Should We be Moved
by What Motivates Expressivism?

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Suppose we were to devise a metric that illustrates the degree to which metaethical positions are similar, situating these views in common conceptual space. This metric might yield some surprises, such as the degree to which moral fictionalism and T. M. Scanlon's "relaxed realism" are similar.[1] But it would also yield some predictable results, placing moral realism and expressivism, for example, at opposite ends of the metaethical spectrum. The rationale for situating realism and expressivism in this way would, moreover, be transparent, for these two views appear as different as metaethical views could be: realists say that moral judgments express genuine (or robust) moral propositional content; expressivists deny this. Realists say that these judgments represent the moral facts; expressivists deny this. Realists say that there are moral facts that are represented; expressivists demur.

These differences between realism and expressivism are not superficial but are symptomatic of deep differences in philosophical temperament. Realists are impressed by the degree to which moral thought is similar to other domains of thought, such as thought about the external world, logic, and numbers, which appear to be straightforwardly representational. For it seems that when we engage in such thought, we aim to think about such things as trees, axioms, and prime numbers. Moreover, we often appear to succeed in this, ascertaining such things as that Dutch elm trees are endangered and that naïve set theory is inconsistent. In the moral case, realists maintain that things are similar. When we deliberate about what to do, realists claim that we aim to discover which courses of action are morally permissible and which are forbidden—the instantiation of these properties, by all appearances, are there waiting to be discovered. Often it seems that we get things right, as when we slowly over time came to realize that slavery is morally impermissible.

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[1] Enoch (2011, ch. 5) makes a case for the similarity between fictionalism and Scanlon's view. I borrow the term "relaxed realism" from McGrath (2014).

Expressivists, for their part, find themselves impressed by the ways in which moral thought is discontinuous with thought about the external world, logic, and numbers. These philosophers often mark the apparent contrast by noting that thought of the latter sort is theoretical; its aim is to expand our knowledge of how the world is, informing us about such things as seismic shifts and algebraic functions. Unlike thoughts about the external world, logical axioms, or numbers, expressivists maintain that moral thought is practical; its aim is to expand our knowledge not of what the world is like but of how to behave in the world as we know it.[2] Because it is practical, expressivists note that it is no surprise that moral thought is often affectively-laden, expressing states of commendation or condemnation, as the case may be. These affectively-laden states, after all, are precisely the kinds of thoughts that move us to action or are expressed when we commend or condemn.

When two views differ as sharply as do realism and expressivism, it is easy for their proponents to talk past one another, failing to understand the other's most fundamental commitments. My project in this essay is to bring these two very different views into conversation. I begin by offering a more specific characterization of both expressivism and realism, noting where some of their important differences lie. I then identify the primary rationale that expressivists offer for rejecting moral realism in favor of their view, an argument that has a long history in the expressivist tradition, which I refer to as the *Motivation Argument*. While the Motivation Argument has been widely discussed, I present a strategy of response to it that, to my knowledge, realists have not exploited. This strategy is concessive in character; it doesn't charge that some premise of the Motivation Argument is false or that expressivists have failed accurately to describe the phenomenology of the moral life. Rather, it contends that the Motivation Argument suffers from a dialectical flaw that renders it unhelpful for furthering the expressivist cause. The moral I draw from the discussion is that ex-

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[2] Chrisman (2008) and Gibbard (2012, ch. 10) state the contrast vividly.

pressivism might be true. And there might be good reasons to accept it. But the Motivation Argument is not one of them.[3]

1. Characterizing two rival views

Let me begin with some preliminary matters. Metaethicists tend to use the term "moral judgment" in a very inclusive sense to designate whatever state of mind that is expressed by the sincere utterance of moral sentences such as "It's wrong to cheat friends of their earnings" and "I'm required to give a substantial percentage of my income to famine relief." I'll use this term in the same inclusive way. For present purposes, I'll also distinguish judgments that have moral representational content from those that do not. A judgment has moral representational content, I will assume, just in case it represents a moral fact—where representation is understood to be a genuine aboutness relation between mind and world whose nature might be understood or analyzed in different ways.[4] When the representational content of a judgment successfully represents some state of the world, I will say that it accurately represents that state.

I understand expressivism to be any view[5] that endorses the following three claims:

> Moral judgments lack moral representational content. They do not represent moral reality, the moral facts. Rather, they express attitudes of approbation and disapprobation toward objects, including actions and people, in virtue of their having non-moral features of various sorts, such as their being altruistic.

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[3] While the argument I'll present overlaps substantially with one offered in Cuneo (2014, ch. 4), it has seemed to me worthwhile to present the argument independently of the context and assumptions of that book's discussion.

[4] I realize that some understand representation along deflationary lines, affirming that there is such a relation but that it has no nature. As the characterization of representation above indicates, I do not have representation so understood in mind.

[5] Blackburn (1993, introduction) characterizes expressivism as a research program. While I think there are significant advantages to thinking of expressivism in this way, I'll speak of it here as a view.

> Moral judgments do not represent and, so, do not accurately represent moral reality, that is, the moral facts.

> There are no moral facts, at least as realists think of them.

Moral realists reject each of the three claims embraced by expressivists. According to their view:

> Moral judgments have moral representational content. They represent moral reality, the moral facts.

> Some moral judgments accurately represent moral reality, that is, the moral facts.

> There are moral facts. Some are accurately represented by moral judgments.

