

The Conditions of Moral Realism

Christian Miller
Wake Forest University
millerc@wfu.edu

The Journal of Philosophical Research 34 (2009): 123-155.

With the recent development of sophisticated expressivist, quasi-realist, and minimalist positions in contemporary meta-ethics, it has become increasingly difficult to isolate what it is that is meant to be at issue in discussions of moral realism. Quasi-realists, for example, can claim that moral facts exist and moral statements are true. Indeed, if Blackburn is to be believed, they can even help themselves to the language of mind-independence and objectivity.¹ Thus it has seemed to some that there is nothing at stake between the quasi-realist and the traditional moral realist, and the same goes for realism and several other leading meta-ethical positions.

In this paper, I hope to provide an account of the conditions of moral realism whereby there are still significant metaphysical commitments made by the realist which set the view apart as a distinct position in the contemporary meta-ethical landscape. In order to do so, I will be appealing to a general account of what it is for realism to be true in any domain of experience, whether it be realism about universals, realism about unobservable scientific entities, realism about artifacts, and so forth. I have developed and motivated such an account elsewhere, and will not take the time here to revisit all that went into its formulation.² Rather, my goal in this paper is to take that account of what might be called *general realism*, and apply it to discussions of moral realism. If the result is an informative taxonomy of meta-ethical positions which can isolate something that is still at stake between the rival positions, then such a result should be of significant interest to philosophers working in this area.

We shall proceed as follows. In the first section, I briefly summarize the formulation of general realism that was developed in previous work, and then apply it to the case of moral realism. Section two uses this formulation of moral realism as the basis from which to distinguish moral realism from the following positions: cognitivism, non-cognitivism, error theory, and constructivism. Finally, the paper ends by examining quasi-realism in section three and minimalism in section four in order to see to what extent each of them differs from moral realism, if they do so at all.

I. GENERAL REALISM

Realism debates arise in just about every domain of experience, and the realistic status of scientific entities, morality, God, numbers, and universals have been among the most contentious. Simplifying greatly, the *realists* about a particular domain have typically been those who are committed to the existence and objectivity of the disputed entities in that domain, or at least to the objective truth and falsity of statements which putatively refer to such entities. Platonists about universals, necessitarians about laws, and non-naturalists about the metaphysics of value are all paradigm realists in their respective domains.

On the other hand, many *anti-realists* simply deny outright the existence of the disputed entities or the truth of the relevant statements in a given domain. Here eliminativists about mental states and nihilists about the external world are often taken to be representatives of this form of anti-realism. Other anti-realists, however, typically reject what they see as the implausibly strong objectivity conditions mandated by certain realist positions, and instead make the truth of the relevant statements or the existence of the disputed entities dependent upon the mental activities of human beings. Intuitionism about mathematics and subjectivism about morality serve as helpful examples of this brand of anti-realism.

When it comes to the various formulations of general realism that have appeared in the literature over the past fifty years, it turns out that they tend to be instances of one of the following kinds of thesis:

Metaphysical Thesis: Realism about X is true iff and because X exists and³ X has an existence and nature which are not dependent in certain ways upon human beings.

Thus Michael Devitt holds that according to realism, “tokens of most current common-sense and scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental.”⁴

Semantic Thesis: Realism about X is true iff and because certain claims which putatively refer to X are true (given a certain theory of truth) and/or meaningful (given a certain theory of meaning).

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord writes that, “realism involves embracing just two theses: (1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false, and (2) some are literally true. Nothing more.”⁵

Epistemic Thesis: Realism about X is true iff and because certain epistemic relations can obtain between human beings and X.

According to Paul Horwich, the ‘essence’ of realism concerns “how it is possible for us to know of the existence of certain facts given our ordinary conception of their nature.”⁶

Explanatory Thesis: Realism about X is true iff and because X is ineliminable from our best explanation(s) of certain phenomena in that domain.

According to James Griffin, “realism about a kind of thing is the view that things of that kind must appear in the best account of what happens in the world.”⁷

Mixed Thesis: Realism about X is true iff and because more than one of the above kinds of conditions obtains.

Hilary Putnam claims that for the realist, “the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is.’ Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.”⁸

Quietist Thesis: The most sophisticated forms of what is often called ‘anti-realism’ about some domain can satisfy all the reasonable requirements for being a ‘realist’ about that domain. Thus at the end of the day there is nothing of substance which separates realists from anti-realists. The debate, if there even was a genuine one in the first place, has been dissolved.

Gideon Rosen, for instance, at times flirts with quietism when he makes remarks such as the following: “[w]e *sense* that there is a heady metaphysical thesis at stake in these debates over realism . . . But after a point, when every attempt to say just what the issue is has come up empty, we have no real choice but to conclude that despite all the wonderful, suggestive imagery, there is ultimately nothing in the neighborhood to discuss.”⁹

Which of these approaches should we adopt? Here is not the place to examine them at length as such a treatment deserves a paper in its own right. Rather I shall simply assume a conclusion for which I have argued previously, namely that a metaphysical approach to general realism seems to be the most promising.¹⁰

But there is a long list of different metaphysical formulations of general realism, and instead of considering each of them in turn, let me proceed to directly introduce my own preferred statement of the view.¹¹ The best way to do so is in stages, starting with the following:

- (R1) Realism about X is true iff and because:
(i) X exists.

The problem with (R1) is that it is far too permissive – it lets far too many anti-realist views count as forms of realism. Thus common forms of subjectivism, relativism, and constructivism about a wide variety of domains such as mathematics and aesthetics would all count as realist views according to this account. Similarly, Putnam’s internal realist countenances the scheme-relative existence of ordinary physical objects, a phenomenalist claims that tables and chairs exist, and both a quasi-realist and a minimalist can readily accept the existence of modal facts and causal relations. And yet all such views are widely taken to be *alternatives* to realism. So (R1) seems to badly mislocate the source of contention in the various realism debates.¹²

What we need in addition to an existence condition for realism to be true in a given domain is an objectivity condition. For what makes the various forms of, say, subjectivism or relativism typically count as anti-realist positions is that they tie the truth of the relevant statements or the existence of the relevant entities to the mental activities of human beings. Thus I have argued that (R1) should be supplemented as follows:

- (R2) Realism about X is true iff and because:
(i) X exists.
(ii) The existence and nature of X are independent of the intentional attitudes had by human beings which pertain to X.¹³

(R2) is developed further by making use of the idea that to be a realist about X is to think that X's existence and nature would remain invariant under a wide range of different attitudes that I or any other human being might take towards X; whether or not the sun exists, for instance, does not change based upon my thoughts about the sun's existence. This characterization in turn suggests the following proposal for understanding 'independence' in (ii):

- (ii*) The existence and nature of X do not exhibit counterfactual dependence on the intentional attitudes had by human beings in the actual world which pertain to X.

where 'counterfactual dependence' is taken in the usual way to mean that for two things A and B, A's existence counterfactually depends on B's existence iff if B did not exist, then A would not exist. Thus, for example, it is natural to think of characters in works of fiction as exhibiting this kind of counterfactual dependence on our attitudes pertaining to them. If J. K. Rowling had initially assigned to a character named 'Harry Potter' different essential features, then her literary activity alone would have been enough to bring into existence a different character from the one that is actually in her stories. And if this is right, then it seems plausible to adopt an anti-realist position about fictional characters.

Next we need to incorporate not only intentional attitudes but also conceptual schemes. Conceptual schemes are systems of concepts which determine the mode of presentation of intentional content; very roughly, a change in scheme can result in a change in the presentation of some content which in turn can lead to a change in the attitudes the person has towards that content.¹⁴ Why are conceptual schemes relevant to discussions of realism? For realists, objects will typically have existence and persistence conditions which are independent of the conceptual schemes that we happen to employ. A certain brand of anti-realism made famous by Putnam, on the other hand, can only countenance the existence of objects relative to individual conceptual schemes.¹⁵

Note that condition (ii*) does not adequately preclude the Putnamian conceptual relativist from counting as a realist. For conceptual schemes still might function in the way that Putnam alleges they do even in worlds in which, for whatever reason, human beings have different particular intentional attitudes from the ones that they have adopted in the actual world. So (ii*) gets revised as follows:

(ii**) The existence and nature of X do not exhibit counterfactual dependence on the intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes had by human beings in the actual world which pertain to X.

With this condition, we have the basic outline of the proposed formulation of general realism.

But there is a remaining technical problem concerning the way in which we assess non-actual worlds, and it is important to address this problem here since the issues it raises will resurface throughout the paper. One way we assess worlds is to use our *actual* conceptual schemes in order to determine what is going on in counterfactual worlds, i.e., in order to determine how many individuals are in a box in a world in which there are no human beings.¹⁶ But if we adopt this approach, then the Putnamian anti-realist can *agree* with the common sense realist about how many individuals are in the box in such a world. For the Putnamian can simply use his own conceptual scheme in the actual world to evaluate the number of individuals in the box, even though there are no human thinkers in the relevant counterfactual world. Thus the Putnamian can *agree* with the realist that objects which exist in this world continue to exist in nearby counterfactual worlds in which human beings have different conceptual schemes and intentional attitudes pertaining to their existence.¹⁷ For in effect, what the Putnamian anti-realist can do is rigidify her conceptual scheme and evaluate other possible worlds in light of that scheme.¹⁸

Nonetheless, there still seems to be a way of carving out a difference between the realist and the Putnamian. For the realist, what matters concerning objects in nearby possible worlds is

their existence and nature as divorced from *any* conceptual schemes whatsoever, whether actual or counterfactual. Furthermore, a realist about certain objects thinks that their existence and nature remain invariant in nearby worlds in which we have undergone variations in our conceptual schemes and intentional attitudes. These points suggest a better, albeit more cumbersome way of stating the conditions for general realism:

(R+) Realism about X is true iff and because:

- (i) X exists.
- (ii) In the nearby worlds in which human beings have different intentional attitudes and conceptual schemes from those in the actual world which pertain to X, it is the case that:
 - (a) The existence and nature of X remain unchanged from how they are in the actual world.
 - (b) The existence and persistence conditions of X do not result to any extent from any intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes which pertain to X in the actual world.¹⁹

Note that condition (a) is not sufficient by itself to block the rigidifying move. An anti-realist who follows Putnam could agree that the existence and nature of X do not change in the relevant counterfactual worlds provided that such an assessment of X in those worlds stems from the conceptual scheme that the anti-realist is using in the *actual* world. Thus we need to combine (a) with condition (b), so that realism will be true of X provided only that X is unchanged in these particular counterfactual worlds and yet at the same time X in those worlds does not have existence and persistence conditions which result from our actual conceptual schemes. In such a case, we can say that X enjoys an existence in the actual world which is *mind-independent*.

