DECONSTRUCTİNG MORAL ANTİ-REALİSTS' DENİAL OF MORAL FACTS

[Ahlaki Gerçekçilik Karşıtlarının Ahlaki Gerçekleri Reddetmesi]

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to deconstruct anti-realist's denial of moral facts. One of the controversial issues in meta-ethics is the debate about the ontological status of moral facts. This is an issue between moral realists and moral anti-realists. While moral realism affirms the existence of moral facts, moral anti-realism on the other hand is often interpreted as a thesis that denies the existence of moral facts. Thus, the fundamental problem however, is how to interpret this denial. This question is so pertinent because taking the debate at face value, scholars do not always pay attention to different ways by which this denial could be interpreted. This paper intends to fill the gap. The paper argues that contrary to the parochial way of looking at the anti-realist's denial of moral facts mainly from the absolute sense, there is another possible way by which the denial could be understood, which is the non-absolute sense. Essentially, in deconstructing moral anti-realist's denial of moral facts, this paper clarifies and examines (i) idealist-antirealists' argument, (ii) logical positivists' claim in defense of moral anti-realism.

The paper concludes by critically examining some arguments with which moral anti-realists deny the existence of moral facts and some possible responses.

Keywords: Moral Facts, realism, anti-realism, idealism, logical positivism.

ÖZET

Bu makale, anti-realistlerin ahlaki gerçekleri inkâr etmelerini yapısöküme uğratmaya çalışmaktadır. Meta-etiğin tartışmalı konularından biri de ahlaki olguların ontolojik statüsüne ilişkin tartışmalardır. Bu, ahlaki gerçekçiler ile ahlaki gerçekçilik karşıtları arasındaki bir sorundur. Ahlaki gerçekçilik ahlaki gerçeklerin varlığını doğrularken, ahlaki anti-realizm ise çoğu zaman ahlaki gerçeklerin varlığını inkar eden bir tez olarak yorumlanır. Dolayısıyla asıl sorun bu inkârın nasıl yorumlanacağıdır. Bu soru o kadar önemlidir ki, tartışmayı olduğu gibi ele alan bilim insanları, bu inkârın yorumlanabileceği farklı yollara her zaman dikkat etmezler. Bu makale boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Makale, anti-realistlerin ahlaki gerçekleri inkarına esas olarak mutlak anlamda dar görüşlü bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşmanın aksine, inkârın anlaşılabileceği başka bir olası yol olduğunu, o da mutlak olmayan anlam olduğunu ileri sürüyor. Esasen, ahlaki anti-realistlerin ahlaki gerçekleri inkârını yapısöküme uğratan bu makale, (i) idealist-antirealistlerin argümanını, (ii) mantıksal pozitivistlerin ahlaki anti-realizmi savunma iddiasını açıklığa kavuşturuyor ve inceliyor. Makale, ahlaki gerçekçilik karşıtlarının ahlaki gerçeklerin varlığını reddettiği bazı argümanları ve bazı olası yanıtları eleştirel bir şekilde inceleyerek sonuçlanıyor.

Anahtar sözcükler: Ahlaki gerçekler, gerçekçilik, anti-gerçekçilik, idealism, mantıksal pozitivizm.

Introduction

The controversy over the ontological status of moral facts has being a perennial problem for the meta-ethicists. This is evident in the works of scholars such as Michael Smith 1994, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord 1988, A.J. Ayer 1970, Simon Blackburn 2005, David Brink 1984, and J.L. Mackie 1988. Are there moral facts right there in the actual world? Moral realists offered an affirmative answer to this question. They maintain the thesis that there are moral facts right there in the actual world. The goal of moral deliberation is to discover moral facts which exist independently of any individual. Meanwhile, moral anti-realists reject the realists claim about the reality of moral facts. Moral anti-realists defended the thesis that moral facts are unavailable to moral inquiry. In other words, while moral realists hold that our moral judgments are "about the world" in much the way our other judgments are, the anti-realists deny this. Moral anti-realists are of the view that in making moral judgments, we are projecting our own attitudes into things or expressing certain attitudes.