I hasten to add that some realists believe that moral judgments may also express attitudes of approbation and disapprobation, as expressivists believe. If these philosophers are right, we can blend insights from both views.[6] I will return to this point toward the end of our discussion.

I now introduce some refinements, beginning with expressivism. Despite their deep disagreements with realists, *traditional expressivists* agree with realists about this much: if there were any moral facts, they would be as realists say. More specifically, these philosophers maintain that if there were any moral facts, they would be as non-naturalist realists say, belonging to a *sui generis* non-natural realm.[7] Unlike realists, however, traditional expressivists believe that there are no such facts; indeed, some are forthrightly dismissive of the claim that there are such facts, calling non-naturalistic realism "mumbo-jumbo."[8] A. J. Ayer,

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[6] See, among others, Copp (2001), Hare (2003), Boisvert (2008), and Schroeder (2009).

[7] This agreement is largely due to prominent representatives of both traditions endorsing some version of the Open Question Argument.

[8] Gibbard (2003, 192). Gibbard (2012, 239) calls the view "hocus pocus."

Jonathan Bennett, and the early Allan Gibbard are examples of traditional expressivists.[9]

Sophisticated expressivists, by contrast, advance a view that is both more nuanced and difficult to characterize. Unlike their traditionalist cohorts, these philosophers maintain that we can properly say that there are moral properties or moral facts so long as we understand such properties or facts in a sufficiently deflationary way. What does this mean? It is exceedingly difficult to say, but the rough idea is that these properties or facts would be sufficiently ontologically "lightweight" that they come for free with well-behaved moral predicates, and would play none of the explanatory roles typically reserved for moral facts.[10] So, for example, when presenting his favored version of quasi-realist expressivism, Simon Blackburn writes that G. E. Moore was right when he said that there is "almost nothing to say" about goodness. Goodness, writes Blackburn, "will indeed resist analysis, resist any account of empirical or causal access, and bear a relation of supervenience to other properties." As with truth, Blackburn continues, we can say "that there is a property there, if properties are just the semantic shadows of predicates. But there is no topic there, no residual mystery, therefore, about how we get our hooks into it nor why we should want to do so."[11]

As I say, it is difficult to know what to make of these and other similar pronouncements. How should we understand the metaphor of moral properties being "shadows" of predicates? Are we to understand this to mean that moral properties depend on moral predicates much in the way that shadows depend on opaque objects? Or consider the claim that we can say that there are moral properties, so long as we understand them to be shadows. Is this best understood to be a metalinguistic thesis about what we are *saying* when we claim that there

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[9] See Ayer (1936), Bennett (1993), and Gibbard (1990).

[10] This last claim is somewhat controversial. I offer reasons in its favor in Cuneo (forthcoming).

[11] Blackburn (2010, 310-11). Elsewhere Blackburn (1993, 181) writes: "There is no harm in saying ethical predicates refer to properties, when such properties are merely the semantic shadows of the fact that they function as predicates. A quasi-realist protection of ethical truth protects ethical predicates, and if our overall semantic picture is that predicates refer to properties, so be it. But ethical predication remains an entirely different activity from naturalistic predication."

are properties or an ontological thesis about the character of these properties themselves?

I am not sure how best to answer these questions. Neither, so far as I can tell, are most other philosophers, some worrying that deflationism provides no way to distinguish sophisticated expressivism from non-naturalist realism.[12] Despite these difficulties about how to understand sophisticated expressivism—and I will have more to say about the view later—there seem to be two important differences between it and moral realism.

One difference is that when offering an account of the workings of moral thought and discourse, sophisticated expressivists wish not to appeal to moral properties or facts; we are not to offer an account of the meaning of moral sentences in terms of them. In his later work, Allan Gibbard states his view as follows: "Expressivism…consists in a pattern of explanation." What sort of explanation? Gibbard says that it is a pattern of explanation with regard to meanings. It covers "any account of meanings that follows this indirect path: to explain the meaning of a term, explain what states of mind the term can be used to express."[13] Filled out a little more, the idea seems to be that while we may end up saying that there are moral properties and facts, we do not explain moral thought and discourse in terms of them. Rather, we take the "indirect path" to which Gibbard refers in which, when explaining moral thought and discourse, we appeal to states of mind that lack moral representational content.

Second, and relatedly, although sophisticated expressivists are willing to talk of there being moral facts and of our knowing them, they deny that there is any substantial sense in which moral judgments represent these facts. In one place, Blackburn puts the matter like this:

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[12] Rosen (1998) and Dreier (2004) develop the worry.

[13] Gibbard (2003, 7). Elsewhere Gibbard writes: "The expressivist starts with states of mind, and uses these to elucidate normative beliefs or seeming beliefs … At the outset, in any expressivist's scheme, the initial states of mind are explained not as beliefs with such-and-such content, but in some other way. They are psychologically, as sentiments or attitudes … or states of planning. The expressivist then tries to show that these states of mind act much like beliefs: it as if they were beliefs with a special content" (180-1).

