Moral Realism and the Incompletability of Morality[1]

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The core claim of *moral realism*, one of the major approaches in contemporary meta-ethics, is that moral or ethical[2] statements are true or false independently of what human beings think of them. That is to say, to almost any moral or ethical question that we may ask, say, whether letting someone die under certain circumstances in order to save our own life is morally permissible, or whether having a great career is sufficient to have a good life, there is a correct answer that is "out there" awaiting discovery, and the correctness of that answer has nothing to do with what we might think about the matter. Some realists articulate this core idea by positing a distinctively moral (i.e. non-natural) "realm" consisting of "moral facts", whereas others purport to locate the so-called objective "moral facts" in the natural world.[3]

Why would anyone be a realist? Well, many philosophers believe that some sort of realism is necessary to vindicate moral discourse and inquiry. We ask moral questions, and in many cases we take the answers to them very seriously (often acting against our interests, sometimes even risking our own lives, based on a moral judgment that it is the right thing to do). But, the realists argue, such moral inquiry would be pointless, or groundless, unless there were correct answers to our moral questions that held independently of our opinions about them. If there is nothing to *get right* (independently of what we might think) when we reflect on a moral question, what is the point of asking the question in the first place?[4]

That is the main motivation for realism – to explain the point or the significance of moral inquiry. The standard motivation for *not* being a realist, however, is the significant difficulty of making philosophical sense of an independently existing "moral realm" and our access to it.[5] Accordingly, many philosophers, namely, the *moral anti-realists*, claim that the truth or falsity of moral statements is ultimately a function of our actual attitudes or opinions. Whether, say, letting someone die under certain circumstances in order to save your life is morally permissible, or whether having a great career is sufficient to have a good life, they insist, ultimately depends on the basic attitudes we actually have towards these things. Not postulating any questionable entity (such as a distinctive "moral realm"), anti-realists do not have to explain what its metaphysical status is. And making moral truths a function of what we actually think, anti-realists do not have the problem of explaining how we can access moral truths. On the other hand, they do have the difficult task of explaining why we should take morality seriously at all, given that it ends up being just a reflection of what we already think. If morality is at bottom our self-expression, an articulation of some of our attitudes to some things, how could it have the force or authority to compel us to even risk our lives?

In this essay, I will put aside anti-realism for the most part (mainly because I believe that regarding moral inquiry as amounting to the tracking of our actual attitudes and opinions isn't a vindication of it), and focus on moral realism. However, I will not be interested in the usual philosophical worries about how to make metaphysical and epistemological sense of realism, but, rather, approach it from a straightforwardly moral point of view. I will raise a fundamental (moral) challenge to the core realist idea that moral inquiry aims at obtaining objective moral truths that are "out there" awaiting discovery, on the basis that this idea comes down to promoting moral blindness or lethargy as a moral ideal, which is morally objectionable. Then, I will explain why

this doesn't mean a return to moral anti-realism, and how, in fact, there is an easy way of accommodating the realist intuition (as mentioned above) in an unobjectionable way.

Wakefulness as a Fundamental Moral/Ethical Value

Imagine that whenever we formulated a moral/ethical question, we would somehow receive the right answer to it (by a telegraph from the "moral realm," as it were). As soon as we asked 'What is the right thing to do now (or in such-and-such a case)?' we would receive the correct answer[6]: 'Let him die'. If we also wondered, 'Does it matter morally that he put himself in this situation?' we would receive the correct answer: 'No, it doesn't.' Or, if we asked a more general question such as 'Is it possible to have a good life without having friends?' we would receive the correct answer: 'No, it isn't.' In short, to whatever moral or ethical question we would pose – whether it concerned what to do, why to do it, what matters morally at all, or what matters more than what – there would be an objectively correct answer, and it would somehow be immediately revealed to us.

