structure' (i.e. all moral states of affairs either being justified or necessary).

At any rate, we can leave what Murphy means aside and consider which of these principles could suffice for a completion of the two versions of the objection. One may ask whether or not these two kinds of principles are logically equivalent to each other (i.e. is AP1 equivalent to AP2 and is AP3 equivalent to AP4) but I think it's clear that they are not. Using the first two principles as an example, it seems to me that AP1 can be understood as a conditional of the form 'If any moral states of affairs obtain at all then it must be the case that they do not obtain arbitrarily'. As such,

[21] Others who write about voluntarism or the DCT also do not make it clear. E.g. Rooney (1995), Adams (1979), Alston (1990).

the truth of the antecedent is left open. A different way of putting this may be that if there are some states of affairs that obtain arbitrarily then they cannot be properly understood as *moral* states of affairs precisely because they obtain for no moral reason. AP2 says that moral states of affairs *do not*, as a matter of fact, obtain arbitrarily and, as I see it, this could be for one of two reasons. Either (1) there are no moral states of affairs which obtain at all or, (2) there are moral states of affairs that obtain but there is a moral reason why they obtain. Whether (1) or (2) is opted for, AP2 seems to be the weaker of the two because it only says something about the actual world whereas AP1 says something about what is possible across different worlds. So, AP1 claims that it is impossible for moral states of affairs to obtain for no moral reason, thus making it equivalent to a necessary claim. In contrast, AP2 says something about what is the case in this world thus making it a contingent claim.

I think that AP1 is what is really needed to complete the arbitrariness objection because if the objection rests on a contingent claim then it makes it much weaker. This is because AP2 leaves open the possibility of worlds in which moral states of affairs do obtain for no moral reason without any suggestion that such a possibility would be problematic. As such, the only problem with voluntarism would be that it does not correspond to this world which, in my opinion, is not what the objection wants to say. Even if this were the intention of the objection it could not apply to a metaethical version of voluntarism because the metaethical version is not committed to voluntarism being the case in the actual world. With AP1 such a possibility is ruled out altogether and I think this is really what is needed for the objection to have enough force to threaten the validity of metaethical theological voluntarism.

AP1 does seem to at least capture *what we mean* when we think of what we believe to be an obtaining moral state of affairs. For example, the following is widely thought to be one such moral state of affairs: it is wrong to torture innocent babies for fun. If this is true then we would typically believe that this is a moral state of affairs that cannot obtain arbitrarily, i.e. there is surely a moral reason why it is morally wrong, as opposed to morally right, to torture innocent babies for fun. It may be further asked *why* there should be (or *why we think* there should be) a reason for such states of affairs. In other words, it may be asked why this, i.e. non-arbitrariness, should be explanatory criteria for the validity of moral states of affairs. I admit that there may be no further explanation for why this is the case other than ‘it just is’. One reason may be that our

rational nature makes it such that we think all states of affairs must exist in virtue of some reason or another. Perhaps a scientific or causal analogy might be helpful here. We typically think that events do not just happen to occur but rather that they occur in virtue of something. It would be unsatisfactory to us if some event just happened to occur and there was no available explanation for it. Even if there were no available explanation we would probably view this as an epistemic failure on our part and insist that there was something that caused the event but that we just do not currently know what that cause was. Perhaps a similar line of reasoning could serve as the justification for AP1. If there is no explanation as to why some moral state of affairs obtain then this would, I believe, leave us with an unsatisfactory account of that state of affairs. We would insist that it is not just a matter of chance and maintain that there is an explanation for it. I believe that the problem with TV highlighted by the arbitrariness objection is that it seems like a matter of chance or coincidence that God just happens to decide what we view as a morally reasonable set of commands.

A similar justification, *mutatis mutandis*, could apply to AP3. If a moral state of affairs is both unjustified and contingent, there would be no reason why it obtains. Given the way Murphy formulates his distinction, I believe that this would only apply to basic moral states of affairs. Even though I do not go into detail elaborating on this, it was worthwhile developing argument A2 because I think Murphy's definition of what it would mean for the structure of morality to be arbitrary is both useful and informative. I will say more about this in the next section.

Completing the Objection

We are now in a position to complete the two distinct formulations of the arbitrariness objection:

A1.1: (P1) If TV is true then moral states of affairs obtain arbitrarily.

(P2/AP1) Moral states of affairs cannot obtain arbitrarily.

(C) TV must be false.

P1 is essentially the conclusion of A1. It states that under voluntarism moral states of affairs do not obtain for a moral reason. P2 is AP1. The two premises entail the conclusion that voluntarism must be false.

A2.1 (P1) If a limited version of TV is true then the structure of morality is arbitrary.

(P2/AP3) The structure of morality cannot be arbitrary.

(C) Therefore, a limited version of TV must be false.

Similarly, P1 is the conclusion of A2 and P3 is AP3. If a limited version of voluntarism is true, then it would lead to the unacceptable implication that the structure of morality is arbitrary thus implying that even a limited version of voluntarism must be false.

Section III

Aim of Section III

If one accepts the arbitrariness principle, then it follows that it applies not just to voluntarism but also to other non-voluntarist conceptions of morality. By 'non-voluntarist conception of morality' I refer to a moral theory which does not conceive of morality as being dependent on a divine will. Even if one is not a voluntarist they will still have to adhere to an arbitrariness principle of some kind.

It should also be noted that the arbitrariness principle is not dependent on there being a dilemma for the voluntarist. To recap, the second horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma asserts that if God commands the actions that he does because they are morally right then there is an objective moral standard that obtains independently of God. This poses problems for voluntarism due to reasons that have been explained, i.e. reasons pertaining to God's omnipotence and the dependency

relation purported by voluntarism. There is a dilemma because both options, i.e. actions being morally obligatory *because* they are commanded by God and actions being commanded by God *because* they are morally obligatory, lead to seemingly indefensible implications for voluntarism. When it comes to non-voluntarist accounts there are no such options seeing as there are no commands being issued and morality is dependent on natural or non-natural facts. However, just because this is the case it does not follow that the arbitrariness principle is not applicable to non-voluntarist theories. The arbitrariness principle is needed in order to complete the arbitrariness objection and this is what makes possible the first horn of the dilemma. Hence, if one rejects the principle there is no arbitrariness objection and, therefore, no dilemma. If one accepts the principle, then there is a dilemma but one must also accept that the principle applies to voluntarism as much as it does to non-voluntarism.

What I will attempt to argue is that one of the implications of the arbitrariness objection is that a moral theory must have a foundation that is composed of necessary moral states of affairs if it is to be non-arbitrary. I begin by showing how some authors have speculated that if voluntarism implies that morality is arbitrary then so do other moral theories. After going through this, I use the definitions of arbitrariness that were operative in A1 and A2 of the previous section to establish a final definition of arbitrariness that will be used for the rest of the paper. I then suggest that what the authors who have speculated on arbitrariness claim, i.e. if voluntarism is arbitrary then other moral theories are also arbitrary, is not necessarily the case seeing as it is possible for a moral theory to be composed in a way such that it is not arbitrary. The way that this can be achieved is if all basic moral states of affairs obtain necessarily. I go on to explain why necessity rather than contingency would be required in order for this to be the case and I do this by appealing to the intuitive concerns raised by the arbitrariness objection. I conclude the section by considering the alternative of basic moral states of affairs being contingent rather than necessary and explaining, through the notion of moral properties supervening on non-moral properties, how this would result in an unsatisfactory account.

