Truth in Ethics and Epistemology:

A Defense of Normative Realism

by

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Abstract

In this work I defend moral realism, the thesis that there are objective moral truths, by defending "epistemic realism." Epistemic realism is the thesis that epistemic judgments, e.g., judgments that some belief is epistemically *reasonable*, or *justified*, or *known* or *should be held*, are sometimes true and made true by stance-independent epistemic facts and properties.

One might think that epistemic realism needs no defense because it is obviously true and nearly universally accepted. But there are influential arguments against moral realism, which is analogous to epistemic realism: moral realists think that moral judgments, e.g., that something is *morally good*, or *ought to be done*, are sometimes true because there are stance-independent moral facts and properties. Moral irrealists deny this for a variety of semantic, metaphysical, psychological and epistemological reasons. They argue that moral judgments are neither true nor false since they are non-cognitive expressions of emotion or commands, or are never true since they fail to refer, or that their truth is "relative."

Drawing on the moral irrealisms of Ayer, Stevenson, Hare, Mackie, Harman, and more recent thinkers, I construct parallel arguments for epistemic irrealisms. On these views, epistemic judgments are also merely expressive, a kind of command, always false, or relativistic in truth conditions: even "epistemic platitudes" like "justified beliefs are *better than* unjustified beliefs" and "ideally, one's beliefs *ought* to be consistent" are understood not as epistemic propositions that might be believed (much less believed *truly*), or as attempts to accurately represent epistemic facts, or as attributions of epistemic properties.

The implications of these claims are highly at odds with common epistemological assumptions, even those that moral irrealists tend to accept. I argue that these implications are rationally unacceptable and that, therefore, the premises that support them should be rejected. Since these premises are those given in defense of moral irrealisms, I thereby defend both moral and epistemic realism. Thus, I argue that

"oughts," "shoulds" and other evaluative judgments are equally legitimate in both ethics and epistemology.

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CHAPTER 1: Moral & Epistemic Realisms.

1.1. Introduction.

In this work I defend moral and epistemic "realisms," according to which there are objective, stance-independent, moral and epistemic facts or properties that make some moral and epistemic judgments literally true and others literally false.[1]

Epistemic realism is, simply put, the thesis that epistemic judgments – e.g., judgments that some belief is epistemically *reasonable*, or *justified*, or *should* be held, and so on – are *beliefs* (not another, non-representational, state of mind), and that some of these beliefs are true, and made true, because there are epistemic properties and facts. It thus concerns the semantic, metaphysical, psychological, and logical "foundations" of epistemic judgments.

Moral realism is a view on the analogous foundations of ethical judgments; it is, simply put, the analogous thesis that moral judgments are beliefs and that some are true because of stance-independent moral facts and properties: when a moral judgment is true, it is not made true by anyone's attitude towards that moral proposition; rather it is made true by facts other than anyone's stance toward it.

I defend moral and epistemic realisms from arguments against them Some of these arguments are against realisms and for views that there are no stance-independent moral or epistemic facts or properties to serve as truth-makers for these kinds of judgments. Other arguments are given to think that such judgments are neither true nor false, and so that moral or epistemic judgments are never literally true.

My defense of these two realisms depends on similarities between moral and epistemic judgments. The crucial similarity is that these two kinds of judgments are sufficiently similar in their features such that an objection to understanding one kind of judgment in a realistic manner is also an objection to understanding the other in a realistic manner. Put another way, my arguments depend on these two kinds of judgments being

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[1] To cast my metaphysical net as wide as acceptably possible, I speak of both facts and properties. For anyone who sees this as redundant excess (e.g., thinks that if one posits facts, there is no need to posit properties, or vice-versa), he or she can adjust my claims accordingly. What is important, for my position, is that there are truth-makers for moral and epistemically evaluative claims and that their existence is not dependent on attitudes towards these evaluations: they are, what might be called, "objective," or better (since the obvious contrast to "objective," viz. "subjective," is not ideal), "stance independent," since their existence does not depend on anyone's attitudes, or stance, towards them.

sufficiently similar so that this claim is true: an objection to understanding one kind of claim realistically is also a plausible, if not equally strong, objection to the other kind.

Critics of moral realisms claim that moral judgments have various specified features and so moral irrealism is true (or likely true). I respond that it is *as plausible* to think that epistemic judgments also have these features and ask whether we should think that epistemic irrealism is true (or likely true) also, since having these features seems to be the basis for accepting some kind of moral irrealism. I argue that since we should not accept a version of epistemic irrealism, we should not think that moral judgments' having these features provides good reason to reject moral realism. This, I argue, shows that the standard arguments against moral realism have at least one premise that we should not accept.

In this chapter I make a *prima facie* case for the similarity of these two kinds of judgments in terms of their semantic, metaphysical, logical, epistemic, and psychological features. This case is developed throughout this work as I examine the particular objections philosophers have given to understanding moral judgments in a realistic manner.

Whether moral realism should be accepted or rejected is a controversial issue. The status of epistemic realism is far less controversial (it is accepted by most moral irrealists), so if it can used to defend moral realism, then moral realism can be defended from assumptions that even most moral irrealists accept. If this can be done, this is surely an ideal basis to defend moral realism from, since it's generally preferable to defend a view using premises its critics accept. I intend to do just this.

1.2. Epistemic Realism: A Sketch.

Since I use epistemic realism to defend moral realism, I will say more about what epistemic realism is. It is a view on the "foundations" of epistemology and reasoning, although in a sense different from which most epistemologists typically think of in terms of "foundations." It pertains to the semantic, metaphysical, psychological, and *epistemic* bases of epistemic judgments. It includes the view there are epistemic propositions and an epistemic "way the world is" that we try to represent in our making epistemic evaluations, and that we sometimes represent this reality successfully. Epistemic realists believe that epistemic judgments are beliefs, i.e., attempts to represent information about

the world, or propositional attitudes, and that these beliefs are sometimes true. They also believe that that other epistemic attitudes (e.g., suspending judgment) can be objectively fitting also: it can be true that someone rationally ought to suspend judgment regarding a proposition.

While the foundations of moral judgments have been much explored, these foundations of epistemic judgments are a largely neglected topic. One might think that this neglect is justified because, as a general view on the foundations of epistemic judgments, epistemic realism needs no defense. Many might think this because they think that epistemic realism is obviously true and nearly universally accepted: they might think that nearly everyone believes that epistemic judgments are beliefs that are sometimes true and, when true, true because of stance-independent epistemic facts and properties. They might think that since everyone thinks this, there's no need to defend the view.

While epistemic realism *is* nearly universally accepted and few have felt the need to explicitly defend it, some philosophers reject *moral* realism, which is the analogous claim about the nature of moral judgments. Moral realists think that moral judgments are beliefs that attempt to represent moral reality, that these beliefs are sometimes true, and that they are made true by objective or stance-independent moral properties.

Moral irrealists deny these claims in a number of ways, for a variety of semantic, metaphysical, epistemic and psychological reasons. Some moral irrealists argue that moral judgments aren't even, strictly speaking, *beliefs*. On these kinds of views, moral judgments are expressions of emotion, or commands, or some other non-representational mental state that admits neither of truth or falsity. Other moral irrealists argue that moral judgments are beliefs but that they that are never true because there is nothing to make them true; these is no metaphysical foundation for morals. Other moral irrealists argue that there are moral truths but that their truth is not stance-independent, but "relative," i.e., dependent on factors such as which moral principles are accepted in a community or by the attitudes some contingent being(s) take towards the moral judgments in question. And there are other, subtler, ways to deny moral realism also.

There is some lively debate concerning the status of moral realism, so the issue is deemed worthy of conversation. But epistemic realism is analogous to moral realism: epistemic realists understand the epistemic in ways comparable to how moral realists

understand the moral. So if there is debate concerning foundational questions about the nature of moral judgments, then perhaps there should be more debate about the foundational questions about the nature of epistemic judgments. This debate might be especially called for if moral and epistemic judgments share many of the properties which moral irrealists point to in making their cases for moral irrealisms. If moral irrealists argue that since moral judgments are like *that*, and therefore we should understand them irrealistically, then if epistemic judgments are often like *that* too, then comparable cases can be made for understanding both kinds of judgments in irrealistic manners.

This is, in fact, how most moral irrealists argue for the positions: they identify features of moral judgments and then argue that these features support an irrealistic understanding, or are better understood on a version of moral irrealism. The motivating thought behind these various arguments for moral irrealism, a thought that is often left unstated, seems to be that any judgment having some specified features should be understood in an irrealistic manner; of course, the exact manner will depend on the particular irrealist theory in question.

Here I present and examine the more commonly arguments for moral-realisms. In the process, I develop a parallel case against epistemic realism. My strategy is to identify the major premises of the more common and historically influential arguments against moral realism. I argue that when moral judgments have these features, epistemic judgments also have these features, or that many epistemic judgments have them to the extent that a variety of moral judgments have them.[2] Thus, many commons reasons given to reject moral realism seem to be comparable reasons to reject epistemic realism.

Moral irrealists claim that moral judgments have some specified feature and that, therefore, they should be understood irrealistically. Sometimes their initial claim about moral judgments having this feature is quite plausible: e.g., as logical positivists argued, moral judgments are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. If it were true that

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[2] Moral judgments about *goodness* and *rightness*, although both moral judgments, might differ in important ways such that an argument against moral realism might have, e.g., stronger claim against judgments of rightness than against judgments of goodness. E.g., it might be more plausible to think that judgments about what ought to be done have a motivational quality than it is to think this about judgments about what's good. Similarly, judgments that something *ought to be believed* and something *is known* are both

judgments that are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable are never true, then this might very well be a sound argument for moral irrealism, if were plausible to think that both these premises are true.

Other times, moral irrealists' claims about what moral judgments are like are highly dubious: e.g., the claim that moral judgments have an essentially motivational component. Any argument based on this premise is doubtful. For these latter kinds of arguments for moral irrealism, I grant the irrealist her controversial and dubious claim, but argue that it's *as plausible* to think that epistemic judgments also have this feature that they point to. After either establishing these common features of moral and epistemic judgments (or, in some cases, accepting them for the sake of argument), I argue that premises used in arguments for moral irrealisms have implications for how epistemic judgments should be understood, given these common features.

These premises tend to suggest that epistemic judgments are never true. These include those mentioned above (e.g., concerning what's epistemically reasonable, or justified, or should be believed), evaluative judgments pertaining to inferences (e.g., what one should believe, given, among other considerations, the other things one believes), as well as "epistemic platitudes" like "justified beliefs are better than unjustified beliefs" and "one ought to believe only what one has good evidence for."[3] That is, these kinds of claims should be understood not as epistemic propositions that might be believed, or as epistemic facts or descriptions, or as attempts to attribute epistemic properties. Rather, they should be interpreted in some emotivist, expressivist, prescriptivist, error-theoretical, relativistic,[4] or other non-standard way.

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epistemic judgments, but there might be important differences between them such that an argument for epistemic irrealism might be stronger for one kind of judgment.

[3] If any of these are intended to be moral evaluations, then moral irrealists readily would agree. However, I suspect that most moral irrealists do not see these kinds of intellectual platitudes as moral evaluations: they are evaluations of a distinctly intellectual kind.

[4] Moral and epistemic relativists allow for "relative" truth, i.e., that some moral or epistemic proposition is true, but only "relative to" a set of other propositions (which themselves are either not true or are true "relative" to themselves). There are no *just plain true* moral or epistemic judgments. Some might think that allowing some kind of truth make a position "realist." While views can be categorized in any manner and using any label one likes, on most self-proclaimed realists' understandings of realism, a meta-ethical positions countenancing relative truths is insufficient for that position being genuinely realistic: on most realist's views, non-relative truth-makers are needed for genuine realism. I discuss and criticize relativisms in later chapters.

Thus, I argue that reasoning parallel to that given in defense of non-realistic meta-ethics often suggests analogous non-realistic meta-epistemologies as well. This parallel has been observed before, but has rarely been developed in great detail. Other philosophers have suggested that parallel cases for and against realisms in ethics and epistemology can be made. For example, after noting some similarities between ethical and epistemic judgments, William Lycan writes:

> It's interesting that this parallel [between ethics and epistemology] goes generally unremarked. Moral subjectivism, relativism, emotivism, etc. are rife among both philosophers and ordinary people, yet very few of these same people would think even for a moment of denying the objectivity of epistemic value; that is, of attacking the reality of the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable belief. I wonder why that is?[5]

His suspicion is that, given the similarities between the two kinds of judgments, we would expect that there be more meta-epistemological positions analogous to those found in meta-ethics: there should be more epistemic nihilists, relativists, emotivists and so on. Here I develop these possible positions and critique them. I then use this critique to defend moral realism.

Epistemic irrealisms are, at least, at odds with common epistemic and intellectual assumptions, including those made by most moral irrealists and used by them in their making their cases for moral irrealisms. Nearly all philosophers presume that their own epistemic judgments are beliefs and, presumably, that their epistemic beliefs are sometimes true, and made true by something "in" or "about" the stance-independent world: it's not the case that our epistemic attitudes, when true, are true *because* we have them, or because of our attitudes toward the epistemic propositions under consideration.

And philosophers tend to accept the following epistemic platitudes as beliefs and, perhaps, beliefs that must be presumed for philosophical, or generally rational, thinking: "It's good to have evidence for one's beliefs," "All else being equal, it's better to have consistent beliefs than inconsistent beliefs", "It's bad to be unreasonable," "You shouldn't believe something unless you have good reasons to believe it," "The strength of

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[5] See Lycan ("Epistemic Value" 137).

one's belief ought to be proportional to the strength of the evidence."[6] Most philosophers think that, at least sometimes, when one sees that some proposition is a consequence of one's beliefs, one should accept that consequence, and it is as justified as the initial beliefs. These kinds of intellectual evaluations are often presumed to be sometimes true; I aim to argue that common reasons given to think that moral evaluations are never true suggest that these intellectual evaluations are not true either. Insofar as this as a surprising suggested implication, this might contribute to reasons to reconsider these arguments against moral realism.

Although analogous views are common about moral evaluations, few philosophers think that epistemically or intellectual evaluative claims like these above are mere expressions of emotion, or disguised commands, or relative in their truth conditions, or some other linguistic expression or mental state that does not admit of literal truth and falsity. Again, even moral irrealists who accept these understandings of morality tend to reject these understandings of reasoning and epistemic evaluation: they typically do not think that their claim that they, or anyone, should accept their arguments about moral realism is merely an expression of emotion, or a command, or, of course, a claim that is, literally, false.[7] And they typically think their rejections of epistemic irrealisms are reasonable and justified and that, again, that this evaluation is not an expression of emotion.

Of course, a view's being unpopular does not entail that it is false or that it ought not to be believed. So, if epistemic irrealism is not popular, that's not necessary a strike against it. And that an unpopular view follows from some premises does not entail that any of those premises should be rejected. That most philosophers accept epistemic realism might not be much in its favor: perhaps nearly all philosophers have assumed a view that is, ultimately, indefensible. Also, if some defenders of moral irrealisms have an

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[6] What exactly an epistemic judgment is is not entirely clear. Perhaps some of these are not epistemic judgments, especially the various intellectual platitudes I mention. But they are evaluative judgments of some kind, and they are not intended to be moral judgments. My basic argument would seem to apply to them, whatever evaluative category they fall into: reasons to think that no moral evaluations are true would often apply to these intellectually evaluative judgments or assumptions also.

[7] Allen Gibbard (see Gibbard *Thinking How To Live*) and Hartry Field ("Apriority as an Evaluative Notion" and "Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse") might be exceptions to this claim. I discuss their views and their arguments they offer in their favor in my final chapter.

inconsistent overall position, this does not mean that moral irrealism is false or their arguments for it weak.

But perhaps those who think that they are justified in rejecting epistemic irrealism are mistaken: perhaps the entire common picture on the foundations of epistemic judgments is false. There seems to be no reason why epistemic irrealism *must* be false or why it *must* be unreasonable or unjustified for every person who considers it. Few, if any, views are essentially such that they ought to be rejected, and epistemic irrealism does not seem to be a contender for that possible class of views. *Maybe* some kind of epistemic irrealism is true: maybe there are no epistemic properties, maybe there are no epistemic truths, or maybe epistemic discourse is only expressive.

I concede that this is possible, in a broadly logical sense. But do I intend to argue that irrealist meta-epistemologies are rationally unacceptable for most, if not all, actual believers who carefully consider the issues.[8] I argue that critical reflection on that which seems true about epistemic evaluation reveals that the premises that support epistemic irrealisms, which also support moral non-realisms, should be rejected. Thus, I will argue that nearly anyone who reasons through this issue should reject the common arguments against moral irrealism.

This claim about how we ought to reason itself is an epistemic judgment; I will argue this claim itself is true; it is not an expression of emotion, or a command, or anything that an epistemic irrealist might say it is. I argue that there is better reason to accept epistemic realism than reject it.

Thus, I defend moral realism by undercutting the cases against it. I do this by arguing that the premises given against it have unacceptable implications in that, in conjunction with premises describing the features of epistemic judgments, they entail or (for non-deductive arguments) make likely various kinds of epistemic irrealisms. I defend epistemic realism by, first, showing that it is need of defense: there are many plausible cases to be made against it since most things that have been said against moral properties and a cognitive understanding of moral language can be said against the notion of

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[8] I do not argue that epistemic irrealisms are unjustified for every actual, much less possible, thinker. If epistemic realism is true, then, perhaps, there are some people who have very good evidence to think that, e.g., *there is no good evidence for anything* and *there is nothing anyone should believe*. While I think these

epistemic properties and a cognitivist understanding of epistemic language. Second, I argue that these meta-epistemologies are false and have other rationally unacceptable consequences. My arguments that both these various irrealisms should be rejected yield defenses of both kinds of realism.

My organization is historical and cumulative. I begin with A.J. Ayer and work towards the present, discussing C.L. Stevenson's, R.M. Hare's, J.L. Mackie's, Gilbert Harman's, and more recent arguments against moral realism. I also occasionally note David Hume's empiricist influence on some of these philosophers' positions and arguments.

I apply their reasoning in meta-ethics to epistemology (and reasoning itself), find unacceptable implications, and bring these results back to meta-ethics to re-evaluate their arguments. For each figure I press similar kinds of objections. I observe that their major premises given in defense of their moral irrealisms – in conjunction with premises describing features of epistemic judgments – either entail or suggest that epistemic judgments are never objectively true. I then argue that this is a false and rationally unacceptable consequence, which provides reason to reject the initial major premise. This effectively undercuts their cases against moral realism.

I also observe that epistemic irrealisms seem to yield bizarre consequences for argumentation: for one, if an epistemic irrealism is true, then it's not literally true that it (or any other view, including an irrealistic meta-ethical view) *should* be accepted or is reasonable or justified. This might undercut the epistemic support for these kinds of views: at least, it renders a highly non-standard view about the nature of epistemic evaluations, one which few moral irrealists accept, and one that I argue should not be accepted because there are better reasons to reject it than accept it.

For an example of this perhaps undercutting consequence, if an epistemic relativism is true, then although believing that "epistemic relativism is true" might be reasonable relative to the epistemic standards accepted by some epistemic relativist, I suspect it is not likely to be reasonable relative to the epistemic standards accepted by an epistemic realist. Thus, for the realist it will not be reasonable and it will is not true *for*

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people are mistaken, their view cannot be judged unreasonable for them out of hand, apart from an appreciation of their evidence.

them that they should change their minds and accept some kind of epistemic relativism. If this is so, this at least puts an epistemic relativist in an odd dialectal position since few (if any) non-epistemic-relativists will have reason to accept their view.

While I concede that this *might* be the way the epistemic world is, I argue that we have little reason to accept this picture. I argue that it is more reasonable to believe that epistemic judgments are sometimes true than that they are never true, and more reasonable to believe that *there are ways we ought to reason* than it is to believe that *there are no ways we ought to reason*. I argue that it is reasonable to believe that the major premises of common arguments for epistemic irrealisms have false implications, and so these premises are false. Since the cases against moral realism rest on these premises, I effectively undercut them in light of their false epistemic implications. Thus, both moral and epistemic realism are defended.

I focus on Ayer, Stevenson, Hare, Mackie and Harman's objections to moral realism. I focus on them because most contemporary work on moral realism and irrealism is done in reference to these positions and the kinds of arguments these philosophers originally developed in favor of these views. Despite the fact that Harman is still our contemporary, we might call these figures "classical" moral irrealists insofar as contemporary irrealists are indebted to them for many of the basic arguments that they have refined, developed and defended with increasing sophistication (or sophistry and evasion, depending on one's point of view).

For example, Simon Blackburn and Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons have developed arguments against moral realism based in concerns about supervenience; earlier expressions of this concern, which contemporary authors build on, are found in Mackie.[9] Allan Gibbard and Crispin Wright have attempted to dispense with moral properties because of their alleged causal impotence, a worry which Harman first developed.[10] Timmon's and Horgan's "Moral Twin Earth" arguments against moral naturalism are descendents of Hare's arguments against naturalism.[11] And contemporary

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[9] See Blackburn (*Essays in Quasi-Realism*), Horgan and Timmons ("Troubles on Moral Twin Earth"), Blackburn (*Essays in Quasi-Realism*) and Mackie (*Ethics*).

[10] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt* Feelings), Wright (*Truth and Objectivity*), and Harman (*The Nature of Morality*).

[11] See Timmons (*Morality Without Foundations*) and Hare (*The Language of Morals*).

expressivists, like Gibbard and others, are much indebted to the work of Ayer and Stevenson in developing their versions of emotivism.

I discuss some of these contemporary positions, especially in my final chapter that addresses Gibbard's and Field's epistemic irrealisms, but my focus here are these classical moral irrealists. They provide the roots of the contemporary scene, and my aim is to "weed out" contemporary moral irrealisms at the root. I attempt to develop a kind of objection that shows that the basic standard arguments against moral realism are weak. And these basic arguments are not made stronger by the contemporary bells and whistles that more recent philosophers have attached to them.

