

Article

The Moral Argument for the Existence of God: An Evaluation of Some Recent Discussions

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the discussion on the Moral Argument for the existence of God—an important argument of natural theology which is relevant to science and religion dialogues—by showing that the argument can be formulated in a such way that avoids the lack of comprehensiveness in Andrew Loke’s original formulation and the unnecessarily complicated reformulation offered in Jack et al.’s criticism of Loke. This paper also contributes to the discussion by demonstrating the failure of relaxed (moral) realism proposed by Jack et al. to rebut the Moral Argument and offers replies to their other objections concerning moral obligations and social relations, the law-like character of moral obligations, and moral truths and responsibilities.

Keywords: moral argument; relaxed moral realism; moral obligation; social relations; natural theology

1. Introduction

One of the most prominent arguments of natural theology is the Moral Argument for the existence of God. One of the most eminent scientists who is involved in contemporary science and religion dialogue—Dr Francis Collins—cited this argument as one of the important factors that led to his conversion from atheism to theism (Collins 2006, pp. 19–28). One significance of this argument in science and religion dialogues is that the practice of science itself requires ethical guidance, and yet science by itself is unable to ground objective morality (even non-theist philosophers recognise this point; see the citation of Parfit’s view in Section 2.3). The Moral Argument attempts to show that objective morality is grounded in God, hence indicating the potential relevance of theistic religious ethics for the practice of science.

The Moral Argument continues to be actively debated in the recent literature. In 2024, Evan Jack, Mustafa Khuramy, and Erik Schulz published their article (Jack et al. 2024), titled New Moral Argument for God Fares No Better, with the intention to criticise Andrew Loke’s new deductive formulation of the Moral Argument (Loke 2023), which had sought to improve on previous formulations of the argument (Loke 2023). Although Jack et al. had pointed out one omission in Loke’s logical syllogism with the purpose of clearer clarification, their many other arguments in several sections of their article lack adequate justification. To demonstrate this, we shall rebut their criticisms by systematically going through the reasoning in their paper. In the latter part of this article, we shall briefly analyse their proposed relaxed (moral) realism and show that it is logically unsound. We shall also suggest how Loke’s formulation of the New Moral Argument can be improved such that it does lead to the conclusion that objective moral truths are metaphysically grounded in a divine personal entity.



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2. Summary of Loke's Original Argument and Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's Criticism

2.1. Allegation of Invalid Argument or False Premise

Let us begin by briefly explaining Loke's New Moral Argument:

1. A number of objective moral truths exist.
2. These objective moral truths are either metaphysically grounded in an impersonal entity, a non-divine personal entity, or a divine personal entity, i.e., God, or they are brute facts.
3. These objective moral truths cannot be metaphysically grounded in an impersonal entity.
4. These objective moral truths cannot be metaphysically grounded in a non-divine personal entity.
5. These objective moral truths can be metaphysically grounded in a divine personal entity, i.e., God.
6. These objective moral truths are not brute facts.
7. Therefore, these objective moral truths are metaphysically grounded in a divine personal entity, i.e., God (from 2 to 6).
8. Therefore, God exists (from 1 and 7).

The first premise states that a number of objective moral truths exist. Loke gives examples that many would not disagree with, such as 'it is wrong to torture babies for fun' (Loke 2023, pp. 28, 32, 34 and 35). In addition, many people would find it implausible to accept that rape is not objectively wrong (Loke 2023, p. 26). Premise 2 intends to provide an exhaustive list: either objective moral truths are metaphysically grounded in an impersonal entity, a non-divine personal entity, or a divine personal entity, or they are brute facts. After eliminating the three other alternatives by justifying their implausibility (premises 3, 4, and 6) in the rest of Loke's article, the remaining alternative is that the objective moral truths are metaphysically grounded in a divine personal entity (premises 5 and 7).

However, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz scrutinised Loke's new deductive formulation and argued that, while Loke's formulation is a better formulation than William Lane Craig's version, it does not guarantee the conclusion that objective moral truths are metaphysically grounded in a divine personal entity. Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz tried to 'help' in reconstructing the argument to make it more logically exhaustive, but even then they claimed that the argument failed, as Loke ignores relaxed realism—one metaethical view that admits there are objective moral truths, but these truths 'lack actual states of affairs as their truthmakers—according to which moral truths are not metaphysically grounded (distinct from a brute fact view, on which moral truths do have facts as their truthmakers but the facts lack explanation)' (Jack et al. 2024, Section 1.1). They claim that moral realism does not necessarily affirm that there are objective moral facts, even though it affirms that there are objective moral truths (Jack et al. 2024, footnote 1). With that, they come to the conclusion that Loke has failed to consider relaxed realism as a distinct alternative concerning objective moral truths.

To elaborate, the main contention in Section 1 of Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's paper is their accusation of Loke's second premise. They alleged that the second premise threatens the whole argument, i.e., Loke failed to consider that there are moral truths which are metaphysically ungrounded (this is distinct from a brute fact view). They gave their own three interpretations of Loke's second premise and yet admitted that it renders the argument either unsound or invalid. This is mainly because, as they claimed, relaxed realism was not considered. Since it is their own interpretation and their own conclusion of their interpretations, we see no reason to reanalyse the plausibility of their way of interpretation. Nonetheless, we do agree with their third interpretation that Loke's second premise should

be read as a disjunction, and we agree with their suggestion that the possibility that there may be moral truths that are not metaphysically grounded needs to be considered. In Section 3 of this paper, it will be shown that the New Moral Argument can be modified. Having said this, we are of the opinion that ‘brute fact’ and ‘relaxed realism’ are of a similar category, whereby they are metaphysically ungrounded. If Loke’s argument against ‘brute facts’ discussed under premise 6 is also valid against ‘metaphysically ungrounded’ (as we will show in the following sections and reply to other objections offered by Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz), then it would be valid against ‘relaxed realism’. Hence, the objection by Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz does not threaten the whole argument, although it does call for a more precise formulation of Loke’s argument.

