

Expressivists Should be Reductive Naturalists

Quasi-realists claim there are moral facts and properties, but they don't always make it clear what kind of facts and properties they are. I argue for two things. First, making sense of these claims requires expressivists to go hybrid. Second, if expressivism is true, there is no way to believe moral properties are irreducibly normative without believing something untrue. Expressivists are effectively compelled to reject non-reductivism. Instead, they should believe moral properties are natural and can be referred to with non-moral terms. This isn't a bad thing; the combination of expressivism and reductive naturalism is an independently appealing metaethical theory.

1. Introduction

Moral metaphysics is inquiry into the nature of moral reality and its relationship with non-moral reality. Are there moral properties and facts? If so, what sort of things are they? If moral facts reduce to facts about natural things like pain and pleasure or supernatural things like the will of the gods, what is the nature of their reduction and why do moral claims seem so radically different to bog-standard descriptive claims? If instead moral facts are not reducible to anything we can refer to in non-normative terms, we face metaphysical worries about queerness and supervenience, as well as epistemological and semantic access challenges.

Expressivists tell us moral claims do not robustly represent the way the world is. Instead, moral claims express desire-like states such as approval and disapproval (Stevenson 1944), commitments (Blackburn 1998), plans (Gibbard 2003), states of being for (Schroeder 2008), and so on. 'Stealing is wrong' may express disapproval of stealing, or being in favour of blaming people for stealing, or some such attitude. Expressivists are not always clear about their stance on the nature of moral properties, but it is often thought that expressivism involves a rejection of moral metaphysics outright. If moral discourse is "merely" a matter of expressing our desires, it is hard to see how those pesky metaphysical questions could make any sense. This paper shows that they can make sense.

In §2 I explain how expressivists have typically earned the right to answer metaphysical questions by rendering them internal to moral inquiry, which

requires providing an account of the appropriate desire-like states. In §3 I show that hybrid expressivists (Ridge 2006, 2014; Toppinen 2013) have a much easier time doing this than pure ones. The argument for the paper's title comes in §4. I reveal that expressivists cannot assign an appropriate mental state to the judgement that moral properties are irreducibly normative without including a false or untrue belief component. Expressivists should instead believe moral properties reduce to natural ones. I discuss what's different about this transcendental argument and position in §5 by contrasting it with what others have said before (Blackburn 1993: ch.9; Gibbard 2003: ch.5; Ridge 2014: ch.7; Toppinen 2018). The resulting theory may be called "quasi-naturalism"¹ but there isn't very much that's *quasi* about it. Moral properties are natural, natural properties are real, so moral properties are real. Sure enough, to *think* that wrongness is natural property F rather than natural property G is to take up a moral stance, which the expressivist will say is a desire-like state. But even though the psychology is different, the metaphysics are as real as they are in any natural moral realism. I think it's an attractive view, and I end with some of the implications for metaethics in §6.

2. Moral Metaphysics

After Simon Blackburn (1984) initiated the project of quasi-realism, most expressivists have wished to "earn the right" to make claims that traditionally were attributed only to realists, such as the claim that moral facts exist. Here's one such fact: it is wrong to torture innocent people merely to pass the time. This fact doesn't depend on what we think of it, and it seems very different to the fact that torturing innocent people merely to pass the time causes lots more pain than pleasure, or any other descriptive fact.² Some realists (Enoch 2011; Fitzpatrick 2016) believe this is because moral facts *are* distinct from bog-standard descriptive facts, which requires addressing sceptical worries, arguments from queerness and the like. Other realists (Boyd 1988, Jackson 1998) deny the initial appearances and identify moral facts with descriptive ones, leading to open question worries, Moral Twin Earth objections and others. Quasi-realists (Blackburn 1993; Gibbard 2003) also believe in moral facts, so a simple question arises: are they reducible or are they not?

¹ The term has been used before. Majors (2006: 65) labels Bloomfield's (2001) view "quasi-naturalism" but he notes a "drawback of this terminology is that the analogy inevitably suggested – that with Blackburn's quasi-realism – is quite misleading." I am using it in the less misleading sense: Blackburn's quasi-realism plus moral naturalism.

² Descriptive facts and properties are those that can be referred to without using normative terms.

In this paper I take expressivists and quasi-realists to be the same people. It is of course possible to be an expressivist and not a quasi-realist. One may believe moral judgements are desire-like and yet not be on board with the program of vindicating realist-sounding ideas such as the existence of mind-independent moral facts.³ It is also possible to be a quasi-realist and not an expressivist. One may be a different sort of anti-realist and still try to vindicate realist-sounding discourse.⁴ Since the project of quasi-realism has traditionally gone hand in hand with expressivism I will only be concerned with that coupling here.