Speculation on the applicability of the arbitrariness objection and clarification on the definition of 'arbitrary'

In a paper where he suggests some responses to the arbitrariness objection for the divine command theorist, Alston (1990, p. 322) writes:

> An answer to the question "What is good about X?" will cite certain alleged good-making characteristics. We can then ask: "By virtue of what does good supervene on those characteristics?" The answer to that might involve citing the relation of those features to other alleged good-making characteristics. But sooner or later either a general principle or an individual paradigm is cited. Whichever it is, that is the end of the line. (We can, of course, ask why we should suppose that this principle is true or that this individual is a paradigm; but that is a different inquiry.) On both views something is taken as ultimate, behind which we cannot go, in the sense of finding some *explanation* of the fact that it is constitutive of goodness. I would invite one who finds it arbitrary to invoke God as the supreme standard of goodness to explain why this is more arbitrary than the invocation of a supreme general principle.

Alston (Ibid.) asserts that in questioning what makes a state of affairs good or bad we will either arrive at some ultimate principle that is "self-evident" or an "individual paradigm" (i.e. God or some omnibenevolent being who acts as a moral exemplar).[22] The bottom line is that there will be some stopping point for any chain of moral justification and it is unclear why we should think that the voluntarist account results in arbitrariness whereas other moral theories do not.[23] This point is very similar to the one made by Murphy where he points out that for any moral state of affairs, there cannot be an infinite chain of distinct moral states of affairs justifying it – there must eventually be some stopping point. They both seem to be appealing to a regress of moral reasons.

Alston never really makes it clear whether or not he is rejecting arbitrariness as a genuine problem for voluntarism because he thinks it would then be the case that, by the same line of

[22] We may also arrive at more than one ultimate principle and end up with something resembling W.D. Ross' moral foundationalism.
[23] As in the previous section, the word 'justification' here denotes metaphysical justification and not epistemic justification.

reasoning, any moral principle could then be said to be arbitrary or if he is simply pointing out that moral principles are, in general, just as arbitrary as voluntarism. The latter would entail that he does consider arbitrariness to be a genuine problem while the former would act as a sort of *reductio*. If Alston thinks that invoking God as the supreme standard of morality *is* arbitrary then he could be saying that other moral principles (or at least those that invoke some 'supreme general principle') are just as arbitrary; this would commit him to the view that moral theories *are* arbitrary. Alternatively, he could mean something like: 'If arbitrariness applies to voluntarism then it also applies to all moral theories which invoke some supreme general principle. But it would be absurd to think that all moral theories are arbitrary. Therefore, voluntarism is not arbitrary.'

Rooney (1995, p. 164) raises a similar point after mounting a lengthy response to the arbitrariness objection:

> What has been argued above is…that a thorough appreciation of the manner in which, in reasoning about human ends, the stopping-point in a chain of reasoning is reached enables us to understand how the arbitrary nature of divine commands does not preclude their being rationally acceptable. If an objector to divine command theory continues to be dissatisfied with an account according to which God's pleasure, so to speak, is made the foundation of morality – perhaps arguing that there is nothing particularly moral about all this – then he should be reminded that, whatever morality is based upon, the ultimate criterion of the good must be something that is non-moral.

Rooney seems to, first of all, be accepting that a voluntarist account does imply that God's commands, along with the moral states of affairs that arise because of his commands, are arbitrary. Secondly, though I will not explain his reasons, Rooney also claims that this is not an objectionable implication.[24] There are two things we can draw from this quotation that are relevant for my purposes.

The first is that he also accepts that a 'stopping-point' must be reached in a chain of moral reasoning – I think this is quite uncontroversial. The second is that "whatever morality is based upon, the criterion of the good must be something that is non-moral" (Ibid.). Here Rooney seems

[24] This amounts to a rejection of AP1.

to be making a point similar to that of Alston's. Remember, the arbitrariness objection argues that God cannot appeal to a moral reason in issuing his commands. Therefore, if voluntarism is true, morality is determined by something non-moral – it is arbitrary. What Rooney is claiming here is that, whatever the foundation of morality is, it will ultimately be non-moral and, therefore, just as arbitrary. He seems to be implying, in my opinion, that even if we accept the arbitrariness objection, then it can also be applied to other moral theories which claim that morality is based on something other than divine commands; i.e. they are just as arbitrary.

These remarks from both Alston and Rooney make points which relate to my own argument. What they are getting at is that even if a moral standard obtains independently of God, it's unclear why it should be regarded as not being arbitrary. First, I want to make clear which definition of 'arbitrariness' I will be proceeding with. We can extract two definitions of arbitrariness from section two.

In A1, what is at issue is, first of all, God's commands. P2 of A1 states that 'If God's commands are made for no moral reason(s) then they are arbitrary'. Remember, the arbitrariness is transmitted from God's commands to the MSAs which voluntarism claims obtain in virtue of his commands. Therefore, from A1 we can derive that a MSA is arbitrary just in case it obtains or exists for no moral reason – this is straightforward.

In the case of A2, it is not God's commands but rather the structure of morality that is of concern and this complicates things to some extent. To recap, P2 of A2 states that what makes the structure of morality arbitrary is that there are some MSAs within the structure that are unjustified *and* contingent. Also, in this line of reasoning a MSA can only be justified by another (non-identical) MSA. This point is, I think, similar to P2 of A1 since a non-moral state of affairs is incapable of providing sufficient justification for a MSA in the same way that (in P2 of A1) a non-moral reason is incapable of adequately justifying, in the ontological sense, God's commands.

Let us recap:

P2 of A1: If God's commands are made for no moral reason(s) then they are arbitrary.

P2 of A2: The structure of morality is arbitrary unless all moral states of affairs are justified or obtain necessarily.

In P2 of A1, the problem with God's commands (and therefore with the resulting moral states of affairs posited by the voluntarist) is that they are made for no moral reason – this is what makes them arbitrary. So, in A1 a MSA is arbitrary just in case it obtains for no moral reason. As I explained earlier, it is not as though God's commands are made for no reason at all. It's just that, by definition, they cannot be made based on *moral* reasons because, in terms of logical priority, his commands are made before any moral reasons exist. What is relevant at this juncture is that if a MSA obtains in virtue of something non-moral then it is arbitrary.

P2 of A2 implies that what would make the structure of morality arbitrary is if there are moral states of affairs within said structure that are unjustified and contingent. When explaining A2 I noted that in this argument, any MSA can only be justified by a distinct/non-identical MSA in conjunction with some non-moral state of affairs. The example I used was that murder is wrong (MSA1) because deliberately ending an innocent person's life is wrong (MSA2) and murder involves deliberately ending an innocent person's life (non-moral state of affairs). The important take away from here is that in a chain of moral reasoning, moral states of affairs cannot be justified by non-moral states of affairs.