2.2. Objective Moral Truths and Relaxed Realism

Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz alleged that Loke failed to consider other possible alternative(s) such as relaxed realism. Although they mentioned Parfit’s name, they did not provide a further explanation of Parfit’s moral concept to clearly demonstrate that relaxed realism is relevantly distinct from a brute fact view in a way that avoids Loke’s criticism of the brute fact view. Indeed, their support for relaxed realism is not convincing because (as we shall explain further in the rest of this article) they fail to recognise that things without ontological weight cannot lay claim over us and give us duties. We argue that moral obligations are characterised by accountability, responsibility, expectation, prohibition, and a binding character, all of which indicate that there must be Someone who sets the expectation; there is a binding effect that prohibits us and thus holds us accountable.

Necessary Grounding on a Truthmaker

In the later part of our article, we shall elaborate more on the law-like characteristics of objective moral truth, supporting our argument that moral obligations necessarily entail a relationship between the authority and the ones that are obliged to obey. It holds humans accountable to the ultimate Truthmaker, i.e., God. Thus, the existence of this duty clearly demonstrates that a moral obligation has to be metaphysically grounded on an authoritative truthmaker. At this juncture, we briefly add on an important philosophical consideration for why moral obligation must have this ontological weight, laying claim over us and giving us duties.

The characteristic of morality is neither mechanical nor random. There is no such morality that has no purpose or is executed without a will. Morality is always directed to a purposeful and meaningful end, e.g., human flourishing. Since moral actions are always guided by goals or ends with intentionality, their source must have a purpose and a will. Since morality is authoritative with a binding effect, the source must also be from an authority. Morality as being objective would mean it transcends human individuals, society, and time. This would also mean that its source transcends human individuals, societies, and time. So, objective morality has the feature of universality, which holds across time and societies. Taking note that such characteristics of purpose, will or intentionality, and authority only occur in person, then only a personal truthmaker fits the description of the source of morality. Since abstract objects, whatever brute facts, or any impersonal entities are not personal, then it does not have any personal source, and thus does not have any robust metaphysical grounding. Obviously, non-personal entities are disqualified. And since no other personal creature has the ultimate authority, one would safely conclude that a personal truthmaker as the authoritative source of objective morality fits the description of a personal God. In other words, objective moral truths are metaphysically anchored in a transcendent, personal divine being. Such a grounding decisively challenges and ultimately undermines the accounts of objective morality proposed by relaxed realism,

whose ontological commitments lack requisite metaphysical depth. Hence, objective moral truth is metaphysically grounded in a divine personal entity. This would clearly rebut whatever description or characteristics of objective morality are drawn out by the relaxed realists.

2.3. Rebutting the Relaxed Realist Mathematic Analogy

Therefore, we conclude that since relaxed realists assume that there is no truthmaker for moral truths, it is very similar to brute facts in that they are taken as given and do not have an explanation or a cause. If there is no truthmaker, then brute facts and moral truths, according to the relaxed realists, are the starting points in a chain of reasoning or explanation.

To elaborate, relaxed realists claim that there are objective moral truths but do not rely on any metaphysical grounding. Therefore, these truths are irreducibly normative. They frequently use mathematics as an analogy to compare with morality. They argue that just as mathematics are not reducible to any set of non-normative truths and do not need to be metaphysically grounded, so are any objective moral truths. Although Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz did not mention mathematics¹ as an analogy to compare with objective moral truths, we offer a brief argument against this analogy since the relaxed realists whom they cite (e.g., Parfit 2011, vol. 1, pp. 488–510; Scanlon 1998, lecture 2 and 4; Scanlon 2014, pp. 62–63) often invoke mathematics in their arguments.

For example, Parfit acknowledges that moral truths cannot be explained in naturalistic terms, nor are empirically discoverable, but he then claims that these non-empirical normative moral truths are in these ways like logical, mathematical, and modal truths (Parfit 2017). Parfit writes

If, as I believe, reason-involving normative facts are in a separate distinctive category, there is no close analogy for their irreducibility to natural facts. These normative facts are in some ways like certain other kinds of necessary truths. One example are mathematical truths, such as the fact that $7 \times 8 = 56$. . . normative and natural facts differ too deeply for any form of Normative Naturalism to succeed. (Parfit 2011, vol. 2, p. 326)

Scanlon believes that

the way of thinking about these matters that makes most sense is a view that does not privilege science but takes as basic a range of domains, including mathematics, science, and moral and practical reasoning. It holds that statements within all of these domains are capable of truth and falsity, and that the truth values of statements about one domain, insofar as they do not conflict with statements of some other domain, are properly settled by the standards of the domain that they are about. (Scanlon 2014)

And the relaxed realists, including Scanlon, engage in these normative truths based on the principles, language, and framework of the respective domain itself, rather than stepping outside it to analyse or critique it externally. Scanlon claims that “*the truth values of statements in [the normative domain], including existential statements, are properly settled by standards internal to that domain*” (Scanlon 2014, p. 20).

The problem with the above views is that their proponents fail to see that mathematics and morality fall under different sub-sets of a larger domain. Instead, their disanalogies are more significant in a way that they belong to different domains of ontology, i.e., mathematics being in the abstract realm, independent from human relationships, whilst morality concerns how actions ought to be rather than how they are described, creating obligations amongst relationships with one another. To locate morality with respect to some truths

studied by empirical sciences or mathematics with no metaphysical grounding is like a kind of category mistake. Mathematics does not have a feature of moral obligation, rights, and duties that require a personal relationship. Unlike mathematics or logic, which are independent from the natural universes or any metaphysical realm, objective moral truths have the character of moral obligation and rights, which must be grounded in persons with certain properties. Any breach of it made by a moral agent may entail an infringement against or detriment to the moral patient (including the moral person who breached).