In my final chapter, I note how a number of contemporary philosophers have come to that conclusion about these arguments, based on arguments similar to mine. But my focus is on arguments for moral irrealism that have, thus far, remained of interest over much of the history of twentieth century meta-ethical thought.

1.3. Characterizing Moral Realisms & Irrealisms.

Before surveying the considerations offered against moral realism, which I will argue are also often considerations against epistemic realism, it will be useful to briefly characterize moral realism in even greater detail. Statements from contemporary defenders and critics reveal its central features. Since there are few explicit critics or defenders of epistemic realism, that kind of view should be understood as analogous to kinds of meta-ethical views that are realistic.

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord understands realism about any domain to simply involve just two theses, that "(1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false (cognitivism), and (2) some are literarily true."[12] He understands 'literal' truth in terms of correspondence.[13] So, on his view moral realism is simply the view that some moral claims are literally true in virtue of their correspondence to moral facts or properties or in virtue of their being warranted assertions.

All moral realists agree that some moral claims are literally true: although there are disagreements about their nature, they all accept the existence of moral properties.

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[12] See Sayre-McCord ("Introduction" 5).
[13] See Sayre-McCord ("Introduction" 6). He also suggests understanding truth in terms of warranted assertibility, but I will not discuss this notion since, for one, it seems to have difficulty making sense of the notion of a justified false belief.

But many moral realists consider a meta-ethical position's meeting Sayre-McCord's two conditions to be necessary, but insufficient, for it to be realistic. This is because his conditions imply that subjectivisms, relativisms, constructivisms and ideal-observer theories – cognitivist theories that hold that a moral proposition's truth value logically *depends* on an individual's, society's, hypothetical agent's or someone else's beliefs and/or attitudes towards that proposition – are realistic theories.

There is no point in arguing whether these theories are *really* versions of moral realism or not, but few moral realists accept theories that make moral truth dependent on the attitudes taken towards moral propositions. The most obvious explanation why there are strong arguments that these kinds of views are false and/or explanatorily inferior to other theories that don't make moral truth dependent on attitudes toward moral propositions: these arguments might take the form of Euthyphro-type dilemmas with the suggestion that it's more plausible to think that some agent would have the moral views he or she (or it) does *because* there are objective moral truths and the agent accurately perceive them, instead of the moral truth being created by the agent's attitudes.

These theories might be also objected to with the observation that they make even core moral beliefs merely contingent truths, dependent on the agent's whims and nothing more. There are other arguments against these kinds of views, so realists tend to reject them not merely because they don't fit into the "realistic" category of theories.

Realists tend to think that the truth of a moral proposition depends on "objective" factors, not the attitudes anyone (or any group) takes (or might take) towards it.[14] This objectivity will be characterized in greater detail later, and I should note that there are important disagreement among realists on what this objectivity depends. That is, realists disagree on the ontology of moral truth-makers or facts. Some realists argue that they are identical to "natural" facts, facts discoverable by empirical science. Other realists argue that moral facts supervene on natural facts but aren't identical to them. Still others argue that they are "non-natural" facts, facts not discoverable by scientific means.[15] But most

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[14] Realists needn't reject *as false* a claim like "Acts are right if, and only if, an all-knowing agent approves (or would) approve of them." Realists might accept this logical equivalence but argue that the claim that, 'acts are right *because* the agent's approves of them' is false: the agent approves because of objective features of the act, not because of the agent's attitude toward the act or the proposition describing it.

[15] This is the approach I favor. Just as science cannot tell us what we morally ought to do and what is morally good, science also cannot tell us what we ought to believe, what knowledge is, and how we should

realists agree that meeting Sayre-McCord's conditions is insufficient for a meta-ethical position's being in the neighborhood of a plausible (and, hence, realistic) view.

Other statements of moral realism give more details on the kind of view realists tend to accept, or the kind of position I aim to defend. Realists David Brink and Nicholas Sturgeon all defend similar positions. Brink briefly states the position in this manner:

> [M]oral realism claims that there are moral facts and true moral propositions whose existence and nature are independent of our beliefs about right and wrong. Moral realism's metaphysical claim suggests the semantic claim that moral judgments and terms typically refer to moral facts and properties.[16]

Sturgeon's characterization is quite similar. He explains that moral realists believe that:

> [O]ur moral terms typically refer to real properties; that moral statements typically express propositions capable of truth or falsity; . . [. . and . .] these moral truths are in some interesting sense independent of the subjective indicators—our moral beliefs and moral feelings, as well as moral conventions constituted by coordinated individual intentions—that we take as guides to them. [17]

These positions meet Sayre-McCord's criteria of cognitivism and literal truth, but impose the additional constraint, that moral truth is not dependent on our moral evaluations, that is more characteristic of typical realist positions.

Michael Smith notes a realist strand in most people's thinking about morality. He observes that:

> [W]e seem to think that moral questions have correct answers; that the correct answers are made correct by objective moral facts; that moral facts are wholly determined by circumstances; and that, by engaging in moral conversation and argument, we can discover what these objective moral facts determined by the circumstances are.[18]

Russell Shafer Landau understands realism this way:

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reason. The practice of science presupposes that there are truths here, but they are not determined scientifically, in any ordinary sense of "scientific."

[16] See Brink ("Externalist Moral Realism" 24).

[17] See Sturgeon ("What Difference Does it Make" 116-117).

[18] See Smith (*The Moral Problem* 6).

Moral realism is the theory that moral judgments enjoy a special sort of objectivity: such judgments, when true, are so independent of what any human being, anywhere, in any circumstance whatever, thinks of them . . . At the simplest level, all realists endorse the idea that there is a moral reality that people are trying to represent when they issue judgments about what is right and wrong.[19]

Mark Timmons, a moral "irrealist," offers a statement of the kind of view he argues against:

Moral realism . . is the view that there are moral facts—facts concerning goodness and rightness—and that they exist objectively. . . . Moral realists . . hold that moral properties and facts exist and that their existence and nature are conceptually and metaphysically independent of our moral beliefs and theories, including our warranted or even ideally warranted moral beliefs and theories.[20]

Gilbert Harman, a moral relativist, claims that "moral absolutists" hold that "there is a single true morality."[21] And Judith Thomson defends a thesis of "moral objectivity," viz., that it is possible to find out about some moral sentences that they are true.[22] Since absolutism and objectivism are their names for morally realistic positions, Harman's and Thomson's brief characterizations provide some further insight into the kind of view I will defend.

Perhaps it is due to its completeness, in terms of the breadth of considerations that he addresses, that Peter Railton claims that his position "might well be described as 'stark, raving moral realism.'" The view that he has defended is that:

[M]oral judgments can bear truth in a fundamentally non-epistemic sense of truth; . . moral properties are objective, though relational; . . moral properties supervene on natural properties, and may be reducible to them; . . moral inquiry is of a piece with empirical inquiry; . . it cannot be known *a priori* whether bivalence holds for moral judgments or how determinately such judgments can be assessed; . . there is reason to think we know a fair amount about morality, but also reason to think that current moralities are wrong in certain ways and could be wrong in quite

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[19] See Shafer Landau (*Moral Realism: A Defence* 2).
[20] See Timmons (*Morality Without Foundations* 35).
[21] See Harman (*Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* 5).
[22] See Thomson (*Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* 68).

general ways; . . a rational agent may fail to have a reason for obeying moral imperatives, although they may nonetheless be applicable to him.[23]

Railton articulates many dimensions on which a theory can be assessed as realistic or not. I will not discuss all these dimensions, but some of the themes he mentions are those that other authors have focused on in characterizing realism; these are the ones I will focus on also.

Thus, to summarize, moral realists believe that moral judgments are beliefs: they are not other states of mind such as, e.g., expressions of desires, emotions, commands or attitudes that lack a truth-value. So, realism concerns what is going on in people's minds when they make moral judgments: it is a psychological thesis and a thesis concerning philosophy of mind. Since to have a belief is to have an attitude toward a proposition, there are moral propositions. Propositions are, of course, either true or false, although realism is consistent with the possibility of some truth-value gaps due to vague moral sentences. Thus, moral realism is a thesis concerning philosophy of language as well.

Realists think that some moral propositions are true: they are accurate representations of a moral reality, and moral reality includes moral facts or properties that are not constituted by the attitudes taken towards them. Thus, realism is a metaphysical thesis, although, as mentioned above, realists disagree on the preferred ontology. But, whatever moral facts and properties are like, realists agree that their existence is conceptually[24] and metaphysically independent of anyone's beliefs and thoughts about them. Realists reject that believing something to have a moral property or having certain attitudes toward it *constitutes* the moral property or, in itself, entails something having that property.

Of course, whether moral claims are true will often very much depend on mental states; e.g., whether it was wrong for Billy to say what he did to Sally might depend on whether it upset Sally and caused her pain, and whether pain is bad will depend on what pain is like. So mental states are highly relevant to the truth of moral judgments, but,

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[23] See Railton ("Moral Realism" 165).

[24] Someone who might deny this might say, e.g., "The *concept* of 'being bad' is that of 'being disapproved of by God.'" On this sort of view, moral concepts are understood in terms of the preferences of, on many views, a necessarily existent being. Whether this sort of view should count as a version of realism is debatable. Resolving this controversy is not needed for my purposes here.

according to moral realism, the truth of a moral proposition is not determined by anyone's attitudes toward it.

Finally, although I will not discuss this in detail, I should mention that realists typically reject epistemological skepticism about morality: they typically think that some people have some justified, reasonable beliefs, if not knowledge, about what's moral. But they can differ on their preferred epistemology: among realists we find foundationalists, coherentists, reliablists, and defenders of other epistemological positions. One could accept moral realism but be a complete moral (or even global) skeptic, but this is not common.

1.4. The Meaning and Use of Moral Terms.

This provides a basic overview of some of the most important features of a morally realistic position. But an especially important issue that isn't mentioned in any of our characterizations above concerns the meanings of moral terms. This issue has important psychological and metaphysical implications, which will be explored below.

Moral realists accept a particular kind of view about the meanings of moral terms: they think moral terms' meanings are "cognitive" or "descriptive." On this kind of view, to make a moral judgment is to attempt to describe something, to say that something has some property; it's to try to convey some information about the world or represent the world has having some features.

Thus moral realisms are also semantic theses. What are these cognitive or descriptive meanings, i.e., what do various moral terms like "right" and "good" mean? Different realists have different answers, depending largely on which (if any) substantive moral theory they accept. But it is important to note that realists, at least, are united in rejecting a kind of view about the meanings of moral terms. Explaining this contrast provides some understanding of how realists of all stripes understand the meanings of moral terms. And this understanding has implications for the psychological and metaphysical aspects of the position.

The nature of "meanings" is controversial: the meaning of "meaning" is less than clear. I do not hope to resolve the question of what meanings are here. Therefore, I hope to remain as intuitive or theoretically neutral as possible on the issue, 'naïve' in the truly naïve and non-technical sense of the term. So, when asking what some term means, my

methodology is to speculate on what someone would say if asked, "I don't quite understand what you are saying; could you say more about what you mean by that?" Insofar as, from a naïve point of view, how someone uses a term is a consequence of its meaning (or meanings), I will investigate how moral and epistemic terms are used.

To understand some views about the meanings of moral terms that some moral irrealists are fond of but realists typically reject, it is useful to think about the meanings of some non-moral terms. An important observation is that it seems that some words' meanings are such that, if someone, in an ordinary context and using the term in an ordinary sense, sincerely utters a grammatical sentence using these terms, she *must* be expressing some emotion or revealing how she feels. If she sincerely utters one of these sentences, she *could not* be affectively indifferent to the subject matter of her sentence. This affective response might be indicative of the kind of meaning a term has.

One example of this phenomenon about meaning might be the use of the term "bozo" or a "total, complete bozo." It seems plausible that one could not sincerely call someone a total bozo and yet be completely without any negative feelings about him. These feelings might fade and change over time, but if at the initial time of making the statement there are no feelings, then we might doubt that the assertion was sincere, or if the words "total bozo" were being used in an ordinary sense. This is because to say that someone is a total bozo is not merely to describe him (and, in absence, of contextual clues, just calling someone a bozo only gives a rather non-specific ideas about what he's like), but it's also to *express* one's dislike of him, to vent one's emotions.

A more vivid example of this phenomenon might be a long hyphenated series of swear words. Were someone to sincerely say (or even think) of someone, "That guy is a total-God-#&*$^-mother--@-son-of-a-(&^%$%-er!!", she would *have to* be angry about him: she *couldn't* have this thought but have no negative feelings about him.

On a more positive (but, hopefully, non-sexist) note, perhaps it's impossible for someone to sincerely judge a woman to be a "hot, bodacious babe" without having any positive feelings or desires for her. Some evidence for this might be that were someone to make this judgment but then add that he would have no interest or desire *whatsoever* in meeting her under any circumstance (including, perhaps, one where he was less shy, more confident and a snappier dresser), we might doubt the sincerity of his initial

assertion. We might think he didn't really mean what he said: he was just mouthing the words but not saying what they ordinarily mean.

The point of these examples is to show that it seems, for some words, an affective, emotion and desire-oriented component is part of their meaning: their sincere use necessitates this kind of emotional involvement. Some philosophers claim that the meanings of moral terms are like this. They argue that moral terms' meanings are such that, if someone sincerely uses them in a sentence in an ordinary context, that person *must* be expressing feelings or desires.

On these views to sincerely claim that something is, e.g., morally right or good is, necessarily, to have and *express* some positive feeling about it: the judgment *is* the expression of that feeling. And just as one cannot sincerely judge someone to be a bozo and be without feeling, these philosophers claim that one cannot judge something to be right or good and be without feeling towards that act being done, or some state affairs being brought about. If one said that something is wrong, but lacked any feeling about it, then the judgment is not sincere: it's not even a real judgment; it's just a mouthing of the words.

Sometimes this (alleged) emotional phenomenon is described in terms of moral "motivation," or explained using the term. The claim is that moral judgments *necessarily* involve these feelings that provide motivation towards bringing about some end.[25] It seems possible that someone could be quite emotionally invested her moral judgments and so her emotions are always "moved" whenever she judges something to be right or wrong – she is always quite "worked up" – it also seems that this person could not be at all "motivated" to do much about anything: all worked up, but no action.

But those who claim that moral judgments have this motivational influence usually claim that these emotions always, or perhaps even necessarily, influence one's motivation; their claim is that "motivating" feelings, desires, and/or affective "oomph" are "internal" to sincere moral judgments: there is a necessary connection between the two. So, Michael Smith claims, "all else being equal, to have a moral opinion simply is to find yourself with a motivation to act."[26]

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[25] Difficulties in formulating and defending this kind of view will be discussed below and in later chapters.
[26] See Smith ("Realism" 400).

This thesis isn't that someone necessarily acts or behaves as her moral judgment dictates: it typically allows for competing motives to override, weakness of will and, of course, the possibility that one is paralyzed or in a full body cast and so is unable to physically act as one's moral judgments would require. And, presumably, this sort of view would allow for the fact that, for some moral judgments, there are no obvious corresponding actions.

It is also odd when applied toward moral judgments about the actions of others, especially in the very distant past or future, or with rather unspecific moral judgments. Say we judge that Socrates was treated wrongly; it's clear we can't do anything about that now, so it's not clear what we might be moved to do or how any of our motivations would, or should, change. Also, say we expect that in a few hundred years that someone will do something horribly evil. It seems we can have that thought but, again, it's not clear how it might motivate us to do anything, since we would have no idea what to do.

So this sort of "motivationally internalist" view is probably most plausible when applied to judgments about one's own activities at the present time. Ignoring the complication about other moral judgments about other kinds of cases, the idea is that moral judgment entails some motivation, and this is, at root, a feeling or a desire. Thus, if there is no feeling or desire, then a sincere moral judgment was not made.

This is a psychological thesis again in that it pertains to how moral judgment relates to our psychologies. But it is a consequence of a semantic thesis since the meanings of the moral terms are taken to explain the affective phenomena: it's because the terms have these meanings that they have these psychological consequences. This has the consequence that, insofar as these affective states are not, strictly speaking, beliefs, moral judgments are also not beliefs either; they are another, non-representational, state of mind.

The view is that, when used sincerely, moral terms *necessarily* express feelings because of their meanings. Perspectives that claim there is this necessary connection between moral judgment and affect describe the meaning of moral terms as *emotive*, *non-cognitive*, *expressive*, or *non-descriptive*. These characterizations often differ in meaning only slightly, if at all, so for now I will take them as equivalent and take "emotive meaning" as shorthand for the other terms that might describe the view.

"Emotive meaning" contrasts with "cognitive" or "descriptive meaning." A term's meaning is *purely* cognitive or descriptive perhaps if it can be sincerely used without the speaker (or, perhaps, thinker or author) expressing any feelings. Some philosophers who believe that moral terms have emotive meaning think that their meaning is *purely* emotive: they have no descriptive meaning and so to sincerely use such a moral term is never to state (or imply) a sentence that has a truth value. As we shall soon see in subsequent chapters, A.J. Ayer's view was like this. C.L. Stevenson's final view was like this also.[27]

Moral realists needn't deny that emotions sometimes run high when making moral judgments: that's just an empirical truth. And realists needn't think that's a bad thing, in any sense of bad: they needn't advocate a Mr. Spock-like, emotion-free existence. They can think that having a rich emotional life is morally valuable and important.

"Important for what?" one might ask. At this point an answer in the negative might be best: the emotions can be important for things other than there *being* moral judgments. Emotions can motivate, and perhaps they sometimes contribute to epistemic insight, but they can motivate us towards, and help inform us of, doing the right thing that exists independently of our motivations toward doing that right thing. Emotivists deny this: recall that motivational internalists think that moral terms have emotive meaning *because* they think that moral judgments are necessarily motivating. They claim if there were no such feelings, there could be no such judgments: they claim that's impossible.

Realists deny this impossibility: they think it is possible that someone could make a moral judgment and lack corresponding motivation altogether. They might plausibly think that in a world with no beings that have an experiential welfare, nothing would have any moral qualities since nothing could go better or worse for anyone, but this is not the issue.

Again, realists believe that moral judgments' truth depends on objective moral facts or properties, and that to make a moral judgment is to say that something has some

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[27] Stevenson originally (in "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms") offered a mixed theory on which to make a moral judgment is both to (a) *express* one's approval (or disapproval) and (b) to *report* one's believe that one approves (or disapproves). He later came to see that his view was more plausible without

moral property. But on the standard, Humean view of motivation, affect, or "oomph," believing that something has some property is never, *in itself*, sufficient to motivate someone or rouse someone's feelings. Motivation comes from other sources, e.g., desires. But what someone's desires are is, presumably, a contingent matter, and it seems at least possible that someone could lack any desires to do the right thing.

While this affective and motivational phenomenon is not easy to pin down in a highly concrete manner, it is useful to classify theories of the nature of moral judgment along these dividing lines. For each theory, in addition to the more straightforward desiderata discussed above, we might ask if it implies that there are any kinds of moral judgments that are necessarily motivating or necessarily influence the emotions. If it does, that reveals important interrelated semantic and psychological features of the view that will, in turn, likely have important metaphysical and epistemic implications.

Two important implications are that if moral judgments necessarily motivate, this would, at least, suggest that moral judgments are not (or not merely) the apprehension of properties and so not merely beliefs. These results would have important implications for moral epistemology. If there are no moral properties, then there are no moral truths, and so no true moral beliefs. And, obviously, if moral judgments are not beliefs, then, strictly speaking, there are no justified moral beliefs or moral knowledge, strictly speaking. Moral realists resist all these implications.

Some more recent theorists – realists and not – have challenged the standard Humean assumptions about motivation and have argued that beliefs can motivate in themselves, or motivate without any related desires.[28] But these views are controversial and will not be discussed here, as I will be working with the standard assumptions about belief and motivation.

On the more standard conception of moral realism, motivation and affect are contingent features of making moral judgments; they are explained by psychological factors, not the semantics of moral terms. Thus, any view that claims an essential motivating feature to moral judgments is likely unacceptable from the assumptions most moral realists are apt to accept and traditionally have accepted.

(b), the reporting function, and thus advocated a pure expressivism. See Stevenson ("Retrospective Comments" 210-214).

[28] See Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism: A Defence*).

Although moral irrealisms can be easily understood as denials of moral realisms, there are many ways that one can deny moral realisms. One can deny that there are moral beliefs, objective truths, propositions, properties or facts. Starting with any of these will often lead to many of the others, as the concepts within the cluster are often related.

For example, if one denies that there are moral beliefs because one thinks that moral judgments are purely expressive, one will (and *should*, I will argue) also deny moral propositions and, of course, true moral propositions.[29] One might also deny moral facts and properties and, while this might eventually lead one to some kind of expressivism, it needn't; one could think that there are moral beliefs, but that they are no facts or properties to make any of them true, as J.L. Mackie did.

Most generally, moral irrealists all agree that there are no positive objective moral truths, either because moral language just isn't the kind of discourse that admits of truth and falsity, or there are no moral truth-makers (or they understand these truth-makers as a function of the attitudes toward the propositions, a position that realists deny).

Some recent irrealists have attempted to buck this trend by using the predicates "is true," "is a fact," "is known" in various "minimalist" senses; these views exploit the fact that sometimes these phrases are used to affirm various claims and express one's agreements. These newer positions will be briefly discussed in my final chapter, but it is sufficient here to note that they differ significantly from realisms given that realists understand these locutions in non-minimalist terms. While minimalists sometimes wish to *say* everything realists say about the nature of morality, if these minimalists did that, then there would be nothing to distinguish their position from the realists' position. I will argue that once these differences are revealed, minimalisms are not attractive positions.