Even though the subject matter is different in the two arguments, in A1 it is God's commands which are arbitrary and in A2 it is the structure of morality which is arbitrary, it seems as though only a moral state of affairs is capable of providing moral justification whereas a non-moral state of affairs is incapable, at least by itself, of serving this purpose.

As an aside, these considerations have led me to believe that what is really arbitrary in A2 is, first of all, the commands themselves. To recap, under a limited version of TV there are going to be some moral obligations which God has a perfectly good moral reason to command and, at least Murphy would have us believe, there are going to be some that he does not.[25] Whether or not this is the case, I still believe that what is really at issue is, in the first place, God's commands. As I have explained, the arbitrary nature of his commands is what makes it such that the moral states of affairs are arbitrary and even in A2, which is concerned with a limited version of TV, there is a

[25] This is because the axiological domain of morality is not determined by God under a limited version of voluntarism.

premise, P1.2, which classifies God's commands as arbitrary and then, as a result, the structure of morality is said to be arbitrary.

Although I do accept Murphy's distinction regarding the two different ways in which it can be argued that TV is arbitrary, I think that any purported structural arbitrariness is transmitted from the arbitrary nature of God's commands. I am not quite sure I find plausible the claim that just because *some* moral states of affairs are unjustified and contingent this implies that, under a limited version of TV, the whole structure of morality is arbitrary. I don't see the need to label the whole structure of morality arbitrary when we can be more precise and just say that some moral obligations are arbitrary. The relevance of this is that it is what determines the moral states of affairs, i.e. commands in this case, that make them arbitrary and speaking about the structure as a whole seems unnecessary to me.

Getting back to the matter at hand, i.e. which definition of arbitrariness should be used going forward, I believe that there are two options:

D1: A moral state of affairs is arbitrary just in case it obtains for no moral reason.

D2: A moral state of affairs is arbitrary just in case it is unjustified and contingent.

As I explained earlier, when it comes to D2, any given MSA can only be justified by a distinct MSA in the same way that, when it comes to D1, only a moral reason can sufficiently justify a MSA. Given this similarity I believe we can use the following hybrid definition: A moral state of affairs, call it MSA1, is arbitrary if it is unjustified and is contingent[26]; whereby only a distinct/non-identical moral state of affairs can provide sufficient justification insofar as it explains why MSA1 obtains. I refer to this as a 'hybrid' definition because I believe it incorporates both D1 and D2 for the reasons I have just mentioned.

What does this entail?

Using this definition, my claim is the following:

[26] Conversely, a moral state of affairs is non-arbitrary if it is justified or necessary.

All basic moral states of affairs must be either justified or necessary.

Remember, a basic (or foundational) moral state of affairs is a moral state of affairs for which there is no further explanation; there is nothing that ontologically makes it the case that such moral states of affairs obtain. We have seen, in the explanation of A2 in the second section, that for any moral state of affairs there cannot be an infinite chain of distinct moral states of affairs justifying it. There must be a stopping point, meaning that it must be the case that we will arrive at a basic moral state of affairs that is not justified and is found at the end of the chain of justification. For any basic moral state of affairs to escape the charge of arbitrariness it must be one that obtains necessarily. Therefore, it must be the case that any basic moral state of affairs obtains in every possible world – there must be no world in which it fails to obtain.

To be clear, in the case of theological voluntarism, the moral states of affairs are unjustified because there is no moral reason why they obtain. This is because there are, by definition, no moral principles guiding God's commanding activity. That there are no moral reasons guiding him is also why the moral states of affairs are contingent. Anything God commanded would have been morally obligatory – his commanding behaviour is not restrained by anything.

One might question this demand of necessity. It may be asked, why should a basic moral state of affairs, which are unjustified, have to be necessary? Why couldn't they exist contingently and yet still provide firm support for the moral states of affairs which they are explanatorily prior to?

One answer can be found in the unsatisfactory air of contingency that voluntarism is accused of. As I just recapped, the main concern captured by the arbitrariness objection is that since God's commands are not guided by moral reasons he could have commanded that humans perform actions that are widely regarded as being immoral. The definition of arbitrary I am using is a conjunction of a moral state of affairs being ontologically unjustified *and* contingent. The conjunction is important because it captures the fact that if at the stopping point of a chain of moral justifications there was a basic moral state of affairs that was necessary, then this would not be problematic. However, the problem comes when thinking about basic moral states of affairs that are unjustified *and* contingent because they are ontologically unjustified and there is nothing about them which implies that they necessarily had to have obtained.

Although other authors, with the exception of Murphy, do not necessarily phrase the objection as 'God's commands are unjustified and contingent' this is what they mean since what they all say is that he has no moral reason to issue any of his commands (i.e. they are morally unjustified) and his commands could have been different (they are contingent) meaning that he could have commanded any action and it would thereby be morally obligatory. I have focused heavily on Murphy's (2012) account of the arbitrariness objection because he is the only one who goes into detail when it comes to explaining what it would mean for God's commands to be arbitrary. The others really only go as far as to say God would have no moral reason to make his commands or that he could have commanded anything but I believe this is also contained within the definition I have opted for since, as I have explained, I think what they are really committed to is that his commands are unjustified and contingent.[27] For example, Richard Joyce (2002, p. 62) touches on this in referring the objection as "The Modal Vulnerability Problem" and he says, about the possibility of God commanding highly immoral acts, "...we have the intuition that murder and mayhem are *necessarily* morally wrong, and therefore the DCT is in trouble."

A popular example often used, including by me earlier in the paper, when trying to highlight the problem raised by the arbitrariness objection is that God could have commanded that torturing babies for fun is an action that humans are morally obliged to perform. The worry seems to be that if God did this he would be getting things wrong because torturing babies for fun could never be a morally permissible action let alone an action that we are morally obliged to perform. It seems to me as though what the objector is committed to is that there could be no world in which such an action could be morally obligatory. This amounts to being committed to the claim that torturing babies for fun is wrong because, for example, it constitutes a moral state of affairs that is ultimately justified by a distinct and necessary moral state of affairs: that intentionally causing harm to an undeserving being for an unjustifiable end is wrong.[28] The problem with voluntarism is that the chain of justification would end in God's commands and his commands are not guided by moral reasons meaning that any action, no matter how intuitively immoral, could have been obligatory.

[27] See, for example, Alston (1990, p. 305), Quinn (2006, pp. 74-75), Copp (2003, p. 6), Joyce (2002, p. 62), Antony (2006, p. 71), Sinnott-Armstrong (2006, p. 108).
[28] I say 'ultimate' because there could be several other moral states of affairs in between but there will be a stopping point which will be a basic moral state of affairs.

Furthermore, if this were not the case then the objection would be incoherent. Say the objector believes that torturing babies as a source of entertainment is wrong in the actual world but that this may not have been the case. It would be inconsistent for the same objector to then think that it would be problematic for moral obligation to be determined by the commands of a divine being just because said being's commands could have been otherwise. In both instances there will, at the end of the chains of moral justification, be basic moral states of affairs that are unjustified and contingent and so, if there is a problem at all, both instances must be equally problematic. To say otherwise would be inconsistent.

