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## THE NATURE OF NORMATIVE MORAL JUDGMENTS

**Abstract.** Moral judgements have been a crucial subject-matter of a discussion in the domain of normativity. Many thinkers argue moral judgments are necessarily action-guiding, which prescribe what one ought to do and what ought to be the case. The moral statement “killing is wrong” is prescriptive and locates in the purview of first-order ethical questions. Moral realists widely accept that moral judgments represent propositions, therefore they are subject to truth and false conditions. Thus, moral conclusions can be derived logically from valid premises. How to derive the conclusion “killing is wrong”? How to justify the statement? What does “wrong” mean in this context? This kind of philosophical issue has been labeled as the second-order questions, which is in the purview of metaethics. This article is devoted to the subject of normativity and the nature of moral judgments advocated by metaethicists David Copp and Ralph Wedgwood. The purpose of this article is to outline the current debate on the nature of normative moral judgments. In conclusion, I shall agree with both Copp and Wedgwood on two points. One, normative moral judgment can be subject to cognition. Two, there are true and false beliefs about particular moral facts which constitute the significant part of the reality we live in.

**Keywords:** Normativity, Normativity of Morality, Metaethics, Moral Judgments, Truth and False Statements, Moral Realism.

### *Introduction*

The domain of normativity embraces an infinite number of issues. Generally, the one who deals with normativity would be confused about how to start telling its story. Normativity has been in vogue both among philosophers and among those ordinary people who steadily strive to acquire the meaning of existence. The only difference between philosophers and ordinary people is that the latter are committing to it unconsciously without digging into the extreme trivia which the domain of normativity covers. In real life, we do engage immensely in normative discourse. As Stephen Finlay argues, our shopping list is also, to some extent, normative because it directs us what we are going to buy at a grocery store [2010]. Likewise, we do make moral judgments by evaluating actions as good and bad, or right and wrong. So, the given moral terms constitute a large part of our normative lives. An assumption regarding the existence of particular moral norms which govern our life can be true. Indeed, the view that moral facts and properties exist has been propounded by moral realists like Russ Shafer-Landau, Terence Cuneo, and some of the representatives of Cornell Realism such as Richard Boyd, David Brink, etc. They argued that it is essential that if “killing is wrong”, then we ought not to kill, and this norm ought to be applied for all community species.

Over the last few decades, the second-order ethical, or metaethical issues have mostly been on philosopher's line of sight. The second-order problems, to mention a few, concern the metaphysics of moral terms, moral properties and relations, naturalism and non-naturalism in ethics, reason and rationality in ethics, internalism and externalism about moral judgments, etc. Michael Smith in his work entitled ‘The Moral Problem’ writes, “we should begin our study of ethics by focusing on meta-ethics, not normative ethics. For we cannot hope to do normative ethics without first knowing what the standards of correct argument in normative ethics are, and it is in meta-ethics that we discover these

standards” [1994]. It is established that metaethical issues have been in vogue from G.E. Moore’s ‘Principia Ethica’, which is mainly devoted to the question of non-natural morality per se [Fisher 2011, p. 3]. All things considered, as most of the philosophers perceive it, the foremost aim of normativity is to ponder over the issue ‘what are the conditions for judging something as right and wrong’.

So, how are we to determine our actions as right and wrong? Let us take an earlier statement “killing is wrong”. The statement explicitly states that we ought not to kill. Applying the judgment “killing is wrong” to humans only or to non-human living beings as well is another issue which I shall not discuss it here since Philippa Foot in her book entitled ‘Natural Goodness’ has brought it extensively [2001]. Is the statement “killing is wrong” of a natural character? Or is the judgment an invention of humans? To find the sources of those normative judgments and moral normativity is not an easy task. I argue that the problem should be addressed not by philosophers and ethicists alone but the answer should emerge from a collective effort of various disciplines. Nonetheless, we may seek to find the sources of normativity in questioning ourselves why we need good things, why we need benevolence or how benevolence is important at all. Reflecting on these and the like questions may bring us to partial answers of our normative lives. One might agree with Christine Korsgaard’s compelling argument that one could find the sources of normativity in humanity itself [1992]. I suggest that this is one of the realist positions on how should one live.