1.5. Epistemic Realisms and Irrealisms.

This concludes my brief characterization of the kind of position moral realism is. In light of this characterization, I will again summarize the nature of an analogous kind of view, epistemic realism.

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[29] On could think that there are (true) moral propositions but that moral discourse is always and only expressive and so no one ever states a true moral proposition. On this view, we are prevented from stating (true) moral propositions. It's unclear what the motivations or advantages for this view would be, however, and I don't think it has ever been advocated.

By analogy, epistemic realisms are views that hold that epistemic judgments are beliefs and other doxastic attitudes, such as suspensions of judgment. Epistemic realists hold that while one might express strong emotions in making an epistemic judgment, these emotions are not essential to the judgment. Strong emotions might arise in the context of making epistemic evaluations, but these emotions are only contingently related to the evaluations: emotion and motivation-free epistemic evaluations are possible and, seemingly, actual.

Since there are beliefs about epistemic matters, there are epistemic propositions. And some of these beliefs are true because there are objective, stance-independent epistemic truths, facts and properties. They are "objective" in the sense that they are not constituted, or determined by, our beliefs and attitudes toward epistemic propositions. There are disputes among realists as to the preferred epistemic ontology, i.e. whether epistemic properties or facts are identical to "natural" facts, supervene on them, or are some kind of non-natural facts. Regardless, on all epistemically realistic views there is an epistemic reality that can be, and sometimes is, represented and that epistemic terms have descriptive or cognitive meaning: their meanings are not expressive or emotive.

Thus, epistemic realism is a position on the semantics, metaphysics and psychology of epistemic judgments. Although epistemic realists typically are not epistemological skeptics, they could be: a skeptical *epistemology* of epistemic judgments is possible. Here I will not focus on epistemic epistemology, although much of my discussion suggests that we can have rational, *a priori* insight into the realm of the epistemic and that this kind of view is unavoidable; someone could argue against this sort of view only by presupposing it.

Epistemic realism seems the standard position among philosophers, especially epistemologists. Few have denied it. But if anyone denied it, what would his or her view be? Irrealisms in epistemology are analogous to non-realisms about morality. Irrealists about epistemic judgments would, for the most part, think that no epistemic judgments are true.

Again, the basic division is to think that no positive epistemic judgments are true either because epistemic discourse is, in some manner, expressive or non-descriptive and so does not admit of truth and falsity, or because there are no epistemic properties or facts

to make any epistemic judgments true. "Relativistic" perspectives that allow epistemic truths are possible, and on these views the truth-value of an epistemic proposition depends on the attitudes taken toward that proposition or the believer's epistemic principles seem possible as well. Standard possible forms of epistemic irrealism take either of these options; other possible epistemic irrealisms could be modeled after more recent moral irrealists that are subtler in their development of alternatives to the standard, realistic view.

Epistemic irrealisms are rather striking views. Epistemic expressivism, one kind of epistemic irrealism, implies that epistemic judgments or evaluations are not, strictly speaking, beliefs; rather, they are expressions of approval or desire that something be believed or disbelieved. This is a radical implication. Some global skeptics *believe* that we don't know anything or are justified in *believing* anything, but if an expressivist epistemic realism is true, then the claim, "We don't know anything and we are not justified in believing anything," is not even a belief; rather, it is a non-cognitive expression that is neither true nor false. That is an interesting consequence.

Other epistemic irrealisms allow that an epistemic judgment like this is a belief, but that there are no properties or facts to serve as epistemic truth-makers so it, or any other positive epistemic evaluation is never true. On this view, non-skeptics can never truthfully insist that some of our beliefs are justified or known, and skeptics can never truthfully assert that our beliefs are unjustified (they might be *not* justified, but this is not the same as them being unjustified). While skeptics typically argue that our beliefs don't meet what they regard as the high standards for knowledge, many epistemic irrealists are more radical in arguing that there are *no truthful epistemic standards* at all, and that is why we don't know or have any beliefs that are reasonable. These are uncommon views, with surprising consequences. More specific formulations of this kind of view and its many rivals will be explained and discussed in greater detail later. I will argue that we have better reason to reject these views than accept them.

Although some might take these views as a *reductio* of the premises given against moral realism, I see no reason to think that epistemic judgments *must* be descriptive and sometimes true (and true because of stance-independent epistemic properties): the world isn't such that epistemic realism has to be true. But I suspect that most of us – given what

we believe now – could develop better arguments against epistemic expressivism than for it: all things considered, we have better reason to think epistemic judgments are sometimes literally true and we can see that this implies that epistemic expressivism is false. These arguments, however, will typically imply that various premises in arguments for moral irrealisms have at least one false premise and so are unsound. This, of course, undercuts many of the cases for moral irrealisms. If we see this, we see that, perhaps, there's little reason to accept ethical expressivisms in the first place.

1.6. Moral and Epistemic Judgments: Some Similarities.

Before I turn to the case against moral realism, which I will use to make a case against epistemic realism, I should note that premises offered as reasons to reject moral realism might be reasons to reject to epistemological realism only if epistemic language, and its metaphysical presuppositions, is sufficiently similar to that of moral language. While epistemic and moral discourse is, of course, different, the success of my case depends mainly on epistemic judgments being similar to moral judgments in ways that moral irrealists point to in support of their moral irrealisms.

My target moral irrealists generally aren't global irrealists: they don't think that all language should be interpreted irrealistically. But they do think that moral discourse and practice has features that are better understood on an irrealistic model and so moral realism's semantic, metaphysical, psychological and/or epistemic presumptions are likely mistaken. I will argue that epistemic discourse shares these features. This is necessary to argue that if moral irrealists think the presence of these features is sufficient to warrant an irrealistic understanding of morality then, to be consistent, they should also think that an irrealistic understanding of epistemic matters is warranted as well.

An interesting aspect of my discussion is that I focus on this "should" in the previous sentence and its semantic and metaphysical status. Moral irrealists think that moral "shoulds" *should* be understood irrealistically, but they think that what might be called logical, or epistemic, "shoulds" – "shoulds" about how one ought to reason, or what we should conclude given various premises – *should* be understood realistically. I aim to argue that this is, ultimately, an inconsistent position, in terms of the reasons moral irrealists give in favor of their moral irrealism. They tend to accept the assumptions, shared by moral realists and irrealists alike, that one's beliefs should be consistent and

that there is something bad or disingenuous about having inconsistent beliefs, especially if they are recognized as such. This might seem to especially be the case if one is a professional philosopher since, one might think, philosophers either should just recognize the value of consistency or, at least, because that concern just goes with the job: it's some kind of role or occupational obligation.

These claims above all sound like epistemic or intellectual value judgments. I will argue that they are and that moral irrealists are inconsistent in accepting them: their own views imply that such intellectual value judgments are false, or merely "relative" truths, or expressive and so neither true nor false. So moral irrealists tend to believe something, and base their cases for moral irrealism, on assumptions that a premise in their case against moral irrealism suggest are not true. This is an inconsistency.

If they are inconsistent, is it a bad thing? And were this recognized, should moral irrealists change their views? I will argue that these questions should be answered in the affirmative but that that it is very difficult to answer them affirmatively from a vivid awareness of the bases of morally irrealistic positions. I hope this reinforces the presumption in favor of epistemic and logical realism and that this presumption can be shown to imply that the arguments for moral irrealism should not be accepted, and that judgment – that moral irrealism should not be accepted – is true in a robust, realistic sense.

As a brief start to highlight some similarities between moral and epistemic judgment, it is often said both moral and epistemic judgments are "normative." Exactly what this means is not entirely clear, but it seems, at least, that normative judgments concern what *ought* and *ought not*, or *should* and *should* not, be the case.

This description is not perfect, since it seems to be true that, e.g., it *is* the case that good *ought* to be promoted, but it seems appropriate since epistemic evaluation concerns what one ought to believe, how one should reason and even what kind of intellectual or cognitive character traits one ought to have. Ethics concerns how one ought to behave, what states of affairs ought to be brought about, what attitudes and feelings one should have, and what kind of character one ought to cultivate. So there are both moral and epistemic "oughts" and "shoulds."

A related idea is that moral and epistemic judgments are also often described as prescriptive and evaluative. Since both seem to concern value or goodness (although likely of different kinds) this latter label seems appropriate. And it is commonly supposed that are both moral virtues and epistemic virtues, and that some virtues that have both moral and epistemic aspects.

Moral and epistemic judgments also have both seemed subject to "deontic" understandings (and there are deontic logics of each kind). These are analyses or definitions in terms of what is permitted, required and forbidden from their respective perspectives, what is a duty or obligation, what is be deserving or praise and blame, and so forth. Many terms like this are common to both moral and epistemic discourse.

In epistemology, claims like this are associated with a much-discussed notion of a "deontic conception of justification." Objections have been raised to a deontic understanding of epistemic terms, mostly along the lines that these conceptions of justification falsely presuppose that we are able to decide what to believe, but I will defend some versions of this understanding of epistemic terms. In fact, I will argue that, in a clear and important sense, we are all epistemic deontologists and that some versions of epistemic deontology cannot plausibly be denied. Since much of this dissertation concerns the propriety of epistemic "ought" and "should" judgments, addressing some common objections to these judgments shall be the focus on my second chapter.

Another similarity is that what the metaphysical foundations, or the truth makers, of both kinds of judgments are not clear. For many, what the moral components of a moral fact are not obvious: many are puzzled by what would make a moral judgment true. Similarly, what the epistemic components of an epistemic fact are not obvious either. At least from many common perspectives, these kinds of facts seem quite different from more mundane, empirical facts; it's not uncommon for people to be mystified by what *in the world* could make something morally right, or good, or such that it ought to be done.[30]

Comparable curiosity and puzzlement is understandable for alleged epistemic facts: what *in the world* could make it such that I ought to believe some proposition, or

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[30] Our beliefs and attitudes are, of course, "in the world," but having these serve as truth-makers for judgments will, at least, present a challenge for making sense of moral and epistemic error, among other difficulties.

that it's good to have evidence, and so forth? If one is puzzled about how and where one would find the moral facts, one should be equally puzzled about the epistemic facts. If this puzzlement leads one to reject moral facts or properties, then comparable puzzlement perhaps would lead one to reject epistemic facts or properties also, and perhaps it should.

Many realists in both ethics and epistemology have argued that supervenience is involved in there being truth-makers for such judgments: moral truths supervene, or depend on, natural features; it is these natural features that, ultimately, make a moral or epistemic judgment true (or false). But critics have argued that supervenience is excessively mysterious and so have focused an attack on moral realism for its dependence on it. But if epistemic properties are also supervenient, then epistemic realism is subject to the same kind of attack leveled against moral realism.

There seem to be related metaphysical concerns about whether moral and epistemic properties possess causal powers, as well as how epistemic access to each might be achieved. Some have argued that we should not believe in properties that lack causal influence: if this is true, then perhaps we should not believe there are moral properties, but we should not believe in epistemic properties either. Some philosophers, especially those who call themselves "naturalists," might be equally puzzled about where each kind of property is found in "nature."

And we also might wonder whether moral and epistemic facts need to be appealed to in order to explain our moral and epistemic experiences. Some have argued that we needn't think that there are moral properties in order to explain our moral beliefs: these can be explained by our upbringing and background beliefs, not by our detecting moral properties. Perhaps there are comparable epistemic concerns: e.g., when it seems that a belief is justified to someone, do we need to posit a property 'justified' in order to account for that experience, or can that phenomenon be adequately accounted for without such a property?

In the moral case, some have argued that the experience can be explained without positing the property. Perhaps the analogous conclusion is plausible about epistemic properties also. This conclusion, unlike the moral one, has the consequence that if it is true, and there is no need to posit epistemic properties, then it's not true that we *should not* believe that they exist or that our belief would be *unjustified*: this is because there are

no such properties. This would surely be a surprising consequence, and one that might lead us to rethink this test for which properties we should acknowledge. This result might even give good reason to reject these arguments against moral realism.

A further similarity between moral and epistemic judgments is that it is plausible to think that they at least sometimes have a motivational quality: they impact our emotions and what we are motivated toward bringing about. So, sometimes, so it would often be odd to make such a judgment without having some correlated desires. This phenomenon is more discussed in the context of moral judgment, but it seems that comparable claims can be made for some epistemic judgments having the same kind of motivational and connotative influence.

For example, it does seem that it would be odd for someone to judge one of her beliefs unjustified or irrational, but for her to have no desire to be rid of that belief. And people tend to think that if we convince someone that she has good reasons to believe some proposition, she will then desire to believe that proposition and this will change her belief set (or it should).

Although epistemologists rarely investigate the possible emotional and motivational qualities of epistemic judgments, it seems at least prima facie plausible to think that epistemic judgments have these features. If their association with moral judgments is suggestive of moral irrealism, then perhaps their association with epistemic judgments is suggestive of an epistemic irrealism also. This is, at least, an under explored commonality between moral and epistemic judgments.

A further possible similarity between moral and epistemic judgments includes the sense that they apply to us irrespective of our wishes and desires. Perhaps this is controversial, but few people believe that one can "get out of morality" by, e.g., ceasing to care about anyone's well being besides one's own. Were someone to not at all care about anyone else, that wouldn't make it the case that, were they in a position to easily and safely prevent some innocent from enduring horrendous suffering, he or she is no longer under any obligation to do so. Ceasing to care about others does not preclude one from moral obligations and being subject to moral evaluation: some might express this idea by saying that morality (or some aspects of it) is "categorical."

But epistemic evaluation is comparably categorical: ceasing to care about reasons, evidence and clear and critical thinking wouldn't make it the case that one's epistemic situation cannot be truthfully evaluated; ceasing to care about having evidence wouldn't make a belief that "Starbucks' has become a famous store for selling grape Kool-Aid" not unjustified, were the typical person to find herself with that belief.

Another common, related, yet not optimally clear, way to express this idea is that there are moral and epistemic *reasons*, and their existence is not dependent on our desires for our moral and epistemic lives. So, we might say that there are always reasons to prevent horrendous suffering when we can easily do so, and reasons to believe what we have evidence for, even if we don't care about or value either of these things.

A final similarity is that there seem to be widespread disagreements about which moral evaluations are correct, and there seem to be widespread disagreements about which epistemic evaluations are correct. These disagreements concern both particular moral and epistemic judgments, as well as disagreements about more basic, general principles. Moral irrealists have appealed to these disagreements in making a case for their moral irrealism. If a case for the existence of epistemic disagreements can be made that is comparable in strength to the case for moral disagreements, then this might suggest analogous arguments for epistemic irrealism.

If the cases are not very comparable, however, an issue remains: why *should* we accept what we regard as the best explanation of some phenomenon? Answers here might point to facts about objective intellectual and epistemic values, the existence of which might be hard to reconcile with the premises of arguments against the existence of objective moral values.

These are just a few of the similarities between moral and epistemic judgments. To sum them up, both kinds of judgments evaluative and are often made using deontic language. The nature of the truth-makers for both kinds of judgments is less than clear, and both typically presuppose supervenience on natural features. Both kinds of judgments, and the properties commonly presupposed in making them, do not obviously seem necessary to explain facts that are clearly "natural" facts. Both kinds of evaluations and requirements seem categorical: their application to us does not depend on our desires. A final similarity is that there are disagreements about which particular moral and

epistemic evaluations are true, and disagreements about the philosophical natures of such judgments. More similarities will be noted as I survey the various particular arguments given against the morally realist presumption that there are some objectively true moral beliefs.

Since many objections to moral realism appeal to some feature of moral judgments or theorizing that the objector claims is best understood on a denial of realist presuppositions, I will argue that epistemic judgments share many of these features so that the moral irrealist's premises apply to both. I will then argue that that since this feature does not show that epistemic discourse should be interpreted irrealistically, it does not show that moral discourse should be interpreted irrealistically either.

Of course, there are many differences between moral and epistemic evaluation: like everything else, moral and epistemic judgments are similar in some ways and different in others. In fact, the more the differences are developed, the more it might seem that the comparison is strained. This seems especially the case given the extremely diverse range of perspectives on morality and moral thinking.

However, to prevent the comparison from slipping through our fingers, my approach is, again, to focus on the fact that epistemic judgments are comparable to moral judgments in the way irrealists use to make their cases for moral irrealism. With this focus, differences between moral and epistemic judgments will be irrelevant: if epistemic judgments have the features that moral irrealists find, what we might call, "objectionable" about moral judgments, then it does not straightforwardly matter that epistemic judgments have additional features also, since epistemic judgments will still be caught up in the net of premises moral irrealists use to try to make their case. If having feature A is thought to be a sufficient reason for understanding a judgment irrealistically, that principle applies to judgments that have feature A, even if they also have features B and C.

If my arguments are successful they will at least show– if the common presumption is correct and epistemic discourse should be interpreted realistically – that many morally irrealists' criteria for when a kind of discourse should be interpreted irrealistically are logically insufficient for a discipline or field not having any objective truths in its domain. Thus, that a discourse meets these conditions is not enough to

warrant an irrealistic understanding of it since epistemic discourse meets it and, I will argue, it shouldn't be understood irrealistically. This result should, at least, force moral irrealists back to the drawing board to produce tighter arguments. Ideally, it will lead them to reject their cases for moral realism, and it truthfully should.

However, I should note that if any moral irrealists perceive a *need* to revise their arguments, then this will only feed back into my defense of moral and epistemic realism. For if they think that moral-antirealists who understand these arguments *should* change their arguments or position, or *ought* to respond in any way, we can ask if this is true or why should accept this claim instead of, say, its negation. I suspect that affirmative answers to these questions will ultimately be based on evaluative assumptions that are inconsistent with premises of arguments given against moral realism. The sense that, from an intellectual point of view, we *ought* to think in certain ways raises many of the same philosophical problems that the sense that we ought to act, or change our character, in certain ways does also. I will argue that this sense can be developed into provide powerful reasons to reject arguments for moral irrealisms.

1.7. Conclusion.

In this chapter I have done three things. First, I characterized the main meta-epistemological issue that I will address in my dissertation and laid out the basic strategy of my argument. Second, I characterized the kinds of moral and epistemic realisms I aim to defend, and I have explained my strategy to defend them. Finally, I surveyed some similarities and differences between moral and epistemic judgments. Further chapters will involve the development of these positions and careful examinations of the arguments for moral irrealisms with an eye towards showing that they suggest analogous arguments for epistemic irrealisms. I then argue that these epistemic arguments are unsound, and so are the analogous moral arguments, thereby defending both moral and epistemic realism.

CHAPTER 2: Defending Epistemic Deontologies.

2.1. Introduction.

In this chapter, I develop in detail a comparison between moral and epistemic judgments that I briefly mentioned in the final section of my previous chapter, namely that they can both be understood in "deontic" terms, such as "oughts," "shoulds," "permissions," "obligations," "requirements," and so on.

I argue that common objections to understanding some epistemic judgments in some deontic terms are weak.[1] Since we often make deontic epistemic judgments, and epistemic realists hold that these judgments are literally true or false, it is important to defend them from objections. This is especially important since epistemic irrealisms suggest that no positive deontic epistemic evaluations are true. If, however, some deontic epistemic judgments are true, this implies that epistemic irrealisms are false. This implies that some premises given in their defense are false. Since these premises are often used to argue for moral irrealism, undercutting them is important for defending moral realism. Thus, a defense of epistemic deontology can contribute to a defense of moral realism.

As we shall see, the exact nature of the deontological conception of justification is hard to pin down, in part because many epistemically-evaluative terms have been associated with this it. Here I clarify that conception, and defend it from some common objections in the epistemological literature. These objections are largely independent of the meta-ethical and meta-epistemological concerns that are the main focus of this work and articulated in the previous chapter.

In subsequent chapters I will develop arguments against a version of the deontological conception of epistemic justification that are parallel to the arguments commonly given against there being truthful deontic moral judgments. I then defend epistemic deontology from these objections. Themes developed in this chapter contribute to that defense.

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[1] The many *some*s in this thesis make it quite qualified. This qualification is needed due to the wide range of both epistemic and epistemically-deontic evaluations: there are so many that I need to restrict myself to those that are more commonly used and so I have a clearer sense for what they mean. So my focus here includes, for deontic evaluations, *ought* and *should*, and, for epistemic evaluations, *justified* and *reasonable*. Although I discuss other evaluations, some of them strike me more as philosophers' inventions (e.g., being praiseworthy for belief) and so we lack a firm, "real-world" basis for evaluating their possible semantics. I discuss this below.

2. 2. Basic Objections to the Deontic Conception.

The deontological conception of epistemic justification (or epistemic deontology) is much discussed in recent epistemological literature.[2] It is not uncommon to hear philosophers claim that they reject the deontological conception of justification.

Some philosophers reject it because they think it implies doxastic voluntarism, the view that, roughly, we have direct voluntary control over what we believe. This objection is based in the idea that if there are things we *ought* to believe (or not believe) or are *obligated* to believe (or not believe), then it must be the case that we *can* believe them (and *can* refrain from believing them). Critics argue that this latter condition requires abilities to influence what we believe that we do not have, so the deontic conception is mistaken.

The deontic conception is also sometimes said to imply epistemological internalism, the view that epistemic justification depends on internal, or mental, or accessible states alone. Again, this objection might be motivated by a thought along the lines that if there are things we ought to believe, then we must have some access to, or awareness of, what justifies our beliefs, and so some kind of internalism must be true. This thought might be motivated again by a kind of "ought implies can" principle: for an evaluation of what one ought to believe to be true, it must be the case that one *can* access all of the factors that epistemic justification depends on. Those who reject internalism, often because they think justification depends on, in part, factors that are not cognitively accessible (perhaps because they are non-mental factors), will thereby reject epistemic deontology, if they think it has this consequence.