From the perspective of moral realism, it seems that this would be moral heaven. We would completely achieve what realists claim there is to achieve in moral inquiry, namely, the obtainment of all moral truths. There would be nothing left for us to figure out morally. We wouldn't really need to pay attention to the specifics of the situation, or compare and contrast it with similar cases. If someone asked for your help, or some money, you wouldn't even have to look at that person – all you would have to do would be to formulate the moral question, 'Should I help this person?' and (by hypothesis) you would immediately have the correct answer. If your friend made you complicit in some deception, you wouldn't really have to reflect upon the nature of loyalty and honesty, or what should take precedence in that particular case, or in general – because you would immediately acquire the correct answers to those questions.[7]

Now, the question is whether there is something morally lacking or objectionable in this sort of moral ideal. If what we want from moral inquiry were just the *obtainment of moral truths,* then there would be nothing morally unsatisfactory or lacking in a situation such as the one I have sketched above, in which we had access to all moral truths, but were utterly inattentive to the circumstances we found ourselves in, and completely bereft of wrestling with challenging or novel cases, and second guessing ourselves. If moral inquiry were aimed merely at achieving a certain result – namely, acquiring the objective truth about the moral matter at hand – then a passive, sleepy, disengaged way of achieving that result would be just as good. But I want to suggest that that is not so. I want to suggest, rather, that a certain moral alertness or wakefulness is essential to morality.[8]

Franz Rosenzweig says that "[i]n actual conversation something really happens"[9]. You cannot (are not supposed to) assume what your interlocutor can be saying to you at a given moment, given who he is, given who you are, given the relationship, the context, given how the world is. You are not supposed to know beforehand how *you* will respond to what he is saying. In actual conversation, as Rosenzweig puts it, something really happens – meaning, it is as if the situation is completely unique, novel, surprising, possibly devastating. Anything can happen. You have to pay attention.

So it is with moral inquiry. In genuinely successful moral reflection, we may say, something really happens. We look at the world, at life, at the particular circumstances that we are in, without assuming what can possibly be happening and what its moral significance can possibly be. What we want from morality is friction – that is to say, a genuine encounter with life (including other people), where we are alert and sensitive to, and perceptive of its subtleties.

What is the basis for these claims I am making about morality? What is so good about the so-called moral alertness and openness? Fundamental value judgments (such as the ones I am making about what we really want from morality, or what is essential to moral success) are hard to justify, for the simple reason that they are fundamental value judgments. We always justify a value judgment regarding the goodness or badness of something by appeal to a more basic value judgment. For instance, we can justify a smoking ban by appeal to the goodness of health (and how the ban promotes health), and then justify the goodness of health by, say, appeal to the goodness of happiness (and how good health promotes happiness).[10] But, if someone asks, 'What is so good about happiness?' it may not be so easy to provide an informative answer. In ethics or morality, where we make a case for the goodness or badness, or rightness or wrongness of things, justification must come to an end somewhere.[11] We cannot establish the goodness of something without assuming the goodness of something else.[12] So, when it comes to the most fundamental values that (for that reason) cannot be justified in terms of anything more fundamental than them, what we can do is simply point to, invoke, and (at best) articulate their value – which will of course really convince only those who already appreciate them to some extent. In any case, that is what I intend to do here: to invoke the intrinsic (ethical/moral) value of paying attention. An essential component of ethical/moral success, I claim, is some sort of wakeful and open encounter with life and other people.[13] We can see this, I think, by imagining a scenario in which we automatically, but blindly and sleepily, acquire all moral truths, and asking ourselves whether we have completed moral/ethical reflection with absolute success, or whether, as far as the point of moral inquiry is concerned, there is something seriously lacking. I believe it is the latter: in a situation like that, the most important part (arguably, the whole point) of morality would be missing – namely, paying attention to life and other people, and trying to make moral sense of it.

