Moral Facts, Possible Moral Worlds and Naturalized Ethics

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ABSTRACT
Given his commitment to the project of naturalizing every normative aspect of philosophy; reducing its a priori content to some sort of empirical enterprise, Quine's inroad into moral philosophy is expected to set the stage for the project of naturalizing ethics. However, Quine argues that ethics is methodologically infirmed. Hence, the hope of naturalizing ethics hits the rock. This paper aims at advancing the project of naturalizing ethics by an attempt to settle, *in a way different* from the postulations of Flanagan and White, foremost commentators on Quinean ethics, Quine's charge of methodological infirmity.

1. *Introduction*

Since 1978, when Quine published his only paper on ethics entitled "On the Nature of Moral Values"[1], quite unlike many of his publications in other areas of philosophy, the level of debate generated by this essay is quite low[2]. Possible reasons that could be adduced for this are, first, Quine is delving into a strange land and had probably not said anything controversial enough that is worthy of academic dispute. Second, Quine's aim is to show that, unlike other areas of discourse, given the specialty of Ethics, its method makes it to be outside the 'naturalized world' and having shown this, there is nothing more to debate. While my first postulation is trivial, hence, indefensible, the second postulation is cogent[3]. Scholars who had written on Quinean Ethics so far are sharply

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[1] The paper was first published in Goldman A.I. and Kin J. (eds.) (1978: 37-46). The version referred to in this paper is in Quine W.V. (1981:55-66).

[2] The only known substantive articles on Quinean Ethics are four. These are Flanagan O. J. (1982: 56-74), White M. (1986: 649-662), Gibson Roger F., "Flanagan on Quinean Ethics" (the version of this paper I used in writing this paper is unpublished.) and Quine's "Reply to White". (1986: 663-665).

[3] Several arguments are being offered to underscore the appeal of naturalism. The possible truth of these arguments exacerbates the need to incorporate ethics into the naturalist

divided on whether or not Quine is right in arguing that on the basis of methodology, ethics and science are quite different in all ramifications. Flanagan and White hold that for Quine to be a consistent naturalist, his conclusion that ethics is methodologically infirm is unwarranted, hence, he ought to continue with the project of naturalizing ethics. Gibson, on the other hand, supports Quine in arguing that on the basis of methodology, ethics and science do not belong to the same boat.

In what follows, I shall attempt to advance Quine's project of naturalizing ethics by an attempt to settle, in a way, different from the postulations of Flanagan and White, Quine's charge of methodological infirmity against ethics. In what follows, a short explication of Quine's account on the genealogy of moral values is carried out to establish the point that moral value is generated in the same way as it is done in science and other naturalized discourses. This is followed by a concise exposition of Quine's argument for the charge of methodological infirmity against ethics. In an attempt to advance Quine's project of naturalizing ethics, the difference between the notions of possible worlds and actual or natural world would be used to explain the existence of moral facts to which moral judgments would correspond. This is used to show, in the conclusion, that ethics as compared to science is not methodologically infirm.

2. *The Technology of Moral Values*

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the body of principles or standards of human conduct that govern the behavior of individuals and groups. It is considered a normative science because it is concerned with the norms of human conduct, as distinguished from formal sciences such as mathematics and logic, physical sciences such as chemistry and physics, and empirical sciences such as economics and psychology. Ethics arise not simply from man's creation but from human nature itself making it a natural body of

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programme. See Virginia Held, (2002: 7-24), for a few of the arguments on the appeal of naturalism. Quite pointedly, in this article, Held, p. 8, also argued that "naturalism holds out hope of philosophical knowledge that will progress along with advances in specialized scientific inquiries, and of moral knowledge that will advance along with scientific knowledge".