Clearly much more could be said here, but my goal in this paper is not to revisit issues about general realism, but rather to use (R+) to help sort out the leading views in the meta-ethics literature. As a preliminary step in doing so, we can note that there has been a great deal of variation in the characterizations of *moral* realism as well:

Metaphysical Formulations:

Mackie, Butchvarov, Smith, Timmons, and Fine.²⁰

Semantic Formulations:

Platts, Skorupski, Klagge, Schiffer, Dummett, Pigden, Sayre-McCord, Field, Copp, and Railton.²¹

Epistemic Formulations:

-

Explanatory Formulations:

Hurley, Griffin.²²

Mixed Formulations:

Quinn, Platts, Sturgeon, Solomon, Boyd, Brink, Horwich, Railton, Devitt, Timmons, Oddie, Bloomfield, Copp, Shafer-Landau, and Dreier.²³

Quietism:

Blackburn, McDowell, and Gibbard.²⁴

As in the case of general realism, my view is that a metaphysical approach to formulating moral realism also seems to be the most promising. Consider, for instance, two recent non-metaphysical proposals. According to Michael Devitt, moral realism is the view that:

- (D) There are people and acts that are objectively morally good, bad, honest, deceitful, kind, unkind etc. (virtues and vices); acts that one objectively ought and ought not to perform (duties); people who are objectively morally entitled to privacy, to a say in their lives, etc. (rights). That this is so is open to explanation and plays a role in causal explanations.²⁵

But as Devitt himself notes,²⁶ such a position implausibly excludes some meta-ethical positions which certainly seem to be realist views. For example, one could hold a view according to which objective moral facts are constituted by but not identical to objective descriptive facts. However, because of Kim-like worries about causal overdetermination,²⁷ the view might deny that the moral facts have causal powers, and instead ascribe to them only a normative role in justifying certain actions. Such a view certainly deserves to count as a realist position, but Devitt's causal explanatory requirement would preclude it from doing so.

Similarly in his recent book *Morality without Foundations*, Mark Timmons offers the following mixed formulation of moral realism:

- M1 There are (instantiated) moral properties and facts.
- M2 Such properties and facts are objective.
- S1 Moral discourse is fact-stating.
- S2 The statements constituting the discourse are either true or false (depending on whether or not they correspond to objectively existing moral facts) (1999: 36).

I agree that M1 and M2 are necessary conditions for moral realism; indeed my view is that they are both necessary *and* sufficient. But why think that either S1 or S2 is necessary? At best, they might be entailed by the metaphysical conditions, in which case they would not be fundamental conditions for being a moral realist. However, I doubt that the entailment claim itself would be true. For one thing, it is not obvious that a commitment to M1 and M2 brings with it a particular theory of truth. The correspondence theory is a theory about the metaphysics of the truth property, and it is hard to see why it would be entailed by metaphysical claims about morality. In other words, one could in principle accept M1 and M2 while adopting Wright's minimalism about truth or Alston's alethic realism.²⁸ Secondly, suppose that there are moral facts as described by M1 and M2, but for some reason we have never come close to gaining epistemic access to them. In such a world, it could be that human beings instead evolved a non-factual mode of ethical discourse and utter moral claims which are not truth-apt. Timmons' formulation would mistakenly fail to classify such a world as one in which moral realism is true.²⁹

We could continue in a similar manner to examine the other non-metaphysical formulations of moral realism in the literature. However, the considerations I offered in previous work on behalf of metaphysical formulations of general realism are perfectly general considerations, and so apply to how best to characterize all of the specific realism debates, including the moral one. So instead let us proceed directly to the positive formulation of moral realism. And (R+) makes it easy to do so. For we get what will be referred to in the remainder of the paper as '(M+)' by restricting the extension of 'X' to some item or class of items in the moral domain and leaving the rest of (R+) unchanged. Thus 'X' could, for instance, be the virtue of compassion, the property of moral goodness, or the fact that someone is despicable. Note that

care should be taken when substituting for ‘X’ since one could in principle be a realist about some moral properties (such as goodness) but not others (such as despicability).

Let us consider an example involving Smith’s character trait of being courageous. According to (M+), for moral realism to be true of this trait the following conditions would have to obtain:

- (i) Smith has the trait of courage.
- (ii) In the nearby worlds in which human beings have different intentional attitudes and conceptual schemes from those in the actual world which pertain to Smith’s trait of courage, it is the case that:
 - (a) The existence and nature of Smith’s trait of courage remain unchanged from how they are in the actual world.
 - (b) The existence and persistence conditions of Smith’s trait of courage do not result to any extent from any intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes which pertain to Smith’s trait of courage in the actual world.³⁰

Less formally, the idea is that for realism to be true of Smith’s trait, its existence and nature must not vary with what anyone thinks about his trait at the time. In other words, in nearby worlds in which we think that he does not have the trait or that there is no such thing as courage to begin with, he has the trait of courage just as he does in the actual world. Furthermore, the existence of his trait in such worlds does not stem from anything having to do with what we think in the actual world about Smith’s character in those worlds.

The real interest in (M+) should be in how it carves up the meta-ethical landscape. So let us proceed directly to the leading positions in the literature.

II. DISTINGUISHING THE META-ETHICAL POSITIONS

Applying (M+) turns out to be less than straightforward given that most meta-ethical positions often are stated in two non-equivalent ways in the literature – either as semantic claims about moral judgments, or as metaphysical claims about moral ontology. As we will see, these different kinds of claims will end up generating a notable result, namely that certain semantic

formulations of allegedly anti-realist positions end up being compatible with the metaphysical existence of objective moral facts.³¹

Clearly we need not mention every position that has been advanced in recent years. It is enough if we briefly discuss several of the more prominent views, starting at the most general level with the divide between moral cognitivists and non-cognitivists.

A. Cognitivism

There is no uniform characterization of moral cognitivism on offer in the literature, but several themes are typically emphasized in almost any statement of the view: moral judgments express cognitive states like beliefs,³² moral claims are truth-apt or truth-evaluable,³³ and moral statements are factual and thereby purport to represent things as being a certain way.³⁴ As such, then, cognitivism is neutral concerning the truth of moral realism for the obvious reason that it says nothing about whether there actually *are* any such moral facts to begin with.³⁵ Indeed, the error theory is a cognitivist position and yet it denies the existence of moral facts.

*B. Non-Cognitivism*³⁶

Traditional formulations of non-cognitivism take the view to involve the individual or joint denial of the three cognitivist theses above – moral judgments do not express cognitive states like beliefs but rather conative states like desires and emotions,³⁷ moral claims are not truth-apt,³⁸ and moral statements do not purport to represent moral facts but rather have some other, perhaps more emotive purpose.³⁹ Thus like cognitivism, non-cognitivism is strictly speaking neutral with respect to the truth or falsity of moral realism since it is not making any metaphysical claims about moral facts themselves.⁴⁰

Such a claim may be challenged. For example, one might claim that if moral discourse does not purport to represent or refer to moral facts, then it would make no sense to say that such

facts could still exist in a realist manner. Hence as is typically held, non-cognitivism is indeed not compatible with moral realism.⁴¹ But this challenge is overstated. First of all, it would also imply that the *rejection* which one commonly finds being made by non-cognitivists of the existence of objective moral facts would also be nonsensical, since such a rejection is just as much purporting to refer to reality.⁴² But second and more importantly, the claim that there could exist objective moral facts even if non-cognitivism were true, is not itself a *moral* claim and so it is *not* one which is precluded by non-cognitivism from purporting to refer to the world. Rather it is a metaphysical claim being made from what we will call in section three the ‘detached’ perspective. From this point of view one makes non-moral claims about moral metaphysics, epistemology, semantics, and the like, just as a philosopher of science makes non-scientific claims about the nature of unobservable scientific entities.

Hence so long as non-cognitivism is formulated at the semantic level, it need not conflict with certain versions of moral realism at the ontological level. To use an example we saw earlier, suppose that there are non-natural, wholly objective moral facts, but since evolution did not endow us with the requisite faculties to detect them, we instead evolved non-cognitivist modes of ethical judgment and discourse. Alternatively, one can adopt Allan Gibbard’s recent view and combine non-descriptivism about moral concepts with full-blown realism about moral properties. Thus for Gibbard, while at the level of concepts we are not (just) attempting to describe the world, it is nevertheless true that our moral predicates can pick out suitable natural properties which together constitute “the thing to do.”⁴³ Finally, perhaps the best example to consider is David Copp’s expressivist moral realism. At the metaphysical level, Copp countenances moral properties which are “akin to ordinary nonmoral properties.”⁴⁴ However, at the semantic level Copp argues that someone who makes a moral judgment expresses *both* a moral belief and a

non-cognitive motivational state. Thus his proposal “combines the chief doctrines of moral realism with a central positive view of expressivism.”⁴⁵ If these three views are coherent, and they each certainly seem to be, then we have examples which illustrate the following implication of (M+): *moral non-cognitivism does not entail moral anti-realism.*⁴⁶ Similarly, it follows from the above that *moral realism does not entail moral cognitivism.*

C. Error Theory

Here again we find an important difference between semantic and metaphysical formulations of a meta-ethical view. As a representative example of the former, consider Peter Railton’s characterization: “the error theorist . . . claims that [some] discourse, though cognitive, systematically fails to refer or otherwise is pervasively in error.”⁴⁷ In the moral case, however, this failure at the level of discourse is compatible in principle with the robust existence of moral facts at the metaphysical level. Suppose for instance that some version of the causal theory of reference is true, but we are unable to enter into the relevant causal relations with mind-independent moral facts, perhaps because those facts are causally inert or we do not have the required epistemic faculties. Then our moral discourse would systematically fail to refer to such facts, and Railton’s formulation of an error theory would thereby be compatible with the truth of moral realism.