How the value of wakefulness or alertness (or paying attention) constitutes an objection to moral realism may be clear by now, but let me formulate the argument explicitly. If we regard moral wakefulness or openness as *essential* to moral success, then any position that promotes a moral ideal that is compatible with moral lethargy or inattentiveness is morally objectionable. An unqualified moral realism, which regards moral inquiry as aimed at the *obtainment* of objectively correct answers to moral questions, does promote a moral ideal that allows moral lethargy and inattentiveness. For, whatever moral truths there are "out there" awaiting discovery, they can in principle be obtained in a morally inattentive, lethargic way (just put the true moral judgment in our head). Therefore, moral realism is morally objectionable.

Can't the realist solve this problem by simply adding a moral value of wakefulness or attentiveness to his theory? Can't he say, in other words, that it is morally commendable to have an open moral mind and be alert to the subtleties of the situation under consideration, even though, in the end, the main purpose of moral inquiry is the obtainment of moral truths? First of all, if I am right that the kind of moral attentiveness that I have been describing is essential to success in moral inquiry, the realist must regard moral wakefulness or attentiveness as an intrinsic value, and not just as a good means to obtaining moral truths. He must, in other words, claim that the purpose of moral inquiry is to obtain the truth about moral matters (which are already "out there" awaiting discovery) *and* to be morally alert and open-minded. But can the realist plausibly promote moral alertness and open-mindedness even when, as in the hypothetical scenario I have described earlier, there is the option of obtaining all the desired moral truths at once? Can he, as a moral realist, say that even when we can simply obtain the truth about the moral matter, get the correct answer to the moral question that we are asking, it is morally praiseworthy to keep paying attention to the aspects of the situation under consideration and keep an open moral mind? Can he say that, even

though we know we *can* get it right and be finished with the moral issue at hand, it is morally commendable to regard ourselves as never being finished with it? I reckon that he cannot. The realist thesis that there are correct answers to the moral questions that we ask, which we could in principle acquire at once, makes it impossible to promote any significant value of moral attentiveness and open-mindedness. For, if there is a *correct* answer to the moral question we are asking, which we can in principle acquire at once, there really is no point in continuing to stare at the circumstances and to second guess ourselves. We already know the truth.

What if the realist makes room for the value of moral wakefulness by allowing *some* moral questions to lack objectively correct answers? In fact, leading moral realists have always qualified their realism by insisting that, in their view, *not all* moral questions have objective answers.[14] So, what if the realist divides moral questions into two categories – those that have objectively true answers awaiting discovery, and those that do not – and promotes a value of moral wakefulness and openness only in relation to moral questions that do *not* have objectively true answers?[15]

The thing is that, as I have mentioned at the beginning, the leading realists always advertise their view by arguing that realism, namely, the view that there are objectively true answers to moral questions, is the only way to account for the significance of morality. They claim that if there is no objectively correct answer to the moral question we are asking, then there really is no point in investing so much time and energy in morally reflecting on the question. So, at least for the prominent realists, who have been defending their view in the above manner, the value of moral wakefulness and openness will be applicable only to moral questions that are not that serious – where, according to the realist, we can live without positing an objectively correct answer. That is to say, we will have to be morally alert, attentive and open-minded only when it comes to trifling moral issues! I have been arguing for the exact opposite: an important, serious moral question is

precisely a question that requires our perpetual attention, alertness, and open-mindedness – it is a question that we can (or, rather, must) never (even in principle) be finished with. That is why, contrary to the common realist presumption, the really significant moral questions are precisely those that we should *not* regard as having fixed objectively correct answers that we could in principle acquire at once.

As I have said earlier, I will propose a way of maintaining what is compelling in the "realist" approach in a way that is compatible with the value of moral wakefulness. But first I would like to raise several objections to what I have said so far, and respond to them.

Objection 1: If we must never finish with a moral question, how do we ever act morally?