Earlier in the section, I highlighted that Alston believes it is no more arbitrary to invoke God as the supreme standard of morality than it is to cite some supreme general principle. One reading of his response to the arbitrariness objection is that whether we invoke a supreme principle or a divine being as being the source of moral value it will still be arbitrary since a stopping point must ultimately be reached. So either way, no matter what morality is dependent upon, it will be arbitrary. Unlike Alston, I do not think that a supreme general principle would necessarily have to be arbitrary.

If the foundation for morality consists of, for example, a plurality of moral principles which somehow obtain necessarily then I believe that their necessity would sufficiently explain why they obtain rather than not. Also, that they are themselves *moral* principles would mean both that they are not explained by or do not depend upon anything non-moral. This would mean a rejection of Rooney's (1995, p. 164) contention that "the ultimate criterion of the good must be something that is non-moral". In this way, at least in terms of what is possible, my position differs from that of Rooney and Alston.

A potential objection to my contention is that even if a basic moral state of affairs obtains necessarily, this does not mean that it is not just as arbitrary as one that obtains contingently. Murphy (2012, p. 40) seems to think that the demand of necessity may not be sufficiently justified:

> …the very fact that some state of affairs obtains necessarily does not entail that its obtaining does not require explanation, and there is no reason why moral states of affairs

> would be special on this score. So one might think that not only is it possible for justifications to bottom out in contingent moral states of affairs, there is no reason to think that such justifications are as such any less adequate than justifications that bottom out in necessary moral states of affairs.

Murphy is claiming that contingent basic moral states of affairs may be just as ontologically valid, to the extent that they are fit for providing ontological grounding for other moral states of affairs, as necessary basic moral states of affairs. I am very skeptical about this claim. The concept of moral states of affairs supervening on non-moral states of affairs may be used to explain why one should be skeptical of Murphy's claim. It is typically thought that at least some moral states of affairs supervene on non-moral states of affairs and what this means is that the moral states of affairs are dependent on the non-moral states of affairs (Brink, 1989, p. 160; Copp, 2006, p. 8; Jackson, 2000, p. 119). Supervenience, in the moral sense, is a law-like relation that obtains between facts at the base of the relation, otherwise known as subvening facts or states of affairs, and the moral facts that are dependent on them and are found at the top of the relation, otherwise known as the supervening facts.

For example, take, again, the widely accepted and uncontroversial moral fact that torturing babies for fun is wrong. This moral fact would be dependent upon certain non-moral facts such as the fact that the act of torturing a baby causes the baby to feel pain. This moral fact is therefore dependent on the non-moral fact in the sense that part of what makes the relevant action wrong is that it causes the baby harm. This may be further supplemented by other non-moral facts such as the fact that babies are incapable of defending themselves, are not responsible for their actions and that the torturer is performing the action for purely for the sake of entertainment. Were it not for these subvening non-moral facts then there would be no moral fact. This is the sense of ontological dependency that is being referred to.

When it comes to supervenience there are two forms that are relevant to this particular discussion and those are weak and strong supervenience (Brink, 1989, pp. 160-61; Horgan, 1993). Both weak and strong supervenience imply that, in two distinct situations, if the facts at the base of the relation are the same then the supervening facts will also be the same. For there to be a difference in the supervening facts or properties (which in this case are the moral facts or properties) then there must be a difference in the subvening facts or properties (which in this case are the non-

moral facts or properties). The difference is that weak supervenience is a relation that occurs *within the same world* such that instantiation of the same subvening facts entails instantiation of the same supervening facts only within the same possible world. As such, this entails only a contingent relation between the subvening facts and the supervening facts – the law-like relation only obtains contingently. In contrast, strong supervenience implies that any relation between subvening and supervening facts obtains across all possible worlds. So, unlike weak supervenience, strong supervenience entails that if some relation obtains in the actual world it must be the case that it obtains in all possible worlds. Hence, strong supervenience entails a law-like relation which obtains necessarily.

Let's use the act of theft for example. Let us say that two individuals both rob a bank in the actual world. The supervening moral states of affairs would be that, in both instances, the act of robbing the bank was wrong. The subvening moral states of affairs would be, for example, that they both entered financial institutions which fit a certain description, they both threatened and possibly committed violence by injuring the security guards and threatening customers of the bank and they both coerced the staff of the bank into giving them money or other assets that belong to the bank.

Weak supervenience entails that if two individuals in the actual world both rob a bank then both of their actions are wrong. However, according to weak supervenience, that this is the case in this world does not entail that it would be the same in all possible worlds. There could be worlds in which the subvening states of affairs are the same as this world, i.e. the individuals commit identical actions, but the supervening states of affairs are different, i.e. neither of the individuals did anything wrong by robbing the bank. The relation between the subvening and supervening facts is contingent which entails that it does not necessarily obtain in other worlds or that it did not necessarily have to be the case.

In contrast, strong supervenience would entail that if the actions of these individuals are wrong in this world then they are wrong in all possible worlds. This means that the robbing of the banks could not have failed to be wrong because the relation is necessary, meaning that it obtains across all possible worlds. So, we can see that with strong supervenience the relation is necessary, whereas with weak supervenience the relation is contingent.

The problem, in my opinion, with Murphy's contention that basic moral states of affairs could be unjustified and contingent is that it would allow for two worlds, w1 and w2, to have identical non-moral states of affairs but non-identical moral states of affairs. It would allow for the torture of babies to be morally impermissible in w1 but morally permissible in w2 despite the non-moral states of affairs in both worlds being exactly the same. Intuitively, this seems like an unacceptable possibility and this unintuitive notion is exactly what the arbitrariness objection reveals. To be clear, in the case of theological voluntarism the moral states of affairs would supervene on God's commands which are understood as non-moral.

Again, once one accepts the arbitrariness principle then the arbitrariness becomes problematic and in saying that there might not be anything wrong with basic moral states of affairs being contingent this is what Murphy is essentially suggesting. What if one does not accept the arbitrariness principle? In section two, I have touched on suggestions as to why one should accept the principle but I do not regard this as conclusive. It is all well and good for one to abandon or reject the principle but then one must also abandon the arbitrariness objection all together. It must be remembered that it is a widely accepted principle for if it were not then the arbitrariness objection would not be widely accepted. There is a great deal of literature which attempts to refute the arbitrariness objection in ways other than rejecting the principle and, as far as I am aware, there is barely any discussion on the validity of this principle.

Having established why I believe that basic moral states of affairs must obtain necessarily in order to be non-arbitrary, I will now spend the next section explaining how the arbitrariness objection applies to naturalism and contrast this with how it applies to supernaturalism.

Section IV

Aim of Section IV

In the previous section I argued that an implication of accepting the arbitrariness principle is that even non-voluntarist accounts of morality must have non-arbitrary foundations. In this section I will get more specific and examine one specific non-voluntarist account, namely, naturalism. To

recap, I began the paper by giving some background on the metaethical area that my paper will be concerned with, i.e. moral ontology which is one component of a realist position. With respect to moral ontology, there are traditionally three categories and these are, roughly:

Naturalism: Moral facts are natural facts.

Supernaturalism: Moral facts are supernatural facts.