laws from which man's laws follow. As Schueler observes, "The human conceptual apparatus, including that part of it involved in making and acting on moral judgments, is somehow instantiated in the brain and nervous system"[4]. Ethics is a natural, scientific and technical phenomenon. This suggests that ethics exists as parts of the natural structure of the world. It evolves on its own course, as response to the other structures of the world. It is parts of the supporting pillars of the natural world, without which the world would have been different. Put differently, ethics is a metaphoric walking stick that human beings, one of the structures of the world, need to stand, withstand and walk through the other features of the world[5]. Hence, as speculated in the philosophy of Democritus, "struggling to survive against hostile forces in his environment, man is compelled to associate himself with other men; hence speech. He is also compelled to *learn* from *experience*; hence the *mechanical arts.*"[6] This compulsion is explained by the fact that ethics, as one of the fabrics of the world, complements other features of the world. It is, therefore, a natural phenomenon subscribed to by every rational human being. Hence, just as every other structures of the world is studied Ethics, the moral institution qualifies as a natural edifice, which as Quine notes, is "to be studied in the same empirical spirit that animates natural science".[7]

One important characteristic that distinguishes human beings from other species of animals is the ability to make rational and informed choices. These choices are motivated by values. Hence, Quine explicates the relationship between the capacity to make rational and informed choices and the value of the choices made. For Quine, this capacity and the value made are intertwined. Encompassed in the concept of capacity is what Quine call 'belief'. For Quine, 'belief and valuation intertwined'.[8] In the belief aspect are the epistemological components of the ability to make rational and informed choices. The epistemological components among other, "involves standards of perceptual

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[4] G.F. Schueler, (1996: 315).

[5] The same point of the naturalness of morality was emphasized by Annette Baier. For details see, Annette Baier, (1996: 5-17)

[6] Gregory Vlastos (1946: 54). (I deliberately put these concepts in italics. These concepts would be used to explicate the point that ethics is a natural, scientific and technical phenomenon.)

[7] Quine, W.V.O. (1969: 26)

[8] Quine. W.V.O, (1981:55)

similarity: some of these standards are innate, others are acquired."[9] Other components include awareness of the object of value by the subject. The choices that are made are consequent upon the epistemological component of belief. Moreover, according to Quine, our value involves pleasures and pains. In this respects too, there are innate likes and dislikes as well as acquired likes and dislikes, which guide our choices. Since rational human beings would naturally want to maximize pleasure and avoid pain, the standard of perceptual similarities becomes an essential instrument in evaluating episodes appropriately, either as pleasurable or painful. Hence, "the drive to increase or decrease the similarity will...vary with the degree of pleasantness or unpleasantness of the earlier episode."[10]

According to Quine, "the similarity standards are the epistemic component of habit formation, in its primordial form, and the reward-penalty (pleasure-pain) axis is the valuative component."[11] The similarity standard becomes the instrument that shapes human's thoughts and world-views. This is clearer as Democritus notes, "the nature of the soul is not fixed by original pattern of the soul-atoms. This pattern itself can be changed: Teaching re-forms a man, and by re-forming, makes his nature." [12] This explains the Democritus's dictum "teaching that makes nature". What could be derived from this is the point that epistemology is prior to metaphysics. This is because it is what you know that shapes your world. However, for Quine, the relationship between epistemology and ethics is complementary. For him, "(c)learly, all learning, all acquisition of dispositions to discriminatory behaviour, requires in the subject this bipartite equipment: it requires a similarity space (epistemological component) and it requires some ordering of episodes along the valuation axis(ethics), however crude."[13] It is this exercise of fulfilling these bipartite requirements that exacerbates the science and technicality of moral discourse. The similarity space and the ordering of episodes are being studied, progressively changed and elaborated through scientific method of induction, and eventually, hypothetico-deductive method.