So, how have expressivists attempted to vindicate moral metaphysical claims? They have done so by treating them as first-order moral claims. Just as the sentence 'it is wrong to torture for fun' expresses (say) disapproval of torturing for fun, the sentence 'it is a *fact* that it is wrong to torture for fun' also expresses disapproval of torturing for fun (perhaps with a little more conviction or oomph, however that's construed). Since this is a perfectly sensible mental state to have, the claim is said to be vindicated.

Expressivists have been keen to distance themselves from subjectivists, contextualists and relativists (Horgan & Timmons 2006). Moral properties and truths, they say, are *mind-independent* – they do not reduce to or constitutively depend on our actual or hypothetical responses. For example, torture wouldn't suddenly become okay if we happened to approve of it. How do we form this judgement? By moralising. We contemplate possible worlds in which we approve of torture and we use our current moral faculties to judge that torture would still be wrong in such worlds (Blackburn 2010: 29-30). If expressivism is true, this is a desire-like state: disapproval of torturing in those distant worlds where we approve of it. Moral metaphysics is not conducted from an external, Archimedean standpoint but from within. It's first-order ethics using more abstract terms.

3. Metaphysical Sidesteps

Let's make the expressivist's strategy more explicit. In the previous section we saw how expressivists treat metaphysical questions, such as whether moral properties are mind-independent, as moral questions. In order to answer them they take up an internal, moral standpoint. It is important to stress that this first-

³ A.J. Ayer (1936) was in this camp.

⁴ Error theorists who argue we should retain, rather than abolish, our current moral practices may fall into this category.

order moralising is not strictly their job *qua* expressivists. Expressivists, in making sense of moral claims, only need to provide an account of the desire-like mental states that constitute the appropriate judgements; as quasi-realists, they need to vindicate the realist-sounding claims by showing the mental states they express are sensible – that they can be coherently accepted. This is what James Dreier (2015: 283) calls “the Expressivist Sidestep.” To make sense of a metaphysical claim, then, quasi-realists must first assign a sensible desire-like mental state that constitutes accepting it, and then it is a matter for first-order moralising whether or not to accept it.

Expressivists may differ in their moral views, and so in principle they might disagree about moral metaphysics. One may be an expressivist and reject the mind-independence of moral properties. But how? Suppose we disagree with the sorts of conditionals we considered at the end of the last section. We think that, were we to approve of torture for instance, torture would be right. This is insufficient to count as a rejection of mind-independence. Consider robust realists for illustration. Robust realists like David Enoch do not think that moral properties depend on what we think of them. However, their view is consistent with moral properties being assigned in the following way: an act is right if and only if the agent plans to do it and it is wrong otherwise. In other words, rightness may be *correlated* with agent responses without being *reduced* to, or constitutively dependent upon, agent responses; agent responses don’t *make* something right and wrong but maybe they match up nevertheless. Is there a way for expressivists to make sense of this distinction? In general, can expressivists make sense of claims to do with the nature of moral properties?

3.1 Pure Sidesteps

Expressivism now comes in two forms: pure and hybrid. We’ll discuss pure expressivism in this subsection and hybrid expressivism in the next, and we’ll see that the former fails to make good on moral metaphysics while the latter succeeds. For the *pure* expressivist, straightforward moral judgements are only desire-like states. The nature of these states differs from theory to theory, so in what follows I use ‘approval’ and ‘disapproval’ (and the ‘H!’ and ‘B!’ operators) as placeholders for whatever the correct attitudes are. Here is an example to begin with.

Claim: torture is wrong.

State: B! (Torture)

To accept *Claim* is to be in *State*. So far, so simple. Yet we want to discuss claims *about* moral properties, rather than moral claims about other things like torture. Consider the claims below, drawn from the discussion before the beginning of this subsection.

Mind-Correlation: moral properties are necessarily correlated with the actual or hypothetical responses of agents.

Mind-Dependence: moral properties are constitutively dependent upon the actual or hypothetical responses of agents.⁵

The kinds of conditionals Blackburn and other pure expressivists draw upon in their acceptance of mind-independence are too coarsely grained to distinguish between the two claims above, a point also observed by Selim Berker (2020: 197-198). I might accept, for instance, that all actual and possible acts of torture performed by agents who plan to torture are morally right, and all acts of torture performed by those who *don't* plan to torture are morally wrong. I might accept something similar across the board:

Plan-Correlation: all actual and possible acts X performed by agents who plan to X are morally right.

State_{P-C}: H! (Enacting one's plans, whatever they are)

Plan-Correlation is a form of *Mind-Correlation*. The worry is there is no plausible way for a pure expressivist to distinguish accepting any form of *dependence* over and above accepting *correlation*. This casts doubt on Blackburn's supposed acceptance of mind-independence. What he was really doing was rejecting *Mind-Correlation*. Blackburn may insist this is okay because the negation of *Mind-Correlation* implies mind-independence by contraposition: if moral properties depended on agents' responses they'd be correlated with them, but they're not, so they don't. However, this is jumping the gun. Blackburn is not entitled to make this argument; he has not "earned the right" to speak of dependence over and above correlation because he has not told us what mental states we must have in order to accept each of the claims. In speaking of the implication from one to the other he is assuming we have a grasp of what is being inferred. I do not. Not on the pure expressivist picture, anyway.