Given that there are at least two main versions of moral anti-realism, non-cognitivist version defended by Hilary Putnam and Simon Blackburn holds the view that the very notion of a moral fact is incoherent. The second group led by J.L. Mackie champions the view that the search for moral facts though intelligible, is always futile. (Sayre-McCord, 1988, p. ix). We shall return to these versions soon in the light of the implications they have on the two interpretations.

In this paper, we intend to deconstruct the anti-realist denial of moral facts. We start by considering the main claims of moral anti-realism. In order to achieve the aim of this paper, the logical positivists' and idealist anti-realist' arguments in support of moral antirealism will be critically examined.

Understanding Anti-Realists' Claims

Generally, in philosophy, the term "anti-realism" is used to describe any position involving either the denial of an objective existence of reality or rejection of a world containing entities with relations and properties that are to a large extent independent of human acts and agents. To understand anti-realism, it is important to revisit the main realist position. According to Jane Grady,

> Realism is constructed as a range of views that things exist independently of being thought or observed. In scholastic philosophy, the view (opposed to nominalism and conceptualism) that universals have a real objective existence, in modern philosophy, the view (contrasted-with idealism, and anti-realism) that material objects exist externally to us, independently of our sense experience. (Sayre-McCord, 1988, p. ix)

There are two key realist points. First, the point about ontology is well made. Ontology deals with existence of human or nonhuman properties. Meanwhile, the second point is about justification of what actually exists. For realists, certain properties exist independently of human mind. The existence of such properties does not depend on their being perceived by certain human mind. Plato makes a distinction between the world of Forms[1] and the world of appearance.[2] The world of Forms, according to Plato exists and its real and their reality do not depend on any perception by human minds. The world of form exists even if no one perceives it.

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[1] "The World of Forms": Plato Postulated a world where there is an existence of an objective universally valid, reality-and this he found in the theory of forms. For detailed- explanation on "Plato's theory of forms", see; Hilary Staniland, *Universals,* London: Macmillan Press, 1973, p. 5.

[2] "The world of Appearance": Plato postulated the world of appearance to contain the copies of the real things that exist in the world of forms which is the world of reality. For further details see, Hilary Staniland, *Universals*, London: Macmillan Press, 1973, pp.5-6.

It is important to know that the contemporary anti-realism is a reactive movement. It challenges the existing philosophical notions held by the realists. Essentially, anti-realism is strongly-contrasted with realism in the sense that it denies the minimum realist claims about "independent existence" of certain properties. The anti-realist camp comprises heterogeneous movements- including those claiming to be idealists, constructivists, logical positivists, to name a few. For the purpose of this paper, anti-realism is described as a reactive movement or the many philosophical positions opposed to realism. (Pablo, 1998, p.347). It should be noted that these many philosophical positions that are opposed to realism gave different accounts to defend anti-realism. As earlier mentioned, moral anti-realism as a reactive movement, denies the philosophical position maintained by moral realists. Moral anti-realists accept the following claims:

(i)   there are no objective moral values. (Mackie, 1998, p.95).

(ii)   there are no mind-independent moral facts. (Craig, 1998, p.538).

(iii)   moral judgments are non-cognitive and have no truth-value.

(iv)   moral language is prescriptive (Hare, 1972, p.1), and

(v)   moral judgments are purely expression or projection of emotion. (Ayer, 1970, p.107, Stevenson, 1937, p.15)

The Denial of Moral Facts Revisited

As hinted earlier, moral anti-realism is partly interpreted as a position that denies the existence of moral facts. The pertinent question however, is how to interpret the denial itself. The denial could be understood in at least two ways;

First, the denial could be understood in its absolute sense. In the absolute sense, moral anti-realists defend the thesis that there is nothing like moral facts. This is the view defended by

A.J. Ayer, J.L. Mackie, C.L. Stevenson, and the logical positivists. Moral anti-realist' argument that moral facts are not part of the structures of the world is the denial of the existence of facts in the absolute sense. Essentially, moral antirealism clashes with moral realism on this point. The moral anti-realist denial of moral facts and the realist affirmation of such fact clash on this point.