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[9] Gibson. R.F. "Quine on Ethics" unpublished p.5
[10] Quine. (1974: 28)
[11] Quine. (1981: 55)
[12] Gregory Vlastos. (1946: 54)
[13] Quine. (1981: 56)

An example will suffice in illustrating how these methods of natural sciences are used in realizing values. If we discover that a particular kind of act or thing, say X, always produce a desired end, say Y, and since, every normal human being would always want a repeat of what is desirable, it is probable that there would be desire to repeat X in order to get Y. Hence, for example, it is on the basis of inductive reasoning that I infer that a new computer system will serve me well on the ground that I got very good service from a number of computer systems earlier purchased from the same manufacturer. Again, if a new book by a certain author is introduced to me, I infer that I will enjoy reading it on the basis of having read and enjoyed other books by that same author. It is, also, by induction that I reason that my car, made of metal would have a dent if it hits a harder object, this is because I have observed several cars made with metals that got dents when hit against harder objects. Having experienced an event or a thing being followed by the same effect always, the scenario is now believed to be part of nature. The experiences are summarized into general laws or universal generalizations. For example, having observed that cars made with metal get dents when hit against harder objects, I then generalize that 'All objects made with metal when hit against a harder object will have a dent'. On this basis, once I see a car, made of metal, hit against a harder object, I deduce, without further observation that the car must have a dent. This is clearly an example of the hypothetico-deductive method.

In the same vein, this scenario also obtains in terms of valuations.[14] According to Quine, when "we learn by induction that one sort of event tend to lead to another that we prize" (It is important to note as earlier remarked, that this inductive process, is an epistemological component that human beings possess innately or acquired) and then by a process of transfer we may come to prize the former not only as a means but for itself"[15]. This means that on the issue of values, reasoning starts from induction, by observing instances of what event or thing is valuable and or otherwise. On the basis of these observations, these events or things are valued for themselves, not because they lead to other

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[14] It is important to note that valuation is an inevitable exercise for beings. As Shirk notes, 'value is assigned to people, places, acts, sensations, or thoughts. This is an exercise that is almost inevitable in human affairs. For details on value and different dimensions on value, see Shirk Evelyn (1965)

[15] Quine (1981: 57)

values. These events or things, valued for their own sake, therefore, become the conditions of assessing other kinds of event or thing.

This, according to Quine, also obtains in ethics. As he reasons, "many sorts of good behaviour have a low initial rating on the valuation scale, and are indulged in at first only for their inductive links to higher ends."[16] These good behaviours are arrived at through inductive reasoning, and they are used to generate higher ends, which are valued for themselves. The good behaviours, therefore, become means and the higher ends become the end. Hence, the good behaviour forms the premises of an inductive argument in which the higher end is the conclusion. The more the instances of the good behaviour are obtained, the more the higher end is confirmed. The good behaviour becomes a moral value if it is turned into an end-in-itself or a higher-end; which is demanded for its own sake, not as means to an end. This is done by making the good behaviour a general statement or a universal generalisation in a hypothetico-deductive method of reasoning. For Quine, it is this process of "transmutation of means into ends… (that) underlies moral training"[17]. Take for example, in Yoruba culture, if I prostrate to greet someone, my action will be applauded a good behaviour. This good behaviour becomes a premise of a higher end, say, respect. For Quine, the act becomes a moral value when the good behaviour, which is a mean to an end, transmuted into an end, and is therefore valued for itself and no longer as a means to an end. So, the act is performed habitually without experiencing the slightest applause. Hence, a general law ensued, through which other similar behaviour is assessed. Thus, consider this example:

(1) "it is a good behaviour for Yoruba male child to prostrate while greeting an elderly person"

(2) Biodun is a Yoruba male child

(3) Biodun prostrated while greeting his father

(4) Therefore, Biodun's act is a good behaviour.

The above is an instance of a hypothetico deductive method of reasoning. (1) is a hypothetical statement under which (2) and (3), the initial conditions or

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[16] Quine (1981:57)
[17] Quine (1981: 57)

instances, are subsumed, and once these two hold, (4) the conclusion is derived. It is through this system of reasoning that moral value is produced among human beings. This, indeed, is a technical affair, hence, as Quine remarks, "good behaviour, insofar, is technology"[18]. Quine's distinction between moral value from other kinds of values is summarized by Gibson: "moral values, as opposed to moral values, are 'irreducibly social', i.e., they are oriented towards the satisfactions of others"[19] The important point that is being underscored in this section is that moral values and moral standards are derived in the same way as scientific theories are derived.