Isn't morality at bottom about figuring out what to do under this or that circumstance? Being awake is nice and good, but what good does that do if in the end morality doesn't tell us whether we should choose loyalty over honesty in this case, or let the other person die in that case, or focus on our career at the expense of our relationships? Isn't success in moral inquiry above all about *settling on* the best answer we can come up with? And doesn't that mean that, contrary to what I have been claiming, the unending alertness, attention and sensitivity to the subtleties of a given circumstance is rather a failure in moral inquiry?

To be sure, we must act, and that requires us to settle on the best answers that we can come up with to the moral questions we ask. If we kept reflecting on a particular moral question so that we would never act, or miss the right moment to act, that would clearly be a moral failure. But I am not suggesting that we do nothing but reflect on the moral questions we have already formulated. I am only claiming that, even after we deliberate on a certain moral question and act

on our best judgment about what to do and when to do it, we should not regard ourselves as having finished with the matter. Because a moral matter, as I am suggesting, can never really be finished with – it does not have the kind of "right answer" that can in principle be acquired once and for all.

Then, *when* is the right moment to stop deliberating and act on our best judgment? Well, that is a substantive moral question itself. The answer depends on the circumstances. If your life is in imminent danger and you are asking yourself whether it is morally permissible to let the other person die in order to save your own life, then, presumably, you must stop deliberating pretty fast. Or, if you have a good enough justification for your action, then, presumably, it would be a good idea to go ahead and act. But, what constitutes a good enough justification for your action? That is again a substantive moral question, and the answer depends on the circumstances. In morality, we evaluate what we should do, why we should do it, and whether our evaluation itself is fairly good, and whether it is time to act and move on to other things. I am not saying that we must not give answers to these questions – of course we must. I am only saying that we should never regard such moral questions as having fixed, preexisting, unique "right answers" that (in principle) can be acquired once and for all.

Objection 2: Isn't every intellectual inquiry incompletable anyway? Why are we only talking about morality?

There are reasons to think that every intellectual inquiry is incompletable. We humans have limited abilities and time, we are prone to error, and the conceptual frameworks that we work with (presumably) never fully capture reality. If that is the case, yes, moral inquiry is incompletable, but exactly in the way that any intellectual inquiry, including science, is incompletable. So, what is the big deal about the incompletability of morality?

Well, I am not merely arguing for the conclusion that morality should be regarded as incompletable, but, rather, that it should be regarded as incompletable *because* (of the moral reason that) not doing so amounts to promoting moral lethargy. Does that matter? As long as I reach the same conclusion – that morality is incompletable – what difference does it make if I provide limited human abilities, nature of concepts, or (the fundamental value/goal of) moral wakefulness, as the reason? It makes *all* the difference.

It cannot be stressed enough: morality is primarily about justification. It is primarily about the kind of *case* we make for or against an action (or a way of life etc.), rather than our claim that we should or should not do it. Two fundamentally different moral stances may happen to promote the same conclusion with fundamentally different reasons. Imagine, for instance, two people, who both claim that torture is morally wrong. But one claims that it is morally wrong because it is a violation of basic human dignity, whereas the other claims that it is morally wrong because torture doesn't actually work (to extract reliable information from the tortured person). These are clearly fundamentally different moral stances. Even though they both end up saying that people should not be tortured, one regards torture as a violation of basic human dignity, and the other does not really find anything intrinsically wrong with it – it is just that it doesn't work (so, if it did, it would be morally permissible). In morality, the substantive content is primarily in the *case* one puts forward for a conclusion, rather than the conclusion itself.

By the same token, there is a big difference between claiming that morality should be regarded as an (in principle) incompletable task because of human limitations or the nature of concepts, and claiming that it should be regarded as (in principle) endless because not doing so amounts to promoting moral lethargy. The conclusion – namely, that morality is incompletable – may be the same, but the cases made for that conclusion are completely different. The former

comes down to a (metaphysical/semantic/epistemological) claim about the nature and the relationship of humans and reality, whereas the latter (which is what I am defending) comes down to a moral claim concerning the value of wakefulness, and how, in the light of that value, we should regard moral inquiry. Even if they are both true (as in the case of torture, presumably, which is both a violation of basic human dignity, and does not work), they have fundamentally different contents.