More in the spirit of Mackie’s error theory is the claim that despite the non-naturalist pretensions of moral discourse, as a matter of metaphysics there are no objective moral facts of any kind.⁴⁸ This could be either because there are no moral facts or because there are moral facts but they are not sufficiently objective enough to satisfy the realist assumptions of our discourse. Either way, an error theorist would thereby fail to qualify as a moral realist according to (M+).

These remarks suggest a more general pattern to moral error theories. Suppose that Mackie is right about the semantics of moral discourse, but moral facts are really identical to natural facts. Then a kind of error would be implicitly pervasive in folk moral discourse.⁴⁹ Or suppose that Mackie is no longer correct about contemporary moral discourse, which has become wedded to claims about moral facts which are implicitly relativized to cultural practices. Then a similar kind of error would result if, at the level of ontology, some form of moral realism were true. Finally, as we noted when discussing Railton's characterization of error theories, it could even be that folk discourse has realist pretensions, mind-independent moral facts exist, *and* moral statements systematically fail to refer because the facts have no causal powers or are cognitively inaccessible.

What these remarks suggest is that there are a number of different kinds of error theory, and that a moral error theory as such is compatible with *both* moral realism and anti-realism.⁵⁰

D. Constructivism, Ideal Observer Views, and Response-Dependence

Typically what we get with these views is a biconditional linking some purported moral fact about rightness or goodness with what a paradigm individual or community would endorse.

For example, according to John Rawls:

- (i) P is a principle of justice iff P is what free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association.⁵¹

Numerous other examples of such response-dependent accounts could also be mentioned,⁵² but what all these views seem to have in common is a commitment to something like the following version of the basic equation:⁵³

- (B) X is [moral term] if and only if X tends to elicit [response] from [respondents] in [circumstances].

where the class of respondents and circumstances is taken to be ideally suited to the kind of moral phenomenon at issue.⁵⁴

There are at least three considerations which figure prominently in evaluating the compatibility of realism with response-dependent views. The first is that the relevant biconditional can be proposed either at the level of moral concepts or at the level of moral facts.⁵⁵ If the former is the case, however, then response-dependent views are neutral with respect to the truth of realism unless and until they are supplemented with an ontological thesis about the existence and nature of the entities in the extension of the concept.

Secondly, merely positing a biconditional between some moral phenomenon and our responses underdetermines the direction of explanation and thereby falls prey to a familiar Euthyphro dilemma – in the words of Mark Johnston, such biconditionals can be given either a left-to-right ‘detectivist’ reading or a right-to-left ‘projectivist’ reading.⁵⁶ And a detectivist reading, according to which the relevant respondents come to have the responses they do *because* the thing in question is morally good or right, is naturally well-suited to a realist outlook. However it is the projectivist reading that is intended by advocates of most response-dependent views. Thus, for example, it is *because* agents behind a veil of ignorance would endorse a certain principle of justice that such a principle is binding on them.⁵⁷

Finally, the biconditional can be offered either as a *reduction* of some part of the moral, and thereby precludes use of the moral term on the right hand side on pain of circularity, or as a non-reductive elucidation of some part of the moral, thereby freely appealing to the same term in filling out either the class of respondents or the kind of circumstances.⁵⁸ As an example of the latter, consider the following non-reductive account:

- (vi) X is good if and only if X tends to elicit the judgment that X is good from good people in circumstances of full imaginative acquaintance with X.

But such an analysis would be compatible with moral realism if the right hand side appeals to an independently characterizable concept or property of goodness.

In general, then, it turns out that a number of different forms of a broadly response-dependent view are compatible with moral realism. The main exception looks to be a response-dependent biconditional which is reductive, ontological, and projectivist. Since such analyses purport to tie moral facts to the intentional attitudes of human beings, albeit often vastly improved human beings, they imply claims which are incompatible with condition (ii) of (M+) and thereby count as forms of anti-realism.^{59 60}

E. Realism

After all this, do any meta-ethical views in the contemporary literature get to count as versions of moral *realism*? We already know of one such position, namely the view that posits mind-independent but as yet unknown (and perhaps unknowable) moral facts. Fortunately the options available to the realist are more numerous than this. Cornell realists and moral functionalists both agree that moral facts exist, and furthermore that these facts are either identical to or constituted by certain descriptive facts.⁶¹ Where they differ is over the role that conceptual analysis should play, with functionalists affirming and Cornell realists denying the analytic reducibility of moral predicates and sentences into wholly descriptive terms.⁶²

As such, then, both views make claims about the existence of moral facts which clearly satisfy condition (i) of (M+). But neither view gets to automatically count as a form of realism unless it also holds that the ethical facts are appropriately mind-independent. After all, it would not help the realist to argue that certain ethical and descriptive facts are identical, if those same descriptive facts turned out to be merely mind-dependent projections. Fortunately representatives of both views have shown a willingness to accept something like condition (ii) as well.

III. A CASE STUDY: QUASI-REALISM

Notably absent from our discussion thus far is a view which has typically been rather difficult to classify, namely Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism.⁶³ Roughly, the view starts from a form of non-cognitivism about evaluative discourse, but then develops the formal apparatus whereby moral statements can mimic most if not all of the standard cognitive properties attributed to them by realists.⁶⁴

According to the quasi-realist, to think that something is good is to value it, where valuing involves being in a positive affective relation to the thing in question.⁶⁵ But quasi-realism "starts from a contrast between expressing belief and expressing an attitude, which it then undermines, by showing how the expression of attitude takes on all the trappings of belief."⁶⁶ The details here are complex, but roughly the claim is that propositional attitudes towards moral claims can be constructed so as to reflect an agent's underlying affective states.⁶⁷ So, for example, on Blackburn's view "believing that X is good or right is roughly having an appropriately favorable valuation of X."⁶⁸ And in general, moral statements are a "'propositional reflection' of states that are first understood in other terms . . . It is the isomorphism between propositional structures and necessary practical states that is the heart of things."⁶⁹ Finally Blackburn adopts a version of deflationism about truth so that, unlike for traditional non-cognitivism, some moral claims do in fact turn out to be true.⁷⁰

Assuming that the details of such a project can be worked out, it seems that Blackburn is right to think that the quasi-realist can enjoy the benefits of moral realism at the semantic level. As he notes, "there need be no attempt to deny the distinctive nature of the commitments, and the unique meaning of the various vocabularies, and this still leaves open a projective theory of what is true of us when we use them. This implies that the pure philosophy of language has less to

offer to such problems than most recent discussions assume.”⁷¹ And yet it is commonly thought that quasi-realism is a serious *rival* to moral realism.⁷² What then should we make of this view?

The following passage from *Spreading the Word* helps to set things straight:

Projectivism is the philosophy of evaluation which says that evaluative properties are projections of our own sentiments. Quasi-realism is the enterprise of explaining why our discourse has the shape it does . . . if projectivism is true. It thus seeks to explain, and justify, the realistic-seeming nature of our talk of evaluations – the way we think we can be wrong about them, that there is a truth to be found, and so on. One might believe that quasi-realism is successful, yet still dislike projectivism . . .⁷³

What this and other similar passages show is that quasi-realism by itself is simply a strategy for semantic translation. As Blackburn notes, it is only when quasi-realism is combined with an anti-realist metaphysical position like what he calls ‘projectivism’ that a serious conflict with moral realism emerges. Hence given the availability of such a combined position, the place to look for a substantive difference between moral realists and anti-realists is not at the level of normative discourse, but rather at the level of substantive moral ontology.⁷⁴ And there we find that Blackburn’s projectivism is committed to saying that “evaluative properties are projections of our own sentiments.” Thus since his view makes claims which are incompatible with condition (ii) of (M+),⁷⁵ Blackburn’s combined projectivist and quasi-realist package can be construed as a form of anti-realism.

However, the above characterization of Blackburn’s view might be resisted, especially in light of certain remarks he makes in his recent book *Ruling Passions*. There he repeatedly asserts that he is entitled to make moral claims such as ‘Kicking babies for fun is wrong,’ and that these claims are both true *and objective*.⁷⁶

These remarks can be made consistent with Blackburn’s anti-realist characterization of projectivism once we distinguish between the moral engaged and morally detached

perspectives.⁷⁷ The morally engaged perspective is that of ordinary normative discourse in which people make categorical moral pronouncements such as the following:

- (i) Slavery is wrong.
- (ii) You ought to keep your promise.
- (iii) It is not permissible for you to spend your money on luxury items while children are starving.

From within this familiar context, Blackburn's view can understand these statements in such a way that they are *not* qualified or hedged as being only 'relatively' true or 'mere' projections. Rather they turn out to be as robust as anything offered by the moral realist.

However, we can easily grant Blackburn this understanding of how his projectivism applies to the morally engaged perspective, since our interest is in what happens from the morally *detached* perspective. This is the metaphysical point of view, in which we no longer engage in ordinary moral discourse, but step back and consider metaphysical, epistemic, and semantic questions about morality. These questions are not themselves moral questions, but rather non-moral questions about, for instance, the existence and nature of moral facts. And such a detached perspective is not unique to ethics but appears throughout philosophy. Thus ordinary scientists might talk about the spin of an atom, but philosophers of science wonder whether there really are any unobservable scientific entities in the first place. Mathematicians perform calculations using numbers, but philosophers of math ask if numbers are merely socially constructed objects. And all of us talk about tables and chairs, but mereologists wonder whether metaphysical nihilism is true and only simples exist. So too are we here concerned with the metaphysical status of moral facts when we occupy the detached perspective.

With this distinction in mind, we would expect to find Blackburn making claims from a detached perspective which attempt to distinguish his projectivism from moral realism since the former is supposed to have decided ontological advantages over the latter. And in fact we do find Blackburn making remarks in *Ruling Passions* which are in line with characterizing his

projectivism as a form of anti-realism. For instance, he writes that “what we describe as the ethical properties of things are *constructed* precisely in order to reflect our concerns.”⁷⁸ Thus at the detached meta-ethical level, the level of moral metaphysics to which our account of realism in (M+) can be brought to bear, Blackburn’s view seems to imply that moral properties are mind-dependent.