Although I do not develop this objection in detail, another consideration raised against epistemic deontology is that it is also said to imply that some virtue-based understandings of justification are mistaken; those who are fond of virtue epistemology might then reject it.[3] It might also be thought to objectionably divorce justification from truth since, perhaps, a deontic epistemic evaluation of someone's beliefs can be appropriate yet their beliefs are not true or, in any relevant sense, likely to be true. Those

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[2] My discussion in this chapter, however, suggests that debates about the deontic conception of justification are not very important since, if we get clear on what we are talking about – especially in a concrete manner, we see that we all accept some kind of deontological epistemic evaluations.

[3] See Zagzebski (*Virtues of the Mind* 7-8).

who accept some version of a truth-conducive conception of justification might thereby reject deontology. Finally, perhaps some might be uneasy with the suggestion that some deontologists make, viz. that there are "epistemic duties." Perhaps they are uncomfortable with this kind of terminology because it again might suggest doxastic voluntarism, but some think that this makes reasonable belief "too demanding," much more demanding than it really is.

Many argue that at least some of these implications cast doubt on epistemic deontology: they argue that if it has any of these implications, it is likely false. I will argue that these judgments are premature. While widely criticized, few writers have adequately clarified their understanding of the deontic conception. This clarification is needed to successfully argue against it: if the concept of the "deontological conception" is unclear, then it is not obvious that it has the allegedly false implications that its critics say it does.

When philosophers claim that they accept, or reject, the deontological conception, it is not entirely clear what they have in mind. Here I try to clear this up. Based on the wide variety of suggestions given by the critics and defenders of epistemic deontology, I develop a number of general interpretations of what it might be. I argue that some of these interpretations are implausible. Thus, if this is what some philosophers have in mind when they reject epistemic deontology, they are right to do so.

However, other conceptions are plausible, I will argue, and these conceptions seem acceptable and *accepted* by all. Furthermore, it would be hard to coherently deny some of these deontic conceptions because to argue against them, it seems that one would have to presuppose the truth of some deontic epistemic evaluations, or presuppose a basic idea motivating many epistemic deontologists, viz. that there are intellectual requirements and that if some belief does not meet them, then it ought not be believed. I will argue that that idea, or variations on it, cannot easily be denied, especially in a plausible manner.

Thus, I argue that we all accept some version, or versions, of epistemic deontology: we are all epistemic deontologists. I show how this result defuses some of the tensions above, focusing on the internalism/externalism debate. I conclude that none of the considerations given against a plausible version of epistemic deontology or a deontological conception of justification refute it. To relate this result to the main theme

of this work, these objections to epistemic deontology provide no reason to think that epistemic realism is false and that it ought not be believed.

The discussion of this chapter has an important general methodological point. Here I address a wide variety of claims that all their proponents relate to the deontological conception of justification. If we look carefully at what is being said, however, we see that many authors have very different ideas of what this conception is. Given these differences, we can see that it is often fruitless to categorize views in such general terms and for philosophers to attack theories in such sweeping, general terms. General categorizations especially of views that do not have an obvious connection – e.g., some thesis that they all share – too often results in confusion and philosophers merely talking past each other. What would be far more productive would be to simply state one's view in the most careful and precise way one is able to, instead of associating it with a label. Once disassociated with a general label, we can more clearly see the merits and demerits of individual views and then, perhaps, make progress in understanding and evaluating them. This seems true about this debate, and it seems true about many other philosophical disputes also.

2. 3. The Many Epistemic Deontologies.

As I said, there are many understandings of the deontological conception of justification. Below are a large number of representative characterizations of the deontological conception of justification. As we shall see, many different ideas share this label.

Proceeding alphabetically, William Alston characterizes the view this way:

being justified in believing that p consists in some sort of 'deontological' status, for example, being free from blame for believing that p or having satisfied one's intellectual obligations in doing so.[4]

Alston also presents the deontological conception in these ways:

[O]n the deontological conception of the epistemic justification of belief . . to be justified in believing that p at t is for one's belief that p at t not be in violation of any epistemic principles . . that permit only those beliefs that are sufficiently likely to be true. . . . . To say that S is justified in believing that p at time t is to

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[4]See Alston (*Perceiving God* 72-73).

say that the relevant rules or principles do not forbid S's believing that p at t. In believing that p at t, S is not in contravention of any relevant requirements.[5]

Michael Bergmann discusses a perspective that

epistemic justification is essentially a matter of duty fulfillment.[6]

Lawrence Bonjour says that

the concept of epistemic justification . . . has to do with what one has a duty or obligation to do, from an epistemic or intellectual standpoint.[7]

Anthony Brueckner claims that a deontologist

conceives of epistemic justification as consisting in the fulfillment of epistemic obligation, or duty. . . On a deontological conception of epistemic justification, S is justified in believing that P if and only if S's belief that P is in conformity to S's epistemic duty.[8]

Carl Ginet, who, according to Alston, is a "model deontologist" who "sets out the conception with admirable directness",[9] presents the view as

One is *justified* in being confident that p if and only if it is not the case that one ought not be confident that p; one could not be justly reproached for being confident that p.[10]

Alvin Goldman reports that

Epistemic deontologists commonly maintain that being justified in believing a proposition *p* consists in being (intellectually) required or permitted to believe p; and being unjustified in believing *p* consists in not being permitted, or being forbidden, to believe p. When a person is unjustified in believing a proposition, it is his duty not to believe it.[11]

John Greco says that

. . the main idea of deontological theories is that justified belief is a function of [or is 'licensed by'] correct cognitive rules or norms.[12]

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[5] See Alston ("Deontological" 258-9).
[6] See Bergmann ("Deontology" 87).
[7] See Bonjour ("Externalist Theories" 55).
[8] See Brueckner ("Deontologism" 527).
[9] See Alston ("Deontological" 259).
[10] See Ginet (*Knowledge, Perception, and Memory* 28).
[11] See Goldman ("Internalism" 273).
[12] See Greco ("Virtues" 117).

Alvin Plantinga says that

> epistemic deontology [is] the view that epistemic duty and obligation are of
> crucial epistemic importance and that . . *being* [epistemically] *justified* is being
> within our rights, flouting no epistemic duties, doing no more than what is
> permitted . . [and being] subject to no blame or disapprobation.[13]

And, finally, Matthias Steup reports that

> Epistemic deontology is the view that the concept of epistemic justification is
> deontological: a justified belief is, by definition, an epistemically permissible
> belief. . . . Our beliefs are justified if, and only if, what we believe is epistemically
> permissible for us to believe.[14] . . . It is a duty-based view of the *nature* of
> epistemic justification.[15]

Epistemic deontology clearly is of interest: many philosophers find it worthy of
discussion.[16] Most are interested in criticizing it; only a few explicitly are interested in
defending it.

But there are a number of very different suggestions here about what it is in the
first place, so many such that, ideally these must be addressed on a case-by-case basis. I
aim to categorize these claims in order to identify a clear deontological view to criticize
or defend. I will argue that some of these suggestions are plausible, and others are not.
Insofar as some of the plausible ones are widely accepted, we are all epistemic
deontologists.

2.3.1. Evaluating Epistemic Deontologies.

Although the topic is sometimes called the deontic *conception* of justification, I am not
immediately concerned with how any philosophers would spell out their concept, or idea,
of what justification is. To avoid concerns about concepts being merely "in the head,"

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[13] See Plantinga (*Warrant: The Current Debate* vii, 13-14). Plantinga attributes this view to Descartes and
Locke and claims that "the whole notion of epistemic justification has its origin and home in this
deontological territory of duty and permission . . . Originally and at bottom, epistemic justification *is*
deontological justification: deontological justification with respect to the regulation of belief."
[14] See Steup ("Doxastic" 25).
[15] See Steup ("Epistemic" 231).
[16] Further statements of deontological conceptions of justification include Pryor ("Highlights" 111):
according to epistemic deontology, "justification should be understood in terms of epistemic blamelessness
and epistemic responsibility. . . [and] whether one is justified depends on how well one has met one's
epistemic obligations, whether one is 'doing the best one can' as a believer, or at least the best that one can

and so perhaps highly idiosyncratic, I will focus on the concern of relations between properties, that of bi-conditional entailments between some deontic properties and the property of being justified. So, the fact that many epistemologists would not explain their concept of justification by appealing to any deontological concepts does not show that any epistemic deontologist's claims about the nature of justification are false. For example, Alston claims that the term "justification" is "most naturally understood" in deontic terms.[17] But for those who do not understand it in these terms, the question remains of what relations (if any) these putative deontic properties have to properties pertaining to epistemic justification.[18]

A first set of suggestions relates the, or *a*, concept of justifiably believing p with the concepts of being **"**free from blame" or "disapprobation" for believing that p, and/or not being "justly reproachable" for being confident that p. Alternatively, in light of the suggestion above, claims like these might suggest an essential relation between the putative *property* of justifiably believing p with these latter blame (and, perhaps, praise)-oriented deontic epistemic properties. I will argue that these deontic conceptions of justification are false. A second set of suggestions relates the concept or property of justifiably believing p with concepts (or properties) of epistemic duties, obligations, requirements and/or permissions. A third kind of suggestion relates justification to epistemic rules, norms, principles or requirements. I will argue that these kinds of claims, these epistemic deontologies, are true and that, for the most part, we all accept them.

For each set of suggestions, we can ask what this relation is between an epistemic property or concept (e.g., the property or concept of justification) and the deontic property or concept in question. Bonjour suggests that the relation is that justification "has to do with" epistemic duties and obligations. Depending on what exactly is meant, this might be a rather weak relation: there is *some* connection, some relation, between the two kinds of notions or properties. Others make the stronger suggest that justification

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reasonably be expected of one . ."; and Zagzebski (*Virtues of the Mind* 7): a justified belief does not violate any "epistemic *rules*" or "epistemic *duties*"; it is "epistemically *permissible*, within one's epistemic *rights*".

[17] See Alston ("Deontological" 257-258).

[18] Here I presuppose that there are epistemic properties. Objections to epistemic deontologies are not objections to epistemic properties in general; rather they are objections to some kind of epistemic properties, e.g., beliefs having the epistemically deontic property of there being a *duty* or *obligation* for them to be believed (in a context, by a believer, etc.) and claims that *if there are epistemic properties* (like being justified, etc.) *then there are epistemically deontic properties*.

"consists in" or "is essentially" some other deontic evaluation; thus, some judgment about whether a belief is justification is true just in case another deontic epistemic evaluation is true also: there is a bi-conditional equivalence. This will be the equivalence I will consider. Steup and others suggest this equivalence, and Steup even sometimes appears to suggest something stronger in his claim that epistemic deontology "is a duty-based view of the *nature* of epistemic justification." I will present one possible way to understand a stronger claim like this, i.e., as a robust theory of epistemic justification, and argue that it is false.

To evaluate these various claims that justification (or the concept) has some relation to deontic epistemic properties (or concepts), a concrete place is to begin with the variety of possible deontic evaluations. We can ask ourselves if these evaluations are ever true and, if so, whether this in any way seems to depend on our judgments about justification which, we are presuming, are sometimes true. That is, we can consider cases of intuitively justified belief and ask whether a corresponding deontic evaluation would seem to necessarily apply also. This is just to ask if these bi-conditionals are true: we consider a case of (un)justified belief, conjoin it with the bi-conditional, and see if that belief also has the positive (or negative) epistemically deontic status. We could also start with the deontic evaluations to accomplish the same task, in terms of evaluating the bi-conditional.

2.3.2. Justification, Praise and Blame.

Let us first consider the first set of deontic evaluations, viz. those that associate justification (or lack of justification) with being "free from blame" or "disapprobation" for believing that p, and/or not being "justly reproachable" for being confident that p. Earl Conee and Rich Feldman provide a further statement of this kind of view: "According to deontological conceptions of epistemic justification, one has a justified belief in a proposition when one deserves praise (or does not deserve blame) for having the belief or when it is one's duty or obligation to believe the proposition (or believing it violates no duty or obligation)."[19] Others add to the mix the idea of responsible and irresponsible believing.

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[19] See Conee and Feldman ("Internalism Defended" 239).

These kinds of views are difficult to evaluate since praise and blame-oriented evaluations like these for beliefs are not often made. They are unfamiliar. For many of us, if we were to try to make a list of the conditions in which we "praise" people for what they believe, we would not know where to start because we rarely actually do praise people for what they believe. Many evaluations related to praise for belief might actually be directed toward something else related to what is believed, but not, strictly speaking, the belief itself.

For example, I currently believe that the lights are on (and they are on). I believe I am justified in believing this and that most would agree with this evaluation, and justifiably so. However, while I might like the praise, it's hard to see how I *deserve* praise for believing the lights are on, or my belief is somehow praise-*worthy* or praise is fitting. If my deserving praise for believing this entails that someone *ought* to praise me for this, then that would seem to be a false implication: it's not true that anyone ought to praise me for this justified belief I have. Those around me would be puzzled and annoyed by my suggestion that I deserve their praise and they ought to praise me. This mundane example could be multiplied many times over to show that, in general, we don't praise people for their justified beliefs: we even don't think that although they do deserve to be praised, or ought to be praised, we're just not giving them what we deserve: we're not meeting our obligations. Thus, claims to the effect that a belief is justified if, and only if, some praise is deserved are highly doubtful, in part due to their unfamiliarity and, in part, due to the fact that it just seems false that all justified beliefs should be praised.

As far as I can tell, the only clearly obvious time we praise people for their beliefs is when they, due to some pride or stubbornness or some other vice, they refused to believe something that we think they should have. Once this vice is overcome and they believe that we think they ought, we might be happy that they have changed their mind and think better of them, and praise them, for having done so. But here the praise might be for becoming more open minded, or less prejudiced, or for taking the time to think hard about a topic: it needn't be merely for now having some justified belief.

Praising people for their beliefs is often unfamiliar; for many, criticism is more comfortable. It is an understatement to say that some of us think badly about some of what others believe. Sometimes, we think badly of others for having what we regard as

unjustified beliefs. While it might be odd to say that they deserve blame (e.g., "It's your fault for not believing as the evidence requires!"), we sometimes think that insults, criticism and disgust are warranted. Perhaps, in this context, this is just what blame is: negative reactive attitudes regarding what people believe. These negative attitudes and evaluations are especially common when we think that something of moral importance depends on the beliefs, and the fact that this person has an unjustified belief will contribute to there being greater evil in the world: if only they would believe what the evidence supports, then they wouldn't do the wrong that this unjustified belief will contribute towards doing it. These attitudes also might be common when we think that the person just should have known better, or the person is flouting some intellectual standard that he or she accepts and even advocates, e.g., when someone professes the value of having evidence, but avoids the evidence for beliefs that "hit close to home," e.g., his or her own religious or moral beliefs. This perhaps can sometimes be a kind of deplorable inconsistency or, perhaps, hypocrisy for which an attitude of disgust is warranted.

So many people think that *sometimes* if someone has an unjustified belief then he or she deserves blame or "disapprobation" and can be "justly reproachable." However, on this suggested theory of epistemic deontology, justified beliefs are *always* beliefs deserving of such blame. This suggestion is not very plausible. In defense of this, we might observe that few of us have blame-oriented reactions, or have these kinds of negative reactive attitudes, towards *all* unjustified beliefs. For some unjustified beliefs, it's just not worth it. We might think that someone's belief is unjustified, but not blame the person or think badly about him or her. We might just think that the person is not very smart and that's why he has such unjustified beliefs, and so there's no sense in criticizing people about that, except in circumstances when something especially important is riding on the belief. In response to the insistence that although we do not blame people for each unjustified beliefs, they nevertheless are blame*worthy*, it is hard to see why this is true.

On a similar theme, for many of us, if we were to try to make a list of the conditions in which we "blame" people for what they believe, or think badly about them, we would not know where to start because we do not often blame people for what they believe, or blame them for every unjustified belief we think they have. Thinking about

when people are "responsible" for their beliefs would be an even more foreign task. But, for most of us, the mere fact that a belief is unjustified would not be sufficient for our thinking that some kind of blame or negative attitude is warranted. This does not clearly show that this blame-oriented deontic equivalence is false, since maybe we are mistaken, and maybe we should *always* blame people for their unjustified beliefs (or, at least, a blaming attitude always fits, regardless of whether we demonstrate it).

But there are reasons to doubt this kind of view, and few positive reasons that might be given in its defense. We do not blame people for all their unjustified beliefs and we tend to not think that all unjustified beliefs deserve blame (whether we blame or not), so there is little to recommend this deontic equivalence. The fact that on many moral views, this view is false about moral evaluations (i.e., not all morally wrong actions are blameworthy, or all vicious character traits or motives are blameworthy) provides further reason to doubt this kind of view about epistemic evaluations.

A full defense of this kind of equivalence, and its praise-oriented counterpart, would require a careful phenomenology and analysis of our reactive attitudes surrounding judgments of justified and unjustified belief. As far as I know, this has not been done; discussion of these kinds of deontic evaluations has been done on the basis of too little epistemic psychology. Finding this data would be a quite interesting project, and it might wind up supporting some kind of epistemic deontology, but my quick perusal of the issues suggests that they are a lot more complicated than the simple relation the praise and blame-oriented epistemic deontologist suggests. Thus, I conclude that we should regard these versions of epistemic deontology as false.

2.3.3. Epistemic Duties and Obligations.

A second set of suggestions relates the concept of justifiably believing p with concepts of epistemic duties, obligations, requirements and/or permissions, terms which, if any, clearly should be called "deontological" terms. This is an attempt at stating necessary and sufficient conditions for justification. So, Steup writes, "Our beliefs are justified if, and only if, what we believe is epistemically permissible for us to believe."[20] Bruekner reports that deontologists hold that a belief is justified if, and only if, it confirms to one's

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[20] See Steup ("Doxastic" 25).

epistemic duties. Many others make similar claims relating epistemic evaluations to deontological evaluations.

There are at least two ways to understand these suggestions. The second way will be discussed in the next section. I will argue that this first way yields a true view, and the second yields a false view.

The first interpretation, however, I will call the "deontic equivalences" interpretation of epistemic deontology. This is the idea that for each belief that has a "justificational status," that belief necessarily has at least one deontic status as well and whenever a belief has some "positive" deontic status, necessarily, it is justified, and vice-versa (and the same for unjustified beliefs and "negative" deontic statuses).[21] Steup seems to suggest this idea: "The idea underlying the deontic conception of epistemic justification is that, *whenever* a belief is epistemically justified, no epistemic obligations have been violated. The idea . . is that epistemic justification *necessarily* involves a deontic dimension despite the fact that its deontic dimension need not be made explicit by giving an analysis of epistemic justification in deontic terms."

The common view is some beliefs are justified and others are unjustified; at least, some beliefs are unjustified. And given the wide variety of deontic terms, and, thus, the wide variety of epistemically "deontic judgments"—i.e., judgments pertaining to epistemic matters that make essential use of a deontic term—that can be made, it seems that some beliefs have deontic status as well. Rich Feldman notes some common deontic judgments made about epistemic matters:

> We say that a typical well-informed contemporary American *ought* to believe that
> the Earth is round and *should not* believe that the Earth is flat. A person wrongly
> accused of a crime might say that his accusers have no *right* to believe that he's
> guilty since no evidence of his wrongdoing has been brought forth. In such a
> case, we might say that believing the person is not guilty is *permitted* or perhaps
> even *required.*[22]

Kornblith notes others:

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[21] See Steup ("The Deontic Conception" 67).
[22] See Feldman ("Voluntary Belief" 77) and Feldman ("The Ethics of Belief" 667). The term "deontic judgment" is Feldman's.

> She shouldn't have believed him. . . You shouldn't believe everything you read. . .
> He should have known better.[23]

Both Feldman and Kornblith introduce important deontic terminology that was not given in our survey of the statements of epistemic deontology above, viz. that of epistemic "oughts" and "shoulds." This terminology is surely more commonly used than any other deontic terms: we, especially non-philosophers, often ask whether we *should* believe something. These terms are probably more commonly used than "justification" and "rationality," and are surely related to them. John Pollock writes, "Epistemic justification governs what you should or should not believe."[24] I will explore this relation between epistemic justification and epistemic "shoulds" and "oughts" below.

At least some epistemic judgments like those Feldman and Kornblith offer seem true, although, given the variety of deontic judgments, the semantics of each term (e.g., duties, obligations, requirements and/or permissions) would need to be investigated on a case-by-case basis. We definitely sometimes say that we ought to believe this, or we should not believe that: we think these claims are sometimes true also. Insofar as there is a close, perhaps entailing, relations between the concepts of what ought or should be the case and what is obligatory, required and/or permitted, our truthful use of epistemic "oughts" and "shoulds" lends support to their being what can be called epistemic obligations, requirements and/or permissions. We don't often ask, "Is believing this proposition obligatory for me, or required, or permitted?" But if a judgment that "one ought to believe p" entails that p is epistemically permitted, or required, or obligatory, or that there is a duty to believe p, then (at least some of) these judgments are true also.

And it seems that there is such an entailment, despite the uncommon language. The existence of such a connection would have some explanatory value: if you ought to believe p, this is because believing p is epistemically obligatory, not merely because believing p would be epistemically good, or better than not.[25] If you should not believe p, then that can plausibly be explained by the idea that believing p is not permitted on the relevant epistemic standards. More can be said for *why* believing p is obligatory or

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[23] Kornblith ("Epistemic Obligation" 231). He equates "talk of epistemic obligation," i.e., the truth of some deontic judgments, with the deontological conception of justification.
[24] See Pollock (*Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* 8).

permitted, or why you might have a duty to believe p, and *on what basis* this duty depends, but the entailments seem to be there nonetheless. At least, they are there for ethical evaluations, which might suggest their plausibility for epistemic evaluations also; some reasons to doubt these epistemic evaluations will be discussed below, and I will argue these objections are unconvincing.