I think expressivism needs something like the distinction between thin truth, or thin truth aptitude on the one hand, and a more 'robust' or substantive 'thick' concept of representation or description on the other. That is, expressivism can profit from minimalism [or deflationism] about truth, since this makes it easier to allow that normative utterances are true. But it needs them not to be representative or descriptive, so these must be regarded as thick notions, attaching only to a sub-class of indicative utterances in good propositional standing.[14]

In another place, Blackburn writes:

Yes, I am an anti-realist; no, this does not mean that there are no facts of an ethical or normative kind…. Quasi-realism…refuses to give ethical facts a typical explanatory role. This is already heralded when we turn our backs on ethical representation. A representation of something as F is typically explained by the fact that it is F. A representation *answers to* what is represented. I hold that ethical facts do not play this explanatory role.[15]

The position voiced in these passages seems to be that, while sophisticated expressivists are happy to say that moral claims are true and that there are moral facts, these philosophers insist that moral claims do not have moral representational content; they are not "descriptive," purporting to be about a realm of moral facts. Since they are not, moral facts are not, in their view, the sorts of thing that "answer to" the contents of moral judgments.

This characterization of sophisticated expressivism raises a host of issues that call for explanation. On this occasion, however, let me rush

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[14] Blackburn (2001, 25). Blackburn (1998, ch. 3) takes a different approach, advocating deflationism about representation itself. Cuneo (2008) addresses this strategy.

[15] Blackburn (1999, 216).

by the issues it raises, turning to moral realism for the purpose of specifying somewhat more exactly how I understand the position.

The type of realism on which I have my eye remains neutral regarding two issues that divide realists from one another. First, some realists hold that moral facts are ordinary natural facts of the sort investigated by the usual sciences; others do not, maintaining that they are non-natural. I will understand realism to be compatible with either of these positions. Second, some realists maintain that moral facts imply categorical reasons that apply to agents regardless of their contingent desires, goals, or social allegiances. Others do not, holding that moral facts generate reasons only when agents have contingent commitments of certain kinds. Realism, as I understand it, is compatible with either of these positions as well.

While I understand realism to be neutral with respect to some important questions about the nature of moral facts or truths, I will understand it not to be neutral with regard to others.[16] For I'll understand the view to commit itself to certain claims about what sorts of moral facts there are. More specifically, I'll understand realism to commit itself to there being a range of substantive first-order moral facts that (drawing from other work) I will term the *moral fixed points*.[17]

To flesh out this idea, it will be helpful to have some terminology in hand. Suppose we say that a *moral system* is a reasonably comprehensive and consistent body of moral propositions regarding beings like us in a world such as ours. By a *reasonably comprehensive* body of moral propositions, I mean an array of propositions that concerns nearly all situations that agents like us might find themselves in, and imply—often in conjunction with empirical propositions—a range of moral assessments and recommendations for those situations. *Beings like us* are mortal, embodied, susceptible to physical, emotional and other psychological pleasures and pains, capable of introspection, of friendship, of self-esteem, possessed of some degree of empathy and sympathy, and able to reason in at least minimal ways. *A world such as ours* is one that is regulated by laws of nature and broad empirical

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[16] For present purposes, I will slide freely between talk of moral facts and moral truths. I believe there is a distinction between the two but marking it will not matter on this occasion.

[17] See Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014).

statistical generalizations that are at least close to the ones here on earth.

It is possible that there are moral systems that govern beings very different from us, in worlds rather different from ours. And, for all I say here, there might be deviant moral systems that recommend such things as inflicting pain. To avoid focusing on such possibilities, I will say that a *minimally eccentric* moral system is one that does not incorporate eccentric empirical assumptions about us and the world, such as the assumptions that we tend to like pain, that we are incapable of being deceived, that we ordinarily have absolutely no concern for the well-being of others, that upon death we are immediately bodily resurrected, and so forth. And I will assume that a *non-deviant* moral system is not one that morally recommends inflicting suffering on others or harming them but instead recommends alleviating suffering and not inflicting harm on others.

Let us call *substantive realism* the view according to which any minimally eccentric, non-deviant moral system must include the moral fixed points. Substantive realists maintain that the moral fixed points include propositions such as:

> It is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons.

> It is wrong to break one's promises simply because one feels like it.

> It is wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure.

> It is wrong to torture others just because they have inconvenienced you.

> It is wrong to impose severe burdens on others simply because of their physical appearance.

> It is wrong to satisfy a mild desire if this requires killing many innocent people.[18]

The moral fixed points may or may not lie at the theoretical foundation of a minimally eccentric, non-deviant moral system. For all I say here, they might, for example, be grounded in even moral general principles, such as Kant's Formula of Humanity or Ross's prima facie duties. However that may be, the fixed points constitute the *boundaries* of any such system, as nothing could count as a minimally eccentric, non-deviant moral system were it not to include these truths. By committing substantive realism to this claim, I realize that I am attributing to realism commitments that many other realists have not explicitly endorsed. Still, the version of realism just described is not without precedent. When Thomas Reid defended the claim that the "first principles of morality" are constitutive of competent moral thought, he endorsed a similar view.[19] And when Philippa Foot argued against Hare's position by calling attention to so-called thick evaluative predicates such as "rude" and "just," whose application conditions are fixed by their descriptive content, she also defended a position similar to the one described. For Foot forcefully pressed the view that there are certain in-built conceptual constraints on what could qualify as rude or just behavior, guaranteeing that some actions, by definition, could not qualify as rude or just.[20] Indeed, one could view the position articulated above as an attempt to apply Foot's basic insight to the case of minimally eccentric, non-deviant moral systems.

So, according to substantive realism (henceforth simply "realism"), any minimally eccentric, non-deviant moral system must include the moral fixed points. Realists add that the fixed points are also hold or are true. Indeed, they maintain that they are *evidently* true. To paraphrase something that Sharon Street—who is no friend of realism—says in another context, it seems almost crazy to deny them.[21]

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[18] I have stated the fixed points in such a way that they do not have any qualifications attached to them. It might be, however, that they should be understood to be defeasible. I'll leave this possibility open here.