Despite this textual evidence, though, Blackburn explicitly denies that his view makes moral properties mind-dependent even from the detached perspective. As he writes:

According to me, ‘moral truths are mind-dependent’ can *only* summarize a list like ‘If there were no people (or people with different attitudes) then X . . .’, where the dots are filled in by some moral claim about X. One can then only assess things on this list by contemplating the nearest possible world in which there are no people or people with different attitudes but X occurs. And then one gives a moral verdict on that situation.⁷⁹

What Blackburn is doing here is applying the rigidification strategy that we saw in section one. Thus in a world in which most people believe that slavery is permissible, Blackburn can still say that slavery would be wrong in that world since he is using his *own* morally engaged perspective in the actual world to evaluate the practice of slavery in the other world. So according to Blackburn the wrongness of slavery does *not* vary with changes in the attitudes of people in counterfactual worlds in a way that would suggest it is mind-dependent.

With the distinction between morally engaged and detached perspectives before us, however, we can see where Blackburn’s defense of the objectivity of moral facts has gone wrong. For remember that we are supposed to be working at the morally *detached* level, and yet Blackburn has slipped back into the morally *engaged* perspective to assess these counterfactual worlds. That is why he says he is giving a ‘moral verdict on that situation,’ a verdict that is made from the actual world and stems from the engaged moral perspective. But the relevant question is whether, at the *detached* level, the fact that slavery is wrong would still continue to exist in worlds in which people had attitudes the expression of which endorsed slavery. And given that

we have already seen Blackburn say from what we are interpreting as the detached level that “ethical properties of things are constructed precisely in order to reflect our concerns,” it is not at all clear that it would.

We can conclude that Blackburn’s strategy of rigidifying his own engaged moral outlook and using it to assess other worlds will be insufficient to secure mind-independence. And we knew this already from our discussion of (R+) in section one. For recall that the final stage in the development of that proposal involved adding this feature to condition (ii):

- (b) The existence and persistence conditions of X do not result to any extent from any intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes which pertain to X in the actual world.

Thus for the realist, slavery does not get to count as wrong in the relevant counterfactual worlds in which people believe otherwise merely because, as a result of conceptual schemes or intentional attitudes had in the actual world, slavery falls under the heading of ‘wrong.’⁸⁰ So even with these extra refinements in Blackburn’s recent work, his view still deserves to be labeled as an anti-realist position according to (M+).⁸¹

IV. A SECOND CASE STUDY: MINIMALISM

Recently there has been much discussion of whether non-cognitivism should continue to be stated in such a way that it precludes the truth-evaluability of moral claims. According to disciplined syntacticists, for example, so long as any statement is suitably well-behaved – it can be embedded in propositional attitude contexts, plays an appropriate role in conditionals and logical inferences, is sufficiently meaningful, and so on – there is no reason to deny its truth-aptness.⁸² Combine such a view with the following minimalist platitudes:

It is a fact that p iff p .

For any object x , x has the property of being F iff x is F .

and suddenly the minimalist about ethics has no trouble agreeing with the moral realist that there really do exist moral truths, moral facts, and moral properties.⁸³ Since there then seems to be nothing separating the moral realist from what we might call the ethical minimalist, some have taken the availability of a minimalist position to weigh heavily in favor of quietism.

Should we agree so readily that the ethical minimalist about truth-aptness, facts, and properties deserves to be counted among the ranks of the moral realists? Here condition (ii) of (M+) plays an important role. While the minimalist can countenance the existence of moral facts in some suitably lightweight deflationary sense, he cannot countenance the existence of more ontologically robust moral facts. After all, the primary motivation for being a minimalist about ethics in the first place is to avoid having to accept purportedly illegitimate realist moral facts by tying them down in some way to our conative mental attitudes. And it is the denial of those kinds of realist facts which would, according to (M+), lead a view to be categorized as an anti-realist position.

To expand on the previous paragraph, consider what leading advocates of the minimalist strategy tell us is their motivation for employing it in the first place. Here is Allan Gibbard:

Expressivist quasi-realism . . . can explain belief in [normative facts], it might be said, without helping ourselves to normative facts at the outset, to facts of what's good or bad, or to facts of what is the thing to do. This would contrast with a standard realist's mode of explanation . . . We must start with a realm of naturalistic facts.⁸⁴

Similarly, when discussing his preferred minimalist approach to formulating expressivism about rationality, Paul Horwich writes that one of the central claims of the view should be:

. . . a distinctive metaphysical claim about the nonexplanatory nature of normative facts (namely, that beliefs about what is rational are not consequences of what is in fact rational).⁸⁵

And again according to Horgan and Timmons, what motivates the semantic claims of expressivism (including expressivists who are minimalists about properties, facts, truth-aptness, and the like) is the following claim:

There are no *moral* properties or relations to which moral terms (and the concepts they express) might be used to refer and, relatedly, there are no moral facts that moral judgments might describe or report.⁸⁶

Thus the starting point for minimalists in this area is precisely the denial of the moral facts and properties which, by their lights, moral realists typically accept.⁸⁷

So far this picture of the dialectic should be largely uncontroversial.⁸⁸ The real difficulty here is in trying to make out what the difference between talk of merely ‘minimal’ facts as opposed to ontologically ‘robust’ facts amounts to. In other words, is there anything which can be said to make it clearer how a commitment to minimal moral facts does not bring with it a commitment to moral facts of a realist variety? Let us first say a bit more about minimal facthood.⁸⁹ Minimal facts are just those facts which satisfy the relevant minimalist platitudes, central among them being the following:

It is a fact that p iff p .

A robust fact, then, is one that satisfies all the same minimalist platitudes, but also satisfies one or more additional conditions which are both not incompatible with the minimalist platitudes and at the same time go beyond them. There have been several proposals made in the literature about what such conditions might be,⁹⁰ but my interest here is not in critically evaluating these alternative views but rather in proposing one of my own. And we do not have far to look; condition (ii) of (M+) offers a mind-independence condition which is well suited to the task of serving as a necessary condition on robust facthood and which clearly goes beyond any of the minimalist platitudes about facts. If this is right, then there will still be a live debate between moral realists and ethical minimalists, as the realist will accept but the minimalist will deny the existence of moral facts which are mind-independent in the sense captured by condition (ii). Furthermore, such a proposal gives the minimalist a target against which to motivate her view in the first place.

To take an example of what a robust fact might look like in this framework, consider the fact that slavery is wrong. For this to be a robust fact, it must not only satisfy the minimalist platitudes concerning facthood, but it also must be the case that:

- (F) In the nearby worlds in which human beings have different intentional attitudes and conceptual schemes from those in the actual world which pertain to the fact that slavery is wrong, it is the case that:
 - (a) The existence and nature of the fact that slavery is wrong remain unchanged from how they are in the actual world.
 - (b) The existence and persistence conditions of the fact that slavery is wrong do not result to any extent from any intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes which pertain to it in the actual world.

Less formally, the basic idea is that for the fact that slavery is wrong to be a robust fact, it must exist unchanged in nearby worlds in which, for instance, human beings believe that slavery is permissible, and furthermore the fact's existing in those nearby worlds must have nothing to do with our conceptual schemes or intentional attitudes pertaining to slavery in the actual world.⁹¹ Such a requirement clearly goes well beyond the minimalist platitudes for facthood, and so I want to suggest, albeit tentatively, that a substantive metaphysical distinction still exists between the realist's 'robust' moral facts and the minimalist's 'lightweight' moral facts.⁹²

Thus I hope that a metaphysical formulation of the conditions required to be a moral realist, and in particular a formulation of the kind outlined in (M+), can helpfully restore order to the often confusing array of meta-ethical positions on offer in the contemporary literature.⁹³

Works Cited

- Alston, William. 1996. *A Realist Conception of Truth*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- _____. 2002a. *Realism & Antirealism*. Ed. W. Alston. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- _____. 2002b. "What Metaphysical Realism is Not." In Alston 2002a: 97-115.
- Barry, Brian 1989. *Theories of Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Blackburn, Simon. 1980. "Truth, Realism, and the Regulation of Theory," Reprinted in Blackburn 1993: 15-34.
- _____. 1984. *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- _____. 1987. "Morals and Modals." In C. Wright and G. Macdonald (eds.), *Fact, Science and Value: Essays in Honour of A. J. Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic*. Oxford: Blackwell. Reprinted in Blackburn 1993: 52-74.
- _____. 1988a. "How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12. Reprinted in Blackburn 1993: 166-181.
- _____. 1988b. "Attitudes and Contents." *Ethics*. Reprinted in Blackburn 1993: 182-197.
- _____. 1990. "Just Causes." *Philosophical Studies*. Reprinted in Blackburn 1993: 198-209.
- _____. 1993. *Essays in Quasi-Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1996. "Securing the Nots: Moral Epistemology for the Quasi-Realist." In Sinnott-Armstrong and Timmons 1996: 82-100.
- _____. 1998. *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bloomfield, Paul. 2001. *Moral Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2003. "Is There Moral High Ground?" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41: 511-526.
- Boghossian, Paul. 1990. "The Status of Content." *The Philosophical Review* 99: 157-184.
- Brandt, Richard. 1979. *A Theory of the Good and the Right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brink, David. 1986. "Externalist Moral Realism." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* Supplement. 23-42.
- _____. 1989. *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boyd, Richard. 1988. "How to Be a Moral Realist." In Sayre-McCord 1988a: 181-228.
- Butchvarov, Panayot. 1988. "Realism in Ethics." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12: 395-412.
- Copp, David. 1991. "Moral Realism: Facts and Norms." *Ethics* 101: 610-624.
- _____. 1995. *Morality, Normativity, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2001. "Realist-Expressivism: A Neglected Option for Moral Realism." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18: 1-43.
- Darwall, Stephen and Allan Gibbard and Peter Railton. 1992. "Toward *Fin de siècle* Ethics: Some Trends." *The Philosophical Review* 101: 115-189.
- De Clercq, Rafael. 2002. "Two Conceptions of Response-Dependence." *Philosophical Studies* 107: 159-177.