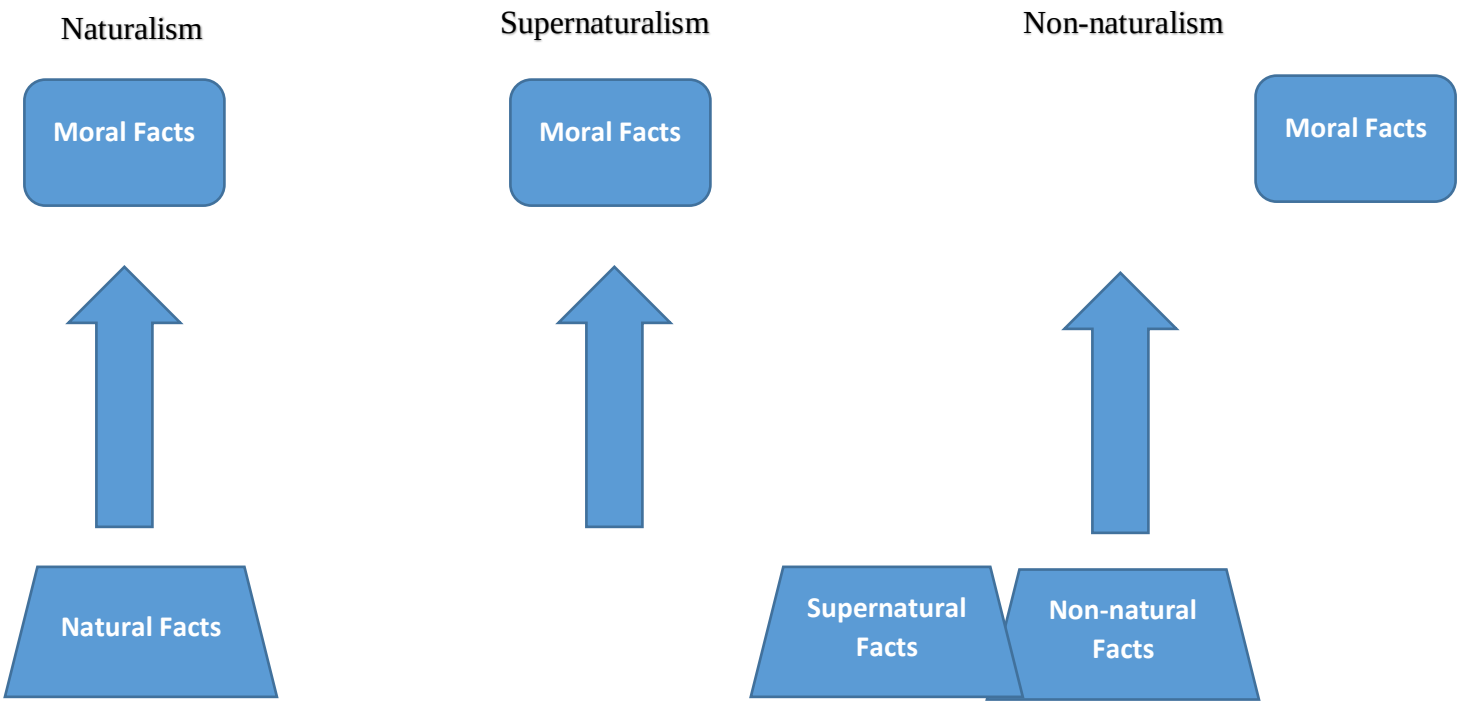
Non-naturalism: Moral facts are non-natural facts.

For naturalists, moral facts are natural facts meaning that they are facts which are the subject matter of scientific inquiry or which are ontologically on par with a physicalist or materialist conception of the universe. Supernaturalism asserts that moral facts or properties are equivalent to supernatural facts or properties which are described as divine or godly in nature or those facts that are purported by religious doctrines. Non-naturalism asserts that moral facts are *sui generis* or unique to the extent that they are in some sense special and are distinct from natural and supernatural facts.

In the second section, I explained that I would be using theological voluntarism as the token form of supernaturalism. More specifically, I explained that I would be concerned with metaethical theological voluntarism which is distinct from normative theological voluntarism to the extent that it is a metaethical theory as opposed to a normative one. I also explained that even when it comes to voluntarism there are different accounts of which supernatural facts are responsible for moral facts and I proceeded to make use of commands as being the relevant kinds of supernatural facts from that point onwards.

Another way of understanding the relation between moral facts and supernatural facts posited by supernaturalism is that moral facts supervene on supernatural facts. Naturalism and non-naturalism can also be put into these terms and this will be helpful in terms of analyzing whether or not these two theories are consistent with the arbitrariness principle. The three theses can be described using the diagrams below:

Dependency relations for theories of moral ontology in terms of supervenience



So, on the left we have naturalism which entails that moral facts supervene on natural facts. On the right we have non-naturalism which entails that moral facts supervene on non-natural facts. Finally, in the middle we have supernaturalism, which entails that moral facts supervene on supernatural facts.

It is important to remember that the problem with supernaturalism is the status of the supernatural facts. The problem is that the supernatural facts, which are the foundation for the moral facts, are both unjustified and contingent, i.e. they are arbitrary. It does not matter whether it is a divine will's commands or intentions, etc. because the problem is not with the type of divine fact that determines morality; the problem is the arbitrariness. It does not matter whether divine speech behavior is used or if it is instead a mental action that determines morality. What matters is that there is nothing moral that guides the relevant divine action and, therefore, God could have commanded/intended/etc. anything and it would have been morally right by definition. Indeed, a popular strategy against the arbitrariness objection for the voluntarist is to somehow argue that God's nature is somehow necessary and that this makes for a non-arbitrary foundation of

morality because it blocks off morally bizarre scenarios (Adams, 1979). This strategy aims to solve the problem of arbitrariness by essentially claiming that although it is true that God has no moral justification for his commands, it still follows that he could not have commanded morally bizarre scenarios because his nature, somehow, could not have been other than it is.

Keeping this in mind, I argue that we can say the same thing about natural facts. The natural facts could have been otherwise and this would have meant that the moral facts would have been otherwise. It is very easy for us to imagine a world in which natural facts such as the biological makeup of humans (or their equivalent) is different than it is in the actual world[29]. In addition to relatively easy thought experiments, evolutionary theory, which is line with the scientific background assumptions made by naturalism, tells us that humans evolved over time to come to have the biological structures they currently have and the implication seems to be that this did not have to be the case. This is ultimately what I will be arguing with respect to naturalism: that the natural facts, upon which the moral facts are dependent, under naturalism are just as arbitrary as supernatural facts under supernaturalism.

When it comes to non-naturalism, I am less sure about whether or not this is the case. Non-naturalism has been accused of being ontologically mysterious. I agree with this assessment and believe that it makes it difficult to apply the line of reasoning found in the arbitrariness objection to a non-naturalist account. Doing so would require an extensive account of non-naturalism which is beyond the scope of this paper.