The problem is a symptom of what we might call the "inscrutability" of moral properties – it is the difficulty of assigning pure desire-like states to claims *about* moral properties. We have seen how correlation and dependence are

⁵ I owe the phrasing of this claim to Ingram (2017: 490), who defines mind-independence as the negation of this in his list of the shared commitments of robust realists, relaxed realists and quasi-realists.

difficult to distinguish for a pure expressivist. Let me show you another couple of claims.

Pleasure-Correlation: necessarily, things are good if and only if they are pleasurable.

Pleasure-Reduction: goodness reduces to being pleasurable.

State_{pleasure}: H! (Everything actual or possible that is pleasurable)

Which claim does *State_{pleasure}* constitute acceptance of? Once again, the pure expressivist does not appear equipped to make distinctions fine-grained enough for the task. As another example of this kind of difficulty, Berker (2020) has argued that expressivists (Berker only considers pure ones) have not yet accounted for moral ‘because’ claims, in the grounding sense. We might claim that something is wrong *because* it is painful and *not* because we disapprove of it, even if wrongness, painfulness and our disapproval all correlate.⁶ It’s unclear how the pure expressivist could even make sense of seemingly trivial claims such as ‘the moral property of rightness is the moral property of rightness.’⁷

There is a choice point here. The first option is to give it a positive spin. Perhaps this shows that, after all, expressivism avoids metaphysics. If there are no possible answers that make any sense, then the questions must have been nonsense to begin with. One simply cannot make any claims about moral properties that cannot be rephrased as ascriptions of moral properties to non-moral things. Indeed, the pure expressivist is better off than relaxed realists (Dworkin 2011, Parfit 2011, Scanlon 2014) who shun metaphysics – at least we now have an *explanation* of why metaphysical questions are bunk. This is a little like Derek Baker’s (forthcoming) response to Berker. Baker shuns the metaphysical grounding relation entirely and provides a pragmatic account of explanation for these ‘because’ claims.

This is certainly a way to go, but it does mean a change of course. Quasi-realists often *want* to say things about moral properties, such as their being irreducible (which I’ll later dispute) and mind-independent. This also applies to Baker himself. He claims that moral properties “neither ground nor are grounded

⁶ The bulk of Berker’s paper is dedicated to an interesting proposal for solving the problem. “To (sincerely) say, “Kicking dogs is wrong because_g it causes them pain,” is to express *disapproval_{w-of-kicking-dogs} because_b of a-belief-that-kicking-dogs-causes-them-pain*’ (Berker 2020: 204) where ‘because_g’ denotes the grounding relation and ‘because_b’ denotes the basing relation. I will not discuss it at length here because Berker ultimately argues there are serious flaws in this proposal, and I agree. The flaws arise from sentences such as ‘I disapprove of kicking dogs because_b it’s wrong.’ I show how hybrid expressivists fare better with these kinds of sentences towards the end of the next subsection.

⁷ Thanks to Lewis Brooks for this example.

by anything” but it is unclear what desire-like state this expresses. It’s not even clear that we can make sense of the claim that moral properties *exist*. If expressivists take this first option at the choice point, they will have to stop talking about moral properties altogether.

The second option is to travel beyond the confines of pure expressivism to continue the search for a vindication of moral metaphysics. Let’s see what hybrid expressivists can do.

3.2 Hybrid Sidesteps

Hybrid expressivist⁸ theories are far better equipped to deal with the questions raised in this paper. I believe all hybrid theories will be able to make sense of metaphysics but I will deal in terms of the view I favour. This is Teemu Toppinen’s (2013) *higher-order state* view, similar if not equivalent to Mark Schroeder’s (2013) *relational expressivism*, both of which are heavily inspired by Michael Ridge’s (2006) ecumenical expressivism. Moral sentences express higher-order mental states composed of a desire-like state and an ordinary descriptive belief which are related in a certain way, and each higher-order state is multiply realisable. To see it in action, let’s sidestep *Claim* again.

Claim: torture is wrong.

State_H: [B! (Actions with property K) & belief that torture has that property]⁹

State_H might be realised by an agent disapproving of actions that fail to maximise pleasure and believing torture has that property, or by a peculiar agent disapproving of actions that are noisy and believing torture has that property. Agents may not know what they approve and disapprove of. All logical connectives get shoved into the belief component: the negation of *Claim* is accepted by being in the higher-order state [B! (Actions with property K) & belief that it is not the case that torture has that property], and to accept that if *Claim* is

⁸ Hybrid *cognitivist* theories also exist (Copp 2001, 2018; Boisvert 2008). These theories begin from a cognitivist starting point and add that a desire-like state is expressed alongside the usual belief. For the hybrid cognitivist, the content of the belief component is the content of the moral claim, and so the truth a moral sentence necessarily aligns with the truth of the belief component of the judgement expressed by it. Hybrid expressivists deny this necessary alignment as we’ll see later in this subsection. This distinction between hybrid theories comes from Ridge (2014: 80).