- Devitt, Michael. 1991. *Realism and Truth*. Second Edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- _____. 1996. "The Metaphysics of Nonfactualism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 10: 159-176.
- _____. 1997. "Afterword." In Devitt 1991: 302-345.
- _____. 2002. "Moral Realism: A Naturalistic Perspective." *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 2: 1-15.
- Divers, John and Alexander Miller. 1994. "Why Expressivists about Value Should Not Love Minimalism about Truth." *Analysis* 54: 12-19.
- _____. 1995. "Platitudes and Attitudes: A Minimalist Conception of Belief." *Analysis* 55: 37-44.
- Dreier, James. 1990. "Internalism and Speaker Relativism." *Ethics* 101: 6-26.
- _____. 1996. "Accepting Agent Centred Norms: A Problem for Non-Cognitivists and a Suggestion for Solving It." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74: 409-422.
- _____. 2004. "Meta-Ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism." *Philosophical Perspectives* 18: 23-44.
- Dummett, Michael. 1991. *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Dworkin, Ronald. 1996. "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25: 87-139.
- Field, Hartry. 1994. "Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse." *The Philosophical Review* 103. Reprinted in *Truth and the Absence of Fact*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. 222-258.
- Fine, Kit. 2001. "The Question of Realism." *Philosopher's Imprint* 1: 1-30.
- Firth, Roderick. 1952. "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Gert, Joshua. 2002. "Expressivism and Language Learning." *Ethics* 112: 292-314.
- Gibbard, Allan. 2002. "Normative and Recognitional Concepts." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64: 151-167.
- _____. 2003. *Thinking How to Live*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Griffin, James. 1996. *Value Judgement: Improving our Ethical Beliefs*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hale, Bob. 1997. "Realism and its Oppositions." In Bob Hale and Crispin Wright (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 271-308.
- Harman, Gilbert. 1975. "Moral Relativism Defended." *The Philosophical Review* 85: 3-22.
- _____. 1996. "Moral Relativism." In *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1-64.
- Hawthorne, John. 2002. "Practical Realism?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64: 169-178.
- Horgan, Terry and Mark Timmons. 2006a. "Expressivism, Yes! Relativism, No!" In R. Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*. Volume 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 73-98.
- _____. 2006b. "Cognitivist Expressivism." In T. Horgan and M. Timmons (eds.), *Metaethics after Moore*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horwich, Paul. 1993. "Gibbard's Theory of Norms." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22: 67-78.
- _____. 1994. "The Essence of Expressivism." *Analysis* 54: 19-20.
- _____. 1998. *Truth*. Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Hurley, Susan. 1989. *Natural Reasons: Personality and Polity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1999. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, Frank. 1998. *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defense of Conceptual Analysis*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Jackson, Frank and Philip Pettit. 1995. "Moral Functionalism and Moral Motivation." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45: 20-40.
- _____. 1998. "A Problem for Expressivism." *Analysis* 58: 239-251.
- Jackson, Frank and Graham Oppy and Michael Smith. 1994. "Minimalism and Truth Aptness." *Mind* 103: 287-302.
- Johnston, Mark. 1989. "Dispositional Theories of Value." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume. 139-174.
- _____. 1993. "Objectivity Refigured: Pragmatism without Verificationism." In J. Haldane and C. Wright (eds.), *Reality, Representation, and Projection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 85-130.
- Joyce, Richard. 2001. *The Myth of Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 2002. "Expressivism and Motivation Internalism." *Analysis* 62: 336-344.
- Kim, Jaegwon. 1998a. *Mind in a Physical World*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- _____. 1998b. *Philosophy of Mind*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Klagge, James. 1988. "Moral Realism and Dummett's Challenge." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 545-551.
- Lewis, David. 1989. "Dispositional Theories of Value." *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63. Reprinted in *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 68-94.
- Lynch, Michael. 2002. "Pluralism, Metaphysical Realism, and Ultimate Reality." In Alston 2002a: 57-78.
- Mackie, J. L. 1977. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. New York: Penguin.
- Mele, Alfred. 1996. "Internalist Moral Cognitivism and Listlessness." *Ethics* 106: 727-753.
- McDowell, John. 1981. "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following." In S. Holtzman and C. Leich (eds.), *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*. London: Routledge. Reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. 198-218.
- _____. 1985. "Values and Secondary Qualities." In T. Honderich. (ed.), *Morality and Objectivity*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Reprinted in Sayre-McCord 1988a. 166-180.
- Miller, Christian. 2002. "Rorty and Moral Relativism." *European Journal of Philosophy* 10: 354-374.
- _____. 2007. "The Conditions of Realism." *The Journal of Philosophical Research* 32: 95-132.
- Oddie, Graham. 1999. "Moral Realism, Moral Relativism and Moral Rules (A Compatibility Argument)." *Synthese* 117: 251-274.
- O'Leary-Hawthorne, John and Huw Price. 1996. "How to Stand Up for Non-Cognitivists." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74: 275-292.
- Pettit, Philip. 1991. "Realism and Response-Dependence." *Mind* 100. Reprinted in *Rules, Reasons, and Norms: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002. 26-48.
- Pigden, Charles. 1991. "Naturalism." In Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 421-431.

- Platts, Mark. 1979. "Moral Reality." In *Ways of Meaning*. London: Routledge. Reprinted in Sayre-McCord 1988a. 282-300.
- _____. 1980. "Moral Reality and the End of Desire." In Mark Platts (ed.), *Reference, Truth and Reality*. London: Routledge, 69-82.
- Putnam, Hilary. 1981. *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1987. *The Many Faces of Realism*. LaSalle: Open Court.
- _____. 1988. *Representation and Reality*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- _____. 1989. "Truth and Convention: On Davidson's Refutation of Conceptual Relativism." Reprinted in *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*. Ed. Michael Krausz. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 173-181.
- _____. 1990. *Realism with a Human Face*. Ed. James Conant. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- _____. 1992. *Renewing Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Quinn, Warren. 1978. "Moral and other Realisms: Some Initial Difficulties." In A. Goldman and J. Kim (eds.), *Values and Morals*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel. Reprinted in *Morality and Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 1-19.
- Rachels, James. 1991. "Subjectivism." In Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 432-441.
- Railton, Peter. 1986a. "Moral Realism." *The Philosophical Review* 95. Reprinted in Railton 2003: 3-42.
- _____. 1986b. "Facts and Values." *Philosophical Topics* 14. Reprinted in Railton 2003: 43-68.
- _____. 1995. "Subject-ive and Objective." *Ratio* 8: 259-276.
- _____. 1996. "Moral Realism: Prospects and Problems." In Sinnott-Armstrong and Timmons 1996: 49-81.
- _____. 2003. *Facts, Values, and Norms: Essays Toward a Morality of Consequence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Railton, Peter and Gideon Rosen. 1995. "Realism." In J. Kim and E. Sosa (eds.), *A Companion to Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 433-437.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- _____. 1980. "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory." *The Journal of Philosophy* 77: 515-572.
- Rosen, Gideon. 1994. "Objectivity and Modern Idealism: What is the Question?" In M. Michael and J. O'Leary-Hawthorne (eds.), *Philosophy in Mind*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 277-319.
- Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey (ed.). 1988a. *Essays on Moral Realism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- _____. 1988b. "Introduction: The Many Moral Realisms." In Sayre-McCord 1988a. 1-23.
- _____. 1991. "Being a Realist about Relativism (in Ethics)." *Philosophical Studies* 61: 155-176.
- Schiffer, Stephen. 1990. "Meaning and Value." *The Journal of Philosophy* 87: 602-614.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ. 2003. *Moral Realism: A Defence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Shope, Robert. 1978. "The Conditional Fallacy in Contemporary Philosophy." *The Journal of Philosophy* 75: 397-413.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter and Mark Timmons. 1996. *Moral Knowledge? New Readings in*

- Moral Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Skorupski, John. 1985. "Objectivity and Convergence." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. Reprinted in *Ethical Explorations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 11-25.
- Smith, Michael. 1989. "Dispositional Theories of Value." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume. 89-111.
- _____. 1991. "Realism." In Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 399-410.
- _____. 1994a. *The Moral Problem*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- _____. 1994b. "Why Expressivists about Value should Love Minimalism about Truth." *Analysis* 54: 1-11.
- _____. 1994c. "Minimalism, Truth-aptitude and Belief." *Analysis* 54: 21-26.
- _____. 1995a. "Internalism's Wheel." *Ratio* VIII: 277-302.
- _____. 1995b. "Internal Reasons." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55: 109-131.
- _____. 2001. "The Incoherence Argument: Reply to Shafer-Landau." *Analysis* 61: 254-266.
- Solomon, Wm. David. 1987. "Moral Realism and the Amoralist." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12: 377-393.
- Sosa, Ernest. 1993. "Putnam's Pragmatic Realism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 90: 605-626.
- Stevenson, C. L. 1937. "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms." Reprinted in *Facts and Values*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sturgeon, Nicholas. 1985. "Moral Explanations." In D. Copp and D. Zimmerman (eds.), *Morality, Reason and Truth*. Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld. Reprinted in Sayre-McCord 1988a: 229-255.
- _____. 1986. "What Difference Does It Make Whether Moral Realism is True?" *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24: 115-141.
- Svavarsdóttir, Sigrún. 1999. "Moral Cognitivism and Motivation." *The Philosophical Review* 108: 161-219.
- Tennant, Neil. 1997. *The Taming of the True*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Timmons, Mark. 1999. *Morality without Foundations: A Defense of Ethical Contextualism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wedgwood, Ralph. 2001. "Conceptual Role Semantics for Moral Terms." *The Philosophical Review* 110: 1-30.
- Wiggins, David. 1987. "A Sensible Subjectivism." In *Needs, Values, Truth*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Wong, David. 1991. "Relativism." In Peter Singer (ed.), *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 442-450.
- Wright, Crispin. 1988. "Realism, Antirealism, Irrealism, Quasi-realism." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12. Reprinted in J. Kim and E. Sosa (eds.), *Metaphysics: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. 649-665.
- _____. 1992. *Truth and Objectivity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- _____. 2002. "What Could Anti-Realism About Ordinary Psychology Possibly Be?" *The Philosophical Review* 111: 205-233.