Relaxed realists frequently argue that moral truths, just like mathematics, lack accessibility to direct perception. As McGrath notes, they view that unlike our direct observational knowledge of purely descriptive truths about the world around us, irreducible normative or moral truths cannot be recognised on the basis of direct observation. However, we do arrive at the conclusion that mathematical knowledge exists. As one applies numerical properties, they can directly perceive states of affairs that consist of physical objects instantiating mathematical and relational properties. But what is not perceptually accessible are the abstract mathematical truths themselves (McGrath 2014). Whilst one may verify or falsify the objective answer on the basis of direct observation (e.g., two apples + three apples is five, and cannot be any number), they can never recognise irreducible normative or moral truths on the basis of direct observation. This is because morality does not have perceptual accessibility. As we argued above, the properties of objective moral truths are different from those of mathematics. Therefore, because they belong to different domains, both are disanalogous.

3. Salvaging the Argument?

Let us now consider Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's attempt to help salvage Loke's argument in Section 2 of their paper:

- (1) If there are objective moral truths, then they are metaphysically substantive truths.
- (2) If they are metaphysically substantive, then they are either grounded by an impersonal entity, a non-divine personal entity, or a divine personal entity (i.e., God), or they are brute facts.
- (3) If they are grounded by a divine personal entity, then God exists.
- (4) There are objective moral truths.
- (5) They are not brute facts.
- (6) They are not grounded by an impersonal entity.
- (7) They are not grounded by a non-divine personal entity.
- (8) Therefore, they are metaphysically substantive truths (from 1 and 4).
- (9) Therefore, they are either grounded by an impersonal entity, a non-divine personal entity, a divine personal entity (i.e., God), or they are brute facts (from 2 and 8).
- (10) Therefore, they are grounded by a divine personal entity (i.e., God) (from 5, 6, 7, and 9).
- (11) Therefore, God exists (from 3 and 10).

In their above reconstructed New Moral Argument, the relaxed realist view would be considered in their premise 1. Nevertheless, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's reconstruction of Loke's New Moral Argument takes us through an unnecessary and longer path of argument.

By contrast, it is simpler to reformulate the argument as follows:

1. A number of objective moral truths exist.
2. These objective moral truths are either metaphysically grounded in an impersonal entity, a non-divine personal entity, a combination of impersonal entity and non-divine personal entity, or a divine personal entity, i.e., God, or they are not metaphysically grounded.
3. These objective moral truths cannot be metaphysically grounded in an impersonal entity.

4. These objective moral truths cannot be metaphysically grounded in a non-divine personal entity.
5. These objective moral truths cannot be metaphysically grounded in a combination of impersonal entity and non-divine personal entity.
6. These objective moral truths can be metaphysically grounded in a divine personal entity, i.e., God.
7. It is not the case that these objective moral truths are not metaphysically grounded.
8. Therefore, these objective moral truths are metaphysically grounded in a divine personal entity, i.e., God (from 2 to 7).
9. Therefore, God exists (from 1 and 8).

By simply changing ‘brute fact’ in premise 2 of Loke’s original formulation to ‘metaphysically ungrounded’, the relaxed realist view would be considered in premise 2 and premise 7 in the new formulation stated above. The other advantage of our new formulation is that it remedies Loke’s original formulation, which missed ‘a combination of impersonal entity and non-divine personal entity’ in the syllogism (it should be noted, however, that this combination hypothesis is in fact addressed in the rest of Loke’s original article).

4. On Assuming Moral Realism

Though not expressly, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz indirectly but hastily conclude that Loke’s assumption on the existence of objective moral truths is more of a bare claim rather than relying on any reasonable facts. They accuse Loke of assuming moral realism without providing any factual proof. Neither analysing the context of Loke’s passage nor giving the benefit of the doubt that it may possibly be that Loke does not want to look dogmatically 100% empirically correct, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz picked that single word ‘*assume*’ used by Loke (2023, p. 28). With that single word, ‘*assume*’, they quickly formed their opinion that Loke took something for granted without proof. Careful English language users take cognisance that ‘*assume*’ does not always imply a lack of strong facts. It can also mean to take on a role or responsibility². In the context of Loke’s passage, the moral prescriptive samples imply that on the basis of the obvious, it is easily assumed that these are objective moral truths.

Not satisfied with the samples of obvious objective moral truths given by Loke, they also picked a single word (i.e., ‘*seem*’) from Evans’ statement (Evans 2013, p. 160) that Loke quoted. From the word ‘*seem*’, they imply that both Evans and Loke are not clear about what facts are associated with objectivity. Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz repeated that passage for easy reference, as we do here too:

“... a good case can be made that moral obligations are experienced as objective; they *seem* to have the kind of objectivity we associate with “facts.” In the moral case these are facts that we sometimes feel very certain about, and at some times wish were not facts, but they still (often enough) feel like facts. We find it hard (though not impossible) to wish them away when we want to, and we are usually quite confident of their reality when we see ourselves as having been wronged.”

Merriam-Webster Dictionary briefly defined ‘*seem*’ (verb) as

- 1: to appear to the observation or understanding.
- 2: to give the impression of being.

The above two alternative meanings given by Merriam-Webster Dictionary did not unequivocally indicate that whenever ‘*seem*’ is used, it must mean that there is some form of ambiguity or an improbable basis. When a person uses the word ‘*seem*’, they mean that something appears to them; or gives an impression of what they had observed. Any

‘appearance’ or ‘impression’ does not necessarily connote that it derives from very little observation or improbability.