The truth of some deontic epistemic evaluations seems compatible with nearly all epistemological perspectives: foundationalists, coherentists, reliablists, naturalists, non-naturalists, and epistemologists of all other stripes agree that some deontic evaluations like these are sometimes true. Everyone agrees that some epistemic "oughts" and "shoulds" are true; below I explore some unpalatable consequences of denying this. And the truth of these judgments seems to depend on the justificational status of the belief in question. When we say that we epistemically ought to believe something, the natural explanation for why this is so is that because the belief is justified or reasonable. And if you should not believe something, this is because it is unjustified and not reasonable. Of course, non-epistemic considerations can factor in, and so it might be the case that, from some other evaluative point of view, you should believe something that you epistemically ought not, but this does not change the epistemic evaluation. Thus, deontic judgments seem to entail judgments about justification, and the truth of deontic judgments would seem to be, in part, explained by the truth of judgments about justification.

Judgments about justification also seem to entail at least some deontic evaluations: if S justifiably believes p, then S epistemically ought to believe p: S should believe p. It could not be that S justifiably believes p, but yet, from an epistemic point of view, S should not believe p. While the truth of deontic evaluations was explained, in part, by evaluations of justification, it is less convincing to think that evaluations about justification are explained by deontic evaluations. Consider the claim that he is justified in believing p *because* he ought to believe p. Although in this case, it's true he ought to believe p, this does not seem to explain why he is justified. Perhaps he is justified in believing p because he ought to believe whatever his evidence supports, his evidence supports p, and this is why he is justified. But here the judgment that he ought to believe

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[25] I restrict this suggestion to cases where you clearly, or definitely, ought to believe p. I ignore possible evidential ties and vagueness-induced borderline cases of epistemic evaluation.

p seems only to be entailed by the judgment about justification; it is not its basis or what makes it true.

2.3.4. An Objection from Doxastic Voluntarism.

Some have argued that the truth of at least some of these deontic judgments would imply "doxastic voluntarism," an often not well-formulated thesis that we can directly and voluntarily decide what to believe. Since there are so many deontic terms and thus so many deontic judgments that can be made, a systematic investigation of each term would need to be made to determine whether the term entails, or presupposes, voluntarism and, if so, whether it can be successfully "compatiblized" with the falsity or restriction of voluntarism.

Defenders of deontic judgments have generally responded in two ways: first, they have argued that (at least some) deontic judgments have no such objectionable implications because that they are compatible with the falsity (or restriction) of doxastic voluntarism. So, they have argued it can be true that we ought to believe certain things, or have epistemic obligations, even if we cannot meet them or influence our beliefs such that we meet the obligations. This kind of view denies a common "ought-implies-can" principle: it might claim that, sometimes, our inability to fulfill an obligation does not make the obligation go away. Financial obligations are like that: we ought to pay our bills even if we can't. They argue that epistemic obligations are obligations like this: they apply to us even if we can't meet them. The relevant ought-implies-can principle is false.

An alternative way to respond to these objections from doxastic voluntarism is to argue that we are, in fact, able to decide what to believe in a manner sufficient for the truth of some deontic judgments.[26] These arguments turn on subtle understandings of the notions of "can," "ability," and "decide." On the first response, it can be true that we *ought* to believe p even if we have no direct control over what we believe; on the second, we *can*, in some relevant sense, decide what to believe (and, typically, sometimes we *do* decide what to believe).

Although I will not discuss these responses in detail here, it's not clear that arguments from doxastic voluntarism render deontic judgments false or inappropriate.

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[26] E.g,, Steup ("Doxastic Voluntarism"), Feldman ("Voluntary Belief"), Heller ("Hobartian Voluntarism"), and Kornblith ("Epistemic Obligation").

Were these arguments against epistemic deontology sound, they would seem to entail that the epistemically deontic judgment that "we (epistemically) *should not* believe that any deontic judgments are true" is false. This is an interesting result: someone fond of epistemically deontological judgments could ask the critic, "Are you saying I *should not* make deontic judgments, or I have some kind of *epistemic duty* or *obligation* to not form these deontically-epistemic evaluations?" The critics' reflective answer would, apparently, be, "No." An epistemic deontologist should be not troubled by this objection then.

Some deontologists, and their critics, understand epistemic deontology in terms of praise and blame for belief. Above I presented doubts against this kind of view since there does not seem to be any necessary connection between epistemic evaluations and judgments or attitudes of praise and blame. But if arguments from doxastic voluntarism showed that these kinds of deontological judgments are false, then nobody would be intellectually *blameworthy* or *irresponsible* if she thought, "Although I find these arguments against any deontic judgments to be quite compelling, but to hell with them— I'll believe that some deontic judgments are true anyway." In practice, arguments against some kind of deontic judgments seem to undermine their own epistemic support: if their conclusions are true, then it follows, perhaps (at least on some epistemic deontologies), that no *criticism* is warranted for those who continue to (even knowingly) make deontic evaluations and it's not true that they *should* stop or that there is some kind of epistemic or intellectual *duty* to not make deontic evaluations.

If epistemic deontology is false, then all that epistemically evaluative talk is false also. But critics of epistemic deontologists sometimes make judgments like these of their deontic colleagues: they hold that deontologists *shouldn't* believe in deontology and that they have no *right* to that belief, given the (allegedly) scathing arguments and evidence against it (and also, perhaps, a self-professed intellectual *duty* as a philosopher, or a mere rational believer, to believe on the basis of the best evidence, which deontologists might *irresponsibly* violate in their accepting deontology). Critics might even *praise* a former deontologist for seeing his errors and adopting a non-deontological view. So, as a matter of fact, even self-proclaimed critics of epistemic deontology make some epistemically deontological judgments. And they seem to make these evaluations based on evaluations

about justification. This lends support to the "deontic equivalences" interpretation of epistemic deontology and my claim that we are, in this sense, all epistemic deontologists.

The "deontic equivalences" interpretation of epistemic deontology also has, I suggest, a condition that there is a necessary connection between truths about justification and deontic truths. Given the wide variety of epistemic-deontic judgments that can be made (or deontic truths that can be stated) and the fact that many seem to depend on judgments or truths about justification, these connections are safe to suppose. After all, all justified beliefs (at least those that are currently held) seem to have the mundane deontic status of being beliefs that the believer *epistemically should* or *ought* believe: this status can also perhaps be expressed in an similar manner, but with (perhaps) more rhetorical flair and drama, as the statuses of being *epistemically obligatory* or there being a *duty* to believe them.

These latter statuses *might* seem more demanding than a mere "should" or "ought", and so these equivalences might be doubted. But I suspect these doubts are due to the simple unusualness and unfamiliarity of evaluating beliefs in terms of epistemic obligations and duties: rarely do we talk this way. We do talk of moral duties and obligations, and these are rather demanding, and so this sense of strong demand might transfer to our thoughts about epistemic obligations, which we might be uneasy with. I aim to quickly calm this lack of comfort.

The idea that there are epistemic obligations or duties can seem more palatable once we see that there is not a weaker demand that is a plausible weaker alternative to obligations or requirements. About action, the common view is that there are moral obligations, but that if one is not going to meet one's obligations, one should at least perform an acceptable alternative. If you are not going to do what you are obligated to do, then we might think you should at least do something that's intuitively morally "neutral," i.e., something that won't harm anyone. But regarding belief, if you are justified in believing that the lights are on, then you ought to believe that the lights are on, and there's no obvious alternative to what you should believe if you are not going to believe what you should believe, or what is obligatory for you to believe. One might suggest suspending judgment would be a good second option, but here that attitude would not fit the evidence at all.

So if there are things you ought to believe, in nearly all actual cases it make sense to call these things that you are epistemically obligated to believe, or have a duty to believe. This sounds demanding, and it is, but it is not clear what the alternatives would be. It's not that it would merely be "epistemically nice" if you believe that the lights are on (when it looks to you like they are on and you have no reason to doubt your perceptions), or that it would be epistemically fine if you did but fine if you didn't. No, you should believe, and this should is so strong that it can be considered an epistemic obligation or a duty. This obligation or duty, of course, can be overridden by competing non-epistemic duties or considerations, so this too might lessen any worries about equating epistemic "oughts" and "shoulds" and epistemic duties and obligations.

Thus, since some deontic judgments seem true, and their truth seems to depend on truths about justification, and vice-versa, the "deontic equivalences" interpretation of epistemic deontology seems plausible and, likely, true. So, in this sense, we are all epistemic deontologists. Weaker equivalence views, that only some judgments about justification have corresponding deontic truths (or vice-versa) are possible. Also perhaps some epistemic-deontological truths that *seem* to apply to matters concerning belief *really* pertain to related moral or practical-action-and inquiry-based matters. This view might have it that at least some deontic judgments are independent of judgments about justification. Given the wide variety of deontic evaluations, it is not easy to make sweeping claims here about the entire class of judgments.

2.3.5. Deontological *Theories* of Epistemic Justification.

A final understanding of epistemic deontology is that it is a view of what justification "*is*", "is essentially", or "consists in." Goldman, Plantinga, Alston, Bergmann, and others suggest this. Epistemic justification is said to *consist in* fulfilling one's intellectual obligations or duties, or believing what's permitted or required. Another proposal is to be justified *is, essentially*, to be free from blame. Further proposals along these lines could be developed using other deontological terms such as "being within one's rights," being "epistemically responsible," and others.

However, there are at least two relevant interpretations of the "is" or "consists in" relation. One is the non-analytic equivalence relation discussed and defended above regarding explicitly deontic terminology. This was what I called the "deontic

equivalences" interpretation of epistemic deontology, which focused specifically on the notions of oughts, shoulds, obligations and duties: I argued that, necessarily, to have a justificational status is to have a corresponding deontic property. Before that, however, I argued that a conception of justification that equates justification with praise or blame-oriented considerations was mistaken.

The second relevant interpretation of the "is" or "consists in" relation, which seems to better fit this language, is suggested by Steup's claim that deontology is "duty-based view of the *nature* of epistemic justification."[27] I will argue that if epistemic deontological positions are supposed to illuminate the *nature* of epistemic justification—what justification depends (or supervenes) on and what *makes* justified beliefs justified—they fail. I consider set of propositions that attempt to do this, i.e., have this explanatory function, theories of the nature of epistemic justification.

To see why deontic claims are not theories of epistemic justification (or, if they are, are not strong ones), an analogy from ethics might be initially helpful. While analogies from ethics to epistemology are often tenuous, one might be instructive to see inadequacies in the deontic proposals for what justification "is" or "consists in." Consider a number of ethical views: first, that an action is "morally justified" (or morally right) if and only if it is permitted; second, that an action is "morally justified" (or morally right) if and only if the agent shouldn't be blamed for doing that action; and, third, that an action is "morally justified" (or morally right) if and only if it is in violation of no obligations or duties. If the question is "What *makes* morally justified actions justified?", "What *makes* right acts right?, then deontological answers, *even when true*, do not provide much of an explanation for *why* an action is justified or what *makes* it justified.

Consider an example: suppose Sue has done a good deed by helping her elderly and frail neighbor take out his trash. This action, let's suppose, is morally justified: it's permitted, violates no duties, and she should be praised for it (or, at least, not blamed). Let's suppose the relations here are all necessary: since she's got one, she's got them all. Even then, we can still ask *why* her action is justified. Not implausible answers include because it brought more happiness into the world than her alternatives, that it was something she would have liked done to her, perhaps that the neighbor had a "right" to

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[27] See Steup ("Epistemic Deontologism" 231).

her services, or even that acts of a helping/caring/or generous *type* are intrinsically right or virtuous. These answers provide moral insight where deontic judgments themselves do not. They suggest possible plausible reasons *why* her action violated no duties, it was permitted, and she is free from blame in doing it. To say that her action was morally justified *because* it was permitted or *because* she shouldn't be blamed lacks explanatory power. That it was justified because it violated no duties or obligations is a step in the right direction, once the basis of these duties or obligations is specified. But once this basis is specified, we have the makings of an explanatory moral theory, not a mere statement of equivalence.

To return to epistemology, Goldman argued that to answer the question 'What is justified belief?' "it is not enough for a theory to state 'correct' necessary and sufficient conditions." He claimed that since we "seek an *explanatory* theory, i.e., one that clarifies the underlying *source* of justificational status . . [a theory's] . . conditions must also be appropriately deep or revelatory."[28] Deontic assessments of beliefs and believers are not deep or revelatory. Grant, for the sake of argument, that a justified belief is a "permissible" belief or one that we are "free from blame" for or where have **"**met our obligations" and that these relations necessarily obtain. This still does not explain what *makes* justified beliefs justified, or what the underlying source of justificational status is, whether it be evidence or reliability or whatever else might make a belief justified. Since deontic statuses seem to depend on of whether these basic, underlying justificatory factors obtain, these factors are the source for epistemic evaluation, not the deontic status.

In the analogous ethics case, there were substantive answers that came in the form of a moral theory. Substantive answers are found in epistemology as well, and they come in the form of explanatory theories that attempt to illuminate the *nature* of epistemic justification. A simple statement of one traditional epistemic theory is that justified beliefs are, by their nature, beliefs that are based on adequate evidence: justified beliefs are founded on good reasons. Other theories with some intuitive plausibility are that justified beliefs are beliefs that result from reliable belief forming processes or cognitive virtues. There are other theories as well. And if we were to make lists of what seems to be clearly justified beliefs and clearly unjustified beliefs – sets of data that we are seeking a

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[28] See Goldman ("Reliablism" 307). Emphases mine.

hypothesis to explain the pattern – we would see that these theories provide some insight and understanding into, at least, what we think the factors that make for justified belief is.[29] Deontic judgments, even when true, do not provide this insight. Were we to try to understand the underlying pattern or rationale of our lists of considered judgments about justification only in light of deontic considerations, far too many deep questions would remain, the most important being what justification, as well as deontic epistemic evaluations, ultimately depend on.

So, while Steup is, when taken very literally, correct that "what distinguishes an epistemically justified belief from an epistemically unjustified belief *can* . . be *explained* in deontic terms, that is, in terms of what is *epistemically* obligatory, permitted, and forbidden,"[30] this explanation is very weak, compared to the alternatives. So, contrary to Steup again, it seems to be a mistake to think that deontology is a view about *nature* of epistemic justification. Only Greco refers to deontology as a "theory," but my arguments suggest that either it is not a theory of justification at all, or that it is an exceedingly poor one.

Following Goldman, a theory of epistemic justification does not merely state correct necessary and sufficient conditions: it provides illumination and understanding of the underlying basis of justification. While claim about moral rightness to the effect of "an action is morally right if, and only if, it is not morally wrong" does state correct necessary and sufficient conditions, I would hesitate calling it a theory because it offers no insight into the underlying basis of moral rightness. Comparable claims can be made about deontic epistemic evaluations: while some are entailed by evaluations about justification, and they likewise entail evaluations about justification, they don't address the basis of justification. Since this is what theories of justification attempt to address, they are not theories of justification. And if it is not a theory of justification, then virtue theories of justification can't conflict with it and it implies nothing for the internalism/externalism debate. If, however, epistemic deontologies are theories about the nature of justification (in the sense Goldman and I articulated above), then even virtue-

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[29] One possibility is that that this methodology only involves identifying and clarifying our *concept(s)* of justification and we are not investigating *justification* itself. However, no philosophical methodology seems able to bypass that worry.

based theories are likely superior to it since they offer some explanation for what justification ultimately depends on it. Also, were deontology a theory, it is not clear its implications would resolve the debate over whether internal or external factors make for justification.

In sum, I have presented a number of ways to understand epistemic deontology or the deontic conception of justification. Only the "deontic equivalences" interpretation seemed plausible: that some deontic judgments are true and they (necessarily) co-vary with judgments about justification. So, at least there are some epistemic *duties* or *obligations*, and so there are some propositions that you *should*, or *should* not, believe, given whether the belief in question is justified for you or not. Some might resist talk of epistemic "duties" or "obligations", but, to my ear, this seems to be just a way of saying that there are propositions you *ought* or *should* (and *ought* or *should* not) believe, given your evidence.

The other interpretations of epistemic deontology, I argue, are either implausible, undefended, probably held by very few (if any), and/or couldn't have the false implications that are attributed to them. Perhaps there are other, more plausible deontologies or conceptions of the deontic conception than the three I have developed. However, as it stands, it appears that much of the discussion surrounding epistemic deontology consists in criticizing an unclear and muddled concept which, when made clear, is seen to be, on one understanding (i.e., the "deontic equivalences" interpretation) quite sensible and, on other the other two understandings, generally implausible.

2.4. Deontology, Internalism and Externalism.

To conclude, I will discuss the implications this understanding of epistemic deontology has for dissolving one dispute concerning the epistemological internalism/externalism debate. One's position on these disputes are sometimes said to provide reasons to reject any epistemic deontological judgments. I aim to show that this is mistaken and so no good objections to epistemic deontology, and so epistemic realism, are found in issues pertaining to epistemic internalism and externalism.

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[30] See Steup ("Deontic Conception"65) (emphasis mine). He states that he "shall call *this* the deontic conception of epistemic justification" (emphasis mine).

The terms "internalism" and "externalism" are relatively new and their uses somewhat stipulative. I will briefly explain what I take the basic distinction to be, although my response should apply to any understanding of the distinction. Most generally, internalists and externalists dispute the "location" of the factors that epistemic justification depends or supervenes on. Theories about the justification or reasonableness of belief are internalist, roughly, just in case they have it that what *makes* beliefs justified only are factors that are "internal" to the mind: sometimes these are described as elements that are cognitively "accessible" to the believer, i.e., *can be* "accessed" with some kind of reflection on one's mental life. So, what justifies a belief or makes it reasonable is the believer's evidence or reasons, which include how things seem or appear to her, her other beliefs, reasoning, memory, and other factors that are all in her mind.

Externalists deny this and hold, roughly, that what makes for justified belief include some "external" factors. So whether a belief is justified depends on, e.g., whether it was produced or caused by a reliable belief forming process, mechanism, or virtue/ability (where reliability is measured by a relation to something external, like truth), or by the obtaining of some other relation between the belief and something non-mental or "external" to the mind.

These characterizations are rough and raise many important questions about the details of each broad account, but they are adequate for my purposes here.

According to many critics of epistemological internalism, many internalists are internalists *because* they accept the deontological conception of epistemic justification.[31] These are empirical claims. Goldman claims that deontology is internalism's most "prominent" and "popular" "rationale" and that this rationale has "widespread support."[32] Plantinga claims that deontology is the "source of the attraction of internalism," "makes it plausible" and that a "deontological conception . . leads directly to internalism."[33] Bergmann reports that, "It is currently fashionable to hold that *deontology induces* [i.e., 'provides a good reason for'] *internalism*," that there is an "intuitive appeal of the move from deontology to internalism" and that although this "(putative) connection is not

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[31] See Conee and Feldman ("Internalism Defended" 257, note 20) "suspect that deontological arguments are more the work of internalism's critics than its supporters."
[32] See Goldman ("Internalism Exposed" 271-272.)
[33] See Plantinga (*Warrant: The Current Debate* 24-25).

always explicitly mentioned by internalists, it is the *main* (and perhaps the strongest) reason they have for endorsing internalism."[34] Bergmann then argues that, "the view that justification is to be understood deontologically does not provide a good reason for endorsing internalism."[35] Goldman concludes that, "the argument from the [deontological] conception of justification to internalism does not work."[36]

An internalist, but one who does not accept an argument for internalism that has an essential premise involving deontological considerations, has quick and easy reply to these critics: "Whatever the merits of these arguments from deontology to internalism are, it makes no difference to *my* reasons for why I'm an internalist since I am not an internalist because of any deontological considerations." This internalist might readily agree with externalist critics, and even some internalists, that the link between deontology and internalism is suspect and that there isn't a good argument from the former to the latter (or vice versa).[37] That one argument for a view fails, of course, does not entail that the view is false or that all other arguments for it fail as well.

A deeper response, which I have developed here, is to question the assumption that there are clear conceptions of the deontic conception from which to argue for internalism from. For those deontic conceptions of justification that are implausible in their own right (and I have argued that at least two of them have this feature: first, the praise-and-blame conception of justification and, second, understanding deontology as a robust theory of justification such that it might rival evidentialism and reliabilism in terms of its function and goals), possible arguments for internalism that are based on them seem doomed from the start.

Is there a good argument from the plausible "deontic equivalences" interpretation of epistemic deontology to internalism? Perhaps there are, but since there are many deontic equivalences, there are many possible arguments to consider. I'll briefly discuss just one kind of argument: consider a possible equivalence of "S is unjustified in believing p if, only if, S shouldn't believe p." Suppose this equivalence is true and then

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[34] See Bergmann ("Deontology" 87, footnote 1). Emphasis in original.
[35] See Bergmann ("Deontology" 89). However, Brueckner ("Deontologism and Internalism" 527, 535) argues that "Plantinga's argument to connect deontologism with internalism is unsuccessful . . [and] fails to show that deontologism is sufficient for internalism."
[36] See Goldman ("Internalism Exposed" 292).

consider a case of, what for most people, is an unjustified belief and, thereby, one that shouldn't be believed. Perhaps a good candidate belief here would be the belief that "Beethoven composed the 'Hokey-Pokey' tune."

A sketch of some reasoning to internalism might go like this. Given all the information that most people have about Beethoven and the Hokey-Pokey tune, most people shouldn't believe that Beethoven composed the Hokey-Pokey tune.[38] If that's so, then these believers have access to features about their mental life (which are all internal features), can recognize that none of these features provides adequate support for this belief (and, in fact, they seem to support for the negation), and so that's why they shouldn't believe it and why, were they to believe it, that belief would be unjustified. Alternatively, to return to the initial data, if people are not justified in believing this and so ought to not believe it, it's because of just how things *seem* to them, which are all internal features.