3. *Ethics and the Charge of Methodological Infirmity*

The process of transmutation of means to ends as explicated above suggests that ethics follows the same pattern of reasoning in establishing moral values, as is the case in natural sciences. The establishment of this point should ordinarily provide a ground for accepting ethics as belonging to the naturalist family. However, Quine argues that the parity between ethics and science does not hold in respect of the method required in settling disagreements. For him, when disagreements occur on moral matters, "one regrets the methodological infirmity of ethics as compared with science".[20] He argues that there are empirical events or states of affair, which serve as empirical footholds of scientific theories. For example, there is the actual event of water getting boiled at 100ºc, which confirms or corroborates the scientific principle that "water boils at 100ºc". Similarly, there is the actual event of deliberate killing of innocent persons, which serve as empirical foothold of the moral code, 'murder, i.e., deliberate killing of person, is bad'. The problem is that "whereas, (in science) we can test a prediction against the independent course of observable nature, we can *judge the morality* of an act *only* by our moral standards themselves."[21] So, in case of disagreements about whether or not water boils at 100ºc, we can point to the physical fact of the actual event of water getting boiled at 100ºc, as the evidence for the justification of the prediction embedded

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[18] Quine (1981: 57)
[19] Gibson (Unpublished:10)
[20] Quine (1981:63)
[21] Quine (1981: 63). Italics mine.

in the scientific theory – water boils at 100ºc –, regrettably, there is no such fact of badness or wrongness, out there in the world, that would serve as evidence in the judgement of the act of deliberate killing of innocent persons as being morally bad or morally wrong, other than making a recourse back to the moral standard – 'deliberate killing of person is bad'. Hence, "science, thanks to its link with observation, retains some title to a correspondence theory of truth, but a coherence theory is evidently the lot of ethics[22]. This is because there is no observable entity that ethics can be linked to in the world.

As Quine further notes, "extrapolation in science, however, is under the welcome restraint of stubborn fact: failure of prediction. Extrapolation in morals has only our unsettled moral values themselves to answer to, and it is these that the extrapolation was meant to settle"[23]. It is on the basis of the unavailability of observable entity in ethical discourse that renders ethics incompetent as being a natural enterprise. Ethics belongs to the normative discourse, which is bound by its internal strings of, mostly debatable and non-objective, laws and theories, which are often the sources of moral disagreements and moral conflicts.

To repeat, Quine's charge is that in an attempt to resolve moral disagreements or moral conflicts, there are no 'empirical checkpoints', which are the solace of the scientist. Hence, ethics and science differ in a major respect, thus, the two belong into different boats. In what follows, we shall examine arguments for and against this position. In the end, an attempt is made to make a case for the ontology of moral facts, which when observed, would break the circle of reference to moral standard in order to justify moral judgments, and, hence, bridge the gap between science and morality.

There are at most, two known naturalists who had commented on the subject of Quinean ethnics. They are Flanagan[24] and Morton White[25]. For its sharp relevance to the dimension of arguments being sketched, I shall be concerned

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[22] Quine (1981: 63)

[23] Quine (1981: 65)

[24] Flanagan O. J. (1982: 56-74)

[25] Morton White (1986: 649-662). White's suggestion is that feeling would play the same role that physical facts play in observation. So, ethical judgment would then correspond to feelings in order to be justified. This suggestion was, however, refuted by Quine. For him, our feeling is part of the moral evaluation that needs justification. It is what conforms to this moral evaluation in the natural world that renders ethics methodologically infirmed. For details, see Quine, W.V. (1986: 663-665)

with Flanagan's attempt to advance the project of naturalizing. My understanding of Gibson's critique of Flanagan raises some issues, which needs further scrutiny. Notwithstanding these issues, Gibson's critique of Flanagan obviates the charge of methodological infirmity leveled against ethics.