Why Assuming Moral Realism Still Outweighs Relaxed Realism

Having refuted Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz’s misinterpretation of Loke’s assumption for moral realism without providing any factual proofs, we will briefly argue that even without proof (as alleged by Jack et al.), moral realism would still be a firmer ethical foundation than relaxed realism. However, we note that it is beyond the scope of this paper to defend moral realism against the anti-realist alternatives which Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz briefly mentioned; this has been accomplished by other scholars elsewhere (For example, [Shafer-Landau 2003](#); [Enoch 2011](#); [Baggett and Walls 2025](#)). Rather, the purpose of this paper is to focus on the dispute between Loke and Jack and his co-authors concerning Loke’s claim that ‘if one affirms moral realism...one should affirm theism’ ([Loke 2023](#), pp. 25–26). Here, briefly, we note that, as argued elsewhere in this paper, relaxed realism risks collapsing into moral relativism. Even the relaxed realist Paiman Karimi admitted in his 2024 article ([Karimi 2024](#)) that: “... relaxed realists can understand normative belief in a minimalist sense...” and “... fail to distinguish themselves from quasi-realists who accept normative belief in the minimalist sense” ([Karimi 2024](#)). Whilst relaxed realists commonly aim to preserve the objectivity of moral discourse without committing to metaphysical moral facts, Karimi acknowledges that this minimalist approach makes it difficult to distinguish relaxed realism from quasi-realism, thereby undermining its claim to realism. Karimi tries to address this problem by accounting for normative belief based on a functionalist theory of mind. Nevertheless, his proposed solution only focuses on the epistemological issue of tracking moral truths that serves to distinguish relaxed realism from quasi-realism ([Karimi 2024](#), pp. 14–16) but does not address the metaphysical problem concerning the lack of metaphysical grounding for these truths (p. 10), a problem which we shall elaborate below. In short, relaxed realism struggles to maintain its philosophical distinctiveness due to a lack of a robust account of why moral beliefs should be considered objectively true. Without robust metaphysical grounding, relaxed realism inadvertently concedes the very objectivity it claims to defend.

On the other spectrum, moral realism affirms that objective moral truths exist independently of human opinion, providing a stable foundation for ethical reasoning and critique. Therefore, even if no adequate proof is provided, assuming moral realism still outweighs relaxed realism. It offers a more coherent and action-guiding framework than relaxed realism. However, Miles Tucker argues that “relaxed moral realists are not ontologically committed to moral properties” and merely “permits a nominalist form ... that is both simpler and more ecumenical” ([Tucker 2025](#)). He states that

“... moral philosophy is immune from ontological concerns not because there are moral properties that somehow resist metaphysical investigation, but because the existence of objective, irreducible moral truths does not require the existence of moral properties. How can this nominalist revision to relaxed realism be achieved? We might require moral properties if (i) moral properties are explanatory or (ii) moral truths ontologically commit us to the existence of moral properties. As we have seen, relaxed realists deny (i); they believe that morality is independent from ontology and thus fundamental moral truths are not explained by appealing to the existence of anything, including moral properties. But this, on its own, tells us little about (ii)”. (ibid.)

Indeed, it tells little about how relaxed realists can show that moral truths ontologically lead them to believe in the existence of moral properties. To be immune from such ontological concerns on moral properties is like saying, “We can talk and reason about moral

truths as if they're objective, but we don't need to believe in actual moral properties to do so." This demonstrates that relaxed realists strip away any metaphysical commitment and treat moral truth as a linguistic or functional construct, not a metaphysical fact, yet relaxed realists struggle to explain why moral truths should be binding if they lack explanatory grounding. In conclusion, even a provisional commitment to moral realism has its practical indispensability, coherence, and supports ethical accountability and universal moral critique, strongly outweighing relaxed realism, a concept without a robust ontological basis. A presupposition that God exists within moral realism is more explanatorily powerful than a relaxed realist's denial of a truthmaker. If God exists, knowledge of robust morality is more readily explained (Baggett and Walls 2025, p. 92).

5. Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's Relaxed Realism and Their Canvas Analogy

5.1. *Bad Canvas Illustration*

'Relaxed realism' is sporadically mentioned in almost all sections of Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's article but its meaning and applicability are not clearly explained in the specific passages mentioned. The only worthy explanation of relaxed realism is in their Section 4, which is only one paragraph in length, most of which is illustrative. The only positive credit we may give is that they intend to provide as simple as possible of an illustration that any layman can comprehend. But that simple illustration does no justice in explaining that relaxed realism is the best alternative to understand objective moral truths, as their illustration can be easily interpreted as having the characteristic of subjectivity. Their illustration is quoted below for easy reference:

Imagine we have a blank canvas, such a canvas represents the whole of reality. We then commit to a set of truths—for example, "the Sun exists," "there are planets," etc. Sometimes, when we commit to truths, they seem to add paint to the picture. When we commit to the aforementioned two truths, we must paint our Sun and some planets. We might also commit to other truths, like "Forms exist" or "God exists," and then paint the Platonic Heavens or write "God" on the upper part of the canvas. No matter how we do it, it seems that committing to such truths forces us to add some metaphysical paint to our canvas. Some truths, however, are not like this, for they don't add any paint to the picture. Some truths, such as negative existentials, tell us what paint not to add. (Jack et al. 2024, Section 4)

We do not share their logic on how relaxed realism can be subscribed to objective moral truths, especially when their illustration seems to imply that reality is subject to us to want to *add paint to the picture*. There are so many of 'us'. Are they saying all of 'us' collectively agree to add the same metaphysical paint to our canvas? Again, there are so many 'our' canvases. Assuming that Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz are implying that 'our' canvas is how all of us invariably view the same canvas and add the same paint, then objective truths are grounded metaphysically by *us*—the non-divine personal entity. And are they referring to 'us' as each individual non-divine personal entity or collective as one metaphysical non-divine personal entity? Whether individually or collectively, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz still have a problem with how objective moral truths have no truthmaker. If truths are collectively agreed upon (consciously, intentionally, or coincidentally) to add the same metaphysical paint, are they not the truthmaker? Or did they discover the objective truths? If they collectively (which entails an indeterminately vast number of individuals—an epistemic claim for which empirical verification is, in principle, unattainable) discovered the objective truth, then they may assume that the objective truth discovered has a truthmaker who originally painted the canvas.