That is why what I am suggesting about morality here does not really apply to science, or any other domain. It is not because science cannot be incompletable. Perhaps it is also in principle endless – but just *not* for the moral reason I am putting forward in the case of morality. There doesn't seem to be anything morally objectionable in regarding science as aiming at the discovery of final truths. If there were a few laws of nature, and some initial conditions, from which everything could in principle be deduced, and if those laws and conditions were somehow magically revealed to us, we would in effect acquire all there is to know scientifically and be finished with science. There would really be nothing left to figure out scientifically. We would be looking at the world in a less mystified and amazed way, thinking that we have deciphered the secrets of nature. Would that kind of scientific completion be deficient? Perhaps. Perhaps there is a case to be made for an in principle endless scientific inquiry (hence, not aiming at the obtainment of all the "scientific truths") by appeal to a *scientific value* of curiousness, or open mindedness. I am not suggesting that a parallel argument cannot be made for other intellectual activities, such as science. What I am claiming is that there is a fundamental *moral* value, goal, or duty, of being morally attentive and awake – in the sense of never finishing with a moral question of what to do and why to do it – which leads to the conclusion that moral questions should be regarded as in principle incompletable.[16]

Objection 3: How can there be a moral argument against a metaphysical position involving morality?

I have been claiming that there is a moral argument based on the value of wakefulness against the idea that there are objective moral truths "out there", which can (in principle) be acquired once and for all, and which moral inquiry aims to obtain. But, even if I am right about the value of moral wakefulness, and that regarding moral truths as things that can in principle be acquired once and for all conflicts with that value, how does it entail that, as a matter of metaphysical/semantic fact, that is how moral truths really *are*? Isn't it possible that the moral task turn out to be completable, after all, even though it is morally problematic to regard it so?

My answer to that question is that morality, or moral "truths", cannot "in fact" have a "nature" that would be morally objectionable to accept. In other words, there cannot be any morally inconvenient facts about morality. Morality aims at what it makes moral sense to aim at, and "right answers" to moral questions consist in what would count as genuine moral success. Morality is not something that we have found ourselves in and cannot get out of, if we see that pursuing its aims, or participating in it, leads to moral vices. If participating in a discourse, and playing by its rules, leads to moral vices, then that cannot be the moral discourse. The whole point of engaging in moral discourse and reflection is to do well morally. That is why if there is any metaphysics relevant to moral matters, it concerns what is the *morally best* way to think of moral truths or moral properties – and that is the same thing as what moral truths and moral properties really *are*.

Therefore, to claim, as I do, that we *should regard* the moral task as (in principle) endless is the same as claiming that the moral task *is* (in principle) endless. To claim, as I do, that we *should not regard* moral 'rightness' or 'truth' as something that can possibly be acquired once and

for all is the same as claiming that moral 'rightness' or 'truth' *cannot* possibly be acquired at once. Moral metaphysics, moral epistemology, moral semantics, are all just morality.[17]

A final objection to what I have been arguing for may be formulated as follows: if, as I suggest, morality should not be regarded as aiming at the obtainment of moral truths, or correct answers to moral questions, then what is the point of all the reflection? If there isn't anything that we are trying to *get right*, what are we doing when we ask moral questions? Doesn't the realist have a point, after all, when he insists that unless there are objective moral truths to be discovered, moral inquiry is pointless? Let us revisit the "realist" intuition.

Morality Matters: The Non-Realist Version

What anyone, who takes morality seriously, really cares about is maintaining the significance of morality – that is, being able to justifiably say that moral inquiry is not pointless, or futile, but, rather, significant and worthwhile. What we (including the realist, I reckon) really want to say is that it matters greatly what answers we give to moral questions – that there is such a thing as doing well and doing badly in answering a moral question, and therefore it makes sense to make an effort when we morally reflect.

