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Elements in Ethics

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ETHICAL REALISM

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Ethical Realism

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Abstract: This Element examines the many facets of ethical realism and the issues at stake in metaethical debates about it – both between realism and non-realist alternatives, and between different versions of realism itself. Starting with a minimal core characterization of ethical realism focused on claims about meaning and truth, we go on to develop a narrower and more theoretically useful conception by adding further claims about objectivity and ontological commitment. Yet even this common understanding of ethical realism captures a surprisingly heterogeneous range of views. In fact, a strong case can be made for adding several more conditions in order to arrive at a paradigm of realism about ethics when understood in a non-deflationary way. We then develop this more robust realism, bringing out its distinctive take on ethical objectivity and normative authority, its unique ontological commitments, and both the support for it and some challenges it faces.

Keywords: metaethics, ethical realism, normativity, nonnaturalism, objective value

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