Their illustration also presumes that the ‘truth’ about God is painted (added) to the set of truths we committed. This imagery of a Platonic Heaven or human God willingly chosen to commit as ‘objective truth’ *forces us to add some metaphysical paint to our canvas* (reality). Their illustration of relaxed realism seems to be more subjective than objective, since each person is allowed to paint their own picture of truths, creating their own canvas of reality. With that weak illustration, we conclude that relaxed realism is no part of any objective moral truth; thereby, it is irrelevant and even unsound to whatever reformulation of the New Moral Argument.

In addition, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz said that there are truths like moral truths that do not tell us what to do with the brush that paints reality at all (ibid.). If truths force us or do not force us to add paint or refrain from adding paint to the picture when we commit to them (ibid.) then what makes us decide to add or refrain from adding to our own subjective picture of reality? What is that truth, or who is to decide which truths do not have anything to do with the brush and are not metaphysically substantive? (ibid.) Based on their canvas analogy, the answer seems to be the individual person who adds paint to the picture, with no one person having the ultimate decision of what paint to add to the picture. Is this not connoting subjectivity? We believe they can obtain a better illustration. However, good illustrations are usually difficult to come by for unsound concepts.

For us, such a misconception of Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz’s divine entity as an addition to the upper part of the canvas (reality) does not help in proving God’s existence. Their wrong presupposition of the nature of God makes God irrelevant in the objective Moral Argument. If based on that wrong presupposition, then it is obvious that Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz will conclude that it is not necessary for Loke to *make reference to God or any other metaphysically substantive entity* (Jack et al. 2024, Section 5) since they and the relaxed realists already presupposed that there is no truthmaker. However, in the definition of God we are using, God is personal, and His existence is not subject to any person’s imagination expressed in his or her subjective painting of the canvas (reality). The existence of God is prior to the canvas. God cannot be equated to the existence of their ‘canvas’, i.e., whole reality. Truth is not subject to us in deciding to add, subtract, or refrain from any coloured paint. Similarly, the existence of objective moral truth is grounded in the existence of this God. Unlike Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz’s misconception of the nature of God, we believe that God does not depend on any existing forms or properties. This is God’s attribute of aseity (from the Latin *a se*, “by itself”), which Moreland and Craig concisely and precisely explain:

“... God does not merely exist in every world wholly independent of anything else. The Scripture affirms the preexistence of the divine Word: “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (Jn 1:3). God is unique in his aseity; all other things exist *ab alio* (though another) ...” (Moreland 2003, p. 504)

Based on this definition of God, it is obvious that the New Moral Argument’s premises on the objective moral truth logically flow to a necessary objective moral maker. Unless the truthmaker exists, there can be no objective moral truth since (as we have argued) such moral truths require metaphysical grounds.

5.2. Negative Existential as Objective Truths?

Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz tried to emphasise that objective moral truths are not metaphysically substantive by demonstrating that there are such truths as negative existentials. They briefly explained:

Some truths, such as negative existentials, tell us what paint not to add. For example, the truth that “Satoru Gojo doesn’t exist” tells us that when we look

at the painting, there won't be any paint depicting the fictional character Satoru Gojo. Then, according to relaxed realists—realists who think objective moral truths are not metaphysically substantive—there are truths like moral truths that do not tell us what to do with the brush that paints reality at all. These truths don't force us to add paint or refrain from adding paint to the picture when we commit to them. (Jack et al. 2024, Section 4)

Are they saying that since Satoru Gojo is a non-existing character, it is a truth of their non-existence in the painting (reality)? Of course, it is true that Satoru Gojo is untrue. But the problem is that Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz equate the non-existence (which is not metaphysically substantive) to the existing moral truth. This is clearly a category mistake. Obviously, anything that does not exist does not force us to add paint or refrain from adding paint to the picture when we commit to it. But objective moral truth exists, and its features do not allow us to assume there is no truthmaker.

One cannot say that if the giant beanstalk is not in existence, it is true for Jack to acknowledge that this non-existent entity is grounded on a non-metaphysical entity. Non-existing things have no grounds at all. Furthermore, anyone's imagination of a giant beanstalk can be different from another's imagination. This would make it subjective, contrary to the relaxed realist's belief of objective truths. Hence, such an argument undermines relaxed realism, making it unnecessary to be considered as a serious consideration for objective moral truths.

5.3. *Relaxed Realists' Non-Commitment to Moral Properties*

Having such a strong connotation of subjectivity reflected from their canvas analogy, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz demonstrated no ontological commitment to moral properties. In other words, like many relaxed realists, they believe that moral truths are not dependent on a prior moral reality (since to them it is the individual person who add paint to the picture, and with no one authority to have the ultimate decision of what paint to be added to the picture, their objective truths are grounded metaphysically by *us*—the non-divine personal entity). In other words, moral properties are allowed (or added/painted on the canvas) only inasmuch as the individual is involved in these truths, instead of being dependent on a prior moral reality. This familiar connection between truth and existence is reversed: there is such a property as rightness only because there are truths about what is right (Parfit 2017, pp. 66–67; Scanlon 2014, pp. 17, 26; Dworkin 1996, pp. 96–97; Tucker 2025) and not confined by some kind of external empirical truths.