⁹ Toppinen (2013: 254) allows multiple different kinds of desire-like states might be eligible to realise the higher-order states, and he allows there may be several properties we have our pro- and con- attitudes towards. Technically, we must include the *totality* of the agent’s relevant attitudes. I list only one for simplicity.

true then there will be a revolt is to be in the state [B! (Actions with property K) & belief that if torture has that property then there will be a revolt].

Since we now have an ordinary belief component that ascribes a property, we are much better placed to answer metaphysical questions by following the same recipe. Furthermore, this does not preclude rendering them internal to moral inquiry – answering them still involves taking a moral stance, which on the current understanding is a set of hybrid states composed of desire-like states and beliefs. Let me begin with the distinction between correlation and reduction.

Pleasure-Correlation: things are good if and only if they are pleasurable.

State_{P-C}: [H! (Things with property K) & belief that things have that property if and only if they are pleasurable]

Pleasure-Reduction: goodness reduces to being pleasurable.

State_{P-R}: [H! (Things with property K) & belief that that property reduces to being pleasurable]

These mental states are clearly distinct. An agent may coherently judge *Pleasure-Correlation* while rejecting *Pleasure-Reduction*. Here is an example of such an agent realising those judgements:

Realiser of State_{P-C}: [H! (Things that are loved by God) & belief that things have that property if and only if they are pleasurable]

Realiser of \neg State_{P-R}: [H! (Things that are loved by God) & belief that that property does not reduce to being pleasurable]

To put it in less formal terms, this agent has a moral perspective that effectively reduces goodness to what God loves and has a theological belief that God loves all and only things that are pleasurable. Being pleasurable, then, is not the *same* property as goodness but it does correlate with it, at least according to this agent. In this way we can make sense of people who accept reductive theses. Here are two potential mental states of agents who believe *Pleasure-Reduction*:

Realiser 1 of State_{P-R}: [H! (Things that are pleasurable) & belief that that property reduces to being pleasurable]

Realiser 2 of State_{P-R}: [H! (Things that are loved by God) & belief that that property reduces to being pleasurable]

The second agent, *Realiser 2*, has a false belief component. The property of being loved by God is not reducible to the property of being pleasurable. I include it because people have mistaken beliefs all the time. Importantly, the truth or falsity

of the belief component does not tell us whether or not the moral judgement as a whole is true or false. In this case, despite the first agent's correct belief component, *both* agents have a false moral belief – they believe goodness reduces to being pleasurable, and it doesn't. But that is my assessment as a moraliser, not as an expressivist. I could be wrong, in which case the second agent has a correct moral belief realised in part by an erroneous belief; sometimes we form the correct moral opinion on the wrong basis.

A potential objection at this point is that there is a danger of involving trivial beliefs as components of judgements about reductions. Look at *Realiser 1*. To think that goodness reduces to pleasure shouldn't be as trivial as believing that the property of being pleasurable reduces to being pleasurable! There are two responses. First, the belief itself is not trivial due to the modes of presentation: 'that property' denotes a different concept to 'being pleasurable' even if they refer to the same property.¹⁰ Second, the judgement of reduction is not simply the belief component. It's the combination of the belief and the desire. If a hybrid expressivist was consciously hedonistic and aware that their belief in *Pleasure-Reduction* was constituted in part by this clearly true belief, they should not come to think *Pleasure-Reduction* is trivially true. They should know that it may be false despite their true belief component. The only way to be sure of *Pleasure-Reduction* is to finish doing ethics and settle one's desires as well as one's beliefs.

We have now seen sensible mental states that constitute accepting and rejecting the reduction of goodness to the property of being pleasurable. We have seen someone who rejects the reduction of goodness to pleasure while still thinking there is a correlation between them. We can similarly distinguish between, on the one hand, a subjectivist who effectively thinks moral properties are constituted by what their ideal self will approve of and who believes their ideal self will approve of a certain set of deontological principles, and on the other, a deontologist who thinks moral principles *just are* these deontological principles. Finally, let me show how the higher-order state view handles the kind of sentence that Berker (2020: 210) was grappling with.

¹⁰ What exactly is that concept at work in the belief component? In my view, this remains to be spelled out satisfactorily. Mogensen (2018) argues that it cannot be the usual demonstrative that we issue when saying or thinking 'that property' due to similar triviality worries. I wonder if there needs to be a unique concept here, not directly expressed by any terms in natural language, which refers to the relevant property in the speaker's moral perspective (see Laskowski 2019). In any case, further work on moral concepts is something expressivists should definitely take up, but I won't be pursuing this line of inquiry here. For our purposes, we will take it on trust that the concept is in fact different.