This kind of reasoning could be repeated, beginning with many intuitively justified and unjustified beliefs and observations of their corresponding deontic statuses, and developed into a non-deductive case for a kind of internalistic view to the effect that the sole epistemic factors relevant to whether one should believe something or is justified in believing are internal ones. Insofar as we often seem to be able to tell whether some belief is justified for us, by way of reflecting on our reasons for why we believe, this kind of argument for internalism has promise.[39]

If this kind of reasoning in favor of internalism from deontic evaluations is plausible, then all the better for the internalist, but if it's no good, she's still fine. This is because the quotes from Goldman, Plantinga, and Bergmann above are empirical claims about the basis of, literally, *most* internalists' belief. While surveys have not been done (perhaps this would be a good task for "naturalized epistemologists") it's not clear that many, or even any, contemporary internalists are internalists *because* they are

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[37] See Pryor ("Highlights" 116, 118) argues that there is no clear entailment from deontology to internalism or from internalism to deontology.

[38] This information, or evidence, exceeds the fact that most people who are familiar with Beethoven *believe* that Beethoven did not write the Hokey Pokey tune.

[39] More would need to be said about what it is to "tell" that a belief is justified, and what it is to have this ability.

deontologists of any kind.[40] Critics of internalism are probably mistaken in their observations here, in addition to not being clear on the nature of the deontological views that they attribute to most internalists.

Probably most internalists are internalists because they accept an explanatory theory about the nature of epistemic justification that has it that the factors that *make* beliefs justified are wholly internal factors. So, they are typically evidentialists or "good reasons"-ists, and are thereby internalists. If this empirical speculation about who believes what and for what reasons is mistaken, it is at least clear that there are clear and simple arguments from these kinds of internalist theories of justification to general internalism. The strength of these arguments depends on the strength of particular internalist theories. The details of these theories are difficult: the nature of evidence, what makes for good reasons, the basing relation, whether (and, if so, when) there is a "higher level requirement" for justification, and other difficult topics. Externalist critics should turn their attention to these possible difficulties for particular theories of justification that say internal states alone make for justification, rather than speculate on mistaken claims about the broad motivations for internalism in general.

2.5. Conclusion.

If epistemic realism is true, then some version of epistemic deontology is true insofar as epistemic realism affirms the truth of judgments like "S should believe p" and "S ought not believe p," and other judgments that entail and are entailed by these judgments. Insofar as these judgments, and other judgments like them, are deontic judgments, it is important to defend them from existing objections. In this chapter I have attempted to do so and have so defended a version of epistemic deontology from objections in the epistemological literature.

In subsequent chapters I will develop a case against the truth of any epistemic deontological judgments that is parallel to cases against the truth of moral deontological judgments, i.e., that some act ought to be done, or is permissible, and so forth. I will then argue that these objections are not strong and that deontological judgments are acceptable

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[40] Steup might be the exception, but seems to endorse internalism both from deontological considerations *and* from evidentialism. I argue below that the deontological endorsement, even if it works, is superfluous.

in both ethics and epistemology and that some are true because there are objective epistemic facts and properties.

CHAPTER 3: *Ayer and Stevenson's Ethical and Epistemological Emotivisms*

3.1. Introduction.

A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson advocated ethical emotivisms, non-cognitivist understandings of the meanings of moral terms and functions of moral judgments. According to ethical emotivism, to make a moral judgment is to express one's emotions and invite others to share them: it is not to state a moral proposition, be in a representational mental state like belief, or attempt to assert moral facts, attribute moral properties or describe moral reality.

I argue that the reasons Ayer and Stevenson gave in defense of ethical emotivisms suggest analogous *epistemological* emotivisms. According to this kind of view, epistemic judgments are neither true nor false either: to judge that some belief is epistemically reasonable, justified, or known; or that some proposition epistemically ought or should be believed; or to that some reasoning is good reasoning is also to *express* one's emotions and invite others to share some feelings about a belief.

The common view, however, is that epistemic judgments are propositional attitudes: they are epistemic beliefs, attempts to attribute epistemic properties or state epistemic facts. Even most skeptics agree: they typically argue only that it is *false* that beliefs are justified or known, not that epistemic judgments are neither-true-nor-false.

Epistemic emotivism is thus at odds with standard assumptions. For many, it might seem obviously implausible and worthy of immediate dismissal: it's just obvious that epistemic judgments are not emotive, and so it's obvious that epistemic emotivism is false and the arguments for it unsound. Other might respond that, although it's not obvious that epistemic emotivism is false, reflection on what epistemic evaluations seem to be like reveals evidence that epistemic emotivism is false or, at least, more doubtful than not: critical reflection reveals more reasons to reject it than accept it.

My response to epistemic emotivism will be more along the second lines.[1] I find no reason why an epistemic emotivism *must* be false or why it *must* be unreasonable or

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[1] In an earlier version of this chapter, I believe I was too quick to dismiss epistemic emotivism as just obviously not true. See Nobis ("Ayer and Stevenson's Ethical and *Epistemological* Emotivisms"). I now believe that stronger reasons can, and should, be given against it.

unjustified for every person who considers it. Few, if any, views are essentially such that they ought to be rejected, and epistemic emotivism does not seem to be a contender for that possible class of views. The meanings of epistemic terms *might* be emotive or expressive: there seems to be little or no reason why they *must* be descriptive or why standard assumptions about the semantics and metaphysics of epistemic judgments must be correct. Nevertheless, I will argue that there are better reasons to reject that view than accept it, especially when we see its far-reaching implications for epistemic evaluations, evaluative judgments involved in reasoning and evaluative presumptions that motivate rational inquiry in general.

I acknowledge that these implications quite literally *can* be resisted, i.e., someone could sincerely affirm all that follows, as a matter of logical consequence, from epistemic emotivism for the nature of epistemic, and other intellectual, evaluations. I will argue that this, for most people, is an unreasonable position. It strains belief because it is contrary to so much else that, for most people, seems true about epistemic evaluations. Thus, most people should not accept epistemic emotivism and the arguments that might be presented in favor, at least those that are parallel to the arguments Ayer and Stevenson give in favor of their ethical emotivisms. Since these arguments for epistemological emotivism are parallel to the arguments given in favor of ethical emotivism, and the former arguments ought to be rejected as unsound, this provides strong reason to reject the arguments for ethical emotivism. Thus, I undercut the arguments in its favor that Ayer and Stevenson provide.

I will argue also that epistemic emotivism has an immediately important implication for meta-ethics in that it seems to undercut any epistemic support Ayer and Stevenson offered for their ethical emotivisms. This is because if epistemic emotivism is true then *all* epistemic judgments are neither true nor false, so it is neither true nor false that anyone *should* accept ethical emotivism or is *justified* in believing it (or any other view, including *epistemic* emotivism, for that matter). But if it it's not true that anyone, from an intellectual point of view, should accept emotivism, then no one should.

Some epistemic emotivists might accept this consequence happily, agreeing that there is no truth to their judgment that they, or anyone, ought to accept epistemic or ethical emotivism. They might affirm this as their position as the basic nature of

epistemic evaluations and respond that objections to this position are based only in contrary epistemic expressions which are equally untrue also. That might be the truth about such matters, but, again, I will give reasons to think that this position is, for most people, unreasonable.

I argue that while Ayer and Stevenson might have had strong feelings for their views, those feelings, if they are expressions of epistemic approval, do not provide good reasons to accept ethical emotivism. If that is so then, truthfully, both ethical and epistemological emotivisms should be rejected, and that's not just how we, or anyone, might merely feel about it.

3.2. Ayer on Ethical Naturalisms and Non-Naturalisms.

Like other logical positivists, Ayer was an ethical emotivist. He also thought emotivism was "valid on its own account" apart from positivistic inspirations.[2] I will argue that the arguments he offers for ethical emotivism suggest analogous arguments for epistemological emotivism as well. I then evaluate this result.

Ayer considered the famous concluding paragraph from Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* an "excellent statement of the positivist's position"[3]:

> When we run over [to] libraries, persuaded of these [empiricist] principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance, let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.

Positivists accepted Hume's sentiment: they claimed that a sentence is either true or false, i.e., it expresses a proposition and so might be believed, if, and only if, it is either analytic or empirically verifiable.[4]

A sentence was considered empirically verifiable, roughly, if it was an "observation statement" or entailed by observation statements in conjunction with analytic propositions.[5] Analytic propositions were said to "enlighten us by illustrating the way in

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[2] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 20).
[3] See Ayer ("Editor's Introduction" 10).
[4] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 5).
[5] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 13).

which we use certain symbols."[6] Too little was said about the meaning of "meaning," but a sentence was considered analytic "if it is true solely in virtue of the meaning of its constituent symbols, and cannot therefore be either confirmed or refuted by any fact of experience": tautologies and formal propositions from logic and mathematics were considered analytic.[7] Sentences that were either analytic or empirically verifiable were said to be "cognitively meaningful" or have "cognitive meaning." Only then might they be true or false; only then might they be true.

Ayer conceded that this criterion was never adequately formulated,[8] little argument was ever offered in its defense, and it is cognitively meaningless – and so not true, since neither true nor false – according to its own standards. But, ignoring these problems, if it is combined with the premise that judgments about what is morally good/bad, right/wrong, just/unjust and virtuous/vicious are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable, it validly implies that these judgments are neither true nor false.

Ayer accepted that argument. He thought that moral judgments were neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. Sentences like "Eve's beating her baby today was wrong" or "Causing pain for fun is wrong" are not analytic since, if true, are not true in virtue of meaning (on nearly any view of meaning), are not formal truths or definitions, are not contradictory to deny and *can* be refuted by an empirical fact such as that Eve never beat her baby. If analytic, they would have none of these features.

Ayer's arguments that moral judgments were not empirically verifiable depended on his arguments against ethical naturalisms and non-naturalisms.

Naturalists defined moral terms in naturalistic terms. They claimed that moral expressions are synonymous with empirical expressions and that, therefore, moral properties just *are* natural properties. Utilitarian-naturalists claimed that "x is right" *means* "x produces the most happiness"; subjectivist-naturalists reduced judgments of rightness to judgments of individual or collective approvals. Naturalists argued that since these latter judgments are verifiable, moral judgments are verifiable as well.

Ayer argued that naturalistic definitions were not analytic since it isn't self-contradictory to deny them and it is an "open question" for competent speakers whether

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[6] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 79).
[7] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 16, 41).
[8] See Ayer (*The Central Questions of Philosophy* 27).

acts with some proposed natural property (e.g., maximizing pleasure) have some moral property (e.g., being right). If the naturalists' various definitions were correct, these questions would be as "closed" as the question are "right actions right?"[9] That question's answer is "obviously, yes!" but answers to questions whether acts with the proposed natural property are right are, at least, not obvious, or, according to some critics of naturalisms, obviously not what any naturalists thought.

Ayer concluded that naturalist definitions were not "consistent with the conventions of our actual language"[10] and, thus, their analytic bridges to reduce moral judgments to empirical judgments were burned down. His arguments here did not depend on positivism; Moore made the same arguments. But Ayer could have also observed that naturalistic definitions (or, sentences where these definitions are offered) are not empirically verifiable either and concluded that, according to positivism, they are neither true nor false. However, he seemed content with these definitions being only false.

Non-naturalists, like Moore and Ross, whom Ayer called "absolutists,"[11] claimed that moral terms were either indefinable or definable only in other moral terms: e.g., "x is right" is synonymous with "x produces the most good," but "good" is either indefinable or definable only in other moral terms (e.g., "worth having for its own sake"[12]). They claimed moral judgments were synthetic but that moral properties could be verified by non-empirical intuition.

But Ayer rejected appeals to intuition, calling it "mysterious."[13] Many claim to intuitively be able to "see" that something is morally good (or bad). However, there are disagreements and since there is no empirical test to adjudicate between competing moral visions, Ayer thought these appeals were "worthless."[14] He argued that since there is no moral intuition, no terms' meanings are such that they stand for properties that can be verified non-empirically. He concluded that non-naturalists' epistemology, semantics and metaphysics were mistaken.

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[9] Or, '*If there are (or were) any right actions*, are right actions right?'
[10] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 105).
[11] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 106).
[12] See Moore (*Philosophical Papers* 94).
[13] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 106).
[14] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 106).

Unlike his arguments against naturalism, these arguments are distinctly positivistic.[15] But, even if one rejected positivism, one *might* find appeals to intuition independently suspicious and draw not merely a skeptical conclusion (i.e., "There *is* goodness, but unfortunately no belief that something is good is ever epistemically justified or known") but positivist-like semantic and/or metaphysical conclusions. As we shall see, Hare, Mackie and Harman do just this.

3.3. Ayer's Ethical Emotivism.

If moral terms have cognitive meaning (i.e., if "cognitivism" is true and so moral judgments are either true or false[16]), their meanings must be the same as either naturalistic or non-naturalistic expressions' meanings. Ayer thought he refuted both possibilities (and if moral terms lack cognitive meaning, that's another reason to think that moral judgments aren't analytic, i.e., true in virtue of cognitive meaning).

His final assessment was that ethical concepts are "pseudo-concepts,"[17] but he did not think that they were meaningless, in the sense of being incomprehensible gibberish. His proposal was that moral terms were meaningful but that their meaning was of a different kind: emotive, not cognitive. The meanings of these terms are such that when people use them, to make moral judgments, they are *expressing* (not describing) states of mind that are "simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false."[18] He suggested that moral judgments "are calculated also to arouse feelings, and so to stimulate action."[19] We might say that he thought there meanings are such that their sincere use had these functions.

He illustrated his position this way:

If . . I . . say, "Stealing money is wrong," I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning—that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false. It is as if I had written "Stealing money!!"—where the shape and thickness

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[15] Non-naturalistic definitions are not empirically verifiable, but Ayer did not argue they were not analytic. He did not argue that their denials weren't self-contradictory or that they failed open question tests. So, he had no argument that they were neither true nor false. Since the definitions do not *in themselves* imply that there is non-empirical intuition, Ayer had no argument that they were false either. His argument was more at non-naturalistic *perspectives* as a whole; in particular, the moral epistemologies they conjoined with their definitions.

[16] Here I am ignoring possible vague moral judgments.

[17] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 107).

[18] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 103).

[19] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 108).

of the exclamation marks show, by a suitable convention, that a special sort of
moral disapproval is the feeling which is being expressed.[20] It is clear that there is
nothing said here which can be true or false. Another man my disagree with me
about the wrongness of stealing, in the sense that he may not have the same
feelings about stealing as I have, and he may quarrel with me on account of my
moral sentiments. But he cannot, strictly speaking, contradict me. For in saying
that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual
statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely
expressing certain moral sentiments. And the man who is ostensibly contradicting
me is merely expressing his moral sentiments. So there is plainly no sense in
asking which of us is in the right. For neither of us is asserting a genuine
proposition.[21]

Cognitivists, i.e., naturalists and non-naturalists, agree that strong feelings sometimes, if
not often, accompany moral judgments and that we often voice moral judgments to try to
influence feelings and behavior. But they deny that this is a necessary consequence of the
meanings of moral terms; they maintain that one could sincerely make a moral judgment
that fails to influence *any* feelings or behavior (including one's own). Since emotivists
think that moral judgments just *are* the expression of feelings, they deny this possibility.

This is Ayer's perspective on ethics. Later I will discuss Ayer's response to the
"only criticism which appeared to threaten it."[22]

3.3.1. Ayer, Positivism and Epistemology.

While many objections have been raised to emotivism, I wish to raise a new objection to
Ayer's defense of it. He said his emotivist analysis applied to aesthetic judgments, but
my interest is what this perspective implies for epistemic judgments and definitions. On

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[20] Since "stealing" has a moral connotation, Ayer should have said something more neutral like "Taking
money" or "acquiring money" or something like that.
[21] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 107-108). Ayer did, however, think that moral judgments have
some descriptive content when they entail an empirical proposition. In the preceding paragraph he writes,
"[I]f I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing the money,' I am not stating anything more than if I
had said, 'You stole the money.' In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement
about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it."
[22] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 112).

the face of it, it seems that they would have a similar fate. I will argue that this is a rationally unacceptable implication.[23]

Consider some particular epistemic judgments, e.g., some of Ayer's. Surely he, like many people, thought of many of his beliefs were reasonable and justified for him, if not sometimes known. Using his preferred terminology, he might have said he had "the right to be sure" of them.[24] But it seems that these epistemic judgments (e.g., "I am *justified* in believing that the lights are on", "It is *reasonable* to believe that I have hands", "As a positivist, I have a *right to be sure of* the emotive account of ethics", etc.) are not analytic since they are not definitions, tautologies, or formal truths: by the standards Ayer accepted in ethics, investigating the meanings of the words or linguistic conventions would not reveal their truth values. And, at least *prima facie*, they don't seem empirically verifiable either: scientific observation might one day, presumably, reveal that one has some belief but it wouldn't show its epistemic status.[25]

These considerations seem applicable to any epistemic judgment that some belief is justified or reasonable, or is something that one should or ought believe, and so on. So it is plausible to think that, on positivistic grounds, particular epistemic judgments are – like ethical judgments – also neither true nor false.[26] Since epistemic platitudes, such as Ayer's suggestion that "certain standards of evidence *ought* always to be observed in the

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[23] See Kvanvig (*The Value of Knowledge* 173) for an endorsement of arguments like those I provide below.
[24] See Ayer (*The Problem of Knowledge* 31-35). Ayer analyzes knowledge into the conditions that "first that what one is said to know be true, secondly that one be sure of it, and thirdly that one should have *the right to be sure*" (p. 35, my emphasis).
[25] Science might reveal all sorts of natural features of the belief, such as its deductive and non-deductive logical relations to other propositions (and, lets suppose, experiences) as well as, perhaps, which belief forming "process" it has resulted from. This is interesting information, but an additional premise must be added to propositions stating that information to yield a conclusion about the beliefs justificatory status or whether it ought to be held, and that premise will not be empirically verifiable. I develop this idea below.
[26] Ayer says of particular ethical judgments that "inasmuch as they are certainly neither definitions nor comments upon definitions, nor quotations, we may say decisively that they do not belong to ethical philosophy. A strictly philosophical treatise on ethics should therefore make no ethical pronouncements" (*Language, Truth and Logic* 103). Perhaps these remarks would apply to particular epistemic judgments as well (e.g., whether a belief is Gettier case, whether victims of 'evil demons' have justified beliefs), and so a "strictly philosophical treatise" on epistemology would contain no particular judgments about the epistemic qualities of particular beliefs or believers. While there is no point in debating what is "strictly philosophical," insofar as current epistemologists use particular judgments about actual or hypothetical particular cases to evaluate epistemic definitions (or analyses or principles), Ayer's suggestion would, surprisingly, seem to suggest that this aspect of epistemological inquiry is not strictly philosophical. And, if my arguments are sound, positivism implies that these epistemic judgments – particular and general – are neither true nor false anyway.

formation of our beliefs,"[27] are neither analytic nor empirical either, it's presumably not true that you ought to follow your evidence, and it's not false either.

One might resist these conclusions by arguing that they follow only if one is sufficiently inattentive to the meanings of epistemic terms. Perhaps, given true definitions or analyses of epistemological terms, epistemic judgments meet the positivistic criterion for cognitive meaning.

While the question of moral terms' meanings has been much discussed, there has been little comparable discussion about the meanings of epistemic terms. But if epistemic terms have cognitive meaning, those meanings are either naturalistic or non-naturalistic expressions. But then they fall prey to Ayer's objections to ethical definitions. If ethical definitions were of no help in making moral judgments analytic or empirically verifiable (and hence either true or false), epistemological definitions are of no help either. If, however, these objections do not refute epistemological definitions, then they likely do not refute moral definitions either.

3.3.2. Against Naturalistic Epistemological Definitions.

Let us first consider some naturalistic epistemological definitions or analyses. While any would do, let use Ayer's. He said that "we define a rational belief as one which is arrived at by the methods which we now consider reliable" and that "to be rational *is* simply to employ a self-consistent accredited procedure in the formation of all of one's beliefs."[28]

These analyses were likely attractive to him since they identified epistemic judgments with psychological-causal-logical judgments that (ignoring possible grave difficulties in identifying "methods" and "procedures" and understanding "reliability") were, at least in principle, empirically verifiable. In this way they were like naturalistic definitions of ethical terms. But then they were, therefore, also subject to the exact same objections, which Ayer did not seem to realize or press against them.

We might grant that the presence of these psychological-causal-logical states is in principle empirically verifiable: perhaps brain scanners will one day be able to reveal them. However, to deny these naturalistic definitions does not seem to utter a contradiction. Although this is not fully clear since Ayer does not define "reliable," it

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[27] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 100).
[28] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 100), emphasis mine. Presumably, these weren't mere stipulations.

does not seem that one contradicts oneself by saying "this belief is rational but it was not brought about by a method which we now consider reliable." Linguistic conventions surely were never so much in Ayer's favor to make that claim analytic. These definitions are also subject to "open question" arguments, since one can sensibly (or quite confusedly) ask, "This belief has been formed by the employment of a 'self-consistent accredited procedure,' but is it a *rational* belief?" If "rational" meant *that*, then there wouldn't be a question here. But surely there is, so this definition, even if true, is not analytically true.

Ayer thought that these tests show that naturalistic definitions of ethical terms are not analytic, that these definitions are false, and, therefore, that moral properties are not identical to natural properties and that moral judgments are not empirical judgments.[29] Unless epistemic definitions are an exception to the semantic rules that Ayer accepted in the context of ethics (and there is no reason to think that they are), these tests also imply that naturalistic epistemological definitions are also not analytic, are false, and so epistemic properties are not natural properties and epistemic judgments are not empirical judgments either.[30]

So, given what Ayer said about ethical naturalism, he should have rejected his own naturalistic epistemological definitions. Although it is not clear what he thought about this, if he thought epistemic judgments were empirical judgments, this view was inconsistent with his reasoning against ethical naturalism (and if he thought recognized inconsistency *should* be avoided, that too is inconsistent with his principles). Since naturalistic epistemological definitions are also not empirically verifiable, it seems that, on positivistic principles, they should be considered not merely false, but neither true nor false. That also seems follow from Ayer's position, which he also did not realize.