Although Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz did not specifically spell out their non-commitment to moral properties, their arguments do imply, like other relaxed realists, that they believe that no Moral Argument should be constrained by external metaphysical truths. This would mean that metaphysical grounding on an external divine person is out of the equation. To them, morality is autonomous and fundamental moral truths do not depend upon truths in other fields, including ontology. This is probably the reason that Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz believe that negative existentials can be objective truths. Their non-existence (but treated as objective truth by relaxed realists) does not require it to be metaphysically substantive because there is nothing to be grounded upon. Thus, there is no requirement for any existence of moral properties.

We find this view absurd. As we have already argued against their position and explained the necessary grounding on a truthmaker in the Necessary Grounding on a Truthmaker Section, properties of objective moral truths are different from those of mathematics in Section 2.3, and we have argued in Section 5.2 above that negative existentials are categorically different from existing moral truths. We will argue for the necessary requirement for moral obligations in Section 6 below that all existing objective moral truths must corre-

spond to something real, and moral properties serve as the “truthmakers” that ground these truths. If we say “raping is wrong” is a moral truth, then something must exist that makes this statement true. There is a wrongness in this act of raping. This wrongness is a moral property and must exist independently of human opinion. A non-commitment to moral properties would mean moral truths would lack ontological grounding and leave relaxed realists no strong explanatory argument. If they are to accept that moral truths are real and objective, then they must also accept that moral truths are grounded in something—moral properties. Without them, moral truths would be floating abstractions with no anchor in reality.

6. Concerning Loke’s Motivations

6.1. Concerning Moral Obligations and Social Relations

Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz attempt to argue that making reference to God is unnecessary by claiming that moral truths (whether one perceives them as objective or subjective) are non-metaphysically substantive. To them, moral authority does not come from any truthmaker but from more of a kind of ‘priority authority’. Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz explained that moral truths *have ‘authority’ in that they override all other obligations and our wants* (Jack et al. 2024, Section 5.1). They use the following example to illustrate in their Section 5.1:

Imagine that you have a legal obligation to not disclose some piece of information, but not disclosing it will cause greater harm than if you disclosed the information. Here, you have a moral obligation to disclose the information. Furthermore, given the authority of morality, it would be said that the legal obligation does not matter in light of the moral obligation, and you should disclose the information.

Whilst their single simple illustration is conceivable, it is not sufficiently robust to counter the compelling inference of divine authority. Even if they are right to say that everybody has the same kind of ‘priority authority’ and this ‘priority authority’ must be adhered to because they are objective moral truths, then what stops us from saying that this ‘priority authority’ is decided by a personal divine authoritative entity? If not, who is allowed to decide which ought or ought not to be the ‘priority’ morality or obligations? Since their argument on ‘priority authority’ is weak, it would be unnecessary and incorrect to conclude that Loke wrongly sees morality as having a unique authority grounded in a personal divine entity.

Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz then accused Loke of making three unclear appeals that objective moral truths entail the necessary existence of God. These are the following: (i) moral obligations depend ontologically on social relations; (ii) moral obligations have a law-like character, thus implying a lawgiver; and (iii) morality gives us responsibilities, implying that those having responsibilities are responsible to someone.

In their Section 6.1, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz seem to demand more reasons from Loke in thinking that moral obligations depend ontologically on social relations. They expostulate that Loke...

“...do not give us any reason to think that moral obligations depend ontologically on social relations” and “... is only saying something at odds with relaxed realism if he thinks that something must be something with ontological weight, but then he must give reason to think that only things with ontological weight can lay claim over us and give us duties.” (Jack et al. 2024, Section 6.1)

Conversely, we may also demand more reasons from Jack and his co-authors to justify the claim that things without ontological weight can lay claim over someone and imposes duties. On the contrary, they did not explain that it is wrong to think moral obligations

depend ontologically on social relations. On the other hand, Loke had already made it clear that moral obligation relies ontologically on social relations:

“The conclusion that God is the ultimate source of moral obligations does not rule out intermediate sources of these obligations, such as our parents . . .; because of limitation of space, I shall focus on their consideration (citing [Adams 2000](#), p. 238; [Evans 2013](#)) that the preponderance of moral reasons is not equivalent to moral authority. Authority is the most important distinguishing feature of moral obligations which involves . . . accountability, responsibility, and holds for persons simply as persons ([Evans 2013](#)). Additionally, moral obligations—as well as other concepts associated with moral obligations such as expectations, prohibitions, and blame—depend ontologically on social relations (*ibid.*, pp. 19–28), which are metaphysically grounded in persons. Impersonal things and properties (whether emergent or not) are not capable of grounding social relations (e.g., there cannot be a social relation between a table and a chair). They cannot lay claims over us, give us any moral duty or hold us accountable for what we ought to do. Thus, they cannot give us obligations nor are we obligated to them.” ([Loke 2023](#), p. 30)

We need not dwell further on this simple issue not just because of the limitation of space but also because it is obviously clear that moral obligations imply that there is a social relationship between the person having rights and the person having the duties to perform those particular moral obligations. Hence, *moral obligation* naturally means that there is something morally obligated by someone (duty-bound by that obligation) to another person or entity that has a legal personality (e.g., a company or a nation). Evidently, Loke has discharged his burden to explain. Unless Jack and his co-authors go beyond a bare accusation, their burden remains undischarged.

6.2. Concerning the Law-like Character of Moral Obligations

As follows, the next argument is who decides which moral obligation? Many people may decide, but it depends on the cultures and practices of a particular nation. But the question regresses to who is right or wrong. Loke’s New Moral Argument is to demonstrate that the existence of objective moral truths, after eliminating the possibility of being grounded by the alternatives mentioned, only leaving the existence of a personal divine entity, thus making it logical to conclude that the existence of objective moral truths logically deduces the existence of God.

