PART III

MORAL REALISM
I am very interested in the possible connections between theism and moral realism. Not because I am a theist, but because I am not.

As I will understand the view here, moral realism stands for the idea that there are some moral claims that are true in a certain way. Their truth does not depend on the attitudes that anyone takes towards their content. Nor are they true, when they are, because of being endorsed, implied or entailed by norms that are constructed from our evaluative attitudes.

Theological realism, as I will understand the term here, is simply theism: the view that God exists. The God I will be talking about is the traditional God of Western monotheism: an omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect agent.

Among philosophers, it is a common thought that moral and theological realism can easily be prised apart. Most analytical philosophers these days are agnostics or atheists, and so reject theism. But even those who are unkindly disposed towards moral realism do not think that its vulnerability lies in a commitment to theism.

The story among non-philosophers is quite different. In that arena, it’s a common thought that the status of morality and religion are very closely connected. On a popular view, morality can be objective only if God exists. That’s a central reason why atheism is taken, by so many, to be such a threat to morality.

We are all familiar with the standard lines of popular thought that seek to tie the fate of moral and theological realism very closely together. I’ll take the liberty of placing some fancy philosophical terms

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