3.3.3. Against Non-Naturalistic Epistemological Definitions.

If naturalistic epistemological definitions are mistaken since they are not analytic, then a non-naturalistic definition must be correct, if any are. But Ayer's objections to ethical non-naturalisms apply equally well to epistemic non-naturalisms also.

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[29] This reasoning was founded on the false assumption that if the claim that "A's are not B's" is not analytic then A's are not B's. For the sake of argument, here I ignore this.

[30] That seems correct, apart from any concerns about Ayer: even if reliabilism and other naturalistic epistemic theories were true, would not be *analytically* true or true *by definition*.

If what a person believes can in principle be empirically verified, many aspects of beliefs are empirically verifiable as well. The various effects of those beliefs (i.e., causal properties of those beliefs) are presumably verifiable, e.g., that it makes someone happy or sad, or is financially productive. Beliefs' psychological properties of being held with a certain level of strength, confidence or doubt are empirically verifiable. Formal, logical properties of a belief can also be identified, i.e., logical relations to other propositions, although positivists would likely claim that these relations can be identified because they are analytic.[31]

But whether some belief is justified or reasonable, or whether there is sufficient evidence for some belief, does not seem to be an empirical matter: observation and experiment do not show the epistemic status of a belief.[32] At best, lab results could show that some belief-forming process has some level of statistical reliability. That beliefs formed by these processes (or processes with some specified level of reliability, or probability, or any other candidate for a "natural" feature) are *justified*, or *ought to be held*, however, is not empirically confirmable. Reliabilism, as a philosophical theory, cannot be confirmed by science; according to arguments parallel to those Ayer gave about ethical naturalisms, it cannot be confirmed by an investigation of our epistemic language either, so positivism suggests that it's neither true nor false. Scientific results do not show if some experience or belief is evidence, or if some evidence is sufficient evidence, if some proposition ought to be believed, or if some explanation is more reasonable than another. In fact, scientific thought and practice depends on antecedent capacities for epistemic assessment that do not seem to be ultimately confirmable in any straightforwardly empirical manner.[33]

Empirical information is often relevant to epistemic evaluation (e.g., whether *S believes p* is relevant to whether *S's believing p is justified*). But identifying the epistemic

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[31] This appears to presuppose some kind of non-empirical intuition that is likely hard to account for on positivistic perspectives, but I will not press that point.

[32] This isn't at all to say that scientific information or, especially common-sense empirical information is not or could not be relevant to whether some belief is justified or whether it should be judged as justified.

[33] Some might disagree by arguing that, e.g., a successful track record in terms of yielding truths amounts to an empirical defense of the justifiability of a method. This kind of argument would surely appeal to empirical observations, but they would never be the whole story. This is because such an argument would probably rest on a premise to the effect that *if some method has yielded many truths, then it is justified and its implications ought to be accepted*. If there were evidence for (a more plausible version of) this premise, it would be non-empirical or not wholly empirical.

status of belief seems to be a matter of something that might be best described as non-empirical intuition. And Ayer rejected views that appealed to intuition since he thought there simply is no such thing. He thought intuition was especially troublesome in ethics since there is no test to decide between conflicting intuitions other than further intuitions: there is no empirical tie-breaker. But the same is true in epistemology: there is no empirical test to adjudicate competing intuitions about what's reasonable or justified, or whether some evidence is sufficient evidence, or if some belief-forming-process is *the* process that justifies some belief. If intuition is "worthless" in ethics, as Ayer thought, it is equally worthless in epistemology.

Ayer rejected ethical non-naturalism because of its intuitionism; he concluded that moral terms do not have the same meanings as non-natural terms, there are no non-natural moral properties and, thus, that moral judgments are neither true nor false. It seems that analogous conclusions would follow for epistemology as well: any theory that implies that epistemic terms *mean* terms that are non-empirically verifiable is equally worthy of rejection from positivistic perspectives. In case he did, Ayer should not have thought that epistemic terms' meanings are non-natural expressions. He should have rejected non-naturalistic definitions and analyses that claimed that epistemic terms are indefinable or definable only in other epistemic terms (e.g., "a belief is rational" *means* the same as "there are good reasons for that belief" or "a belief is justified if, and only if, it is supported by the evidence").

3.4. Ayer's *Epistemic* Emotivism.

Since naturalistic definitions fail to be analytic and non-naturalistic definitions presuppose intuition, it seems that Ayer should have rejected them both. He should have concluded that epistemic terms lack cognitive meaning altogether and so epistemic judgments are neither true nor false. These results are not idiosyncratic to Ayer's epistemology: on positivistic assumptions, contemporary epistemologies – both naturalistic and non-naturalistic – would result in epistemic evaluations being "cognitively meaningless" also.

Unless epistemic judgments are declared completely meaningless, it seems likely that, on positivism, their meaning would also be emotive. There are other options,

however since there are other non-cognitivist interpretations of epistemic language that are, in some sense, "consistent" with epistemic sentences lacking truth values.[34]

But on epistemic emotivism, to sincerely judge that, e.g., some belief is justified (or unjustified) is to *express* one's favorable (or unfavorable) feelings towards that belief and to attempt arouse the feelings of others regarding that belief and stimulate them to believe (or disbelieve) it. The view would have it that like other "statements of value,"[35] the presence of an epistemic term in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. So, in saying "Your belief that p is unjustified and unreasonable" one might not saying anything more than 'You believe p!!??' in, like Ayer suggested about moral evaluations, "a particular tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks" to express one's feelings of disapproval and, perhaps, to try to command the believer to cease believing p.[36]

If epistemic emotivism is true, a seven-day creationist's saying, "evolution is not supported by the evidence; it is unreasonable to accept the theory of evolution," would not be an expression of a proposition; rather, it would be an expression of disapproval of belief in evolution and an attempt to persuade others to reject the theory. An evolutionist's response that creationists are irrational and that, in fact, creationism is a well-justified theory would be equally emotive. Neither party would be attempting to state facts about the epistemic quality of their respective beliefs or attribute epistemic properties.[37] To judge that one knows that one knows something, or that one is justified in thinking some belief is justified, would seem to be expressions of complex feelings: some kind of approvals of one's approvals. That is an interesting result.

This interpretation of epistemic judgments is strongly suggested by Ayer's positivistic critique of ethics. Since most philosophers think that epistemic judgments are propositional attitudes, and epistemic emotivism denies this, it is at odds with common assumptions. If it is more reasonable to accept the common, realistic view about the nature of epistemic judgments, then it's more reasonable to reject epistemic emotivism.

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[34] *Should* positivists only accept views that are consistent with their position (insofar as propositions can be consist with the principle of verification, a sentence that's seems to fail to be a proposition, on positivistic)? While positivists might wish to answer, "Yes," but below I argue that they *truthfully* cannot.

[35] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 102).

[36] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 107, 108).

This, in turn, might provide strong reasons to reject ethical emotivism and at least some arguments that are given in its favor.

Ayer might have agreed with this claim. As far as I know, not even Ayer and other positivists accepted epistemological emotivism, or even noticed that their broader, positivistic perspective suggested it. Perhaps this implication, had positivists seen it, would have led many to change their view about positivistic principles. Perhaps for many non-positivists, is shocking enough – due to its tension with other reasonable beliefs – to serve as (yet another) *reductio* of positivistic principles.[38]

3.4.1. Epistemic Emotivism Undercuts Ethical Emotivism.

For now, I wish to note this emotive consequence for epistemic judgments has interesting and important implications for arguments from positivism to ethical emotivism. This is because epistemic emotivism has implications for what to think about *all* arguments and reasoning.[39] These implications are likely troublesome for positivists and those who reject ethical cognitivism for Ayer's reasons.

To see this, consider the main argument under consideration in this chapter:

(1) A sentence states a proposition if, and only if, it is either analytic or empirically verifiable.

(2) Moral *and epistemic* sentences – particular judgments (and, clearly, naturalistic definitions) – are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable.

(3) Therefore, moral and epistemic sentences do not state propositions.

Premise (1) is "paradoxical" in that if it is true, it implies that it is neither true nor false. Perhaps it was intended to *express* feelings of approval for analytic and empirically verifiable sentences and disapproval for all others, but this is doubtful. I will ignore these problems and, for the sake of argument, accept (1) as true. And I have argued that (2) as true as well, especially on positivistic assumptions. It has long been recognized as true for moral judgments, and I observed that it seems true for epistemic judgments also.

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[37] Perhaps an epistemic emotivist would allow that they are, at least, *attempting* to state the truth about the epistemic qualities of their beliefs, but would think that they never succeed.
[38] Later I investigate in greater details whether this *reductio* could be resisted and whether epistemological emotivisms or expressivisms could be plausibly maintained and defended. I will argue that it can't.
[39] I say *seems* to have implications: although a statement of epistemic emotivism might entail other propositions, claims like "those who accept epistemic emotivism *ought* to accept these implications" are neither true nor false, according to epistemic emotivism.

So, we have a recognized-as-valid argument with premises that, for the sake of argument, we accept as true. Now, the problem: should we accept the conclusion? Would we be justified in doing so? That is, are the sentences "We *should* accept this conclusion" and "We are justified in believing (3)" true? Neither of these sentences is analytic or empirically verifiable. So insofar as (1) can have implications, it seems to imply that these sentences, as epistemic evaluations, are neither true nor false.[40] A sentence even like "someone who believes an argument to be valid, thinks the premises are true, sees that the premises entail the conclusion, and is more confident of the premises than the denial of the conclusion *ought* to accept the conclusion" seems to be neither true nor false either: it is clearly not empirical, does not seem to be analytic, is not a logical truth and reflection on the meanings of its terms does not reveal it to be true. Given all this, positivism implies that these sentences are not true, since they are neither true nor false.

From positivistic perspectives, naturalistic epistemological definitions that might be offered (in conjunction with empirical premises describing psychological states) to reduce these epistemic judgments to empirical judgments would be refuted by open-question arguments; definitions that wouldn't be refuted this way would require a kind of intuition that they found too mysterious. Thus, according to positivism, it is neither true nor false that anyone epistemically should (or should not) accept ethical emotivism. A response that "you *should* be an ethical emotivist but you should resist these arguments for epistemic emotivism," would be neither true nor false either.

So, if epistemic emotivism is true, then it is not true that it *ought* to be accepted or anyone is *justified* or *reasonable* in believing it. If positivist-based epistemic emotivists would judge that they are reasonable or justified in their views, they would be saying something that, on their view, is not true. This is an interesting consequence, one that, probably, few positivists and ethical emotivists would have willingly accepted. Whether they should have resisted this conclusion and, if so, how they might have done so will be discussed below.[41]

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[40] However, I argue below that, on positivism, any principle like 'if someone recognizes that p entails q then she ought to believe q' (or, ideally, a more refined and plausible principle) is neither true nor false.
[41] In my introduction chapter, I note that the claim that someone, from an intellectual point of view, should (or should not) resist some argument is a kind of epistemic or intellectual judgment. Throughout this work I

This interesting consequence extends beyond particular epistemic evaluations to evaluations about which inferences ought to be accepted. Logical relations among propositions are one issue and a fully legitimate one, on positivistic assumptions.[42] Discerning the logical consequences of one's beliefs is surely part of what's involved in reasoning, and it is the basis of reasoning. But reasoning involves attempting to see these logical consequences and attempting to discern which consequences we should accept. What you should conclude (given your experiences and other things you believe), how you ought to reason, what you are justified in believing, etc. are separate kinds of questions from the question of what are the logical consequences of a set of propositions. Not all epistemic judgments appeal to logic, and reasoning and evaluating arguments is more than displaying sets of statements in various logical relations. And seeing these logical relations does not establish what one, epistemically, should believe: it is an open question whether some proposition(s) in some logical relations to others ought to be accepted or is justified, even when these logical relations – these naturalistic features – are recognized. This is true on positivism, and it seems true on non-positivistic assumptions also.

Reasoning typically involves presumptions that "given this, you ought to believe that" and "you should drop this belief if you want to retain that belief"[43] and "it's *better* to believe this than that" and so forth. In practice, it seems to presuppose an imperative of consistency, a presumption that it's better to have consistent beliefs than inconsistent ones and that, at least sometimes, if one recognizes inconsistency, it should be resolved.

argue that reasons to think that moral judgments are never true suggest that judgments like these are never true also. Thus, if, e.g., some positivist were to think that that he or she ought to respond to objections like mine, we need to ask if this judgment is true or not. If it is true, then, I argue this implies that positivistic principles are false. If it's not true, then perhaps it is a kind of non-cognitive expression. I am arguing, however, that most people have better reasons to reject this kind of view than accept it.

[42] Ayer's analysis of judgments of probabilistic logical relations has been subject to the same objections I have raised to his treatment of epistemic judgments, so perhaps all he can truthfully make are judgments about entailments and their absence. R.F. Atkinson persuasively argues that the positions Ayer takes in ethics and probability are inconsistent. See Atkinson ("'Good' and 'Right'" 242-246).

[43] Some might suggest that what can be called "epistemic imperatives," such as these I suggest here involving reasoning, are hypothetical imperatives: if you want X, believe p (or reason in various ways); you want X, so believe p (or reason in various ways). They might claim that this somehow eliminates appeal to evaluative language. But this does not because we are still left with the question whether some principle like 'if you want X and Y is a means to X, then do Y' is a proposition, if it is true, and, if so, what *makes* it true: *why* should you satisfy your desires and take the best means towards doing so? Hypothetical imperatives presuppose all the metaphysical and semantic baggage that categorical imperatives do; to avoid

Typically, these epistemic "should's", "ought's" and other value judgments are understood realistically. Few think that we are *merely* expressing our emotions when talking about good and bad reasoning, and what we should believe.[44] In cases where we might be expressing emotions in making epistemic judgments, few of us think that we are *only* expressing our emotions. Perhaps we are only expressing our emotions, but many would deny that and think that their denial is reasonable. There are reasons to think that epistemic judgments are sometimes true. Some of these are analogous to some of the reasons to given to think that moral judgments are sometimes true. Let me briefly present just a few of these reasons, in no particular order of strength or importance.

First, to many, it seems that epistemic error is possible. Many people think that there are propositions that they used to believe, and even currently believe, but that they were unreasonable or unjustified in believing them, given the evidence that they had at the time. This judgment suggests that beliefs can be unjustified (as well as justified), but we can fail to see this. It also suggests that epistemic judgments are descriptive, i.e., are attributions of epistemic properties, since we can think that some of our own epistemic judgments have failed to describe our own epistemic situations, and that they are made true by things other than our own attitudes toward them. Other examples might reveal that it seems we can accept general epistemic or intellectual standards that we later come to regard as quite mistaken.

These common insights seem to suggest that there are stance-independent epistemic truths. Epistemic emotivisms, and other epistemic irrealisms, might have a very hard time making sense of these phenomena: perhaps they could appeal to expressions of approval (and disapproval) for various expressions of approval (and disapproval), but, to many, this seems to be a strained description of the phenomena. Perhaps such a theory could be worked out, but I suspect an epistemic realist has stronger reason to accept his or her realistic interpretation of the phenomena of epistemic error.

Second, it seems that one can make epistemic evaluations without any emotional involvement. And it seems that any epistemic evaluations made initially with heated

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a regress, they seem to presuppose a categorical imperative also such as, perhaps, that one's desires should be satisfied (irrespective of whatever one's desires are).

emotions can be restated later, in a cooler frame of mind, but the same thing is said: no meaning of the epistemic evaluation is lost. Epistemic realists have a simple explanation of how this can be, since they hold that, for any emotional factors related to epistemic evaluations, they are only contingently related. But on epistemic emotivism, these phenomena are either impossible since there are no emotion-free epistemic evaluations, or we are saying different things when we "cool down" and "heat up" in our evaluations. Both of these claims seem false, and this provides reason to reject epistemic emotivism. Again, while an epistemic emotivist surely has things to say here in defense of his or her point of view, I submit that these responses are weaker than the reasons that can be given in favor of the realist understanding of these phenomena.

Third, and related to the previous points, it seems that "a-epistemicists" are possible. These are believers who make epistemic and other intellectual evaluations, but completely lack any motivation or affective "pull" towards complying with their own evaluations: e.g., they judge that some of their beliefs are completely irrational and baseless, but this in no way motivates them towards changing their views. This possible phenomenon will be characterized in greater detail later in this chapter, but what's important is that epistemic emotivisms would usually imply that such an "a-epistemicist" is impossible. However, if there is reason to think that there could be, and even are, such believers, this provides reason to think that epistemic emotivism is false. Again, while an epistemic emotivist surely has things to say here in defense of his or her point of view, I submit that these responses are weaker than the reasons that can be given in favor of the realist understanding of these phenomena.

Fourth, epistemic evaluations seem to behave like other descriptive language: they can figure into truth functional operations and can be part of seemingly valid arguments. So, this argument seems valid:

(1) If each person should believe what's justified for him or her, then Sally should believe what's justified for her.

(2) Each person should believe what's justified for him or her.

(3) Therefore, Sally should believe what's justified for her.

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[44] Allen Gibbard and Hartry Field are notable exceptions: they recognize that the arguments of ethical emotivism, and other non-realist meta-ethics, have implications beyond what Ayer and Stevenson saw for them. I discuss their views in my final chapter.

Epistemic emotivism might make it a challenge to understanding why this argument – or other arguments with epistemic terms – is valid, just as ethical emotivism makes it a challenge to understand why an argument like this is valid also:

(4) If lying is wrong, then it's wrong to get your brother to lie.

(5) Lying is wrong.

(6) Therefore, it's wrong to get your brother to lie.

The problem is that, if epistemic or ethical emotivism is true, then the meanings of (2) and (5) differ from the meanings of these phrases when used in (1) and (4) because, put most simply, these are different kinds of assertions. But if this is so, then these arguments are invalid, due to, put most simply, equivocations in the premises. If this is so, then the arguments are invalid. However, they seem valid, so it seems that the various phrases, when stated in the differing premises, have the same meaning. Since epistemic and ethical emotivisms imply that they don't, this provides reason to think that these emotivisms are false.

Again, while both ethical and epistemic emotivists have responses to this problem, it's safe to say that these responses are very complicated and that none have been met with much positive response. Perhaps this is due to stubbornness on realists' part, but I submit these negative evaluations of these irrealistic responses to this problem are weaker than the reasons that can be given in favor of the realist understanding of these phenomena. Thus, it is more reasonable to accept the realist explanation of why arguments with epistemic and ethical terms can be, and often are, logically valid.

A final point in favor of epistemic realism is that it just *seems* true. Judgments about what's reasonable, justified, known, and should be believed just sometimes seem to be true: intuitively they seem true, and considerations given above and below are reasons that support this judgment. Thinking about our options can help. If epistemic evaluations are not ever true, then are they always false? Maybe this is the way things are, but this does not seem true either, and many have thought that there are strong reasons to resist epistemological skepticism, which this view might be a species of. Perhaps there are no such good reasons to reject skepticism, but many people would think that we should think that only if we have been given strong reasons to think so. But if this happens, then

strong reasons have been given to think that there are no strong reasons. But this is a self-contradictory position that is, for many, unbelievable.

Epistemic judgments might be neither true nor false, but this does not seem true either. When ethical emotivists respond to the problem above with claims that when one is expressing the state involved in asserting a major premise of such an argument, and then one expresses the different state in asserting a minor premise, then one *should* express some final state also. They make all kinds of evaluative judgments in reasoning, and it seems that these are attempts to state truths, not merely expressions of their preferences for people accepting various patterns of reasoning (or, to describe reasoning in a manner without any evaluative language, accepting various sentences when displayed in various relationships to each other).

It seems that Ayer accepted this common view about reasoning: it does not seem that he was *merely* interested in noting various views about the nature of ethical judgments that are consistent with positivism, yet *not* claiming that some of them (like emotivism) truthfully *should* be accepted. But positivism seems unable to accommodate these judgments, since none of these claims about reasoning and what we should believe or what is reasonable meet their criteria for being cognitive meaningful. Ethical emotivists have been criticized for being unable to account for the role of reason in ethics, since they offered no mechanism to explain which emotive responses are appropriate (and typically claimed that there were no truths about which feelings "fit" a situation) and how one might give reasons for one's ethical perspectives. But my arguments run deeper in that I'm arguing that, if positivism is the basis of their emotivism, then they are unable to account for good and bad reasoning *simpliciter*.

This is because reasoning involves more than observing the natural facts that some propositions of interest are in some logical relations to other propositions of interest; it involves making these observations and then making judgments about what we *should* believe in light of them, or whether we *ought* to accept some consequence of our views, or whether we are *justified* in accepting what we have believed in light of this newly seen implication. Since positivism implies that all such judgments are neither true nor false, it seems to lack the resources to account for what's involved in reasoning: it implies that the kinds of thoughts essential to reasoning are neither true nor false. So, on

their view, argumentation is based on emotions, never true epistemic principles about how we should respond to recognitions of logical truths, and so arguments for ethical emotivism are based on emotional expressions, not any true principle about reasoning. Ethical emotivists might express strong feelings about believing emotivism and try to arouse our sentiments so we might accept it, but it's not clear how those are reasons to accept it, especially for those who don't accept the view. And, at least if positivism is the motivation for ethical emotivism, there's no truth to the claim that we *should* be reasonable, or *ought* to have intellectually defensible views anyway.[45] Those are also merely expressions, and there's no truth to the claim that one should accept them or deny them. Either is equally untrue.