Second, the word "denial" could be interpreted in a less absolute sense. Moral anti-realists argue that moral values, as well as moral facts, are mind-dependent. This view is supported by Rudolf Carnap, R.M. Hare, and Bishop George Berkeley. Moral anti-realists' claim that moral values are mind- dependent could, in a sense, imply the moral realists' support for the real existence of moral facts. That is, both theories need not be totally antithetical. How? In metaphysics, dualists affirm the real existence of human body and mind. Thus, if human mind is real, and morals facts are mind-dependent then, it could be argued that moral facts exists as part of the human mind. By implication, if dualism in metaphysics is true, moral facts will be part of the structures of the universe. Unfortunately, the second interpretation of the word "denial" is rarely favored. In view of this, different strands of moral anti-realism affirm the subjectivity of values. That is, they defend the thesis that values are mind-dependent.

As a matter of fact, moral subjectivists unlike ethical objectivists offer a non-descriptive account of moral term. For moral subjectivists, the meaning of moral judgments depends on the attitudes, desires and goals of the individual. In view of this point, moral judgments are neither true nor false. In view of the fact that moral judgments are influenced by the attitude, desires and goals of the individual, there cannot be genuine disagreement in ethical issues. As a matter of facts, ethics, as a branch of philosophy is sustained by the disagreement in it. Unfortunately, moral realist objectivist position, if pursued in ethics, could undermine the

possibility of expanding the frontiers of knowledge not only in theoretical discourse but the actual human relation. The moral anti-realist claim that moral facts are mind-dependent is more plausible and variously defended in the work of Rudolf Carnap, R.M. Hare, A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson.

Idealist- Anti-Realism and the Denial of Moral Facts

For the idealists, whatever exists, or at any rate whatever can be known to exist, must be in some sense mental. (Russell, 1980, p.19). In other words, existence of things is primarily dependent on mental construction. Bishop George Berkeley's version of idealism is relevant here. According to Berkeley, our sense data cannot be supposed to have an existence independent of us, but must be, in part at least, "in the mind, in the sense that their existence would not continue if there were no seeing or hearing or touching or smelling or tasting."(Berkeley, 1901, p.20).

Following Berkeleyan anti-realism, it is in my view that nothing can ever be known except what is in some minds, and that whatever is known without being in my mind must be in other mind. (Russell, 1980, p.19). Thus, Berkeleyan idealism is a denial of the notion of "objectivity" and "independence" that are mostly built into realism. In line with the second interpretation, Berkeley's idealism needs not be a total denial of objectivity and independence associated with realism if carefully pursued. Are moral facts like material things denied by Berkeley? Moral facts are not like tables, chairs and cups. For Berkeley, these items are combination of different ideas. Can we really say that moral facts are also combination of different ideas? It will be difficult to maintain such a position since we do not really know their identity. We do not know the colour, weight, and temperature of moral facts. However, will the point just made defeat the material realist position? Not quite. It could be argued that

something need not be material to exist. The problem really is about confusing moral facts for scientific facts. "Air" exists and yet not material. Unfortunately, the last point is weak. Though air is non-material, it has the property of being felt. Moral facts do not have such a property. Material things at least occupy space, moral facts do not. Moral facts are not in the class of things that are combination of different ideas. On the point about dependence, moral facts are not external to certain human minds. They are generated by certain minds and perceived by the same minds that generate it. The implication of the above is that moral anti-realism needs not be totally antithetical with moral realism on the question of moral facts. Now, let us move to the next section to examine the reaction of different versions of logical positivism or empiricism.

Logical Positivist Anti-Realism and the Denial of Moral Facts

It is no longer a news that logical-positivism as a theory defended by the Vienna Circle was founded by Moritz Schlick and Hans Hahn before the First World War. Other members of the group were Gustav Bergman, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, Otto Neurath and Friedrich Waismann. (Blackburn, 2005, p.214). In the Preface of *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is of the view that "the reason why these problems (in philosophy) are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood." (Wittgenstein, 1969, p.3). For Wittgenstein, "what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence". (Wittgenstein, 1969, p.3). Undoubtedly, these Wittgenstenian views influenced the linguistic approaches adopted by logical positivist to the problems of philosophy especially that of morals.