### ***Methodology***

The study of moral judgments requires a thorough metaethical investigation. Hence, an essential method to apply should be metaethical analysis. Descriptive analysis is also important in discussing the nature of moral judgments.

### ***Discussion and Results***

The normativity of morality roughly investigates at least two key questions. First, whether all moral claims are action-guiding, that is, prescribing what we ought to do, and what we ought not to do (or all moral claims are merely expressions of our emotions).

Normativity is widely discussed in various ethical deliberations; there would have been a number of uncertainties while pondering over how to actually comprehend the normative. Nevertheless, the domain of the normative which I will be discussing here is purely ethical. The normative, in this paper, is considered in two ways: a) Factualist/realist—the idea that normative judgments are truth-apt and factualist. Thus, normative judgments are the part of the reality itself, and represent things out there in the world. b) Non-factualist/non-realist—the idea that normative judgments are not truth-apt. This implies normative judgments do not bear any fact in their content. Thus, they do not represent anything about the world.

David Copp’s argument that “moral claims are normative” [1995] is a key argument which supports the idea of normativity of morality. A second focal argument emerges from Ralph Wedgwood’s deliberation on normative thought and normative discourse which lead him to the conclusion that there are normative facts or truths. Wedgwood writes, “that these normative facts must be mentioned in any adequate account of our thought and discourse” [2007]. Factual judgments tend to be justified with that of science, hence, according to Wedgwood, normative judgments being judgments of facts can describe different events

in the world along with that of science. Indeed, the compilation of arguments of both Copp and Wedgwood present two important arguments for further development of the nature of normative moral judgment outcomes. These arguments further support the idea that normative moral judgments are subject to cognition. However, a problem arises in the consideration of moral judgments because it is dominantly accepted that some of the value judgments cannot be subject to truth and false conditions. In this regard, I shall assert that there are two types of moral judgments: the first set of judgments are action-guiding judgments such as “killing is wrong” – the statement implies that you ought not to kill; and the second set of judgments is the value judgments such as “Tom is a good person”, or “the movie which has been released last month is good.”

I will draw a realist outline of the nature of the normative, according to which normative judgments are truth-apt. Hence, normative moral judgments are truth-apt, thus they somewhat represent the facts out there in the world. Henceforth, there is a possibility of the normative theory—moral realism which means that there are moral facts and moral properties that could be able to describe certain things in the world. On the contrary, anti-realists argue that normative judgments do not prescribe what we ought to do or what ought to be the case, and that moral judgments do not stand for propositions out of which valid conclusion could be derived. Also, anti-realists steadily argue that moral judgments do not represent any fact-value statements, and that moral statements are merely expressions of emotions. A.J. Ayer is an ardent defender of the view that moral judgments express our emotions of approval or disapproval of something [1971]. As opposed to Ayer, Allan Gibbard’s theory of norm-expressivism [1995] and Simon Blackburn’s theory of quasi-realism [1993] are proponents of the view that moral judgments are not cognitive. Prior to these thinkers, David Hume held that moral judgments are meaningless fabrications of emotion that can be neither true nor false [Hume]. Hume does not consider our mental states, such as beliefs and intentions as products of reason alone. He argues that some of them emerge from sense perception and some of them from sympathy. Hume claims that there are no moral facts as such which are solely derived from reason. Instead, they are moral distinctions derived from sentiments. Hume also suggests that no “ought” judgments can be directly inferred from the set of premises expressed by “is” judgments. One may agree with Hume that ought statements cannot be derived from scientific factual statements. He argues that a moral evaluation does not express any proposition and state any fact. Moral evaluation is a vent of feeling, or a feeling itself. But what can be said about moral “is” judgments. If “killing is wrong”, then why we cannot simply say that “we ought not to kill”? Does it mean that moral judgments obey some other kind of logic? Hume indicates that no ethical or any other evaluative conclusion can be derived from the premises which are solely factual premises. However, Hume implicitly indicates that he, to some extent, accepts that moral judgments are factual judgments.