Flanagan's contention of Quine's charge of methodological infirmity in ethics is not aimed at removing the infirmity. Rather, Flanagan argues that the charge is unwarranted because such a problem is not peculiar to ethics, but is a characteristic of all significant discourses. In the main, Flanagan argues that following Quine's holism, it is no longer fashionable for science to rely on observation as the paradigm of objectivity. Just like what obtained in ethics, the coherence theory of truth is also the lot of science, hence, it makes no sense to distinguish between science and ethics on the basis of methodology.

Gibson's challenge of Flanagan's position is that the latter is based on a misconstrued notion of the nature and scope of Quine's holism. Gibson shows that while Flanagan's conception of Quine's holism as, in summary, 'that all checks are ultimately intersystemic', is too broad, and therefore, erroneously concluded that ethics and science belong to the same boat, the correct conception of Quine's holism is a form of mitigated holism, which allows some sense of distinction between observation sentences and other kinds of sentences. The former have their own meaning derived from observation, while the latter derive their meanings from being members of a system. The crux of Gibson's challenge to Flanagan's understanding of Quine's holism is the failure to make this distinction. With this distinction, the gulf between science and ethics remains. What Gibson did not show, however, is that the observation sentences are mainly the lot of science. In other words, Gibson ought to show that ethical judgments cannot behave like observation sentences. In response, Gibson's acceptance, following Falanagan's that ethical statements can also have relation to experience, could suggest that ethics, just like science, has some title to the correspondence theory. However, Gibson thwarted this line of thought by reiterating Quine's earlier charge, though in another language, to show that Flanagan's suggestion, that consequence of a moral practice would be the observable fact that such ethical statements would correspondence to, would not suffice. Gibson insisted that in relation to moral values, there has to be objective facts, indisputable facts, which would exhibit the morality of the act: the wrongness or goodness, as the case may be, of the act, which ethical statements would correspond to. Without these facts, Quine's thesis of methodological infirmity remains.

It is pertinent to note that the problem explicated above is the root of the dispute between the proponents of the moral realist and moral anti-realist. The problem is described as follow: "Physicists appeal to the presence of protons to explain the observation of vapor trails in a cloud chamber. The vapor trails act on our visual system to produce an observation of them, and, with background knowledge, an observation that protons have passed through the cloud chamber, producing the vapor trail. But in the moral case there is nothing present in the objective facts to act on perceptual systems to produce the observations about moral rightness. Subject-side factors alone suffice to account for whatever moral observations or beliefs are generated in the situation"[26]. As a response to this anti-realist position, the moral realist argues to establish the ontology of moral facts. However, I believe that the threshold of the argument for the unity of ethics and science on the basis of the method of settling disputes is by establishing the ontology of independent, objective and moral facts which exists as parts of the fabrics of the world. Once established, it is to these facts that moral judgements or statements would correspond. In what follows, I shall attempt to articulate arguments that establish the ontology of moral facts.

4. *Moral Facts as the Threshold of Naturalized Ethics*

"Can't you *see* that *this* is *wrong*?" "Could you *imagine this* being *right*?" "How could you have done such *a thing* like *that* (which is *wrong*)?" These are questions that appeals to the *fact* of the *wrongness* of a particular act. In each case, the questioner invites the listener to *see, imagine,* and *consider* the fact that the act in question is wrong. What is being demanded is to, like natural fact which is out there, independent of the observer; establish the ontology of the fact of *wrongness* as an observable, objective entity that exists independently of the moral subjects.

What I propose, however, is that moral fact is an 'entity' that exists in all possible world, in which there is no world in which moral discourse operates and the fact would be denied. By this I mean that the 'entity' *wrongness* in a moral judgment, such as, 'This act is wrong', 'exists', not as entities in the 'actual world', and observable through empirical apparatus with which natural facts are observed, moral facts are kinds of entities that are 'observable' as a possible

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[26] Rottschaefer, W.A. (1999: 1)

entity in every 'possible moral world'. In this possible moral world, these moral facts are 'observable' giving its stipulated laws and principles. It is this entity that is referred to when we say that 'an act, say x, is wrong. In this case, x is wrong if and only if x is wrong in every possible world in which x exists'. The point is that x being wrong in every possible world is the fact that is being appealed to in the moral judgment: 'x is morally wrong'. If there is a possible world in which x would be right, then the moral judgment that 'x is morally wrong' would not correspond to any moral fact. So, when I say that 'Can't you see that this act is wrong?' I am only inviting you to 'observe' the fact that there is no possible world in which the act exists and it is morally right. If my hearer could justifiably show that there is a world in which the act is right, then my moral judgment would not correspond to any fact.