[19] See Reid (2010).

[20] Foot (2002, ch 8).

[21] Street (2016, 327).

The argument I am going to develop in the next section depends on the claim that the moral fixed points are excellent candidates for being moral truths constitutive of a minimally eccentric, non-deviant moral system. While there are a variety of moral fixed points, in what follows, it will be helpful to work with just one of those stated above. So, I will frame the discussion by employing the proposition I'll call:

> **No Slaughter:** It is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons.

In what follows, No Slaughter will function as a paradigm case of a moral fixed point.

2. The Motivation Argument

While contemporary expressivists have offered a battery of arguments for their view, recent defenses of the position rely heavily on a single and historically influential line of argument, which claims that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating.[22] Blackburn, for example, writes:

> The reason expressivism in ethics has to be correct is that if we supposed that belief, denial, and so on were simply discussions of a way the world is, we would still face the open question. Even if that belief were settled, there would still be issues of what importance to give it, what to do, and all the rest. For we have no conception of a 'truth condition' or fact of which mere apprehension by itself determines practical issues. For any fact, there is a question of what to do about it.[23]

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[22] See Blackburn (1998, ch. 3), Gibbard (1990) and (2003, ch. 1), Horgan and Timmons (2000) and (2006), and Timmons (1999) for defenses of expressivism. Gibbard defends the intrinsically motivating character of judgments concerning the "all things considered ought." See also Stevenson (1937, 13), Harman (1977, 33), Blackburn (1984, 188), and Ridge (2014, ch. 2 and 229).

[23] Blackburn (1998, 70).

Gibbard says something similar. Like Blackburn, Gibbard maintains that expressivism regarding ought judgments "*must* be right."[24] The problem with realism is that it "downplays choice" by "treating acting" as "an afterthought." Prominent versions of realism "leave us conceptually in the lurch, with no refined concepts for thinking" our "way to decision."[25] Expressivism, by contrast, furnishes an account of moral judgments according to which they are tailor-made to move us to action. In Gibbard's case, this is because some just *are* decisions to act; as such, they are intrinsically motivating "by definition."[26] If these philosophers are right, moral judgment must consist in something other than the mere apprehension of a moral fact or the acceptance of a moral proposition.

When the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating is deployed as a premise against moral realism, expressivists defend:

The Motivation Argument

(1) Moral judgments are intrinsically motivating: it is conceptually necessary that if an agent judges that she morally ought to act in a certain way, then she is motivated to some degree to act in that way.

(2) If moral judgments express moral beliefs, then moral judgments are not intrinsically motivating.

(3) So, moral judgments do not express moral beliefs.

(4) If moral judgments do not express moral beliefs, then there are no moral facts.[27]

(5) So, there are no moral facts.

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[24] Gibbard (2003, 7).

[25] Gibbard (2003, 10-11); *cf.* also p. 13

[26] Ibid., 17 and 219. *Cp.* Gibbard (2012, 224).

[27] This formulation of the argument probably comes closest to Thomson (1996).

The thought behind the argument's last premise is this: it would be bizarre if moral facts were to exist and yet for moral thought and discourse not to express beliefs, which represent them. For suppose moral facts were to exist. If they were, then they would guide action; this (in part) is what we mean when we say that these facts are practical. But if these facts were to guide action, then at least some of them would be within our ken, for only then could they play their action-guiding role. If moral facts were within our ken, however, then presumably moral judgments would accurately represent some of them. It is difficult to see what would stand in the way.

We can approach the matter from the opposite angle. Suppose that moral judgments were not to express moral beliefs, as the antecedent of (4) states. Then positing moral facts would appear to be entirely superfluous; they would explain nothing regarding the nature of moral judgment or action, as there would be no apparent sense in which moral judgments tracked these facts. But if so, then we have powerful reasons not to accept any theory that implies that they exist. Either way you look at things, we have good reason to accept (4), the final premise of The Motivation Argument.

While there are reasons to reject some of the premises of The Motivational Argument and the grounds offered in their favor, I propose to bracket these reasons for present purposes. Instead, I wish to focus on why someone might accept the argument's first premise. This premise is not supposed to be the fruit of high-level theorizing. Rather, it is supposed to be something that emerges from reflection on the nature of ordinary moral thought and practice. To claim something like "Yes, I sincerely believe that I ought not to murder, but I am not against it" appears paradoxical. How could one sincerely believe that one ought not to murder and not be against it?[28]

In this sense, advocates of The Motivation Argument defer to apparent features of well-formed ordinary moral thought and discourse. But with respect to other apparent truths in the neighborhood, there appears to be no comparable deference. For consider No Slaughter. Like the first premise of The Motivation Argument, it has

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[28] Gibbard (2012, 224, 232) states a point in the vicinity as follows: "*It is conceptually inconsistent to believe that I ought right now to do a thing and act otherwise*…. it is conceptually inconsistent to accept 'ought' and reject 'Do!'."

an excellent claim to being a truth to which sincere participants in ordinary moral practice are committed. Indeed, if what I said earlier is correct, it looks as if a minimally eccentric, non-deviant moral system must include it. And yet to accept the conclusion of The Motivation Argument is to reject No Slaughter.