With a view to addressing some of the core problems of philosophy, the group formulated what is known as the verification or verifiability principle. The principle states that the

meaning of a statement is its method of verification. (Blackburn, 2005, p.381). Therefore, a sentence is meaningful only if it is in principle possible to cite empirical evidence which would count for or against it. (Friedman, 1999, pp.7-8). The goal of the verification principle is to lay a solid foundation for science and to undermine metaphysical statements in religion and ethics. Though, A.J. Ayer was not a member of the Vienna Circle, he wrote what was and still regarded as the bible of logical positivism. The major thesis of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* represents the core position of the Vienna circle. According to Ayer, "a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the proposition it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable." (Ayer, 1970, p.5). In the same book, Ayer does a critique of ethics and theology. Ayer Argues;

> It follows that those philosophers who fill their books with assertions that they intuitively "know" this or that moral or religious "truth" are merely providing material for the psycho-analysts for no act of intuition can be said to reveal a truth about any matter of fact unless issues in verifiable proposition. And all such propositions are to be incorporated in the system of empirical propositions which constitutes science. (Ayer, 1988, p.40).

What is the import of this? The message is simple. For Ayer and the supporters of verification principle, proposition in religion and ethics do not express any meaning. Such propositions are empty. The logical positivist view is one of the pillars on which moral anti-realism rests.

According to Christopher Gowan, moral anti-realism is the position that moral convictions are never true-either because they are always false or, more commonly, because they lack truth value altogether. (Gowan, 2000, p.25). Thus, moral anti-realism is usually defined in opposition to moral realism which holds that there are indeed-objective moral values, that evaluative statement or factual claims are either true or false, and that their truth or falsity is independent of our perception of them, independent of our beliefs, feelings-or other attitudes

towards them. In this way, moral-anti-realism can involve either the *denial* that moral-properties exist at all, or the acceptance that they do exist, but that their existence is *mind-dependent* and not objective or independent. The above view expresses both first and the second interpretations.

Similarly, sometimes, moral anti-realists argue that morality-involves the projection of our attitudes into the world. The theory is frequently invoked to explain the fact that morality lacks the agreement indicator of objectivity. According to G.F. Schueler, moral realism holds that our judgments are "about the world" in much the way our other-judgments are. Anti-realists deny this, holding that in making moral judgments we are projecting our own attitudes onto things, or expressing these attitudes, or the likes. (Scheuler, 1988, p.492).

What is the import of this point? Moral facts are mind-dependent. Thus, one might like J.L. Mackie, hold that while moral judgments are indeed intended to be "about the world" (as realist holds), there are in fact no objective values and hence anyone who makes moral judgments is committed to a claim which is false. However, an important point about falsity needs to be made here. To say that a statement or proposition is false is to admit its meaningfulness. If moral antirealist like Mackie claims that moral statements are false then moral anti-realism could be compatible with moral realism at the level of semantics. Both positions will admit that moral statements could have truth value. However, a problem could arise for a moral antirealist who admits the possibility of a moral statement being false. The moral anti-realist admission will have a serious implication on the anti-realist ontological position concerning the reality of moral facts. It could be argued that something that does not exist cannot be false.

The point is germane but will not pose any serious problem to moral antirealism. Following the second interpretation, the semantic claim about the falsity of a moral statement or proposition and the ontological claim about the non-existence of moral facts are compatible. For instance, the statement "God is human" is either true or false. Its truth value depends on our understanding of what we know about God, not necessarily about the reality of God. If the statement is true its truth depends on what we know about God (may be through upbringing), not necessarily on the actual existence of God. The same point could be made about any moral statement or proposition. The evaluative claim "Abortion is wrong" is semantically meaningful. However, its meaningfulness has nothing to do with the factual status of abortion.

In view of these initial observations, moral anti-realists deny the objectivity of moral values. According to Mackie; there are no objective values. (Mackie, 1997, p.15). Thus, since Mackie is primarily concerned with moral values, one must understand that the denial that there are objective values does not commit one to any particular view about what moral statements means and certainly not to the view that they are equivalent to subjective-reports. Although in this case, Mackie accepted moral subjectivism as an alternative account because the claim to objectivity, however ingrained in our language and thought is not self-validating. (Mackie, 1997, p.14). Thus, it can be questioned. Mackie argues; The assertion that there are objective values or intrinsically prescriptive entities or features of some kind, which ordinary moral judgments presuppose is, I hold it not meaningless but false. (Mackie, 1997, p.40).