In what follows I will focus on naturalism. There are several accounts of naturalism and in the same way I used theological voluntarism as a token account of supernaturalism I will also use non-reductive naturalism as a token account of naturalism. To put this into context, I will touch on the distinction between reductive and non-reductive naturalism. After touching on this distinction, I then construct an argument against naturalism which essentially argues that naturalism entails that moral states of affairs are, objectionably, arbitrary. After completing this argument, I offer what I think is the logical response to the argument. I will argue that such a response implies that the natural facts within the naturalist position are not what primarily

[29] For example, one familiar with Philosophy of the Mind can think of the thought experiments used to argue that pain is not identical to C-fibres firing and that we could have experienced pain in another way (e.g. X-fibres firing).

determine the moral facts and they are not as significant as other facts which must obtain in order for the naturalist to avoid the charge of arbitrariness.

Some accounts of naturalism

There are several accounts of naturalism and what they have in common is that by characterizing moral facts as natural facts which are regarded as being ontologically familiar seeing as they consist of facts that we have no trouble understanding or comprehending. This is one of the appeals of naturalism. Whereas supernatural and non-natural facts seem, at least to some, ontologically mysterious this is not the case for natural facts. In the introduction, I mentioned that there is disagreement about what exactly is meant by natural facts and the way these are usually described is that they are those facts which are the subject matter of scientific inquiry. While this is important for the thesis, it does not immediately matter for my argument. I will take there to be some general agreement on what is meant by 'natural fact' and proceed to briefly give an account of two kinds of naturalism. Additionally, when I say that natural facts are those facts which 'are the subject matter of scientific inquiry' that is not to say that we can necessarily come to know them through scientific inquiry. Naturalists do not think that this is the case but this is beside the point as I am only concerned with the metaphysical aspect of naturalism and leave open epistemological matters.

The first form of naturalism can be referred to as 'non-reductive' naturalism and it claims that moral facts are *constituted by* natural facts. Brink (1989, p. 157) puts it the following way:

> Because 'are' can represent the 'is' of identity or the 'is' of *constitution*, naturalism can be construed as claiming either that moral facts and properties are identical with natural and social scientific facts and properties or that moral facts and properties are constituted by, but not identical with, natural and social scientific facts and properties…Identity implies constitution, but not vice versa.

So, what Brink is saying is that moral facts can be natural facts but that they are not identical with or reducible to natural facts because they could have been realized by facts that are not natural or

by different kinds of natural and social scientific facts.[30] This can be referred to as the 'multiple realizability' of moral facts (Brink, 1989, p. 158). So, for Brink, reduction implies a one-to-one relationship but since moral facts are multiply realizable they are not reducible. Multiple realizability implies that there could be some moral fact X that is realized by a multiple number of natural and social scientific facts, N1, N2, N3…etc.

An example may be helpful here. Take the action of a husband cheating on his wife. The moral fact in this case would be something like 'The act of the husband cheating on his wife was wrong'. However, there could be two distinct sets of natural facts that constitute 'cheating on one's wife'. For example, we can imagine worlds where the institution of 'marriage' is different. Maybe it's conventional for women to propose to men in other worlds. Or perhaps marriage occurs between Martians and not human beings. Or perhaps there are different biological differences which make it such that cheating does not involve what we consider to be cheating, e.g. there are different forms of intimacy that take place. There are many possibilities. The point is the immoral act of cheating can be realized through multiple sets of natural facts and therefore this moral fact is not reducible to or is not identical to one specific set of natural facts.

Reductive accounts accept multiple realizability but reject that it is inconsistent with reduction (Jackson, 2000, pp. 122-123). Reductionist accounts hold that if whenever some natural fact (or set of natural facts) is realized then a corresponding moral fact is also realized then this implies that they are "necessarily co-extensive" which essentially means that they always occur together and because of this the two facts are identical (Ibid.). What this means is that since there is a set of natural facts or conditions which cannot fail to constitute, for example, the immoral act of cheating then this means that whenever these facts are realized then this moral fact occurs. Therefore, if this is the case, then, according to reductive accounts the moral facts are reducible to and identical to the corresponding natural facts even though the moral facts can be realized by a variety of natural facts.

When I discussed supernaturalism, through theological voluntarism, I used the example of commands being the supernatural facts without getting into detail as to which specific commands as this would have made the discussion about a normative account. Similarly, I will touch briefly

[30] By 'social scientific' facts he means facts about things like institutions or norms, etc.

on what kind of natural facts have been proposed by naturalists so that we can get a sense of what might be meant by natural facts.

Richard Boyd, who offers a non-reductive account of naturalism, identifies goodness with a homeostatic group of properties that tend to be realized together, are conducive to one another and which also lead to the fulfillment of human needs (Boyd, 1995, p. 329). Brink (1989, p. 238) argues for a naturalistic account of utilitarianism which implies that "moral facts…consist of natural facts, that is, natural and social scientific facts that contribute to human welfare." This is not immediately relevant for my purposes but it helps to get an idea of which specific natural facts the naturalist might have in mind and having an idea of this is helpful when contrasting it with the supernaturalist account for which we already have some very clear examples. Using Brink and Boyd as an example, we can see the distinction here between the normative and the metaethical. For example, Brink considers himself a naturalist at the metaethical level and at a normative level he opts for a version of utilitarianism which is a familiar moral theory whereas Boyd opts for his homeostatic cluster of properties. As I mentioned in the introduction, being metaethically committed to naturalism, supernaturalism or non-naturalism does not entail any specific normative commitments. You could fill in the normative element of naturalism with a deontological system just the same way you could fill in the normative part of theological voluntarism with some religion other than Christianity.

As with theological voluntarism, where my focus was on the metaethical version of the thesis, my focus with naturalism is with the metaethical element of it. The token account of naturalism that I will be using will be the non-reductive account. I do not, however, believe that it makes a difference for my argument against naturalism which type I use. This is because the driving force behind distinguishing between reductive and non-reductive accounts is identity. A reductive account implies that moral facts are identical to natural facts but it seems as though we have a very clear understanding of the way in which these two types of fact are distinct from each other. The non-reductive account does not have this implication. Since my argument against naturalism is concerned with ontological dependency as opposed to identity I do not believe that it makes a difference which form of naturalism I use. In what follows when I use the term 'naturalism' I will mean the non-reductive version.

An argument against naturalism

To refresh, the problem with supernaturalism was that moral facts are ontologically dependent upon supernatural facts and the supernatural facts are arbitrary. The arbitrariness is transmitted from the supernatural facts to the moral facts due to the nature of the relation. One could argue that the same could be said about naturalism. If naturalism implies that moral facts are dependent on natural facts and we can, very easily, envisage that the natural facts, at the foundational level, are ontologically unjustified and could have been otherwise then one could argue that they are also arbitrary. The argument against the supernaturalist is that the supernatural facts could not be determined by anything moral since the supernaturalist contends that moral facts are dependent upon supernatural facts. In the same way, if the naturalist contends that moral facts are dependent upon natural facts then it follows that if the process from which the natural facts were determined was also guided by anything moral then they are also arbitrary. The arbitrariness would then transmit from the natural facts to the moral facts given the dependency relation purported by naturalism.

A3:

(P1) Naturalism implies that moral states of affairs obtain arbitrarily.

(P2) Moral states of affairs cannot obtain arbitrarily.

(C) Naturalism must be false.