This yields an apparent tension. For suppose we concede, for argument's sake, that if moral judgments express moral beliefs, then these judgments are not intrinsically motivating. Why should we take this to be a reason to reject No Slaughter rather than the first premise of The Motivation Argument? After all, both the first premise of this argument and No Slaughter appear to be truths deeply embedded in (or presupposed by) well-formed ordinary moral and thought and practice. Accordingly, it is difficult to see why we should accept:

> **Argument A**: It is conceptually necessary that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating. If this is right, however, then moral judgments do not express moral beliefs. And if this is so, then there are no moral facts. Suppose, now, that an agent does the unthinkable, slaughtering fellow persons for recreation. It follows that No Slaughter is false: for an agent who acts in this way does not thereby exhibit a moral demerit, such as having acted wrongly.

rather than embrace:

> **Argument B**: If an agent recreationally slaughters fellow persons, then he thereby exhibits a moral demerit, such as having acted wrongly. Suppose that an agent does the unthinkable: he slaughters others for recreation. It follows that he exhibits the moral demerit of having acted wrongly. But if so, then moral facts exist. Suppose, however, it is true that, if moral judgments do not express moral beliefs, then there are no moral facts. This implies that, if moral facts exist, then moral judgments express moral beliefs. Given the truth of premise (2), the first premise of The Motivation Argument must be false: it is possible for an agent to judge that she morally ought to act in some way, but not be motivated to do so.

This, at any rate, is the challenge I wish to pose to proponents of The Motivation Argument. Since it owes a debt to the style of argument that G. E. Moore pressed against skeptics regarding the external world, I will call it the *Moorean-style Objection*.[29]

In principle, the Moorean-style Objection can be met. An adequate reply would be one in which proponents of The Motivation Argument identify reasons why we should embrace Argument A rather than Argument B. The issue before us is whether there are such reasons.

It might appear that there clearly are such reasons. As a first move, friends of The Motivation Argument could simply concede that traditional versions of expressivism, which deny that there is any interesting sense in which No Slaughter is true, are vulnerable to the charge of arbitrariness. But they will also insist, however, that sophisticated versions of the view are not. The reason is that sophisticated expressivists can distinguish two interpretations of No Slaughter, maintaining that the Moorean-style Objection goes through against only one such interpretation.

Under the first interpretation—call it *the robust reading*—No Slaughter reports a robust fact or truth, something that can form the representational content of our moral judgments. Under the second interpretation—call it *the deflated reading*—No Slaughter does not report any such fact or truth. Rather, it reports a "deflated fact" of the sort to which Blackburn alludes when he says that, according to sophisticated expressivists, there is a domain of moral facts that do not "answer to" our moral judgments. Accordingly, under the deflated reading, to accept No Slaughter is not to predicate of recreational slaughter the property of being wrong or to represent a moral fact. Rather, it is simply to express a first-order ethical judgment that condemns recreational slaughter.

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[29] See Moore (1953). McPherson (2009) notes that, interestingly, Moore himself never employed this type of strategy when defending his own metaethical views. McPherson goes on to suggest that there might be a reason for this, as the Moorean strategy is less plausible when applied in metaethics. It is worth emphasizing, though, that the Moorean strategy that McPherson considers is more ambitious than the one I employ here. For the strategy I employ counsels not that we reject Argument A in favor of Argument B but only that we have no more reason to accept Argument A rather than Argument B.

Blackburn develops this last claim by appealing to what he calls "Ramsey's Ladder."[30] Suppose I say that:

> "It is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons."

In doing so, says Blackburn, I would be putting forth a first-order ethical claim. I could embellish this first-order claim, saying the sorts of things that philosophers say when engaging in metaethics, uttering sentences such as:

> "It is true that it is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons."

> "It is a necessary objective fact that it is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons."

and:

> "It is an unalterable, objective, eternal fact of the universe that it is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons."

According to Ramsey's Ladder, however, it would be a mistake to think that when I go on to say these things I would have somehow said something over and above what I said when I put forth the initial first-order ethical claim. For these sentences are notational variants of one another; indeed, Blackburn says that they all mean the same thing.[31] For, in each case, when I express the judgment that recreational slaughter of fellow persons is wrong, I am simply expressing my commitment to condemning such slaughter no matter what the circumstances in which it may take place (and perhaps enjoining others to do so too).[32]

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[30] Blackburn (1998, ch. 3).

[31] See Blackburn (1998, 78-9 and 295-8).

[32] See Blackburn (1993, 153), Gibbard (2003, 7), and also Bennett (1993). Earlier I alluded to the fact that when characterizing their view, expressivists tend to offer accounts of not what it is for a moral claim to be true but what it is for someone to judge, accept, or say that a claim is true. Although I believe this tendency obscures important issues that divide expressivists from realists, in my characterization of their

With this distinction between different readings of No Slaughter before us, let us return to the Moorean-style Objection. The Moorean-style Objection, say defenders of The Motivation Argument, assumes the truth of the first interpretation we just identified—the robust reading—according to which moral judgments have moral representational content. But in this context—or so these philosophers contend—the robust interpretation is not something that can be simply assumed, for it incorporates an account of the way in which moral thought functions which is precisely what defenders of The Motivation Argument reject. To make the Moorean-style Objection stick, realists would need to furnish an additional argument that theirs is the better interpretation of No Slaughter, which they do not.