What derives from this understanding of moral fact is that the actual wrongness of a morally wrong act is not an empirical entity; it is a fact because it is not corrigible in the present and any possible world. Though, the fact is not observable in the same sense in which natural facts are observed, they are observed by all the subjects concerned by searching through the entities in all possible worlds in order to see there is no fact that run contrary to the moral fact.

This account of moral facts above rests heavily on the notion of possible world. It is also based on a distinction between 'world actual' and 'morally possible world'. A detailed discussion on the notion and problems associated with possible world is beyond the scope of this paper. I shall, however, offer a brief discussion of these notions in order to explicate my position.

'Possible world' is one of the numerous terms used by philosophers to elucidate, analyse and proffer solutions to a number of philosophical problems.[27] However, the question 'what is a possible world?' is a philosophical problem that has no consensus solution. However, there are, among others, two prominent positions. The first is the extreme realist position, largely attributed

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[27] The notion of a possible world is not new in Philosophy. The Pre-Socratics had in one way or the other postulated the idea of possible worlds in their speculations about reality. Of particular interest is Parmenides idea of two ways of the world and the Atomists': Leucippus's and Democritus's idea of 'unboundedly many worlds'. For detailed account of the Pre-Socratic conceptions of possible worlds and what they use it to achieve, see Kirk, G.S. et al, (1983). In the contemporary epochs, the notion is commonly used by philosophers in modal logic to elucidate the distinction between necessity and possibility. The notion is prominent among Kripke, Plantinga and David Lewis to mention just a few.

to David Lewis, which maintained that a possible world is another real or concrete world just like ours. On this view, the notion of possible worlds is not just a philosophical tool useful for the purpose of elucidating philosophical arguments or claims. Possible worlds are real in some way. In this conception of possible world, what makes worlds distinct is that they are spatio-temporally separated from one another. In other words, every way that a world could have been is a way that some existing physical world really is. So, possible worlds are real worlds and they actually exist in the same sense the real or concrete world we inhabit exists.[28]

The other position is the moderate realist position supported by Alvin Plantinga, A. Adams and others, who have claimed that a possible world, is nothing but an abstract entity, and does not really exist. For the moderate realist, the notion of a possible world is merely a useful philosophical tool for making arguments. The moderate realist position is that the notion of a possible world refers to the ways we imagine that the world could have been different from the way it is. A possible world is a way a universe might have been. Possible worlds are counterfactual states of affairs. States of affairs are abstract entities that such phrases as

(1) 'Socrates died after drinking poison'
and
(2) 'Socrates having lived after drinking poison'

refer to. Some states of affairs obtain, others do not. Proposition (1) refers to a state of affairs that obtained and proposition (2) refers to a state of affairs that does not obtain. Though the latter does not obtain, it is a possible state of affairs. It is different from a logically impossible and either causally or empirically impossible state of affairs.[29] The concept of a state of affairs is used to define what a possible world is. We imagine some states of affairs as being different from what they in fact are. These different states of affair are referred to as possible worlds.[30] As opposed to the extreme realist view that possible worlds are concrete worlds that exit just as our world exists, the moderate

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[28] Lewis, David (1986:2)

[29] A state of affairs that is logically impossible if it does not respect the law of contradiction. For example, a state of affair such as 'it is raining and it is not raining' is logically impossible. A state of affair is causally or naturally impossible if it stipulates what cannot be physically achieved. For example, the state of affair 'Obasanjo having swum through all seas in the world' or 'Obasanjo having spent 1 million years on earth'.