Accuracy: I disapprove of kicking dogs because (in the *basing* sense rather than the grounding sense) doing so is wrong.

State_A: [B! (Actions with property K) & belief that I disapprove of kicking dogs because doing so (kicking dogs) has that property (K)]

To put this into more natural language, somebody who accepts *Accuracy* will have a moral perspective that highlights a certain property (say, causing pain) as negative, and they will believe that they disapprove of kicking dogs on the basis of kicking dogs having that certain property (or, if mentalism about basing is true, they will believe they disapprove of kicking dogs on the basis of their *belief* that kicking dogs has that property).¹¹ For hybrid expressivists, these kinds of sentences are as coherent as the other metaphysical claims we have considered in this subsection.

To summarise, on the hybrid view each moral evaluator will have desire-like states that determine which properties they treat as the moral ones. Ordinary beliefs ascribing those properties to things will partly constitute judgements ascribing moral properties to things, and judgements *about* moral properties will be constituted in part by ordinary beliefs about those properties. In this way, moral metaphysical claims can be vindicated as sensible things to believe. One sensible way to believe moral properties are beyond scientific analysis would be to approve of things with the property of being loved by God and to believe discovering what God loves is not a scientific matter. One sensible way to believe in mind-independence would be to approve of things insofar as they are prescribed by all of a given set of moral theories (hedonistic and preference utilitarianism, say, or all theories that neither prescribe theft nor torture) and to believe that property is not constitutively dependent on the actual or hypothetical responses of agents. Moral metaphysics can go on.

4. The Reducibility of Moral Properties

Now that we *can* engage in metaphysics, let's go ahead and do so. In this section, and using the framework I have just outlined, I will argue that any moral properties must be reducible to properties we can describe in non-moral terms.

¹¹ It may be worth reminding the reader here that the content of the belief component of *State_A* is not the content of *Accuracy*. Suppose Sonja has a perverse moral perspective that highlights the property of being noisy as negative. She may accept and assert *Accuracy* and her belief component may well be true, but we can still disagree with her. We may even reiterate the truth of her belief component in our refutation: "Sonja, you only disapprove of kicking dogs on the basis that it's noisy, not because it's wrong!"

This means expressivists cannot “mimic” – make the same (internally rendered) metaphysical claims as – non-naturalist realist positions because those realists believe the thesis of *Non-Reductivism*. To see why, let us begin by considering what it would be to accept it.

Non-Reductivism: moral properties are not reducible to descriptive properties.

State_{N-R}: [H! (Actions with property K) & B! (Actions with property L) & belief that those properties are not reducible to descriptive properties]¹²

It will help to be a bit more explicit about what descriptive properties are. “A property is descriptive if and only if it can be ascribed with a descriptive predicate”¹³ and a descriptive predicate is a predicate that contains no normative terms. The predicate ‘is yellow’ is descriptive and so the property of being yellow is a descriptive one. Non-natural realists believe that moral properties are *not* descriptive, and so the only way to refer to them directly is via normative terms (or normative concepts) such as ‘is right’ or ‘the property of wrongness.’ On the other hand, a natural reductivist who believes goodness is the property of being pleasurable should think goodness is a descriptive property, since goodness could then be referred to in purely non-normative terms such as ‘is pleasurable.’ Sometimes I will use the term ‘naturalism’ when ‘descriptivism’ would be more accurate, but only because it’s more familiar. A *supernaturalist* who believes moral properties are, for example, theological properties would be welcome on my side of the fence. We are now in a position to analyse *State_{N-R}*. What possible realisers can we find?

Realiser 1 of *State_{N-R}*: [H! (Actions with the property of maximising pleasure) & B! (Actions with the property of failing to maximise pleasure) & belief that those properties are not reducible to descriptive properties]

An agent who had the above mental state would thereby believe *Non-Reductivism* to be true. Unfortunately they have a false belief, since the properties of maximising and failing to maximise pleasure can be referred to in non-normative terms. Quite clearly, putting *any* descriptive property in the places of K and L is

¹² If there are more than two moral attitudes, these should also be included. For brevity I include only H! and B! for actions, corresponding to judgements of right and wrong.