There must be someone that decides which is moral or immoral, right or wrong, obligated and non-obligated. For objective moral truths, there must be a good God that grounds the existence of an objective moral order and real intrinsic value ([Horner and Moreland 2024](#), p. 170). Otherwise, as Ivan put it in *The Brothers Karamazov*, “without God everything is permitted.” This is why there must be a truthmaker. This is the reason Loke says that moral obligations have a law-like character, expressing that there should be a lawgiver. This law-like character also implies that within the social relation context, moral obligation exists due to being legislated by an authority, making it objectively obligated or duty-bound to one another. Within its relational context, social order is a legal system only if it has effective authority³. Similarly to objective morality, for it to be operative, it must have an effective authority, i.e., the objective moral truthmaker. Law-like character is not something of a law passed by the legislators, which allows you to refrain from obeying it or allows you to paint whatever picture fits your subjective self-interest interpretation of the law. The fact that the law exists entails the existence of an authoritative legislature.

In addition, the aim and advantage of objective morality is equality, fairness, and justice. This is unsurprisingly also the aim of the law. To claim that an objective moral truth has a law-like character means that their similar desires are to achieve this goal objectively.

In the realm of legal philosophy, it is understood that if the basic functions of law in combination with the principle of fairness were sufficient to generate a moral obligation of obedience that is comprehensively applicable, universally borne, and content-independent, then law and morality would be integrally connected in a far-reaching way (Kramer 2005, pp. 180–1). This demonstrates similar characteristics. We are quite bewildered about Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's failure to comprehend this law-like character. Possibly, they had misunderstood what Loke means by a law-like character. With that misunderstanding, they tried to answer their own question in what sense moral obligations have a law-like character. They tried to distinguish legal obligation from morality to stress that morals do not have or lack a law-like character. They explained in Section 6.2 of their article:

...moral obligations are very different from legal obligations in various ways. Here are two: (i) legal obligations are contingent, in that what we have a legal obligation to do can be changed, and (ii) laws are different in different places. Morality lacks a law-like character, then, when it comes to these two things. So, moral obligations may have a lawlike character when it comes to the truth that it is an obligation, but many other properties of moral obligations point to a dissimilarity between law and morality.

Of course, legal obligations legislated by any recognised authorities can be changed. Usually, a change is performed via its legal process or through a sudden regime change, either after a violent civil war or a peaceful coup d'état. Whether the existing or changed law is morally right is a different matter. We agree with Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz that laws are different in different places, but Loke is referring to the legal philosophical nature of law, rather than substantive laws. When mentioning 'law-like character', Loke does not mean law is exactly the same as morality, or morality has the exact characteristics of substantive laws. However, objective moral truths are philosophically perceived to be universally applicable to everyone, and thus they impose rights and duties on the individuals concerned, making them responsible to one another. The imposition must be from some authoritative figure, i.e., a truthmaker. The authoritativeness entails an obligation to comply. A universal objective morality is also like the nature of law, which provides guidance, if one exercises his free will to comply. Hence, it is not merely an obligation to comply with the law but also to be guided by it. Just as Max Weber put it, "as if the ruled had made the content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake." (Weber [1922] 1968).

The characteristic of law is basically that substantive laws must be legislated by an authorised legislative agent. In simple words, the causation of a law requires a cause, specifically a lawmaker. This similarity of the simple philosophy of law on lawmaking, as contrasted with substantive law⁴ per se, is what is meant by 'having a law-like character'. Loke is not referring to the changeableness or enforceability of substantive laws, but a similar requirement of the lawgiver for objective moral truths. In addition, the legal philosophy focuses on the nature of laws, such as the ethics and politics of the legal system, and deals with justice, legal reasoning, the role of law in society, and especially the creation of rights and obligations, which is what Loke is referring to. The creation of legal-social relationships necessitated by these rights and obligations are similar characteristics of moral obligations. These characteristics of this nature of law are what Loke is referring to as having law-like characteristics, and he is not referring to substantive laws.

6.3. Concerning Moral Truths and Responsibilities

Finally, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz note that Loke argues that moral truths concerning what we ought to do give us responsibilities. This "implies we are responsible to someone" rather than responsible to impersonal entities (Loke 2023, p. 32; quoting Evans 2013, pp. 15–16),

and that it is not good to reply that we are responsible to ourselves because “people to whom responsibilities are owed can normally release those who are responsible, but we cannot release ourselves for our responsibility to live well” (Loke 2023, p. 32; quoting Dworkin 2011, p. 42). They then raise three objections (Jack et al. 2024, Section 6.3).

First, they object that “God, if He existed, would have moral responsibilities, but does that not mean He would have to be responsible to Himself, something Loke is saying is problematic?” (Jack et al. 2024, Section 6.3).

The problem with this objection is that Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz assume without argument that “God, if He existed, would have moral responsibilities,” which fails to note that (following the Moral Argument) God is supposed to be the personal ground of all moral responsibilities and thus he does not have moral responsibility to anyone, including himself.

Second, they object that “moral responsibilities are not usually the type of responsibilities we can be released from. . . nor could God release us—as Loke admits that God couldn’t, for example, ‘command us to rape’ (2023, p. 34).” (ibid.).

In reply, the reason why no one—not even God—can release us from the responsibility not to rape is because (as Loke later argues) such moral obligations are necessary truths which require a necessary ground, namely God’s divine nature and personhood which are necessarily existent (Loke 2023, pp. 32–33), and God cannot do what is logically impossible such as creating a round square (Loke 2023, p. 34). We (humans) do not necessarily exist and therefore cannot be the ground for such moral obligations.