The definition of 'arbitrariness' in use here is the same as the one developed in the previous section where a moral state of affairs is arbitrary just in case it is unjustified and contingent whereby only a distinct/non-identical moral state of affairs can provide sufficient justification. It is also useful to refresh from the previous section the concept of basic/foundational moral states of affairs. A basic, or foundational, moral state of affairs is a moral state of affairs for which there is no further explanation; there is nothing that ontologically makes it the case that such moral states of affairs obtain.

I will now turn my attention to the first premise of A3. In some respects, this is the most important premise because we know that P2 is just the arbitrariness principle from the Section Two. In that section I argued for that principle and even if one does not accept that argument then it follows that the arbitrariness entailed by voluntarism is not objectionable. So, if it can be established that indeed naturalism does imply that moral states of affairs obtain arbitrarily then the conclusion would follow from the conjunction of P1 and P2.

Assessing P1 involves going back to our definition. It is a question of whether or not the basic moral states of affairs under naturalism are unjustified and contingent. One could argue that they are unjustified because only distinct moral states of affairs can provide justification. Since natural facts do not fall under this category then they cannot provide the ontological justification that is needed. There is nothing normative or moral about natural facts and it is fairly intuitive to consider them as being distinct from moral facts.

Here it is also useful to think about the process by which natural facts are determined as I think this is important. In particular, morally relevant facts about human biology developed over centuries and while this process was not arbitrary it was certainly not guided by moral reason. There is nothing particularly moral about the way in which these facts came about but they are certainly morally relevant. For example, we can go back to the case of adultery that was used to explain multiple realizability. One of the biological facts in such a case is lust or sexual attraction. Both males and females crave intimacy and we know that there are biological reasons why this is the case. Now, if we take this to be a relevant natural fact, it's easy to see that 1) it is not a moral fact and 2) we came to be like this for non-moral reasons.

The process by which natural facts come to be is relevant because, in the corresponding case, the process by which God's commands are determined is central to the arbitrariness objection against voluntarism. Remember, the process by which God comes to decide which commands he issues is not guided by anything moral. This is because morality is dependent on God so it is a matter of logical priority that he cannot appeal to moral reasons in issuing these commands. Having said that, forget about the reason why the process is not determined by moral reasons, what matters is that it is the case that it isn't determined by moral reasons. A different way of stating this, which better captures my point is this: for supernaturalism, moral reasons do not figure in the

determination process of the supernatural facts. As I have explained, this is considered to be a point against the voluntarist and the supernaturalist position more broadly.

In the same way, one could argue that for naturalism, moral reasons do not figure in the determination process of natural facts. To be more accurate, they do not figure in the determination process of morally relevant natural facts.[31] Just like in the case of supernaturalism, that this is the case should also be considered a point against naturalism. This is important because it supports the claim that natural facts cannot justify moral facts using the definition of arbitrariness that I am using. These considerations are why I believe that basic moral states of affairs are unjustified under naturalism.

The second condition, of contingency, is, I think, more obvious because morally relevant natural facts are contingent and they could have been different from how they are. As I explained earlier, both non-reductive and reductive forms of naturalism accept multiple realizability and this, in and of itself, implies that they accept that the natural facts are contingent.

These are considerations in favor of the argument that, at least the way I've defined 'arbitrariness', naturalism implies that moral facts are arbitrary and if these considerations are correct then P1 is true and the argument goes through.

The naturalist may respond by saying the following: Yes, the natural facts could have been different and if this were the case then the moral facts would have been different. The difference between naturalism and supernaturalism is that under supernaturalism the moral facts could be anything whereas with naturalism the moral facts could not be anything because they are not grounded in an individual's will.

So for example, the naturalist might respond by saying that if the supernatural facts were different such that God commanded torture then this would be morally obligatory but if the natural facts were different then this would not imply that torture could be morally obligatory because the natural facts could not imply that. For instance, we can imagine a world where the natural facts are different such that pain is realized by some mechanism other than it is and that perhaps humans have a much higher threshold for pain than in the actual world. The naturalist

[31] I say 'morally relevant' because I do not think it should matter that, for example, moral reasons do not determine that there are nine as opposed to eight planets in our solar system. Such facts are morally irrelevant and so it should not count against naturalism that they are not determined by moral reasons.

might contend that if this were the case, it would still follow that torture is wrong, it's just that what constitutes torture would be different than what it is in the actual world. In contrast, if torture is inconsistent with God's commands in the actual world but in some other world he actually goes out of his way to command it then it would be morally obligatory in the other world and this could not be the case because torture could never be morally permissible let alone morally obligatory.

What this kind of response would reveal is that the naturalist already has an idea of which moral facts could or could not obtain. There is a preconceived idea of morality that the naturalist assents to and he/she, for some reason, believes that this conception will map onto the natural facts whatever they might be. If this were not the case, then it would be possible for the natural facts to be different such that actions or characteristics that we think are wrong and bad could actually be right and good in other possible worlds due to the fact that the natural facts would be different. I believe that for the naturalist to successfully make the case that, although the natural facts are contingent, it does not follow that different natural facts could imply any morally absurd possibilities, they would have to admit that this is because there are certain bridge laws between the moral facts and the natural facts. In order for the naturalist's account of multiple realizability to be plausible then there have to be certain bridge premises that are true independently of the natural facts. If this is not the case then there would be nothing preventing worlds in which the natural facts are different from the actual world, but not different enough to make us think that moral facts *should* be fundamentally different from what they are in the actual world, and yet the moral facts are bizarrely different.

So, what the naturalist would have to be really committed to, I think, is that there are a set of necessary moral bridge premises because if this were not the case then in the same way that God could have commanded that torture was right, the natural facts could have been different such that torture was right. If the naturalist were to reject this, i.e. that there are a set of necessary bridging laws between natural facts and moral facts, then I believe that there would be nothing grounding the moral facts and nothing preventing morally bizarre possibilities such as those ones that are said to be implied by supernaturalism. These bridging laws could serve as basic moral states of affairs since they would be unjustified but they would obtain necessarily. They would provide a firm foundation for other moral states of affairs.

Going back to the argument against naturalism that I introduced earlier in the section, having a necessary set of bridge laws would mean that P1 of that argument is false. This is because basic moral states of affairs, which are ontologically unjustified by other distinct moral states of affairs, would obtain necessarily despite the fact that the natural facts are contingent. If P1 is false then the argument falls apart and naturalism is not arbitrary.

Implications for naturalism and contrast with supernaturalism

The main takeaway from the previous subsection is this: Naturalism must feature a necessary set of moral bridge premises in order for it to avoid the charge of arbitrariness. This is because, as I explained, the natural facts on which the moral facts supervene cannot adequately justify, in the ontological sense, basic moral states of affairs under naturalism. The naturalist could then respond by saying that the basic moral states of affairs are still necessary and this is what blocks off morally bizarre scenarios, like torture being morally permissible, despite the fact that the moral facts are multiply realizable. If we agree that arbitrariness is something to be avoided, then this is how the naturalists must do it. I would now like to touch on the differences, related to the arbitrariness objection, between naturalism and supernaturalism. I will then explain how, if one accepts these considerations, the naturalist position becomes limited in terms of how dependent moral facts are on natural facts.