[30] Alvin Plantinga (1978: 44).

realists assert that possible worlds are possible or imagined state of affair. It is how a world could possibly have been.

Following the extreme realist arguments, it may mean that there is no difference between the actual world and other possible worlds. This is because, for them, 'the actual world' means 'the world where I am located', and each possible world is actual from the point of view of its inhabitants. The term 'actual' is an indexical term like 'I'. It means 'part of the world of which I am a part' or 'part of the world of which this utterance is a part'. What Lewis means by the claim that 'actual' is an indexical is that actuality is not a necessary property of a particular world. According to Lewis, "surely, it is a contingent matter which world is actual. A contingent matter is one that varies from world to world. At one world, the contingent matter goes one way; at another, another. So, at one world, one world is actual; and at another, another. How can this be absolute actuality? – The relativity is manifest!"[31]

This means that every world is potentially actual; actuality is a property relative to all possible worlds. An Actual world is only one of other possible worlds. It is called an "actual world," not because it is different in kind from other possible worlds, but because it is the world in which the speaker inhabits. To the inhabitants of other worlds, their worlds are actual.[32] Put differently, for Lewis, the word 'actual' and the phrase 'the actual world' being indexicals are rigid designators. Lewis's argument is that when I utter the word 'I', it denotes me. Innumerable number of persons could utter the word 'I' at the same time; the referent of the word is each individual who utters the word.

However, Lewis' view about actuality rests on the realist assumption that there are other worlds that exist just as the world we live in and the inhabitants of these worlds are just as we are; it is this assumption that needs to be proved. The argument about indexicality of 'actual' and 'actual world' merely shows that all the possible worlds are potentially actual. There is a difference between a potentially actual world and a real world. The real world is different because apart from being actual, it is real, while the other actual worlds remain at the level of potentiality. However, Lewis' account would not admit this distinction. This is because, for him, there is no difference between worlds. All worlds are the same. The moderate realists would accept the distinction, and this makes their account more plausible. Let us explore moderate realism on the actuality of

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[31] Lewis, David (1986: 94)
[32] Lewis, David (1973: 86)

possible worlds.

The moderate realists states that the actual world differs in ontological status from merely possible ones in that it is the only world that obtains. For Plantinga, 'an actual world is a maximal possible world that obtains.'[33] This implies that an actual world has the same status as the other possible worlds, but it is special because it obtains. A possible world that obtains is one that actually exists. While other possible worlds remain non-actual, the actual world is real. An actual world is a description of a state of affairs that is real, different from 'how things could have been'. 'How things could have been' is the description of possible worlds. So, possible worlds are different from actual worlds. The latter is real, while the former is merely possible. For moderate realism on possible world, only one world obtains, and it is that world that is named actual world. All other worlds that do not obtain exist as possible worlds.[34]

Given this understanding, the natural world is the actual world. It is the picture of how the world is actually is. The possible worlds are how the world could have been. A possible moral world is not an actual moral world, it is how a moral world could have been; it is, following the moderate realist position, an imagined or possible moral state of affair.

The point I am canvassing is that the moral facts are real in the sense that they exist in all possible moral worlds. A moral judgment is tested against a moral fact that exists in all possible worlds; it is a fact because it is found in possible worlds, and there is no world in which its contrary is found. If, however, there is a possible world where it is justifiably shown that the moral fact does not exist, then the moral judgment would not correspond to any moral fact. Such a judgment is therefore false. In this respect, moral fact, the wrongness in a moral judgment – deliberate killing is morally wrong – is a fact, if and only if, it is shown that there exists no possible moral world in which the act is of deliberate killing is morally right.