Likewise, logical positivists believed that knowledge which is not verifiable could not be true or actual knowledge. Put differently, those statements which do not correlate to specific requirements of the verification principle cannot be regarded as meaningless. Notably, the truth value of moral judgments is not verifiable either by means of scientific methods or anyhow else. However, moral judgments are an important and essential part of our normative life. We are not craving for the valid answer to how logical positivists would justify the assertion that moral claims are an indispensable part of our normative

life. Logical positivists overlook the other part of human reality, which is a normative life full of extraordinary facts and properties. The position of logical positivists concerning moral judgments is not satisfying in terms of the fact that the world can be explained only in terms of physical objects, and events which can be supposedly verified with that of scientific methods. Unscientific discourse like ethics and metaphysics is not cognitive, according to logical positivists.

Copp, in his book, contends that “all moral claims are normative” [1995]. Before elaborating on this further, I will discuss the distinction between normative and non-normative claims. Factual judgments cannot be prescriptive. They do not prescribe anything as such. The function factual judgments mostly bear is to describe the given physical world. It is also evident that factual statements are true statements, so we need not commit ourselves into difficulty justifying the truthness of factual statements. The issue is instead with that of evaluative judgments which cannot be verified either by any science or any applied psychological tool. So, what is the right place for evaluative judgments to be at? What metaphysical and ontological realm they are located at? There is a tendency to abandon evaluative judgments and take them for granted. However, I claim, one must not be doing injustice to those evaluative judgments which are constitutive part of our normative life and the moral realm we are so eagerly trying to locate in our ontology. The issue is not merely about doing justice to value judgments, but the value judgments impartially prove that we do acquire our moral feelings towards people and towards different events. Again, I shall reiterate that this is an essential part of our normative ontology.

So, overall, Copp is a defender of a realistic account of the “normativeness” of moral statements. He sought to show under which conditions moral claims are normative and what normativity of moral claims would mean in general. A standard is a rule or norm, which can be expressed by an imperative. According to Copp’s theory, normative claims express propositions about relevant standards. Further, he elaborates that those propositions which are being represented by some moral claims entail that some moral standards are justified [1995]. That is, the thinker tries to explain the normativity of moral claims by the idea of a standard which entails that moral judgments bear truth-value, and somehow can explain the events in the world.

An essential investigation on the nature of normative judgments has been comprehensively done by Ralph Wedgwood in ‘The Nature of Normativity’. The book is to be recognized, as Wedgwood himself writes, as not just interdisciplinary, but aggressively intersubdisciplinary piece [2007]. The core concepts which he is expanding in the book are the meta-philosophical analysis of normative thinking, the metaphysics and epistemology of normative beliefs. He argues that there are normative facts and truths and that these normative facts are metaphysically irreducible [2007]. Therefore, the whole domain of the normative cannot be elaborated without reviewing the fundamental constituents of the normative such as normative properties, relations, beliefs and so on. Secondly, to explain realism about the normative, Wedgwood appeals to the concept that the intentional is normative. The idea emerges from the philosophy of mind. The slogan “the intentional is normative”, as he writes, “suggests that there is no way of explaining the nature of different sorts of mental states that have either deliberate or intentional or representational content without using normative terms” [2007]. Intentional mental properties are normative; thus, the normative properties are tied with

the features of mental states. Wedgwood argues that mental properties are irreducible; therefore, normative properties are also irreducible [2007].