In other words, Mackie is of the opinion that, the fact that a statement or moral judgment is false does not render such judgment meaningless. For instance, the statement that, 'rats are capable of judging moral values just like human beings' is false but not meaningless. Nevertheless, the falsity of this statement does not render it meaningless because we can

decipher that this statement cannot be true. This position reaffirms the point just made above.

J.L. Mackie's denial of the objectivity of moral values could be traced to R.M. Hare's *The Language of Morals*. On page one of the book Hare is of the view that the primary function of moral principles is to guide human conduct in view of the fact that the language of morals is basically prescriptive. (Hare, 1972, p.1). On page 74 of the same book, Hare denies the objectivity of answers to moral questions. For instance, even if we know the intuitive answer (derived from certain principle) to the question "How should I bring up my child" the decision on the question is not objective since only specific principles can be taught, decisions on principles cannot. (Hare, 1972, pp.74-75).

Still on the denial of moral facts, in *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*, Rudolf Carnap rejects the realist-antirealist disagreement about the reality or unreality of the external world. For him, the debate between the exponents of the two philosophical doctrines is metaphysical and has no sense. That is, the debate is unnecessary in the first place. However, the assertion about the reality of certain objects in the world has meaning, since such an assertion is verifiable. According to him,

> When a zoologist asserts the reality of Kangaroos, his assertion means that there are things of a certain sort which can be found and perceived at certain times and places; in other words that there are objects of a certain sort which are elements of the space-time system of the physical world. This assertion is of course verifiable; by empirical investigation every zoologist arrives at a positive verification, independent of whether he is a realist or an idealist…the disagreement begins only when the question about the Reality of the physical world as a whole is raised... (Carnap, 1935, p. 5).

Carnap point here is that the question about the reality or unreality of the world as a whole has no sense because, according to him, "the reality of anything is nothing else than the possibility of its being placed in a certain system, in this case, in the space-time system of the physical

world, and such a question makes sense only if it concerns elements or parts, not if it concerns the system itself." (Carnap, 1935, p. 6).

What then is the import of this on moral realist- antirealist debate in philosophical ethics? For Rudolf Carnap, value statement like "Killing is evil" or "Killing is wrong" "is merely an expression of a certain wish." (Carnap, 1935, p. 1). In Carnap's view, value statements are not assertive and therefore are neither true nor false. It should however, be noted that the claim that value statements are not assertive is controversial. It depends on our interpretation of value statements.

Meanwhile, in *Language Truth and Logic*, A. J. Ayer rejects a psychological approach (embedded in subjectivism) to ethics because, according to him, personal or public approval of an action does not make the action right. (Ayer, 1970, p.104). Ayer is of the view that fundamental ethical concepts are unanalyzable in view of the absence of any criterion for testing the "validity of the judgments in which they occur" (Ayer, 1970, p.107). Like other moral anti-realists, Ayer is of the view that moral judgments do not state facts about the world. Rather such judgments "are used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them." (Ayer, 1970, p.108). Ethical terms are not only used to express feeling they are employed to arouse feelings in other and to stimulate action. (Ayer, 1970, p.108). Ayer moral anti-realist position also denies the existence of moral facts because ethical statements are mere expressions and excitants of feeling which do not necessarily involve any assertions." (Ayer, 1970, pp.109-110). Unlike the subjectivist view which admits the existence of certain feelings, Ayer denies the existence of the feelings. In view of all these points, Ayer opines is of the view that moral statements were simply meaningless because they did not describe any state of affairs. (Ayer, 1970, p.107). According to Ayer, We shall

set ourselves to show that in so far as statements of value are significant, they are ordinary "scientific statements; and that, in so far as they are not scientific, they are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false. (Ayer, 1998, p.27). Let us consider the following statements:

(i)   You have stolen this money! and
(ii)   You have done wrong in stealing this money

According to Ayer, the two statements have the same meaning. The word "wrong" in (ii) adds nothing to the meaning of the simple statement. (Ayer, 1970, p.107). Thus, it merely shows my feeling of disapprobation.