¹³ Streumer (2017: 3), taking his lead from Jackson (1998: ch.5 & ch.6). A complication is that sometimes we say things like ‘what Sally said,’ which appears descriptive but Sally may have used normative language. When we refer to referrers, we should include their language too when we’re considering whether or not an ascription was purely descriptive.

going to result in a false belief component. Is there a way to put irreducibly normative properties in there instead? Perhaps we could try something like this:

Realiser 2 of *State_{N-R}*: [H! (Actions that have the irreducibly normative property of rightness*) & B! (Actions that have the irreducibly normative property of wrongness*) & belief that those properties are not reducible to descriptive properties]

Note the asterisks. We should not use the ordinary moral concept of rightness or wrongness there, because ordinary moral concepts have a hybrid nature and we don't want a regress. The asterisks denote that the concepts are not what the expressivist would consider moral ones proper, but they attempt to refer to the kind of properties robust realists like Enoch believe in. The question is whether we have managed to find a true belief component in Realiser 2 of the acceptance of *Non-Reductivism*. If we have, then an expressivist can coherently mimic a non-naturalist moral realist. *Prima facie* it does seem true that the moral properties Enoch argues for are irreducible. However, once we dig a little deeper, we will see in the paragraph after next that we have a failure of reference in the belief component – *those properties* or *the properties Enoch argues for* do not exist, or if they do, we can't refer to them with a non-moral belief – and so anything we believe "about" them will miss the mark. Is it true that the present King of France is bald? Clearly not, whether or not we want to say it is *false*. In the same way, the belief component of Realiser 2 is not true.

But don't we all agree that the properties Enoch argues for are irreducible? We must be careful in these waters. When an anti-robust-realist says that the moral properties Enoch argues for are irreducibly normative, she is not best understood as literally claiming something about robustly real properties. Instead we could interpret her as either making a conditional claim such as *if Enoch is right* then moral properties are irreducible, or as a claim about Enoch's position: Enoch (rightly or wrongly) describes moral properties as being irreducibly normative. What we should not do is interpret her as claiming the properties Enoch argues for *actually exist* and are irreducible. Importantly, we have failed to find a realiser of *State_{N-R}* that contains a true belief.

Hold on a moment. I haven't argued that Enoch is wrong. We're assuming expressivism is true of our psychology, but couldn't Enoch have the correct metaphysics? Couldn't such irreducible properties be out there, which we may or may not direct our desire-like attitudes towards? Not quite. Robust realists believe moral properties are irreducibly *normative*. That means there cannot be a way to refer to them without the use of moral (or other normative) concepts. On the hybrid expressivist picture, though, the two components of the judgement do

not involve moral concepts because that would create a regress, hence the asterisks in my formulation of Realiser 2. Thus, the concepts within the two components of the judgement cannot successfully refer to the kind of things Enoch describes. Robustly realist metaphysics are *bound up* with a picture of psychology, and our expressivist assumption rules it out. To clarify, for all I've said, esoteric Enoch-esque ethereal properties might *exist*; the problem is that even if they did, we would not be able to refer to them in the belief (or desire) component of a moral judgement.

We have effectively discovered a transcendental argument against *Non-Reductivism*. Rather than looking at direct arguments against irreducibly normative properties such as arguments from supervenience or queerness, we have been examining the mental states involved in accepting *Non-Reductivism* and determining what we are committed to (dis)believing. Pure expressivists could not make sense of *Non-Reductivism* at all, but we have seen that hybrid expressivists can characterise its acceptance as a mental state that includes a belief component about the irreducibility of certain properties. Then comes the dilemma: are the 'certain properties' actually irreducible? If the properties exist but are not irreducible, then the belief component is straightforwardly false. But if the belief is about the irreducibility of, say, the kind of properties Enoch argues for, then it fails to refer – hence, the belief component is not true. Therefore, on the hybrid expressivist picture, there is no way for *Non-Reductivism* to be accepted without having a belief that is untrue.

Now, we saw in §3.2 how the fact that a moral judgement rests on or is constituted by a false belief does not guarantee that the judgement itself is false. Nevertheless, once a belief of yours has been *revealed* to you to be untrue, it is difficult if not impossible to continue believing it. Given that we should reject beliefs that have been shown not to be true, no expressivist should accept *Non-Reductivism* after the claim has been made sense of. Expressivists, then, should not aim to mimic non-natural realism. They also should not mimic any other metaethical theories that subscribe to *Non-Reductivism* even if they may be considered naturalist, or at least not non-naturalist (Wedgwood 2007, ms.; Stringer 2018; Väyrynen ms.). Instead, they should be *reductive* naturalists. They must believe it is possible to refer to any moral properties in non-moral terms.

I should mention that there is a first-order judgement in the move from rejecting *Non-Reductivism* to accepting something positive. The expressivist could coherently mimic an error theorist instead. In theory they might end up morally approving and disapproving only of actions that have the kinds of properties Enoch argues for, simultaneously believing nothing can have those properties

and therefore there are no substantive moral truths. Yet, given the typical aims of quasi-realists to vindicate realist-sounding thought and talk, and given the desirability (note the first-order claim) of directing our moral attitudes in accordance with properties that can actually be instantiated, the most attractive option is naturalism. I'll say more about why in the section after next.