The mistake the naturalists like Quine makes is to treat moral fact as an entity, like neutron, proton, neurons etc, all of which are physical entities that exist in the physical or actual world. Moral facts are facts of a kind which exist in all possible worlds. I would have agreed with G.E. Moore[35] that those who are

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[33] Alvin Plantinga (1978: 45)
[34] Alvin Plantinga. (1978: 47)
[35] Moore G.E. (1971: 16-17)

looking for moral facts among natural facts commits naturalistic fallacy, however, I disagree with Moore's description of moral properties as some kind of 'simple, unanalysable properties' which are wholly distinct from other natural properties. This is because this conception makes moral properties and moral facts to be some kind of queer and mysterious entities[36]. Moral facts, in my own understanding, are not entities. They are facts about how things are in all possible worlds. This fact justifies the truth of a moral judgment if and only if there is no possible moral world where it does not exist. What I accept from Moore and Mackie is that moral facts are not observable or discoverable by empirical investigation; they are, however, not entities, either mysterious or queer. They are facts in any possible moral world, which are appealed to in moral discourses.

Some possible problems that could be raised against my understanding of moral facts are: first, it could be argued that my account does not establish the ontology of moral facts. Unlike physical facts to which we can identify and observe, are moral facts identifiable or locatable in all possible moral worlds? This view rests wholly on ontological naturalism, which holds that "only natural objects, kinds and properties are real."[37] If this were correct, possible moral worlds would have to be physical or actual worlds, and moral facts would have to exist physically in such worlds. However, given our understanding of possible moral worlds as the way moral discourse could have been or a possible moral state of affair, possible moral worlds are not the same as physical worlds; hence, moral facts in these worlds are not physical facts; they are facts that exist in such possible worlds.

Another problem is that suppose it is conceded that moral facts are some kind of facts that exist in possible moral worlds, the question is how would this help the case of naturalizing ethics? In other worlds, since moral facts do not obey natural laws and principles, then ethics could not be declared a natural discipline. In response, I wish to argue that the project of naturalizing ethics needs not follow the way of ontological naturalism; I think it could be modeled

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[36] This is the same sense in which moral facts have been described by J.L Mackie who noted that there were objective moral values (moral facts), 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 wee aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different form our ordinary ways of knowing everything else". See Mackie J.L. (1988: 115).

[37] Kim Jaegwon and Ernest Sosa. (1985: 343).

towards methodological naturalism. The methodological naturalists do not claim parity among all disciplines, they simply hold that "the best methods of inquiry in the social sciences or philosophy are, or are to be modeled on, those of the natural sciences."[38] In this respect, it is not essential that in modeling an inquiry on philosophy on the method of the natural sciences that all the apparatus used in one must be of the same kind in the other.

What I am trying to establish is that moral facts are facts of moral discourse, which obtain in every possible moral world. True moral judgments correspond to these facts in order to ascertain their truth or falsity. This method establishing the truth or otherwise of moral judgments is modeled on the method of testing theories in natural worlds. However, while in the natural sciences, scientists rely on their own kind of facts (natural) to confirm their theories, ethicists rely on their own kind of facts: moral facts, which exist in every possible moral world, to confirm their moral judgments. In order to confirm a natural judgment or theory, the natural or actual world is observed in order to establish the presence of natural facts, once these are discovered, the judgment is confirmed. In the same way, moral philosopher search through the possible moral worlds to establish that the fact of the moral judgment is present, once this is established, the moral judgment is confirmed.

5. *Conclusion*

The crux of one of Quine's argument in "On the Nature of Moral Values" that I addressed in this paper is that ethics does not belong to the same class of naturalism to which ontology and epistemology have been admitted. The main reason for denying ethics membership of naturalism, according to Quine, is that ethics as compared to science, is methodologically infirmed. This is because there are no moral facts in the world to which moral judgments correspond, through which moral judgments could be confirmed. Having explicated this problem, I attempted to show that, though not in the same natural or actual world, moral facts exist in every possible moral world. Once there is no possible world in which the judgment is contradicted, then the truth of the moral judgment is a moral fact. It is this moral fact that moral judgments correspond to in order to confirm their truth or falsity. Since, this is the method at play in

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[38] Kim Jaegwon, et.al., (1985: 343)

science, I, therefore, think that Quine's charge that ethics is methodologically infirm can be challenged.

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