The realist, in addition to this, believes that the only way to justifiably hold that moral inquiry is worthwhile is to posit the existence of objective moral truths that are awaiting discovery. Unless there is a fixed, absolute point of success (i.e. the uniquely correct answer to the moral question), he claims, we cannot justifiably say that there is a point in trying to answer a moral question as best we can. Unless there is an objective moral truth "out there" that we are trying to capture (or copy accurately), he says, moral inquiry is unmotivated.

If, as I have argued, the realist idea that moral inquiry aims at the obtainment of moral truths is morally objectionable, it makes sense to ask whether we could have what we all want – namely, to justifiably hold that moral inquiry is not pointless or futile, but significant and worthwhile – without being a realist. Here is what I believe is a simple and morally appropriate way of doing that.

Once again, morality is an evaluative domain. It concerns what matters, and why it matters. There are no special tools that would help us discover the property of moral "goodness" or "rightness" or "reasonableness" in the neighborhood of an action, or a thought process. The only evidence or ground for a given moral judgment or evaluation is a good moral case for it. As I have mentioned earlier, the same is true when it comes to "metaphysical" or "epistemological" claims involving morality. In particular, nobody has evidence for the existence of objective moral truths, other than the moral argument that i) without objective moral truths moral inquiry would be insignificant or futile, and that ii) *moral inquiry is significant and worthwhile*. That is to say, the standard arguments for moral realism already presuppose the worth and significance of moral inquiry. They *assume* that moral inquiry matters (just try to argue for moral realism without assuming this!), and then bring in objective moral truths in order to "explain" why moral inquiry matters. But the significance of moral inquiry is not a phenomenon (like lightning or insulin resistance) whose "occurrence" in the universe has to be explained, but, rather, an *evaluation*, which needs to be justified as best we can.

But does positing the existence of objective moral truths awaiting discovery really improve our justification for the significance of moral inquiry? How does the realist justification actually go? "i) Moral inquiry is significant; ii) if there were objective moral truths awaiting discovery, then moral inquiry would be significant; therefore, iii) there are objective moral truths awaiting

discovery, and therefore, iv) moral inquiry is significant"? With that kind of circularity, we could presumably offer the following argument for the significance of moral inquiry: "i) Moral inquiry is significant; ii) If there were a God who commanded us to take morality seriously, then moral inquiry would be significant; therefore, iii) There is a God who commanded us to take morality seriously; and therefore, iv) Morality is significant." (On second thought, the religious argument is more effective than the realist one because, arguably, it is possible to offer independent arguments for the existence of a God commanding us to take morality seriously. Where is the independent argument for "objective moral truths awaiting discovery"?) My point is that merely describing one possible way in which moral inquiry would be significant does not strengthen our case for the significance of moral inquiry. Moreover, if these fruitless extra layers in our argument are actually morally objectionable themselves, as I have claimed realism to be, then we end up having a justification for the significance of moral inquiry, which is *less plausible* than merely asserting the significance of moral inquiry. So, why don't we just assert that moral inquiry is significant and worthwhile, rather than asserting that *plus* some additional morally objectionable things? Just asserting such a fundamental judgment about moral inquiry, without offering a justification for it, may seem arbitrary. But that is the nature of moral justification: we always have to assume some moral judgment, and the live question is which ones to assume in order to justify which others.

In a sense, moral inquiry is really like conversation. Just as we can point to conversational attitudes (such as taking it for granted what the other person can possibly say to you) that are detrimental to a successful conversation, we can point to moral attitudes (such as regarding moral inquiry as aiming at the discovery of a fixed truth) that are detrimental to a successful moral reflection. On the other hand, just as we can hardly explain why it is worth to engage in a genuine

conversation in the first place, we can hardly explain why it is worth to participate in moral inquiry. Not that we couldn't say anything in favor of these activities, but whatever we say would already presuppose what we were trying to establish.