5. Comparisons

Of the conclusions I have reached in this paper, how much is new? Wasn't "quasi-naturalism" the received view before? The expressivist position on moral properties has sometimes been unclear. Some have attributed the thesis of *Non-Reductivism* to expressivists (Ingram 2017: 490) and this is understandable. First, note that expressivists typically believe moral predicates "resist analysis" (Blackburn 2010: 43) and cannot be reduced to descriptive predicates. Blackburn (1993: 181) also writes there is "no harm in saying that ethical predicates refer to properties, when such properties are merely the semantic shadows of the fact that they function as predicates." If the most we can say about moral properties is that they are the "semantic shadows" of moral predicates which are not reducible to descriptive predicates, then it might well seem as though Blackburn commits himself to *Non-Reductivism*.¹⁴ Yet I have argued that moral properties are not merely semantic shadows but are full blown natural properties as real as can be.

Toppinen's (2018) paper on supervenience for expressivists explicitly assumes throughout that moral properties are *sui generis* and non-natural. In its title's terms, it is "non-naturalism gone quasi." It is an ingenious answer to the question of why, if expressivism is true, moral properties supervene on descriptive ones; but if moral properties *just are* descriptive properties as I have argued, then there is no need for such ingenuity. Likewise, Dreier's (2015) paper on the problem of supervenience for quasi-realism assumes that the supervening moral properties are not descriptive.

At the other end of the scale, Ridge (2014: 224, my emphasis) develops his expressivism in such a way that there are "normative propositions, normative truths, even normative facts, and extensions for normative predicates, but *no normative properties*." He notes that he is very much open to the possibility of

¹⁴ At other times, Blackburn (2015: 844) implies moral properties are natural by separately asserting (a) there are moral properties and (b) there are only natural properties in the world. Once again, we're relying on implications rather than clear, explicit claims about the nature of moral properties.

vindicating talk of normative properties as well, but he himself does not do so. I hope that Ridge would agree that my arguments in this paper are compatible with his view.

The expressivist whose toes are most likely to have been trodden on is Allan Gibbard, who tells us (2003: 32) that all "*properties* are *natural*, but some *concepts* are *non-naturalistic*." That being said, it's worth noting there are times when Gibbard seems interested in mimicking non-natural forms of realism. He takes Moorean intuitionism as a "template" (2003: ch.2), and the following quote seems at odds with the naturalism that appears elsewhere and that others (Majors 2005; Schroeter & Schroeter 2005) ascribe to him:

We quasi-realists don't start out talking about properties and relations that are normative aspects of the world. We start with such things as plans and restrictions. The upshot, though, we claim, exactly mimics a normative realism. (When I talk about "normative realism" here, I'll always mean of the non-naturalistic kind.) (Gibbard 2011: 43.)¹⁵

Yet in other places Gibbard's view seems comparable to the one we have arrived at in this paper. In particular, he makes his own transcendental argument in favour of moral properties being "constituted by" descriptive ones (2003: ch.5). He does not make any room for the first-order view that nothing has moral properties (I mentioned this possibility at the end of the last section) and his argument is very different, resting primarily on supervenience considerations. Nevertheless, his conclusion is similar. To illustrate he introduces Hera who thinks maximising her own pleasure at all costs is okay to do. He then supposes (2003: 103) 'Hera is right and the property of being okay to do just *is* the property of being egohedonic. ... We then have two concepts of the same property, the concept of being egohedonic and the concept of being okay to do. In a loose sense, therefore, we can "ascribe" this property to an act in either of two ways, by calling it "egohedonic" or by calling it "okay to do".'

While I agree with conclusion (except I wouldn't say there's anything "loose" about it) I do not believe Gibbard has earned the right to claim it. The trouble with Gibbard saying this comes down to the reasons I gave in §3.1. He is a pure expressivist and I do not believe he can make any sense of the metaphysical claims he's making. What desire-like states do they express? Recall that pure expressivists could not distinguish between correlation and reduction. This is perfectly exemplified by the way Gibbard considers (2003: 96) the claim "[t]here is a factual property that *constitutes* being okay to do" to be an

¹⁵ In that paper Gibbard is aiming to mimic relaxed realists like Dworkin (1996) rather than robust realists like Enoch (2011), but both of these groups accept *Non-Reductivism*.

“abbreviation” of the claim that “[t]here is a prosaically factual property *F* such that for any act *a* open in any possible situation *s*, act *a* is okay to do in *s* just in case *a* in *s* has property *F*.” The latter claim is merely a biconditional and should not be seen as providing a reduction.

In this section I’ve highlighted some differences between the view I’ve put forward and the positions of others. In the next section I’ll describe what I find attractive about it.