¹ We shall examine Blackburn's view in detail in section three below.

² See my 2007.

³ Some realists take the mere existence of X to be sufficient for the truth of realism about X. Others argue that some further condition beyond mere existence is necessary, but reject the claim that this condition has anything to do with dependence relations involving human beings. So even this rough statement of the metaphysical thesis is not uncontroversial.

⁴ Devitt 1991: 23. For extensive references to advocates of each of these six theses, see my 2007.

⁵ Sayre-McCord 1988b: 5. Admittedly it is a bit hard to reconcile this claim with what Sayre-McCord writes a few pages later, namely that "for the most part, realism is a matter of metaphysics, not semantics" (7). See also his 1991: 157.

⁶ Horwich 1998: 55. Similarly he writes that, "anti-realism is the view that our common-sense conception of what we know is incoherent: the supposed character of facts of a certain type cannot be reconciled with our capacity to discover them" (Ibid., 56). Later Horwich also gives the non-equivalent but still epistemic formulation of realism according to which realism is concerned with "the *justifiability* of believing in facts that exist independently of thought or experience" (Ibid., 57, emphasis mine).

⁷ Griffin 1996: 61.

⁸ Putnam 1981: 49.

⁹ Rosen 1994: 279, emphasis his. Others who flirt with quietism include McDowell 1981; Putnam 1987: 19, and Dworkin 1996.

¹⁰ See my 2007.

¹¹ For a critical evaluation of alternative metaphysical formulations of general realism, see my 2007.

¹² For one among many similar claims, see Rosen 1994: 280-282.

¹³ Note that there is no restriction on how widely or narrowly domains of experience must be individuated in order for realism to be true of them. Thus realism might be true of mountains but not tables, or of tables but not quarks, or of observable objects but not unobservable ones, and so on. Furthermore, (R2) is formulated in such a way that X can be a fact, proposition, state of affairs, possible world, event, property, number, or whatever.

¹⁴ Alternatively we might say that concepts are the constituents of thoughts, where thoughts express intentional attitude objects. Exactly how we put all this does not matter much for our purposes. For more see Alston 2002b: 110 and Lynch 2002.

¹⁵ As Sosa nicely describes Putnam's view, "[s]uppose there is a time *t* when our conceptual scheme C first recognizes the appropriate criteria of existence and perdurance. According to our conceptual relativism, prior to that time *t* there were, relative to C, no objects of sort *O*, and in particular object *o* did not exist" (1993: 622). To take Putnam's famous example, suppose that what seem to be before me are three individuals in a box, and that I thereby come to believe that I am seeing three objects. Yet suppose that my conceptual scheme changes such that now two or more objects necessarily compose another object (i.e., I become a mereological universalist). For a realist, either there are or there are not exactly three objects in the box in virtue of objective facts about their existence and persistence conditions. For the Putnamian anti-realist, on the other hand, what goes on with respect to the makeup of my conceptual scheme determines the nature of objects; thus in our example, after the change took place in my conceptual scheme *four more objects came into existence*. (That is to say, four more objects came into existence given the concept of 'object' now operative in my conceptual scheme. On Putnam's view, someone with a different concept of 'object' can deny that there are seven objects in the box without being mistaken.)

For more on Putnam's view, see his 1983: 42-43; 1987: 18-20; 1988: 110-114; 1989: 173-176; 1990: 26-7, 40-1, and 1992: 116-120.

¹⁶ For this example, see the previous footnote.

¹⁷ Sosa, speaking on behalf of the Putnamian conceptual relativist, makes this point nicely as follows:

While existing in the actual world *x* we now have a conceptual scheme *C_x* relative to which we assert existence, when we assert it at all. Now, we suppose a possible world *w* in which we are not to be found, in which indeed no life of any sort is to be found. Still we may, in *x*: (a) consider alternative world *w* and recognize that our absence there would have no effect on the existence or course of a single planet or star, that Mercury, Venus, and the rest, would all still make their appointed rounds just as they do in *x*; while yet (b) this recognition, which after all takes place in *x*, is still relativized to *C_x*, so that the existence in *w* of

whatever exists in w relative to Cx need not be affected at all by the absence from w of Cx , and indeed of every conceptual scheme and of every being who could have a conceptual scheme. For when we suppose existence in w or allow the possibility of existence in w , we do so *in x*, and we do so there still relative to Cx , to our present conceptual scheme, and what it recognizes directly or indirectly, or ideally (1993: 624. emphasis his).

¹⁸ A similar move is familiar from discussions of rigid natural kind terms and definite descriptions in the philosophy of language, as well as from debates about response-dependence as a way of understanding the metaphysics of color and value. For general discussion, see Davies and Humberstone 1980.

¹⁹ Three notes about (ii) – first, we should take ‘different intentional attitudes’ to include not having *any* such attitudes towards X whatsoever, and by the ‘nature’ of X I simply mean all of X ’s essential properties. Thus X has some essential property F *realistically* iff (i) X and F exist, (ii) F is an essential property of X , and (iii) X ’s having F as an essential property does not exhibit the form of counterfactual dependence at issue in (R+). Secondly, a proper statement of (R+) would include time indices, which I have omitted only to simplify the above.

Finally, it is worth saying a bit more about what the notion of “resulting from” amounts to in condition (b). Recall that Putnam’s internal realism would claim that dinosaurs still existed even in nearby worlds in which no one has the concept *dinosaur*. This is because he is assessing those worlds relative to his own conceptual scheme in this world, a scheme which does include the concept *dinosaur*. Hence the need for (b), whereby if realism is true about the existence of dinosaurs, then dinosaurs exist and both of the following are true:

- (a) They would have existed in nearby worlds in which human beings deny their existence or do not have any concepts pertaining to them.
- (b) They do not exist in those worlds in virtue of anything having to do with our conceptual schemes or intentional attitudes in this world.

So another and perhaps better way of stating condition (b) would be as follows:

- (b*) The existence and nature of X in those nearby worlds are not assessed using any intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes which pertain to X in the actual world.

Still another way to put this condition would be:

- (b**) The existence and nature of X in those nearby worlds would remain unchanged relative to intentional attitudes or conceptual schemes which pertain to X in the actual world and imply that X did not exist or had a different nature.

²⁰ See Mackie 1977: 17-19; Butchvarov 1988: 398; Smith 1991: 402; 1994a: 9; Timmons 1999: 16, 35, and Fine 2001.

²¹ See Platts 1979: 282-3; Skorupski 1985: 16; Sayre-McCord 1988b: 8-10; 1991: 160; Klagge 1988: 545; Schiffer 1990: 602; Dummett 1991: 6; Pigden 1991: 421; Field 1994: 246; Copp 1995: 7, and Railton 1996: 59.

²² See Hurley 1989: 10 and Griffin 1996: 60-66, 122.

²³ See Quinn 1978: 1-2; Platts 1980: 69; Sturgeon 1986: 116-7; Solomon 1987: 380-81; Boyd 1988: 182; Brink 1989: 17-8; Horwich 1993: 67; Railton 1995: 272-275; Devitt 1996: 168; 1997: 317; 2002: 4-7; Timmons 1999: 36, 72; Oddie 1999: 252; Bloomfield 2001: ix-x; Copp 2001: 1, 6; Shafer-Landau 2003: 15-17, and Dreier 2004.

²⁴ Blackburn flirts with quietism (1980; 1987: 55-59; 1993: 4, 7; 1998: 319), as does McDowell 1981 and Gibbard 2002: 153. Such a label is, though, used tentatively in each case.

²⁵ Devitt 2002: 6. See also the discussion of a causal explanatory condition in the formulation of general realism in Devitt 1996. And for concerns which are similar to the one which follows, see Rosen 1994: 313.

²⁶ 2002: 6 fn. 14.

²⁷ See Kim 1998a; 1998b.

²⁸ For Wright, see his 1992: chapter three. For Alston, see his 1996. As Alston argues, “Though a particular realist or antirealist metaphysical position has implications for what propositions are true or false, they have no implications for what it is for a proposition to be true or false” (1996: 78, emphasis removed). I take up the relationship between truth and realism at length in my 2007.

²⁹ We will develop cases like this in more detail in the next section.

³⁰ As noted previously (footnote 19), a more detailed statement of these conditions would also include time indices. As an anonymous referee has pointed out, a potential cost of (M+) is that it may preclude the possibility of being a realist about the virtue of modesty. For on some views about modesty, a person cannot be modest if he believes that he is modest. Thus the existence of the trait would not remain unchanged with certain variations in the agent’s intentional attitudes.

Two things could be said in response to this case. First, it might be claimed that there are in fact no nearby worlds in which someone starts off as deeply modest, and then unlike in the actual world, he acquires the belief that he is modest. For if the person really has this trait in a fully developed manner, it would by its very nature preclude the formation of the belief in the first place. Alternatively, we might question the claim of such accounts of modesty that the trait really does preclude one's believing that one has it; it seems conceptually possible that a modest person might believe that he is modest, but make nothing of that fact (i.e., be modest about his own modesty). To be fair, though, I am willing to concede that if both of these responses fail, (M+) will have an odd consequence in this case.

³¹ While the kinds of entities that might show up in a realist ontology about ethics range from facts and states of affairs in the external world to character traits and psychological states, for the sake of simplifying the discussion which follows appeal will be made to a generic notion of 'fact' which is intended only as a convenient stand-in for whatever construal of 'X' is in question.

³² For similar claims, see Smith 1989: 89; 1994a: 9; Jackson and Pettit 1995: 20; Mele 1996: 727, and Svavarsdóttir 1999: 166.

³³ See Railton 1986a: 4; 1996: 52; Sayre-McCord 1988b: 7; Mele 1996: 727; Jackson 1998: 113, and Svavarsdóttir 1999: 166.

³⁴ See Sayre-McCord 1988b: 7; Railton 1996: 52; Jackson 1998: 114; Svavarsdóttir 1999: 166; Wedgwood 2001: 1, and Joyce 2001: 8.