Furthermore, in *The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms*, C.L. Stevenson develops a version of ethical emotivism. Unlike the position maintained by traditional interest theorists, he is of the view that ethical statements do not describe but uttered to create influence. The major use of ethical statements "is not to indicate facts, but to create an influence". (Stevenson, 2006, p.445-446). Also, Stevenson as well argues that moral words have emotive meanings, which are neither descriptive nor analytic. (Stevenson, 1963). J.L. Mackie also maintains the same view in his error theory. Mackie maintains that it is an error to suppose that there are moral entities such as moral facts. (Mackie, 1970, p.40). Thus, the central thesis of Mackie's error theory is that there are no moral facts. According to J.L. Mackie, "the claim to objectivity however ingrained in our language and thought, is not self-validating." (Mackie, 1990, p.41). In his argument from queerness, Mackie denies the objectivity of moral facts. Objective facts about moral values would be strange. In Mackie's view, if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them it would have to be

by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else. (Mackie, 1970, p. 41). Besides, Michael Smith's claim that the realist eschewed queer facts about the universe in favour of a more subjectivist conception of moral facts. (Smith, 2000, p.409). But from a critical point of view, a subjectivist conception of moral facts would amount to contradiction because that would be a strange idea.

According to Hare; the language of morals is one sort of prescriptive language. (Hare, 1952, pp.76-77). Hare denies the existence of moral facts because moral judgments are like commands. Consider the following to sentences below:

(i). You ought not to terminate the pregnancy
(ii). Stand up.

According to Hare, both sentences are different forms of issuing a command. Ethical term like "good" could be interpreted in at least two senses. The word "good" could be used either descriptively or evaluatively. For example, the word "good" is used descriptively in "a good car", "a good knife" and "a good wife". In this respect, "good" is descriptive in view of certain concrete properties the mentioned items possess. On the other hand, the word "good" is evaluative when it is used to commend. Meanwhile, Gensler has a clearer presentation of this view. For Gensler, prescriptivism sees moral-judgment as a type of prescription, or imperative. Moral-judgments as a type of statement like the simple imperative- "close the door" do not state facts and are not true or false. Instead, they express our will or desires. (Gensler, 1998, p.72).

Generally, the exponents of prescriptivism believe that moral statements function as imperatives which are universalizable (i.e applicable to everyone in similar –circumstances) and not a ground for testing-truth value. For instance, let us consider the following sentences:

(i)   Killing is wrong

(ii)   Dot not kill

(iii)   You ought not to kill

The first statement (i.e the indicative) tries to state a fact about the world, and it is true or false for the cognitivists. Thus, to accept the indicative is to have a belief. The second (i.e the imperative) does not state a fact, and it is neither true nor false. Instead, it tells what to do. By implication, it expresses our will or our desire that a person should not kill. For the third, (i.e the general prescription), the "ought" judgments – are universalizable prescriptions and this is what moral judgment should be all about for the moral-anti-realists. Consequently, statement (I) for the moral anti-realists is just a mere indication of what is. But for (II) and (III), "you ought not to kill" – is equivalent to "Do not kill" and let everyone do the same in similar case. What can we make out of moral antirealist views just considered? Do those views make moral anti-realism more plausible than moral realism? It appears moral realism is appealing. The theory has been supported on different grounds by its exponents.

First, the existence of moral facts is demonstrated through the argument from supervenience. There are moral facts because those facts supervene or are the consequences of natural facts. The moral realist argument from supervenience is formulated thus;

I

(i). If there are no material facts then, there will not be moral facts

But there are material facts and moral facts are the consequences of those material facts.

Therefore, there are moral facts.

II

(ii). There are material facts and moral facts supervene on the existing material facts.

Since moral facts are the consequences of material facts

Therefore, there are moral facts and moral facts exist.

