

INTRODUCTION

Some time ago I wrote a book (*Moral Language*, 1982) in which I argued that moral judgments are capable of being true ('truth-apt,' to use a current phrase, or descriptive and having truth-value, to use a more traditional term), that the methods of discovering moral facts are fundamentally similar to those of discovering non-moral facts, and that moral judgments may be true. What I did not do at that time was to develop a moral theory which would demonstrate how the method of discovering moral truths would work and what the criteria of truth actually are. In a later work (*Persons, Animals, and Fetuses*, 1996) I did propose a moral theory as to what the criteria for moral truth are; however, I presented it primarily as an introduction to the discussion of several practical ethical issues and did not argue fully for that theory. It is high time that I did so, because without showing that such a theory can be developed my defense of moral realism is incomplete. It is all very well to say that we can discover what moral beliefs are true, but unless we can demonstrate just which beliefs are true, the thesis that we can discover this truth cannot be fully defended.

For this reason the biggest (although not the only) challenge to showing that ethical objectivity is possible is the presence of moral disagreement — and the contention of many that such disagreement cannot be definitively resolved. The best way to handle this challenge is to develop a moral theory which represents a consensus of sound moral thinking — i.e., thinking based upon argument and defense against criticism. If it can be shown that deviations from such a theory either are only apparent, or fail to represent sound moral thinking (which I maintain is fundamentally similar to sound thinking in any discipline), then such deviations do not point to an inherent failure to resolve moral disagreement; such failure would give a death blow to the possibility of moral objectivity.

In this book I undertake the task of developing such a moral theory. It is with minor modifications the same as the theory I presented in *Persons, Animals, and Fetuses*, but includes many more attempts to answer actual and possible objections. What I shall present here is a version of naturalistic moral realism, but it is a version modified in a number of ways to take into account the important insights of relativists and other critics.



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