³⁵ Cognitivism can be combined with minimalism about facts in order to secure at least the lightweight existence of moral facts. The implications of such a move will be discussed in section four.

³⁶ Here I treat 'non-cognitivism' as synonymous with 'expressivism,' 'projectivism,' and 'non-factualism.' In a more systematic treatment, I would need to distinguish expressivism/projectivism as merely one form of non-cognitivism (to be contrasted, say, with Hare's prescriptivism). Non-cognitivism in turn would be classified as merely one among several forms of non-factualism (see Boghossian 1990: 160 fn. 6). But such complications can be left aside for our purposes here.

³⁷ Hence according to Michael Smith, the paradigm instance of non-cognitivism, namely emotivism, is "the view that moral judgments express certain non-cognitive attitudes: desires, preferences, or pro- and con- attitudes of some other kind" (Smith 1994a: 17). See also Blackburn 1984: 167; Copp 1991: 613; 1995: 11-12; 2001: 1-2; Darwall, Gibbard and Railton 1992: 119; Horwich 1994: 20; Smith 1994a: 10, 20; 1995a: 279; Jackson and Pettit 1995: 20; Dreier 1996: 409; Jackson and Pettit 1998: 239; Svavarsdóttir 1999: 167; Joyce 2002: 336, and Gert 2002: 293.

³⁸ See Blackburn 1984: 167, 224; Sayre-McCord 1988b: 7; 1991: 157; Boghossian 1990: 160; Jackson, Oppy and Smith 1994: 287; Smith 1994b; 1995a: 279; Railton 1996: 52-3; Hale 1997: 289; Jackson and Pettit 1998: 239; Svavarsdóttir 1999: 167; Copp 2001: 1, and Gert 2002: 292.

³⁹ See Stevenson 1937: 16; Sayre-McCord 1988b: 8; Brink 1989: 19 fn. 7; Smith 1994a: 16; 1995a: 279; Railton and Rosen 1995: 434; Railton 1996: 52-3; Jackson 1998: 117; Svavarsdóttir 1999: 167; Wedgwood 2001: 1, and Joyce 2001: 9.

⁴⁰ Admittedly, non-cognitivists may employ certain arguments in order to motivate their view which *themselves* have metaphysical implications about the existence of moral facts. But just because some of the arguments used to argue for this position have metaphysical implications, it does not follow that the position itself does. Similarly, cognitivism could in theory be supported with arguments having either realist or anti-realist metaphysical implications. But cognitivism by itself is neutral on metaphysical issues about the existence and nature of moral facts, and the same holds for non-cognitivism. Thus it is only the formulations of various meta-ethical positions that we are concerned with in this paper, not the arguments used to support them.

Finally, as an anonymous referee has pointed out to me, some early formulations of emotivism denied the existence of moral propositions. Given the assumption that if there are no moral propositions, then there are no moral facts (an assumption which seems to me to be contestable), such a formulation of emotivism would end up implying the denial of moral realism. However, as we have seen above, the leading contemporary formulations of non-cognitivist positions do not directly concern themselves with the existence of moral propositions, and it is those formulations which I take to be neutral on the truth of moral realism.

⁴¹ I am grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

⁴² For a sampling of such claims, see footnote 46.

⁴³ See Gibbard 2002. Here I agree with Hawthorne (2002: 170) in thinking that Gibbard's view in this paper deserves to be classified as a form of moral realism. For further development of Gibbard's recent views, see his

2003. It should be mentioned that my concern is less with interpreting Gibbard's view correctly, as it is in drawing attention to an interesting and seemingly coherent meta-ethical position.

⁴⁴ Copp 2001: 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁶ Thus I find myself parting company with, among many others, Sayre-McCord 1988b: 10; Copp 1991: 613; Darwall, Gibbard and Railton 1992: 119; Railton and Rosen 1995: 434; Railton 1996: 53, and Tennant 1997: 63. However, sometimes one finds formulations of non-cognitivism which also invokes a separate metaphysical thesis to the effect that there are no (objective) moral facts. See for example Blackburn 1984: 169, 171; Brink 1989: 18-19; Devitt 1996: 159, 171; 1997: 308; 2002: 5; Tennant 1997: 63; Wedgwood 2001: 2, and Fine 2001: 3-4.

⁴⁷ See Railton 1996: 54, emphasis removed. See also Blackburn 1984: 158; Sayre-McCord 1988b: 10; 1991: 157; Tennant 1997: 68, and Joyce 2001: 9.

⁴⁸ See Mackie 1977: 15, 17-9, 35, 40; Blackburn 1984: 171; Sayre-McCord 1988b: 13; Boghossian 1990: 159, 167; Smith 1994a: 65; Railton and Rosen 1995: 434; Devitt 1996: 161; 1997: 311; 2002: 4; Hale 1997: 287-8; Timmons 1999: 72; Joyce 2001: 5, and Wedgwood 2001: 2.

⁴⁹ Similarly, many people could make objective moral claims which are closely bound up with their religious beliefs, and yet views like Shafer-Landau's (2003) end up being correct in which moral facts exist in a robustly objective way but do not arise from any supernatural sources.

⁵⁰ It is tempting to extend these remarks to the disconnect between semantics and ontology that we saw in our discussion of non-cognitivism. As we noted there, it is conceivable that there could be a world in which both non-cognitivism and realism are true, and the thought might be that in such a world the moral practices of human beings also systematically fail to capture the moral facts. However, this line of reasoning is misleading. A crude non-cognitivist semantics like the one offered by traditional emotivism, for example, holds that moral claims do *not* attempt to refer to objective moral facts, and so there cannot in principle be any systematic referential failure. For there to be a genuine error theory, the moral discourse has to (implicitly) commit speakers to false metaphysical claims about the world.

Of course in the world described above we could still claim that there is a deeper kind of disconnect or misadaptation present, namely one in which the semantic practices pertaining to morality in general are incapable of allowing agents to be in a position whereby they can putatively refer to the objective moral facts. In such a case, we could say that loosely speaking an 'error theory' would also be true of such humans, but this would not be the kind of error theory that one finds in the meta-ethics literature.

I am grateful to an anonymous referee and to Jason Baldwin for helpful discussion of these issues.

⁵¹ Rawls 1971: chapter one.

⁵² Thus according to Michael Smith's version of the dispositional theory of value:

- (i) We morally ought to x in C iff we would all of us converge, and necessarily so, upon a desire that we x in C if we had a maximally coherent and rational set of pro- and con-attitudes (1995a: 299. See also Smith 1989: 110).

and for normative reasons we get:

- (ii) S has a normative reason to do x in C if and only if, and because, S's fully rational counterpart would desire S to do x in C (1994a: chapter five; 1995b: 110-2, and 2001: 256).

Rosalind Hursthouse's virtue ethical account of right action has it that:

- (iii) An action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically do in the circumstances (1999: 28).

Finally, David Lewis claims that:

- (iv) X is a value iff we would be disposed to value x under conditions of the fullest imaginative acquaintance with X (1989).

For additional examples, see Firth 1952; Brandt 1979; McDowell 1985; Railton 1986a, 1986b, and Wiggins 1987.

⁵³ For general discussion of the basic equation as well as plausible reasons for thinking that it needs to be substantively revised in various ways, see Shope 1978; Wright 1988, 1992; Johnston 1989, 1993; Pettit 1991, and De Clercq 2002. For excellent discussion and doubts about what help response-dependence might be in understanding realism debates, see Rosen 1994: 289-305.

⁵⁴ The basic equation is compatible with other meta-ethical views such as moral relativism. But the hope of many theorists who adopt this approach is that there will be convergence among the responses of the appropriate individuals. See, for example, Smith 1994a: chapter five. Others, however, are more doubtful that their account can vindicate anything more than moral relativism (Brandt 1979 and Lewis 1989). Our concern here will only be with

whether response-dependent views which promise to deliver some form of convergence count as forms of realism; moral relativist positions are briefly discussed in footnote 60 below.

⁵⁵ For response dependent views at the level of concepts, see Johnston 1989; 1993 and Pettit 1991. For similar views at the level of ontology, see Wright 1988: 661-2 and De Clercq 2002. For helpful discussion, see Rosen 1994: 289-305. The discussion in the text is a bit misleading in that it portrays response-dependent accounts as committed to (merely) offering a biconditional connection between some thing or concept and our suitable responses. In fact, of course, there is disagreement on what the connection is supposed to be; Johnston for one thinks that response-dependence involves concept *identity*.

⁵⁶ These terms are attributed to Johnston by Wright 1988: 662. Explaining exactly how to draw such a distinction and thereby explaining the order of determination between the left and right hand sides of the biconditional has proven to be a significant challenge. For related discussion, see Wright 1988: 661-2; 1992: 108-139 and Johnston 1993: 118-9, 122-126. Finally, note that questions about the order of determination do not arise for *non-reductive* candidate analyses, as we shall see in a moment (Johnston 1993: 122-126).

⁵⁷ As Rawls makes explicit, “Moral objectivity is to be understood in terms of a suitably constructed social point of view that all can accept. Apart from the procedures of constructing the principles of justice, there are no moral facts” (1980: 519). See also Barry 1989: 266-268.

⁵⁸ For general discussion, see Johnston 1989: 147-8; 1993: 105-6, 122-126; Wright 1992: 120-123, and Blackburn 1993: 9-10; 1998: 104-112.

⁵⁹ This last point might be resisted. For given a few well placed ‘actually’ operators in the biconditional, we could rigidify the responses of our well-situated respondents in such a way that they would remain invariant in nearby worlds, and thus allow the resulting account to avoid any conflict with condition (ii) of (M+). However, it was precisely the discussion of rigidified conceptual schemes in section one which was intended to show the inadequacy of such a strategy for attempting to transform an anti-realist view into a form of realism.

For further discussion of response-dependence and rigidification, see Lewis 1989: 88-9; Johnston 1989: 148, and Wright 1992: 114-117. And for interesting general discussion of the bearing of ontologically reductive projectivist biconditionals on the realism/anti-realism debate, see Rosen 1994: 289-305.