This response seems to me basically correct. Advocates of the Moorean-style argument cannot simply assume that the robust reading is correct. Still, I doubt that this response goes far enough, since it threatens simply to relocate the problem to which the Moorean-style Objection draws our attention. To see why, it is helpful to have firmly in mind the strategy that defenders of The Motivation Argument employ. When faced with the Moorean-style Objection, defenders of The Motivation Argument propose that we take the argument's first premise at face value; the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating says exactly what it appears to say. They then suggest that No Slaughter is different, for it admits of two interpretations—one which assumes that moral thought is representational, the other of which does not. Under the first interpretation—the robust reading— No Slaughter should be rejected, for it is incompatible with the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating. Under the second— the deflated reading—it is not. Defenders of this strategy then propose to accept both the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating and No Slaughter, albeit the latter under the deflated reading.

It will be convenient to have a way of referring to this last combination of claims, which conjoins the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating with No Slaughter under the deflated reading. Let us call it the *expressivist pairing*. Those who advocate the expres-

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view I have not marked this distinction. Cuneo (forthcoming) addresses the issue at greater length.

sivist pairing (such as Blackburn, under a natural reading) often advertise it as the natural position to accept.[33] In a moment, I will indicate why this strikes me as dubious. In the meanwhile, the point I wish to press is that employing this strategy is risky, for it is a strategy that realists can mimic to neutralize The Motivation Argument.

Consider a realist who says that there is a default reading of No Slaughter, which is its face-value sense. According to the face-value interpretation, No Slaughter says exactly what it seems to say: it is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons. To accept No Slaughter, accordingly, is not simply to issue a first-order moral judgment in which one condemns such slaughter. Rather, it is to attribute *being wrong* to the slaughter of fellow persons or to represent the fact *that it is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons.*

In this regard, realists maintain, accepting No Slaughter is exactly like making other prosaic normative judgments. Consider, for example, sentences such as the following:

> "You are required to file an affidavit within 24 hours."

> "You should never use a water glass to serve wine."

> "Unless you really know what you're doing, you should avoid playing a diminished scale against a major seven chord."

> "If the play at second base is close, then the manager has a right to dispute the call."

In ordinary contexts, sentences such as these express normative judgments such as that you are required to file an affidavit within 24 hours or that one ought to avoid playing a diminished scale against a major seven chord. These judgments are normative because they express claims about how one should act or how one should evaluate an action, which can provide reasons to act or evaluate someone's action.[34]

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[33] Blackburn (1998, ch. 3) and (2005, ch. 5).

[34] I realize that others use the term "normativity" more narrowly to designate properties or facts that are necessarily reason-giving. I am using the term in a more inclusive sense.

Indeed, to my knowledge, no one maintains that to judge that one is required to, say, file an affidavit within 24 hours is merely to endorse the action of filing an affidavit within 24 hours. For, among other things, one could be so deeply averse to performing this action that one is entirely unmoved to do so. If so, realists maintain, we have strong reason to accept the face value reading of No Slaughter. The reason is that, on the face of things, what goes for the semantics of other normative judgments should also go for ethical ones. If other normative judgments, such as those expressed by the sentences offered above have normative representational content—as they appear to— then we should say the same of moral judgments, all else being equal. If the deflated reading were correct, however, then this sort of parity would not hold. And, if it did not, expressivism would imply massive lexical ambiguity with regard to the meaning of normative terms.[35]

Realists, then, maintain that we should accept No Slaughter under its face-value interpretation, according to which it has moral representational content. They then propose to disambiguate the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating. This claim, realists maintain, admits of two readings.

Under the first—call it *the descriptive reading*—it says what proponents of The Motivation Argument claim: it is impossible that an agent judge that she morally ought to act in a certain way and not be motivated to act in that way. However, under the second reading—call it *the normative reading*—the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating is implicitly normative. Under this interpretation, the first premise of The Motivation Argument says something like:

> Moral judgments are intrinsically motivating: it is conceptually necessary that if an agent judges that she morally ought to act in a certain way, then she is motivated to some degree to act in that way, provided that her judgment is well-formed.

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[35] Wodak (2017) develops this point in considerable detail, concluding that expressivists have neither appreciated nor met the challenge that faces their view. *Cp.* Chrisman (2011).

In principle, realists can understand the "well-formedness" of moral judgments in different ways. One such way is to take inspiration from the expressivists themselves, such as Gibbard.[36]

Suppose that operative within ordinary agents are two types of systems. On the one hand is the representational system, which is (roughly) a cluster of capacities whose aim is to represent the world in certain ways—the outputs of which include judgments with representational content. On the other is the motivational system, which is roughly a constellation of propensities to be moved to act in certain ways, which include instincts, desires, and emotions of various sorts. These two systems do not operate independently of one another. Rather, they work together when outputs from the representational system, such as the belief that an action would be fatal to one's loved ones, yield appropriate affective states, such as fear or aversion. A well-formed judgment, we can say, is the output of these two systems working together as they should.

Moral judgments, according to this way of seeing things, can also be well-formed. They are well-formed when judgments—such as that an action is morally required—yield motivational states of the appropriate sort, such as a desire or intention to perform that action. If this is right, were a judgment that an action is required fail to yield such an affective state, then it would be malformed; it would be like a belief that an action would be fatal to one's loved ones but nonetheless fails to yield any desire to prevent it.