6. The Attractions of Quasi-Naturalism

We’ve arrived at quasi-naturalism via the following steps. First, we assumed expressivism was true. Taking our lead from previous expressivists who have conducted moral metaphysics internally, we then sought to make sense of moral metaphysical claims and found that hybrid expressivists had the tools to do so. Following that, we saw the claim that *moral properties are irreducibly normative* could not be vindicated, which effectively commits expressivists to rejecting mimicking non-naturalism. The rest is first-order ethics: what should we direct our desire-like attitudes towards? Theoretically we could choose non-existent properties or properties that cannot be instantiated and become quasi-error-theorists, but I hope that most of us would choose otherwise and morally approve or disapprove of things insofar as they have features they can actually exhibit.

If the reader is convinced that expressivists should indeed be reductive naturalists, I would deem this a mission accomplished. Nevertheless, it would be a shame if this were to be considered a *reductio* of expressivism. The resulting theory is not intended to be thrust upon expressivists with regret; it’s appealing on its own terms. While the jury is still out on all these issues – we are doing philosophy, after all – I shall briefly describe what I think are the advantages of quasi-naturalism with respect to some traditional issues in metaethics.

Meaning. Like the Cornell realists (Boyd 1988, 2003; Sturgeon 1985), expressivists tend to hold that moral concepts are not analytically equivalent to descriptive ones (Gibbard 2012: 33; Blackburn 2015: 844). After all, moral judgements necessarily involve desire-like states but descriptive ones do not. Even though moral properties can be referred to in descriptive terms, moral terms do not mean the same thing as descriptive terms. Moral truths are synthetic, not analytic, and this explains why Moorean questions seem open.

Motivation. There is a reliable connection between making a moral judgement and being motivated to act in line with it due to the desire-like nature

of the moral perspective. This connection can be severed. The fact that you approve of actions insofar as they have K and believe that ϕ -ing has K does not logically entail the desire or plan to ϕ (compare Gibbard (2003) where ought-judgements *are* plans), but it does explain why there is a *tendency* to desire to ϕ .

Realism. Moral properties are natural properties, so we should be as realist about morality as we are about the natural world. We'll have to finish doing ethics before we figure out *which* natural properties are the moral ones, but whichever they turn out to be, some things really have them and some things really don't. My moral stance is such that I favour mind-independence, but just as I made conceptual room for error theory, there is room for mind-dependence too. For example, if you morally disapprove of actions insofar as they have the property that you *would* disapprove of them were you fully informed, that can be accommodated within the quasi-naturalist framework.

Disagreement. Naturalists often have trouble accounting for the possibility of moral disagreement persisting after agreement has been reached about all the natural facts. Expressivists can account for this possibility with the common conviction that people's desire-like attitudes can diverge even if all their non-moral beliefs are in agreement. Exactly what disagreement *is* on the expressivist picture is tackled in other work (Ridge 2014: ch.6; Bex-Priestley & Shemmer 2017, forthcoming; Worsnip 2019).

Embedding. It's not as simple a fix as it might seem, but there's good reason to believe hybrid expressivists have an easier time with the Frege-Geach problem than pure expressivists by making use of the belief components (Ridge 2014: ch.5.) just like we did in §3.2 and §4.

Reference. The Achilles heel of synthetic naturalism is the sticky issue of reference. I believe expressivist versions of synthetic naturalism can avoid the Moral Twin Earth objections (Horgan & Timmons 1991, 1992, 2015) that our cognitivist cousins run into by steering clear of causal or indeed any non-normative¹⁶ theories of reference. More work needs to be done to spell out an expressivist-friendly theory of reference for moral terms, but the natural thing to do here is sidestep: what is it to *think* that a moral term 'M' refers to the property F? Presumably one cannot believe, for example, that 'morally right' refers to maximising happiness without endorsing utilitarianism. In general, a moral term 'M' refers to property F if and only if the correct moral theory T assigns 'M' to F. Moral reference is internal to moral inquiry.

¹⁶ Although see Väyrynen (2018: 19-20) for the view that causal theories of reference *are* normative.

I hope it was clear that I do not presume any of these issues have been solved. My intention in this section was simply to highlight what I consider to be some areas of promise in order to stress that it's not a *bad* conclusion that expressivists should be reductive naturalists. Quasi-naturalism is, in my view, independently attractive.

7. Conclusion

We should be sceptical that pure expressivists can vindicate some of the metaphysical claims that they make or that are often attributed to them. There is always the option of going quiet and no longer talking about moral properties, but some may still wish to assert that they exist and are mind-independent or have other such features. Luckily, hybrid expressivists can make sense of moral metaphysics by providing a clear account of what it is to accept metaphysical claims from within a moral perspective.

Given that the right to moral metaphysics has been earned, we can engage in it. I argued in favour of quasi-naturalism by giving a transcendental argument against the claim that moral properties are not reducible to descriptive properties. There is no way to accept *Non-Reductivism* without having a false or untrue belief, so insofar as we are committed to rejecting false and untrue beliefs, we are committed to rejecting *Non-Reductivism*. A short bit of moralising took us from there to quasi-naturalism. Expressivists, then, should be reductive naturalists. Fortunately, this isn't a bad thing to be.¹⁷

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