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[2] I will group ethical and moral matters together in this essay, even though there is a common way of distinguishing the former from the latter by saying that ethical questions involve how we should live our lives in general, whereas moral questions involve more specifically what we owe to other human beings.

[3] More recently, some realists such as Ronald Dworkin and T. M. Scanlon insist that they can keep the core realist claim of the independence of moral truths without making any metaphysical postulations. See (Dworkin, 2011), and (Scanlon, 2014).

[4] See (Landau, 2003, p. 29) and (Enoch, 2011, pp. 32-33) for examples of realists motivating realism in this manner.

[5] One of the classic formulations of this fundamental problem with realism is (Mackie, 1977). For a more recent general objection to moral realism, see (Street, 2006). For a different, substantive moral objection to moral realism, see (Erdur, 2016).

[6] The following "correct" answers are just illustrative.

[7] A less fantastical version of this thought experiment is a scenario in which there is a few fundamental moral principles from which all other moral truths can be derived, (given the non-

moral facts pertaining to the relevant circumstances,) and those fundamental principles are somehow revealed to us. We may imagine for the sake of illustration, for instance, that the only moral principle is that you are morally obligated to do something only if it is necessary for your immediate survival. In such a case, from a substantive moral point of view, there would really be nothing left to figure out – there would only be the determination of the relevant (non-moral) facts (in this case, concerning what is necessary for your immediate survival), and the straightforward application of the principle to the facts at hand. To be sure, this example is an implausible over-simplification of what a true moral principle would really be like. However, my general point stands irrespective of the simplicity or complexity of moral truths: realism assumes that there are determinate true answers to our substantive moral questions; and I am inviting the reader to imagine the case in which, whatever those moral truths are, we automatically obtain them.

[8] My claim that merely acquiring the moral truths is not sufficient in morality may sound like the more general epistemological claim that true belief is not sufficient for knowledge, and that you also need justification. However, in morality, which is all about justification (where the truths are truths concerning what we are justified to do, and the justification for thinking *that*, and so on and so forth,) the distinction between truth and justification is less clear. In any event, what I am claiming to be lacking in the realists' vision of moral ideal is not more justification for our moral judgments (which would just be more true moral judgments, anyway), but a certain kind of engagement with life and people.

[9] (Rosenzweig, 1999, p. 87).

[10] Again, these justifications are merely illustrative.

[11] Or, as Wittgenstein has put it, "Somewhere we must be finished with justification" (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 29e).

[12] This is, in effect, Hume's Law. See (Hume, 1975).

[13] We may even wonder if this sort of moral alertness and openness is not only an essential component of moral/ethical success, but identical to it.

[14] See, for instance, the definitions of moral realism provided by (Landau, 2003), (Enoch, 2011) and (Dworkin, 2011).

[15] I am grateful to an anonymous referee of the Journal of Value Inquiry for pushing me on this point.

[16] By the same token, my argument does *not* apply to Platonic views across the board. What I am offering is only a *moral* objection to regarding *moral* truths as things that could in principle be acquired all at once. Thus, in so far as my argument is concerned, there is no (moral) problem with "realism" about other, non-moral domains, whether they are empirical or *a priori*. I am grateful to the anonymous referee of the *Journal of Value Inquiry* for helping me clarify this point.

[17] Except for some trivial, morally insignificant facts about moral discourse, such as the number of positive moral words (like 'good', 'right', 'virtuous') in English etc. For a more comprehensive defense of this denial of morally neutral meta-ethics, see (Dworkin, 2011). Dworkin himself is a moral realist, of course, but he argues that realism is a substantive moral position, and therefore the only case that can be made for or against it is moral. He provides a case for realism (which is what I have described as the motivation for being a realist), whereas I have provided a case against realism. Shortly, I will also suggest a non-realist way to capture what is compelling in realist accounts.