Third, Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz object by asserting that ‘our moral responsibilities *just are* our moral obligations. . . if there are moral truths, then there are moral responsibilities. It doesn’t seem that we need “a cosmic lawgiver” to “[impose] such a responsibility on all human beings” (Loke 2023, p. 32), because moral responsibilities and obligations just arise given that moral truths obtain.’ (Jack et al. 2024, Section 6.3). However, their assertion, which merely states the equivalence between moral responsibility, moral obligations, and certain moral truths, does not answer Loke’s argument that our moral responsibility implies responsibility to someone.

6.4. Concerning God’s Aseity

Having rebutted Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz’s accusation of Loke making three unclear appeals that objective moral truths entail the necessary existence of God in the above subsections, we want to end our argument by briefly mentioning that God’s aseity logically precludes Him from having moral responsibilities in the same sense as humans.

For humans to be morally responsible, there must be a moral law or a standard for them to subscribe and be answerable to. For such moral laws that have the feature of objectivity, it must have a universal standard. That kind of standard must be external and a higher authority than the subscriber of that objective moral truth (i.e., human being). Unlike humans, God’s aseity (as defined above) implies that his existence is not dependent on anything else. We have to note that ‘it is not logically possible that any agent could bring about God’s existence if God is necessarily an eternal being’ (Swinburne 1993, p. 265). Moreover, being the ground of moral truths and the ultimate moral authority, there cannot be a higher authority over Him to which he is answerable to.

Since His nature defines what is good, just, and right, it would be contradictory to say there is another higher source of what constitutes good, just, and right. This would mean that, with God being the ultimate source of moral law, He cannot be morally responsible, since there is no higher authority or standard that He is obligated to subscribe to. To claim that God has moral responsibilities would imply He is subject to a moral law He did not create—which contradicts aseity..

6.5. Jack's Normative Nothingism

On a side note, before we conclude, we wish to inform the reader that we are intrigued by Evan Jack's⁵ enthralling introductory concept of Normative Nothingism, parodying Mark Balaguer's modal nothingism (Balaguer 2022). Although there is much to discuss on whether modal sentences can be true even if the fact they refer to does not (yet) exist, and the impossibility for any metaphysical grounding on truth without actuality, we just want to briefly mention that Jack made the similar mistake as many relaxed realists do by relying on non-moral truths as an analogy for objective moral truths. This has been argued in Section 2.3 above with regards to mathematical truths. In his article, Jack seems to assume that modal and normative moral domains are structurally analogous. Just as we argued above that mathematics are of a different domain from objective moral truths, so are modal truths. Modal truths concern possibility and necessity (depending on what is possible in principle and metaphysically coherent), but normative moral truths involve interpersonal obligations. We need not regurgitate Loke's argument that moral obligation relies ontologically on social relations, which clearly fall in a different domain from modal truth. Jack, in his article, insists that

“What I now will propose is a view called normative nothingism. Normative nothingism holds that some of our normative sentences are substantively and objective true and that there is nothing about reality that makes them true. . . normative nothingists are saying something stronger than many relaxed realists because they are not only claiming that normative claims do not have truthmakers, but that reality doesn't make them true in any way.” (Jack 2025)

But Jack ignores the fact that talk about “nothing” in the domain of modal truths cannot be used as an analogy or illustration for objective moral obligations because the latter belong to a different domain. Especially, moral obligations require social relations, responsibilities, and an authoritative truthmaker, as we have argued above.

7. Conclusions

We have counterargued against Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's criticism of Loke's New Moral Argument and shown that their attempted reconstruction of Loke's New Moral Argument is unnecessarily complicated. We also argued that they failed to give a proper explanation and defence of their proposed relaxed realism, making it an inadequate alternative to the conclusion of Loke's Moral Argument. From their “adding paint unto the canvas” allegory, it vividly discloses that their version of relaxed realism lacks a normative force to guide actions or decisions because it allows individuals to add whatever truths they are committed to unto their perceived reality. Hence, it ‘relaxes’ the strictness of normative truths and inadvertently leads to a form of relativism, where supposed normative truths become too flexible and lose their objectivity. How is any such metaethical theory, which lacks objectivity, able to coherently affirm objective moral truths? Therefore, we stress that leaving out their proposed relaxed realism does not fundamentally affect Loke's argument. We have also discussed in Section 6 their other objections concerning moral obligations and social relations, the law-like character of moral obligations and moral truths, and responsibilities. It is shown that their objections fail to rebut the argument that moral obligations are characterised by accountability, responsibility, expectation, prohibition, and a binding and necessary character, all of which (considered together rather than separately as they did in their article) indicate that there must be a necessarily existent Divine Person who sets the expectation, prohibits us and binds us, and holds us accountable. Finally, we have shown in Section 3 that the Moral Argument can be formulated in such a way

that improves upon the lack of comprehensiveness in Loke's original formulation and the unnecessarily complicated reformulation by Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz.

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Notes

- ¹ We discuss Jack, Khuramy, and Schulz's canvas analogy in Section 5 of this paper.
- ² For example, "Mustafa assumes the position of lion king in the jungle."
- ³ Section 2 of Legal Obligation and Authority. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legal-obligation/> (accessed on 10 March 2025).
- ⁴ Substantive laws deal with actual rules and regulations that prescribe specific behaviours and the penalties for violating them. It includes laws related to property, criminal offenses, torts, contracts, and family law. Substantive laws do create legal rights and legal duties/obligations, but they can be changed. This statement itself is a philosophy of law, requiring any obligation and rights created by substantive laws needs to go through a recognised process of an authorise Lawmaker (e.g., Parliament).
- ⁵ Sole author of Relaxed Realism and Modal Nothingism (2025) *J Value Inquiry*.

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