For present purposes, we needn't develop the details of this type of approach (although we could, in principle, do so in several ways by offering an account of the nature of the representational and motivational systems). The important point to see is that realists have available a strategy that mimics that used by sophisticated expressivists. The strategy consists in taking No Slaughter at face value, interpreting it as that which is represented by judgments that express genuine moral representational content. It then dictates that we disambiguate the first premise of The Motivation Argument, distinguishing two interpretations—the descriptive reading, on the one hand, and the normative reading, on the other. Under the first interpretation, the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating should be rejected, for it

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[36] Gibbard (1990, ch. 4). See also Blackburn (1998, 131).

is incompatible with No Slaughter (at least if The Motivation Argument goes through). Under the second interpretation, the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating is not incompatible with No Slaughter. Defenders of this strategy then propose to accept both No Slaughter and the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating, albeit only under the second, normative reading.

For ease of reference, let's call this last combination of claims the *realist pairing*. While there is evidence, I believe, for accepting the realist pairing, it might be that accepting it comes at a theoretical price.[37] Perhaps in some respects it is less elegant than the expressivist pairing. If this were right, then both the expressivist and the realist pairings would display theoretical imperfections. Be that as it may, the conclusion with which we're left is this.

The Motivation Argument presents a challenge to moral realism, one which appeals to the intrinsically motivating character of moral judgments. But the argument goes through—and avoids the Moorean-style Objection—only if we accept what I've called the expressivist pairing. This pairing, recall, involves accepting the first premise of The Motivation Argument at face value but No Slaughter under the deflated reading. However, we've seen that there is another way to approach the argument, which consists in accepting what I've called the realist pairing. This pairing consists in accepting No Slaughter at face value and the normative reading of the first premise of The Motivation Argument. Accepting the realist pairing enables one to hold that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating without being committed to a view that succumbs to either The Motivation Argument or the Moorean-style Objection.

Which pairing should we accept? The Motivation Argument itself will not settle the issue. If so, the argument itself is not a reason to accept expressivism. At this point in the dialectic, we need a new argument for why we should accept the expressivist pairing rather than the realist one.

Let me summarize the objection I have developed: reflection on ordinary moral thought and practice seems to reveal that:

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[37] For some of the evidence, see Roskies (2003).

> Moral judgments are intrinsically motivating: it is conceptually necessary that if an agent judges that she morally ought to act in a certain way, then she is motivated to some degree to act in that way.

It also seems to reveal that:

> It is wrong to recreationally slaughter fellow persons.

Proponents of The Motivation Argument reject this second claim on the basis of the first. The Moorean-style Objection charges that doing so would be arbitrary. Why, after all, shouldn't we argue the reverse, rejecting the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating on the strength of No Slaughter?

   This charge of arbitrariness could, in principle, be satisfactorily addressed. Advocates of The Motivation Argument propose to do so by accepting the expressivist pairing, according to which we accept the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating at face value together with No Slaughter under a deflated reading. Realists counter, however, by presenting the realist pairing, according to which we accept No Slaughter at face value but accept the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating under a normative interpretation.[38] To generate the results they want, proponents of The Motivation Argument must accept the expressivist pairing. But it is difficult to see why they should. The Motivation Argument itself offers no support for accepting this pairing.

3. Replies

At the outset of the last section, I quoted passages from both Blackburn and Gibbard in which they state that expressivism must be true, since it explains the intrinsically motivating character of moral judgments while realism does not. These passages certainly give the impression that, in their view, The Motivation Argument (or some-

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[38] Expressivists could, I believe, accept a normative interpretation of the claim that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating. Indeed, Blackburn (2001, 31-2) gestures at such a reading when discussing the aesthetic expressivist. Accepting a normative interpretation of The Motivation Argument's first premise would, however, come at a cost: it would provide no reason to reject realism.

thing close to it) is sufficient to establish the truth of their favored position; there is no need to appeal to other sorts of considerations. I have argued that this is mistaken. We should not accept expressivism on the strength of The Motivation Argument, as realists have a good response to it that does not require them to reject any of its premises. If this is right, the debate between realists and expressivists will need to be played out on other grounds. This, I believe, is the lesson to be learned from the Moorean-style Objection.

In closing, I would like to consider what I take to be the natural strategy of reply to the Moorean-style Objection, which is to furnish additional reasons for thinking that we should accept the expressivist pairing rather than the realist one. In principle, these reasons could come from far afield, drawing upon considerations that have nothing directly to do with moral thought or motivation. To keep things manageable, then, I will consider a pair of replies culled from the writings of expressivists themselves that concern the nature of moral thought.

The first reply draws upon Gibbard's early work in which he develops an expressivist view according to which there are systems of norms—roughly, imperatives of various sorts—that allow, forbid, or require actions of various sorts.[39] According to this approach, when an agent judges that it would be wrong to act in some way, she endorses a system of norms that either permits or requires blaming the perform-ance of such an action. In a well-known passage, Gibbard explains why we should accept this account of moral judgment rather than one according to which moral judgments express moral representational content:

> What, though, of the special element that makes normative thought and language normative? There is such an element, I am claiming, and it involves a kind of endorsement—an endorsement that any descriptivistic analysis treats inadequately. The problem is not merely that every time one loophole in the analysis is

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[39] Gibbard (1990, ch. 1).

closed, others remain. It is that a single loophole re-
mains unpluggable by descriptivistic analysis.[40]

The argument seems to be this: moral thought is of its very nature
normative. For moral thought to be normative, however, it must
involve endorsement, as that is what the normativity of judgment
consists in. But if moral realism were true, then moral judgments
wouldn't necessarily involve endorsement. Hence, it would follow that,
according to realism, moral thought is not normative, which is absurd.