I believe that the main difference when it comes to arbitrariness and supernaturalism versus naturalism is the *because* associated with supernaturalism. Supernaturalism asserts that moral facts are supernatural facts but it also, at least under the voluntarist version of supernaturalism, asserts that moral facts obtain *because* of, or in virtue of, the purported supernatural facts. In contrast, naturalism is only committed to the claim that moral facts are or consist of natural facts. At the ontological level, supernaturalism is already committed to the 'because' type of dependency. This is true, I believe, whatever a supernaturalist happens to believe at a normative level (i.e. which specific moral facts are true or which religious doctrine is true). For the supernaturalist, whatever the normative theory is, the moral facts will obtain because of or in virtue of supernatural facts of one sort or another – the supernatural facts are what make it such that the moral facts obtain. This is significant because it means that the arbitrary nature of the

supernatural facts (whether it is speech behavior, mental states, etc.) means that supernaturalism cannot assert that the basic moral states of affairs implied by supernaturalism are justified or necessary because doing so would result in a contradiction as the moral states of affairs would therefore not be dependent on the supernatural facts.

With naturalism, however, because it is not committed to the thesis that 'moral facts obtain in virtue of natural facts' it can appeal to the natural facts purely as a realization mechanism and the fact that the natural facts are arbitrary means that there is room for necessary bridge laws that fall in between the natural facts and the moral facts.

Having said that, I believe that the arbitrariness principle does have implications for naturalism, namely, that any naturalist theory must involve a set of basic moral states of affairs that are necessary and not contingent. Since this is the case, I believe it puts into question the importance of the natural facts. The natural facts would still play a role in explaining why some action is wrong or why some characteristic is bad, but it would, I think, play a less significant role than the basic moral states of affairs as these are doing the heavy lifting in terms of moral justification. Since the natural facts are incapable of justifying moral facts then it follows that the moral justification would derive from the necessary moral states of affairs.

If it is accepted that there are necessary basic moral states of affairs and that they are distinct from the natural facts then it must also be asked what the nature of such basic moral states of affairs are. I would argue that any complete theory of naturalism (i.e. one that is comprehensive insofar as it has a theory of not just ontology but also how we gain moral knowledge, a normative theory of which moral facts are true, etc.) must contain a necessary set of basic moral states of affairs and must also say something about what type of facts those are. The problem I see with this requirement is that the basic moral states of affairs could not be natural. They could not be natural not just because of the aforementioned problem of justification but also because of the naturalist background that is posited. Any non-natural facts (whether supernatural or whatever the case may be) do not fall within the ontological background of the naturalism.

Conclusion

In the first section of this paper, I briefly outlined moral realism and explained which aspect of it I would be discussing. While there are many aspects within the realist framework (e.g. moral epistemology, moral semantics, how moral facts motivate action, etc.), I have focused on the ontological element of moral realism. I have noted that there are three competing theories in the context of moral ontology, namely, naturalism, supernaturalism and non-naturalism. Although I have at times used examples to more clearly illustrate some of my points, I have also not spoken of these theories at a normative level but, rather, have kept the discussion at the metaethical level.

In the second section of this paper, I gave a detailed account of theological voluntarism (using commands as the relevant divine action), which I have used, in its metaethical version, as the token account of supernaturalism in this paper. I explained how divine commands relate to morally right and wrong actions and I also distinguished between metaethical and normative versions of theological voluntarism and noted that, in the arguments, I was referring to metaethical voluntarism.

The second section also introduced the Euthyphro Dilemma. The Euthyphro Dilemma was important as the rest of the second section, and the paper more broadly, centers around the first horn of the dilemma, i.e. the arbitrariness objection. I established, in standard form, two distinct arbitrariness objections. The first of which argues that voluntarism implies that God's commands are, objectionably, arbitrary and the second of which argues that voluntarism implies that the structure of morality is, objectionably arbitrary. This section also included a discussion on the arbitrariness principle which is required to complete these arguments against voluntarism. There I touched, briefly, on why we should think that this principle is plausible and I do not take those considerations to be comprehensive or complete. Given the fact that, at least in the literature, the arbitrariness objection is widely accepted, this entails that the principle is also widely accepted even if not for the reasons considered during that discussion.

In the third section, I went through the thoughts of William Alston (1990) and Paul Rooney (1995) on how they have suggested, albeit not at length, that if arbitrariness is a problem for the voluntarist then it's unclear why it would not be problematic for other, i.e. non-voluntarist, moral theories. Even though they may have been speculating with respect normative theological

voluntarism and other normative theories, I believe their points are just as applicable when it comes to metaethical theological voluntarism and the other theories of moral ontology. I also used this section to elaborate on the definition of arbitrariness, i.e. how both Alston and Rooney seemed to be using it and also how Murphy and other writers have used it. Since the first section had two distinct arbitrariness objections, I also noted that the definitions of arbitrariness operative in both sections were different and yet similar and established a new hybrid definition that I proceeded to use for the remainder of the paper.

I concluded this section by arguing that all basic moral states of affairs must be justified or necessary (in the ontological sense). In other words, they must be non-arbitrary. I used supervenience to demonstrate why the element of necessity was important and I went through several examples to illustrate this more fully. I explained how necessity is what is required to block off morally unintuitive scenarios where acts such as torturing babies for fun are morally permissible. This, I think, is what is at the core of what the arbitrariness objection is getting at.

In section four, I reintroduced the theories of moral ontology, i.e. naturalism, supernaturalism and non-naturalism. The focus of this final section was contrasting naturalism and supernaturalism and this involved distinguishing between the two main types of naturalism, i.e. reductive and non-reductive naturalism. After explaining that I would be using non-reductive naturalism as the token form of naturalism, I presented an argument against naturalism which, similar to the arguments in section two, argue that naturalism is, objectionably, arbitrary. In the same way that the supernatural facts within a supernaturalist framework were arbitrary and give rise to arbitrary moral states of affairs the argument concluded that since the natural facts within a naturalist framework are arbitrary they also give rise to arbitrary moral states of affairs.

I then considered what the naturalist response to this would be. I contended that the naturalist would have to somehow counter argue that even though it is true that the natural facts could have been different, it does not follow that there anything action could or could not have been morally right or wrong. Unlike with supernaturalism, if the natural facts had been different under naturalism then this would translate into different moral facts as well. The naturalist could claim that the relationship between the moral facts and the natural facts is such that there could not be situations where actions that we intuitively feel are certainly wrong were somehow right (or vice versa).

This type of response would leave me to believe that naturalism must contain a set of necessary bridge laws to bridge the gap between natural facts and moral facts for it to avoid the charge of arbitrariness. Without such bridge laws there would be nothing restricting two worlds that were very similar in terms of the natural facts that obtain but drastically different in terms of the moral facts. The drawback I see for naturalism is that this would imply that the natural facts lose much of their moral significance as they are incapable of justifying moral facts and that, also, these bridge laws, which would serve as basic moral states of affairs, would have to be ontologically accounted for by the naturalist.

As I've noted, the arbitrariness objection is widely accepted. This means that the arbitrariness principle is also widely accepted. Since this is the case I believe that any theory or moral ontology must account for the principle and must be formulated in a way in which it is non-arbitrary. If we accept that arbitrariness is objectionable in the case of voluntarism/supernaturalism then it must be avoided when it comes to other theories of moral ontology as well.

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