The first and foremost issue with normative discourse, according to Wedgwood is that our daily discourse is not only about what people think is the case but the core problem of the whole domain of normative thinking lies in a reflection about what people think ought to be the case [2007]. Wedgwood calls it normative thinking. So, practically, Wedgwood develops a realist account of the nature of the normative. Any judgment which embodies particular properties of realism more or less means that the instantiation of that judgment can be subject to cognition. Thus, the judgment can be true or false. Furthermore, Wedgwood's deliberation of the realistic account of the normative also entails the view that moral realism is possible. Consequently, moral epistemology can also be a plausible theory about moral knowledge. A question arises, what realism implies in normative discourse. It is an ambiguous term. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, in the introduction of 'Essays on Moral Realism', has suggested that some understand realism as implying something being objective; realism in terms of independence from the mental; and at last, realism as a semantic thesis about the nature of truth and its transcendence of our recognitional capacities [1988].

According to Kit Fine's article 'The Question of Realism', it has been stated that in philosophical reflections about realism "the difficulties begin with the formulation of the question rather than with the attempt at an answer" [2001]. Fine provides at least two answers for possible metaphysical grounds of realism. One, metaphysical reality is to be identified with what is "objective" or "factual" [2001]. Here, Fine distinguishes what realistic and factualist terms would mean. Fine writes, "we see that questions of factuality and reality are to be answered by essentially the same means. It is not merely that the determination of what is factual is relevant to the determination of what is real but that, in both cases, the questions are largely to be settled through considerations of ground" [2001]. According to the second assumption, metaphysical reality is to be identified with what is "irreducible" or "fundamental". On this view, the reality is constituted by specific irreducible or fundamental facts; and in denying reality to a given domain, the antirealist is claiming that its facts are all reducible to facts of some other sort [2001].

Ahead of Fine, there is another well-developed article, namely Michael Dummett's 'Realism'. Dummett explains the conception of realism in a characteristic of his style that is immensely analytical and well-bred. The first point which Dummett draws upon is the semantics of realism. He argues that realism is a thesis about what renders a statement in the given class true when it is true [1992]. That is the very rough idea about what realism would conceptually mean is that statements in the given class belong to some reality which exists independently of our knowledge of it; that is the reality itself renders the truth and false values of a statement in the given class. So, subsequently, Dummett concludes that "realism involves acceptance, for statements of the given class, of the principle of bivalence, the principle that every statement is determinately either true or false" [1992]. At the same time, Dummett indicates that acceptance of bivalence is not sufficient to explain realism, but is a necessary condition for it. With the hope that an understanding of the metaphysics of realism developed by Sayre-McCord, Fine and Dummett is reliable, thus we can proceed to the point that normative realm is worthy of any serious investigation.

### **Conclusion**

In our modest understanding, normativity is the conception on how should one live; that is, normativity shall at least naturally beget norms to govern our lives. Ironically, some people might think that it is quite easy to arrive at possible versions of how we should live. Normativity claims that some judgments are prescriptive or action-guiding. That is, the normativity thesis seeks to answer, or at best, to come close to the first-order question of ethics such as “how one should live”, “what we ought to do and what ought to be the case”. Another point with normative judgments is whether these judgments are truth-apt or not, or normative beliefs are only the judgments about approval or disapproval of a particular view about something that is right or wrong.

In this paper, I discussed the views of expressivists and non-realists on the nature of the normative. They argue that the nature of normative moral judgments is not truth-conditional, or normative moral judgments are mere expressions and intimations of emotions. Thus, they have no place in the whole picture of the world because they cannot simply describe the world as it is.

I have mainly reflected on how we can start the discussion about the truth values of normative moral judgments. I have given a brief outline of existing theories on the nature of normative judgments, likewise normative moral judgments. I have mostly appealed to two critical developments on the nature of normativity, namely Ralph Wedgwood and David Copp. While the former is a realist on the nature of normative judgments, the latter is an adherent of the view that normative claims express propositions about relevant standards – that is moral standards. In this paper, I primarily agreed with that of Wedgwood’s position that the nature of normative judgments could be true or false. Hence, their content can consist of a piece of essential information about the world. I also argued that the nature of such moral normative judgments such as “killing is wrong” is true. Therefore, it is a fact that “killing is wrong”. In other words, it is true that such facts exist out there in the world. They exist independent of other related factors external to the statement “killing is wrong”.