The argument from supervenience appears very strong. Given the second interpretation of the denial, moral evaluation is never conducted in a vacuum. The point about the moral rightness or wrongness of human actions and omission will not arise in a world populated by just a single human being. Our human interactions necessitate moral evaluations. A world devoid of material and non-material things would, at the same time, be devoid of moral evaluations. Exponents of the supervenience argument are of the view that the relationship between moral facts and natural facts is similar to the relationship between natural objects and their atomic properties. Just as natural objects are the consequences of their atomic properties, moral facts are then consequences of natural facts. (Brink, 1984, p.120). Just as we cannot deny that material things are the consequences of their atomic properties we cannot, at the same time deny that moral facts are the consequences of natural facts. How plausible is the moral realist point about supervenience?

In our view, the analogy is weak. As a matter of fact, the analogy evades the issues. The mere fact that material things supervene on their atomic properties does not mean that such a relationship exists between moral facts and natural facts. The error is simple. If we remove the

atomic properties of a thing then the thing itself seizes to exist. However, there will still be natural facts even if no moral evaluation is made about them. Material things occupy space while moral facts do not. In view of this point the moral realist argument for supervenience may not be taken as absolute.

Furthermore, our initial observation is that the onus of proof is on moral realists who claim that there are moral facts. We deny the existence of moral facts and do not need to produce what is not available there in the world. We share J.L. Mackie's view that moral facts are not part of the structure of the universe.

Even though recent scholar such as Andres Carlos Luco claims that moral facts cause moral progress (Luco, 2019, 1), this paper still maintains that, generally, moral realism is problematic. The reason is because, it is not clear whether such a claim can survive Harman's objections (Harman,1996, 1975). In fact, Munir Talukder's position is a direct response to Luco's claim. For Talukder, objective moral facts will abandon the progress of moral thinking.   (Talukder, 2011, p.20). Essentially, the moral realist's claim regarding the objectivity of moral facts creates a problem. Moral realist position on the objectivity of values is not plausible because it denies the right of the individual to make moral choices. It hinders creativity and moral progress. Moral problems, by their nature, seem insoluble. One of the primary concerns of ethics is to resolve the possible clash of values. There is a moral need to look at those issues closely and, possibly, discover the lasting solution to them. Moral realist view about the objectivity of values could hinder such a noble task. What is described as objective values originated from the subjective views of some individuals in the society. (Hare, 1952, p.77).

This point is well made by R.M. Hare. One of the fascinating points about moral anti-realist claim about the subjectivity of values is that it opens the window of opportunity for the individual to take decisions on moral issues. In most cases, what is described by moral realist as objective values originated from the subjective mind of certain individuals in the society. Considering the myriads of moral problems the world is confronted today, the debate about the rightness or wrongness of human action like abortion, euthanasia or mercy killing, truth-telling, animal experimentation, and human right to medical treatment to mention just a few is still very strong and necessary in view of the current global socio-economic and political challenges. It would be an error to claim that the rightness or wrongness of any of these practices is objective. In view of the point just mentioned, one can be tempted to argue that moral anti-realism is more plausible than moral realism because the theory is good for the development and expansion of the frontiers of knowledge especially in the field of morals.

Beyond the Logical positivists' objections, one contemporary thinker who also tried to raise argument against the moral realists' thesis is Talukder. I agree with Talukde who argues that the origins of moral facts are not unified. (Talukder, 2011, p.20). The implication of the above view is the denial of objectivity which could also lead to denial of moral facts, which is, interestingly, the position that the logical positivists are defending with different arguments.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to deconstruct anti-realist's denial of moral facts. One of the major debates in meta-ethics is the debate about the ontological status of moral facts. Moral anti-realism is often contrasted with moral realism on the subject matter. In fact, moral anti-realism is often interpreted as a thesis that denies the existence of moral facts. Thus, the fundamental problem however, is how to interpret this denial. This question is so pertinent

because taking the debate at face value, scholars do not always pay attention to different ways by which this denial could be interpreted. This paper attempted to fill the gap. The paper argued that contrary to the parochial way of looking at the anti-realist's denial of moral facts mainly from the absolute sense, there is another possible way by which the denial could be understood, which is the non-absolute sense. Essentially, in deconstructing moral anti-realist's denial of moral facts, this paper clarifies and examines (i) idealist-antirealists' argument, (ii) logical positivists' claim in defense of moral anti-realism. The paper concluded by critically examining some arguments with which moral anti-realists deny the existence of moral facts, and some possible responses against them.

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