⁶⁰ The application of (M+) to both subjectivist and relativist meta-ethical views is straightforward, and so we need only mention them briefly here. At times subjectivism is formulated merely as a semantic view; thus James Rachels says ‘simple subjectivism’ is the view that, “when a person says that something is morally good or bad, this means that he or she approves of that thing, or disapproves of it, and nothing more” (1991: 435, emphasis removed. See also Sayre-McCord 1988b: 16-17; Jackson and Pettit 1998: 239, and Jackson 1998: 114). But as in the case of non-cognitivism, this is compatible with the existence of unknown moral facts, provided we keep in mind that the claim that there might be such facts is not a moral but a metaphysical claim, and so is not subject to the subjectivist’s semantic understanding.

Given that subjectivists motivate their view as a way of avoiding the perceived ontological excesses of certain paradigmatically realist views (Rachels 1991: 432, 434), a better way of formulating the position is as a claim about the metaphysics of moral facts whereby they are at least partially dependent upon certain subjective states of individuals. Various semantic claims about what happens when a person makes a moral judgment would naturally follow from such a picture. As such, then, subjectivism is a form of anti-realism because it is committed to claims which are incompatible with condition (ii) of (M+).

Sayre-McCord claims that the cognitivist relativist is committed to thinking that some moral statements are true, where their truth-conditions are spelled out “in terms of the conventions or practices of groups of people” (Sayre-McCord 1988b: 18. See also his 1991: 162 and Dreier 1990: 9.). But by now it is a familiar point that is consistent with realist possibilities about moral ontology. Instead relativism is more plausibly taken to deny that there are any *objective* moral facts, while at the same time affirming that there are moral facts which are constituted by, for instance, social or cultural practices and agreements (See Wong 1991: 442, 445; Harman 1975; 1996: 4-5; Oddie 1999: 256-7, and Shafer-Landau 2003: 14 as well as my 2002). Since it implies claims which are incompatible with condition (ii) of (M+), moral relativism is rightly thought to be a form of anti-realism.

⁶¹ For Cornell realism, see Sturgeon 1985; 1986; Brink 1986; 1989, and Boyd 1988. For moral functionalism, see Jackson and Pettit 1995 and Jackson 1998.

⁶² See Jackson 1998: 145. In addition to these two forms of naturalist moral realism, there are non-naturalist positions which also satisfy (M+). For instance, Shafer-Landau (2003) has recently argued for the view that objective moral properties exist but are not identical to scientifically legitimate properties.

-
- ⁶³ The following sentence and the two subsequent paragraphs derive from my 2002.
- ⁶⁴ Blackburn 1984: 171, 195-6, 211, 219, 221; 1988b: 185. Blackburn uses the language of ‘mimicry’ in his 1980: 15 and 1993: 4.
- ⁶⁵ See Blackburn 1980: 19; 1988a: 168 and 1998: 50.
- ⁶⁶ Blackburn 1998: 79. See also his 1984: 171, 196 and 1993: 4.
- ⁶⁷ See Blackburn 1980: 19 and 1984: 195.
- ⁶⁸ Blackburn 1998: 70.
- ⁶⁹ Blackburn 1998: 77. See also 1984: 180, 211, 219.
- ⁷⁰ See Blackburn 1988a: 173, 175; 1993: 7; 1996: 86, and 1998: 75-79. Blackburn thinks that similar deflationary moves also entitle him to talk about moral facts, moral properties, and moral knowledge. We shall consider such moves in section four of this paper.
- ⁷¹ Blackburn 1984: 210.
- ⁷² See McDowell 1985: 167 fn. 4; Wright 1988: 653, and Devitt 1991: 55; 1996; 1997; 2002.
- ⁷³ Blackburn 1984: 180. See also *Ibid.*, 221; 1987: 55; 1988a: 167; 1993: 4, and 1996: 83, 86.
- ⁷⁴ See Blackburn 1984: 210; 1988a: 167, 173-5; 1988b; 1993: 4, 6; 1996: 86 as well as McDowell 1985: 167 fn. 4 and Devitt 1991: 55-6; 2002: 5-6.
- ⁷⁵ As is clear from the passage quoted above as well as Blackburn 1984: 169-171, 181-82, 197, 212, 220 257; 1987: 55; 1988a: 167-8, 171, 173-5; 1990: 208; 1993: 9; 1996: 84-5, and 1998: 77, 79-80.
- ⁷⁶ See in particular the appendix to his 1998: 311-320.
- ⁷⁷ I borrow this terminology from Horgan and Timmons 2006a. See also their 2006b and Bloomfield 2003. Blackburn himself accepts what appears to be the same distinction (stated in terms of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ perspectives) in his 1988a: 173.
- ⁷⁸ 1998: 80, emphasis mine. See also his 1998: 50, 77, 79-80.
- ⁷⁹ 1998: 311, emphasis his.
- ⁸⁰ Blackburn would insist that the projectivist can make this claim as well. In other words, Blackburn would likely *agree* that slavery does not get to count as wrong as a result of our attitudes and conceptual schemes in the actual world; instead it is wrong because of certain morally relevant considerations, such as that it causes pain and violates the dignity of human beings. However, the claim in the text is being made from the morally *detached* perspective whereas Blackburn’s claim would be made from the morally *engaged* perspective. And it is only the former which is relevant when giving a metaphysical characterization of moral realism.
- ⁸¹ As an anonymous referee has pointed out to me, it may be that Blackburn would deny the intelligibility of the distinction between the morally engaged and detached perspectives, thereby parting ways with Horgan, Timmons, and others who also accept a quasi-realist approach and rely heavily on the distinction. But this move does not seem likely. For one, the distinction seems to be perfectly intelligible on independent grounds, and itself is neutral concerning the truth of any particular meta-ethical view. Indeed, as I tried to suggest earlier, the distinction between morally engaged and detached perspectives mirrors analogous distinctions in discussions of mereology, scientific realism, and mathematical realism. Additionally, if Blackburn gives up the distinction and continues to insist that moral statements are true, categorical, objective, mind-independent, and the like (claims to which I am happy to grant he is entitled, but only from the engaged perspective), then it becomes increasingly difficult to make sense of the numerous places in which he says things like:
- “evaluative properties are *projections* of our own sentiments” (1984: 180, emphasis mine)
- “anti-realism acknowledges no such state of affairs and no such issue of dependency. Its freedom from any such ontological headache is not the least of its pleasures” (1988a: 173).
- “what we describe as the ethical properties of things are *constructed* precisely in order to reflect our concerns” (1998: 80, emphasis mine).
- Indeed, as we noted earlier, Blackburn himself explicitly accepts the distinction between the internal and external perspectives (1988a: 173).
- Alternatively, Blackburn may accept this distinction between different perspectives, but deny that from the detached one it is intelligible to make claims about whether objective moral facts do or do not exist; rather these claims only make sense from within the engaged perspective. But the passages just quoted should put this concern to rest, since in them (and others noted in footnote 75) Blackburn both (i) makes various claims about the existence and nature of moral facts, and yet (ii) would not make such claims from within the engaged perspective (where, for instance, evaluative properties are *not* projections).

⁸² See Boghossian 1990: 161-167; Wright 1992, and Horwich 1993.

⁸³ For advocacy of such a minimalist view over traditional non-cognitivism, see Wright 1988; 1992; 2002; Horwich 1993; 1994; 1998: 84-5; Divers and Miller 1994; 1995, and Fine 2001: 4-5. For doubts, see Boghossian 1990; Jackson, Oppy and Smith 1994; Smith 1994b; 1994c; O’Leary-Hawthorne and Price 1996, and Jackson 1998: 115-117. And for helpful general discussion, see Rosen 1994; Copp 2001, and Dreier 2004. Blackburn has also made use of minimalist claims in his recent work in particular (see his 1998), as has Dworkin (1996) and Gibbard (2003).

⁸⁴ 2003: 187. Similarly, he writes that “[t]here is no such thing as a specially normative state of affairs; all states of affairs are natural. We do, though, have normative thoughts, and they are distinct from naturalistic thoughts” (181).

⁸⁵ 1993: 74. See also *ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁶ Horgan and Timmons 2006a: 75, emphasis theirs.

⁸⁷ For related discussion, see Divers and Miller 1994; Devitt 1996; 2002: 5, and Dreier 2004.

⁸⁸ For a very similar picture, see Dreier 2004. See also Rosen 1994.

⁸⁹ In what follows, I have been helped by Divers and Miller 1995. For related discussion of minimalism and platitudes, see Wright 1992 and Jackson, Oppy, and Smith 1994.

⁹⁰ For metaphysical conditions, see Wright 1988; 1992; Devitt 1996; 1997; 2002; Fine 2001, and Dreier 2004. See also Field 1994: 242-250 for a semantic proposal. For a combined metaphysical and semantic proposal, see Copp 2001: 4-5. For doubts about this project in general, see Rosen 1994.

⁹¹ This last part thus blocks the minimalist from counting as a realist by rigidifying our attitudes or conceptual schemes and then using them to assess the relevant counterfactual worlds. Dreier, for one, mentions how a minimalist would be tempted to employ this rigidification strategy (2004: 29-30).

⁹² Similar remarks also apply to minimalist views about moral properties, dispositions, propositions, and the like. Minimalists will likely respond to the above remarks by insisting that they too are entitled to say the same kinds of things as what (M+) claims uniquely distinguish moral realists. Using our slavery example again, they might be happy to agree that the following is a (minimal) fact:

(S) Slavery is wrong and its being wrong does not depend on our conceptual schemes or intentional attitudes. I grant that minimalists are entitled to (S), but clearly (S) is a moral claim and so is made from the morally *engaged* perspective. And to revisit issues we have already discussed at length in the previous section, whether a meta-ethical position counts as a form of realism or not is a question that must be evaluated from the morally detached perspective. Once we switch to that perspective, minimalists deny the existence of moral facts in the sense captured by (M+), as we saw with the quotations from Gibbard, Horwich, and Horgan and Timmons at the start of this section.

Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful comments here.

⁹³ For very helpful written comments I am grateful to Jason Baldwin, Michael DePaul, Philip Quinn, and several anonymous referees.