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## Түйін

### Омарова А. Нормативті-моральдық пайымдаулардың табиғаты

Моральдық пайымдаулар туралы философиялық ой-толғаулар әр уақытта философтардың назарында болған. Аталған мәселе нормативтілік саласының маңызды бөлігі, себебі ойшылдардың басым бөлігі моральдық пайымдаулар белгілі бір іс-әрекеттердің себебі деп есептейді, осылайша бізге қалай әрекет етуді және белгілі бір шарттар аясында қандай әрекеттердің шын екені туралы нұсқау береді. «Адам өлтіру жаман іс болып табылады» деген моральдық мәлімдеме нұсқаулық сипатқа ие және бірінші қатардағы этикалық сұрақтар саласына жатады. Моральдық реалистердің пікірлерінше моральдық пайымдаулар қандай да бір пайымдауларды білдіреді, сол себепті шынайылық және жалғандық шарттарына бағынады. Осылайша, моральдық қорытындылар логикалық тұрғыдан дәлелденген алғышарттардан шығарылуы мүмкін. «Адам өлтіру жаман іс болып табылатыны» туралы қалайша қорытынды шығаруға болады және бұл мәлімдемені қалай дәлелдеуге болады? «Жаман» термині қандай мағынаны береді? Осы тәріздес философиялық мәселелер екінші қатарлы сұрақтар ретінде белгіленген, олар метаэтика саласына жатады. Бұл мақала Дэвид Копп және Ральф Веджвуд сынды метаэтикердің қорғаған нормативтілік және моральдық пайымдаулардың табиғаты тақырыбына арналған. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты нормативті-моральдық пайымдаулар табиғаты туралы ағымдағы пікірталасын талқылау болып табылады. Қорытындылай келе, автордың мәлімдеуінше нормативті-моральдық пайымдаудың танымдық мәні болуы мүмкін, сонымен бірге біз өмір сүріп жүрген шындықтың негізгі бөлігін құрайтын, нақты моральдық фактілерге қатысты пайымдаудың шынайылығы мен жалғандығы шарттарына жатады.

**Түйін сөздер:** нормативтілік, моральдің нормативтілігі, метаэтика, моральдық пайымдаулар, шынайы және жалған пікірлер, моральді шынайылық

## Резюме

### Омарова А. Природа нормативно-моральных суждений

Философские размышления о природе моральных суждений всегда были на крючке философа. Данная тема является значительной частью изучения нормативности. Многие мыслители считают, что моральные суждения являются причинами определенных действий и, таким образом, предписывают нам, как мы должны действовать при определенных условиях, также какие поступки есть истинные. Моральное утверждение, что «убийство является плохим поступком», носит предписывающий характер и относится к сфере этических вопросов первого порядка. Моральные реалисты широко признают, что моральные высказывания представляют собой суждения, поэтому подчиняются условиям истинности и ложности суждений. Таким образом, моральные выводы могут быть логически выведены из обоснованных предпосылок. Как сделать вывод, что «убийство является плохим поступком» и как обосновать данное утверждение? Что значит термин «плохой» в контексте? Такого рода философские проблемы были обозначены как вопросы второго порядка, и входят в сферу метаэтики. Данная статья посвящена теме нормативности и природе моральных суждений, отстаиваемых метаэтиками как Дэвид Копп и Ральф Веджвуд. Целью данной статьи является обсуждение текущих дебатов о природе нормативно-моральных суждений. В заключение, автор утверждает, что нормативно-моральное суждение может быть предметом познания, а также подлежать условиям истинности и ложности суждений в отношении конкретных моральных фактов, которые составляют значительную часть реальности в которой мы живем.

**Ключевые слова:** нормативность, нормативность морали, метаэтика, моральные суждения, истинные и ложные высказывания, моральный реализм.