Realists have increasingly pointed out that arguments such as this
fail to make contact with their position. The problem is that expres-
sivists and realists think of normativity differently.[41] As expressivists
view things, normativity is primarily a psychological phenomenon. For
a judgment to be normative is, in their view, for it to involve an element
of endorsement or commendation, something that has motivating
power. Realists, by contrast, do not think of normativity in psycholog-
ical terms. Indeed, according to realists, it is best to think of
normativity not (in the first instance at least) as a feature of judgments
so much as a feature of facts or states of affairs. What feature of facts
or states of affairs is it? About this matter, there is disagreement.[42] But
if we are thinking of normativity in terms of something's having
reason-giving power, then realists would say that normativity consists
in a thing's favoring or justifying one or another response on our
part—where the favoring relation is not to be identified with an agent's
favoring or being for that response.

Many realists have, of course, defended the claim that moral facts
are normative in this last, reason-giving sense. If they are right,
Gibbard's argument would have bite against their view only if his
argument were to imply that being normative in this reason-giving
sense were not enough for being genuinely normative. But Gibbard's
argument does not imply anything of this sort; hence, the diagnosis
that it fails to make contact with realist positions.

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[40] Gibbard (1990, 33); *cp.* p. 10.

[41] Parfit (2011, ch. 28) presses this point. *Cp.* Parfit (2017, ch. 48).

[42] See Copp (2007, ch. 8).

This point having been noted, it is worth stressing there is a more concessive reply to Gibbard's argument available, which is that realists can accommodate the claim that moral judgments are normative in the sense that Gibbard has in mind. Provided that we have well-formed moral judgments in view, realists can maintain that, necessarily, moral judgments have motivational force or are normative in Gibbard's sense. This (in part) was the point of presenting what I have called the realist pairing. If such a view were correct, the contents of some moral judgments would be normative in the sense that realists accept and these judgments would also be normative in the sense that expressivists accept. Under this view, there is no need to choose between different conceptions of normativity; one can maintain that moral judgments of a certain range exhibit both sorts. [43]

Let me now turn to a second reply to the Moorean-style Objection, which draws upon Gibbard's later work. In *Thinking How To Live*, Gibbard considers the possibility that there might be a property such as the all-things-considered *ought*, writing:

> *ought* questions and *reason* questions are by their very nature questions of what to do… I the chooser don't face two clear, distinct questions, the question what to do and the question what I ought to do. *Descriptivism*, in contrast, is the doctrine that *ought* claims describe rather than prescribe, that an *ought* claim describes an act as having a certain special property. This gives the wrong picture, we expressivists say: *ought* claims instead are claims about what to do….
>
> We should explain thinking what to do as moving toward action, and then explain the term 'ought' accordingly, as one I can use to couch my frame of mind when I decide. Don't look for some one property I can attribute which can serve as an all-purpose deciding factor, as if attributing a property could sub- stitute for acting….
>
> My point here is to worry how invoking a property, and saying that it is picked out by the term 'ought,'

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[43] See Copp (2001) and (2008) and the references in n. 6.

> could explain decision. How can all the questions I ask
> in deliberating be relevant only in bearing on the one
> question: which alternative has this special property?[44]

The core of Gibbard's concerns about what he calls "descriptivism" is that normative or "ought thoughts" are about what to do. But positing a property such as *being what one ought to do*, Gibbard maintains, would not help to explain the choices we make or the ways we act. If this is true, then there is no need to say that when an agent judges that she ought on the whole to act in a certain way she thereby grasps the property *being what she ought to do*. However, once this property drops out, then—the claim is—so also does the need to appeal to normative representational content regarding oughts.[45]

We should not, I believe, be moved by this argument, at least if it is supposed to provide reasons for thinking that moral properties would make no difference to explaining what we do.[46] Consider an analogue: suppose I am a lawyer who has been hired to defend a client. A colleague pokes her head in my office, uttering the sentence:

"You are required to file an affidavit within 24 hours."

In ordinary conditions, this sentence expresses normative representational content, since it concerns a requirement that can be a reason to act. Would a property such as *being legally required* play an explanatory role, helping to explain the choices I make? It would seem so. By determining that I have a legal obligation to submit an affidavit in the next 24 hours, for example, I can decide what to do. Or, alternatively, suppose I ascertain that my colleague has a decisive reason to file an affidavit in the next 24 hours. If I discover that she does, I can determine whether she is liable to correction or blame if she fails to do so. If this is so, ascertaining whether actions have normative properties can help explain not only choices but also how to evaluate actions.

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[44] Gibbard (2003, 10).

[45] See Gibbard (2003), especially, pp. 10, 50, and 180-1. See, also, Blackburn (1998, 87).

[46] It might be that Gibbard's argument is best interpreted as assuming that non-natural properties would make no difference to choice. I believe this assumption is also mistaken for reasons that FitzPatrick (2018) presents.

With morality it is, presumably, no different. Imagine that I am not only legally but also morally required to file an affidavit within 24 hours, since failing to do so would be grossly negligent. By determining that I am morally required to file the affidavit, I can decide what to do. And if I see that my colleague has decisive moral reason to also file an affidavit, I can determine whether she is liable to admonition or reproach if she fails to so. If this is right, we should not deny that moral judgments lack normative representational content because the objects of such content—namely, moral properties of facts—would not help explain why we act or evaluate actions in the ways that we do. To the contrary, that they would explain such things appears to be built into their very job description.

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