If positivism undercuts the truth of any epistemic judgments, including judgments about what is and isn't good reasoning – again, since reasoning involves more than observing the natural facts that some propositions of interest are in some logical relations to other propositions of interest – this is yet another reason to reject positivism and undercuts a historically influential motivation for moral non-cognitivisms and irrealisms (that I suspect is still lingering in some "naturalistic" and "scientistic" perspectives). This is because positive implies something that is false and something, as I argued above, that we are reasonable and justified in regarding as false, viz. that there are no literally true epistemic evaluations and never any truths about how we ought to reason.

Below I will consider some ways that positivism-motivated epistemic emotivists might try to resist these arguments. First, however, I wish to sketch my general argument against arguments for moral irrealism, some of which I have developed above. Although I have repeatedly acknowledged that epistemic emotivism, or any other epistemically irrealistic view, might be true and more common views about the semantics, metaphysics, psychology, logic and epistemology of epistemic judgments false and rationally indefensible, I want to make it clear what I concede to be true of possible arguments for epistemic irrealisms and the exact nature of my criticisms.

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[45] What if someone desires that she be able to defend her views, give considerations in their favor, respond to objections, etc.? On positivism, that's not a good thing, or admirable, or an attitude that people ought to strive to have. Those claims are all neither true nor false.

3.4.2. Criticisms of and Concessions to Arguments for Epistemic Irrealism.

Throughout this work, I observe that we can understand moral irrealists as arguing for their preferred version of moral irrealism using a version of the argument stated with what we might call *the general argument schema for moral irrealism*:

(1) If a judgment has features Φ, then it is not objectively true.[46]

(2) Moral judgments have features Φ.

(3) Therefore, moral judgments are not objectively true.

From (3), positive reasons are offered to try to establish some kind of moral non-cognitivism, expressivism, prescriptivism, nihilism, relativism or other meta-ethical theory which, if true, implies that moral realism is false.

While arguments for moral irrealism are rarely formulated as simply and explicitly as this schema, the schema can help us clearly identify the basic reasons each classical moral irrealist gives for his position.[47] For each, we can ask what his basic "Φ" is: what features do moral judgments have such that he thinks that, because they have these features, an irrealist understanding of them is warranted? Each of these figures' Φs can be used to state an instance of the general argument schema for moral irrealism.

These are simplifications that overlook important details which will be developed in later chapters, but, as we have seen, Ayer's basic Φ is it's that moral judgments are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable; he also offers some non-positivistic-based considerations which, as we will see, some later philosophers develop in support of their own views. We will see in the concluding section of this chapter that Stevenson's Φs

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[46] Although I do so, I hesitate using the phrase "objectively true," since that would seem to suggest that there is a plausible alternative kind of truth, or that there are at least two ways something can be true, objectively and non-objectively. Some (e.g., Harman) have proposed "relative truth" for a non-objective alternative. By this, they mean to say that some judgments are true *relative to* some other propositions – they are implied by them, or are somehow supported by them – but are not implied or supported by others, and so are false *relative to them*. To me, it seems misleading to describe this as a way of being true: it would be better to just say that no moral judgments are true, yet – perhaps in conjunction with empirical propositions – some are implied or supported by other moral propositions (e.g., more general moral principles) while they inconsistent with others. This avoids possible confusing concerns about whether some truth is true "objectively" or merely "relatively."

[47] Although this argument schema is that of a deductively valid argument, not all the arguments I discuss below and in subsequent chapters are deductively valid. For my immediate purpose here, however, this does not matter. In this section, I also evaluate arguments as "sound" and "unsound," but these evaluations should be understood here as pertaining to non-deductive arguments also.

include that moral judgments have a motivational quality, that moral discourse has an emotional, dynamic aspect, and a Hume-motivated puzzlement about what a moral truth-maker could be like.

In later chapters, we will see that Hare's Φs include the fact that people can disagree about their moral evaluations even when they accept different naturalistic and non-naturalistic understandings of the meanings of moral terms: they are not talking past each other, as these theories might imply. Mackie's Φs include claims that moral judgments are intrinsically motivational, that moral properties are commonly thought to be supervenient on natural properties, and the claim that there is fundamental, intractable disagreement about what has which moral properties, i.e., disagreements about which moral evaluations are correct. And Harman's main Φs pertain to moral disagreements and the judgment that moral properties don't seem to be appealed to in order to explain our moral beliefs and attitudes or any other clearly natural phenomena. Contemporary moral irrealists (some of whom are also epistemic irrealists), like Blackburn, Field, Gibbard, Timmons, and Wright often accept and build upon many of these Φs in for their arguments against moral (and, sometimes, epistemic) realism. I noted this in my first chapter and will look at Gibbard's and Field's arguments in my final chapter.

I argue that all these arguments for moral irrealism have a problem: the exact nature of my criticism, and some interesting challenges in arguing for it, will be explained below.

My main objection is against the various first premises – instances of (1) – of this argument schema immediately above, so let me make a few remarks about the second premises of this kind of argument. For some of these alleged features of moral judgments, i.e., claims stated in various instances of premise (2), it's very plausible to believe that moral judgments have them: e.g., it's very plausible to think that Ayer is right at least in thinking that particular moral judgments are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable, and so this version of premise (2) is true. Some features expressed in alternative premise 2s, however, are at least controversial: e.g., it is not at all clear that moral judgments have an intrinsically motivational quality about them and so, for a variety of conceptual, phenomenological and empirical reasons, evaluating a premise like that is more challenging than, say, Ayer's premise.

In face of these challenges, however, my general response is to concede that it is plausible to think that moral judgments have such features. So, for each given instance of (2) from the meta-ethical literature that I discuss, I either sincerely accept it or, for the sake of argument, I concede it as true. Thus, I agree with moral irrealists on nearly all points about what it's like to make moral judgments or what moral judgments are like.

Since I find a major fault with arguments for moral irrealism, my objection then must be with instances of premise (1) of the general argument schema above, that *if a judgment has features Φ, then it is not objectively true*. I intend to argue that most actual, given instances of this premise are problematic:[48] each major premise has implications that we have better reason to regard as false, and so reject, than to accept as true. This defect renders the entire argument epistemically defective, since it implies that at the premise is either false or rationally unacceptable, or both.[49]

Before I turn to this objection, I will first discuss one response that I will generally not develop or rely on, as it is rather weak. Some instances of premise (1) could be challenged by claiming that no good reason, or inadequate reason, is given in their defense. A "lazy" version of this response could come from someone of a philosophical temperament who takes philosophical arguments seriously only when positive reasons have been given in defense of all premises of an argument. Someone like this might claim that, as far as she can tell, too rarely is positive defense given for the various instances of premise (1).

As a matter of fact, this is often true since the ideas motivating instances of the premise are often only assumed and not explicitly defended: e.g., both Mackie and Harman seem to only assume that if there were "objective" moral properties or facts that made moral judgments true, then more people would detect these properties and moral evaluations would converge, especially when people agreed on (what they agree is) the

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[48] I do not argue that all possible instances of premise (2) or even every actual articulated instance of premise (2) is problematic. I mainly only examine versions of (2) that are commonly discussed or articulated by philosophers who I have called "classical" moral anti-realists.

[49] Below I discuss how a premise's *being false* is not, strictly speaking, a reason to reject it (or makes it such that it is not justified or that it should be rejected), just as a premises *being true* is not, strictly speaking, a reason to accept it (or makes it justified or that it should accepted). Rather, the relevant consideration is that it *seems* false (or *seems* true), "on balance," or "overall," or more clearly false than true. The exact phenomenon is not easy to describe.

relevant empirical information. Since there isn't such agreement, Mackie and Harman conclude that there are no moral properties.

So their version of premise (1), roughly stated, that *if a judgment has the features pertaining to a specific kind of disagreement (a kind of disagreement that they think is not better explained in some other manner), then it is not true, or probably not true*, is based on an assumption for which they provide little or no explicit defense. Their premise is not supported by the kind of discussion that would be best to defend it with, such as a fully general discussion of what kinds of properties are highly "see-able," which kinds of properties (if any) are not, what we should think about the ontological status of the various kinds of properties that have low or no "see-ability," and an application of this all to the metaphysics of moral properties. Something like this would be needed for an optimal defense of their assumption behind their premise (1). As it stands, this defense is missing, so our "lazy" philosopher might see no reason to take this argument seriously. She might not have any positive objection to the premise; it just doesn't seem true to her so she doesn't accept it.

My response to instances of premise (1) is not as lazy as this. Although it does seem that too often too little positive reasons are given in favor of the various versions of this premise, I intend to argue that we should regard the various instances of these arguments' major premise are false. Someone who understands my arguments would be justified or reasonable in rejecting (1), ought to reject (1), and so should think that the typical arguments for moral irrealism are not sound. To defend such claims, I argue that instances of premise (1) have false implications that, when recognized as such, reveal that the premises are false and so ought to be rejected.

To try to show this, I develop various arguments for *epistemic* irrealisms that are parallel to the arguments for moral irrealism. Epistemic irrealism implies that epistemic judgments – e.g., that some belief is epistemically reasonable, justified, known, ought to be held, should be rejected, and so on – are never objectively true. To develop an argument for such a view, we can construct a parallel *general argument schema for epistemic irrealism* building on premise (1) above from the argument for moral irrealism above:

(1) If a judgment has features Φ, then it is not objectively true.

(4) Epistemic judgments have features Φ.

(5) Therefore, epistemic judgments are not objectively true.

From (5), considerations might be offered to attempt to encourage the adoption of epistemic expressivism, nihilism, relativism or other meta-epistemological theory that, if true, implies that epistemic realism is false.

I have, and will, argue that instances of the argument from (1, 4, and 5) are unsound and use this result to argue that the analogous arguments against moral realism are also unsound. This argument about these arguments can be presented as the following:

(6) If the discussed arguments for *moral* irrealism are sound, then analogous arguments for *epistemic* irrealisms are sound.[50]

(7) Analogous arguments for epistemic irrealism are *not* sound.

(8) Therefore, the discussed arguments for moral irrealism are not sound.

Conclusion (8), if shown, does not provide positive support for moral realism; it is only defensive in showing that common arguments against moral realism are unsuccessful.

To defend this argument (6, 7, and 8), I will need to defend premise (7): my claim that these arguments for epistemic irrealism are not sound. To do that I need to argue that the relevant instances of either premise (1) or premise (4) in the schema for arguments for epistemic irrealism are false.

I accept instances of premise (4) as true: epistemic judgments have the features that moral irrealists find problematic about moral judgments. Like premise (2) above, which describes alleged features of moral judgments, I accept instances of premise (4) for features Φ that moral irrealists appeal to in making their case for their moral irrealisms. Moral irrealists say, "Moral judgments are like *this*." I reply, either sincerely or for the

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[50] In this immediate discussion will assume this premise is true, since the two kinds of arguments are structurally parallel and concern the same properties. Earlier I discussed how the fact that moral and epistemic properties have some *different* features (as well as some shared, common features) would not make an obvious difference to my arguments, since these differences do not change the fact that moral anti-realists suggest that having these (shared) features is sufficient for irrealism. Later I discuss how a moral anti-realists sense that he or she *ought* to revise his arguments, that he would be *justified* in accepting them only if he re-tinkered with them to meet my objections, might be based on intellectually evaluative and deontic assumptions that are ultimately inconsistent with his or her premises given for moral irrealism.

sake of argument), "OK, but epistemic judgments are like that also." These agreements are stated through instances of premise (4).

Thus, my objection is to the shared premise (1), that *if a judgment has features Φ, then it is not objectively true.* If that premise is false, then arguments for epistemic irrealism *and* for moral irrealism are unsound. Those who should believe that this premise is false should also believe that the arguments are unsound; those who are justified in rejecting it are justified in rejecting the arguments against these realisms as unsound.

To object to premise (1), I argue that epistemic judgments have features *Φ* yet they are sometimes objectively true. They are "in the same boat" with moral judgments, in terms of many of the metaphysical, semantic, psychological, and *epistemic* features that moral irrealists have found noteworthy about moral judgments. However, I claim that having these features is not sufficient for them never being objectively true, and so premise (1) is false.

To do this, I show what's entailed by the falsity of epistemic realism, or the truth of (5) above, and claim that we should not accept these entailments: we should regard them as false. Many of these entailments, and the argument against them, might be summed up with this complex argument:

(9)   If no epistemic judgments are ever objectively true, then either there are *no epistemic beliefs*, or/and there are *no epistemic propositions*, or/and there are *no epistemic properties*, or/and there are *no epistemic facts*, or/and there are *no accurate representations of things as they epistemically are* (or/and, *we never even attempt to represent things epistemically*) or/and *the only epistemic "truths" are those relative to different epistemic frameworks, none of which are any better or worse than any other*.

(10) But these consequences are all mistaken; we have better reason to reject them than accept them.

(11) Therefore, some epistemic judgments are objectively true.

The most important consequence of the truth of (11) is that (1) is false, and if that's so, then the typical arguments for moral irrealism are not sound. Recognizing that they have false premises provides strong reason to reject these arguments. If one is antecedently

fond of moral realism, at least one might reasonably think that there are no good objections to the view.

How, however, do I defend (10)? That is, how do I *show* that there are epistemic properties or facts that serve as truth makers for epistemic claims, and even that there are epistemic *claims*, i.e., epistemic beliefs and other propositional attitudes? How do I *show* that epistemic discourse is *not* (merely) emotionally expressive and *not* founded on false metaphysical, semantic, psychological and epistemic assumptions? After all, it could be true that some version of epistemic irrealism is true and some argument for that conclusion sound. The claim that *there are no epistemic properties and all epistemic and intellectual evaluations are purely emotive* is not easily seen to be self-contradictory: contemplation of the claim itself does not inhibit belief. And there's no contradiction in thinking that an epistemic platitude along the lines of *if you realize you have contradictory beliefs, then you should abandon some belief to eliminate perceived inconsistency* is likewise never true (because it's emotive or there are no truth makers for it, or whatever). Someone might accept some kind of epistemic irrealism, with full awareness of its implications, even its implications for the epistemic evaluations of her belief in the theory itself (and everything else she believes): she might call it "reasonable" or "known" but recognize that, on the theory, perhaps, only emotions have been expressed, no truths stated. She could accept these implications even her belief that epistemic irrealism is true and some argument in its favor is sound: there's no flat out contradiction in doing so and she could interpret all forthcoming negative epistemic appraisal in terms of her own theory – as objections that are never true, and are founded on untrue presuppositions – and not be troubled.

So it might very hard to convince some epistemic irrealist that (10) is true, that her view is mistaken and that she should reject whatever argument she accepts in its favor. An epistemic irrealist might think, or feel, that she has good reasons for her view. If asked, "Why believe epistemic irrealism?" an epistemic irrealist might note that it follows from her firmly held principles and beliefs (one of which might be premise [1]), it coheres well with her other beliefs, she thinks is has resulted from a reliable belief-forming-process and/or denying it would seem stranger than accepting it.

All these claims might be true, but, if epistemic irrealism is true, then – if the recognition of various *is-ought* and *natural-evaluative* "gaps" in moral discourse provide reasons to think that naturalistic moral realisms are false – it is also not true that *if any of these "natural" facts obtains, then the belief is reasonable or ought to be held*, since that gap is there also. An insightful epistemic irrealist might see this and, perhaps, embrace it as the way the world is: just as the world is devoid of moral value, it is devoid of intellectual or epistemic value also; all there is are natural features of beliefs and inferences, but no features are objectively more epistemically valuable or desirable, as epistemic realists presume they are.[51] An epistemic irrealist might respond to nearly any objection, any observation of what seems, from common views, to be a crazy implication of the view, with acceptance and, perhaps, the claim that the "epistemic world" is not the way many have thought it is.[52]

This is a general statement of a possibly true view. I suppose it's sustainable, at least in the sense that an advocate of the view would be able to utter many words in response to objections and the discussion could continue for quite a long time. One could truthfully observe that if it is true, then nearly all philosophers' understanding of the nature of reasoning and epistemic evaluation is deeply mistaken, including the understanding of many traditional radical skeptics. An advocate of this kind of view could accuse his critics of begging the question, or merely assuming a position and not giving any reasons in its favor (not that there's anything wrong with that, on this view). How then can we argue against it?

To do this, we begin where, as a matter of fact, *we* are and with what we have to work with. First, we note that – among those who have thought about such views – few

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[51] I presume an epistemic anti-realist would be a moral anti-realist also. It would certainly be surprising for someone to recognize moral values yet disavow epistemic ones. Earlier I discussed attempts to "ground" epistemic values in the contingent desires we have, thus turning epistemic evaluations into a kind of hypothetical imperative. (This proposal could be involved in trying to argue from the truth that (a) *some methods of belief formation yield typically truths* to a conclusion (c) that *we ought to use these methods*.) I briefly argue that any hypothetical imperative is true only if a categorical imperative (perhaps *that one's desires ought to be satisfied*) is true also, so the move to hypothetical imperatives does not avoid any axiological and metaphysical mysteries it is designed to avoid.

[52] Interestingly, moral realists are sometimes accused of believing in a bizarre ontology. It seems to me, however, that epistemic anti-realists would believe in an even more bizarre world: a world without intellectual or epistemic values (or, actually, a world where we vividly believed there are no intellectual values, nothing that is epistemically better or worse) would be quite strange, if we always told the truth about our pursuits regarding belief.

people actually believe this kind of view. In itself, this doesn't count for much, since people can be prejudiced and mistaken, but what does count is that the view *seems* clearly false in its implications and in its contribution to a picture of the way the world is. To most, it seems clear that there are better and worse ways to reason, that some mental states have greater intellectual value or worth than others, and we can have *beliefs* about these states of what's reasonable, or justified, or known, or should be believed, from an intellectual point of view. Emotions sometimes accompany these epistemic evaluations, but they aren't the evaluations themselves. The evaluations are based in evidence, *strong* evidence, of what clearly seems true and nothing that seems false in comparably clear or compelling ways. This provides good reason to think that epistemic irrealisms are not true, the arguments for them unsound and, in particular, that premise (1) is false. We can see that premise (1) is rationally unacceptable for us by either considering it directly in light of counterexamples, or we can see that other kinds of reason beliefs entail that it is unreasonable.

An epistemic irrealist might respond that *if* his theory is true (and, I concede that it *could* be true), then all these common judgments are mistaken and we are radically in error. In this way, the epistemic irrealist is like a skeptic who notes that if a skeptical hypothesis is true, then we lack knowledge or justification. We should agree, but note that we have strong evidence that his theory is false and that he has given, at best, little evidence or positive reason to think his theory and all its radical implications are true. He might then reply that, on his view or if his view is true, we have not said anything that's objectively true. Again, that's true, but for an epistemic realist to *reasonably* be convinced that epistemic irrealism is true (and for her to, perhaps paradoxically, *reasonably* come to believe that all talk of reasons and other epistemic evaluations is, objectively, never true[53]), she needs to be given reasons that are stronger than the reasons she already has for epistemic realism and its metaphysical, semantic, psychological and epistemological presumptions.

It's possible that an epistemic irrealism is true, but, for most, possible only in a logical or metaphysical sense. Relative to what most people *reasonably* believe, it is not a

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[53] My guess is that some epistemic anti-realist could engage in some kind of gyrations upon prompting by those who would think that troubles with this claim reveal that epistemic realisms are false and rationally unacceptable.

reasonable option. They have reasonable beliefs about epistemic matters, they reasonably believe that these beliefs imply that epistemic irrealisms are false, are reasonable in believing (at least in this case) a principle along the lines of that *if you reasonably see that something is inconsistent with what you reasonably believe, and especially if you see that there is little to no antecedent positive reason to accept that something, then you should not accept it*, so epistemic irrealisms are not something they should accept. Again, this might all be mistaken – there is no reason to think the world *must* have epistemic value in it – but we have good reason to affirm the common sense semantic, metaphysical, psychological and epistemic foundations of epistemic judgments, and no good reason to deny it.

To apply this theme to positivism, the main view under consideration in this chapter, I maintain that we, and I suspect this includes most positivists, had (and had) stronger reasons to believe that there are reasons, and justified beliefs, and ways we ought to reason, than the reasons ever given to accept positivistic principle and its irrationalist implications for epistemic evaluations. It's possible that positivism is true and that its suggested epistemic emotivism is true, but nearly everyone (positivists included) has or had stronger reasons to deny than affirm it. And if this is so, this importantly undercuts the premise needed to defend a positivistic-based moral irrealism.

3.4.3. Non-Positivistic-Based Epistemic Emotivism.

Before I consider objections I will briefly discuss some non-positivistic bases for emotivism, both ethical and epistemic. Ayer also thought ethical emotivism was "valid on its own account," apart from positivism. He didn't say why he thought this, but I will briefly mention some of the considerations he gave for ethical emotivism and note that they apply to epistemic judgments as well. Some of these overlap with positivistic reasons, but one needn't be a positivist to accept them.

Ayer calls moral (and aesthetic) judgments "statements of value" and claims that they "cannot with any show of justice be represented as hypotheses, which are used to predict the course of our sensations."[54] He argues that naturalist definitions are not analytic, so moral judgments can't be reduced to empirical judgments. While some say that moral judgments can be verified by "intuition," Ayer rejects appeals to intuitions

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[54] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 102).

since they can conflict and there seems to be no empirical test to adjudicate between them. He notes that what seems intuitively, certainly right or good to someone may seem doubtful, or even obviously false, to another. He observes that moral debates typically are more contentious and emotionally expressive than debates about empirical matters.[55] Someone might conclude, given all this (and without any thought of positivism), that people are just expressing their emotions when making moral judgments: perhaps this would seem to be the best explanation of the phenomena.

But all these considerations apply to epistemic judgments as well: judgments about what's reasonable or justified don't predict sensations, aren't empirically verifiable, and seem to be the result of "intuitions" which, when conflicting, can't be resolved by empirical tests. Epistemic terms are hard to define in empirical terms: any claim that some naturalistic expression is synonymous with an epistemic expression will likely be subject to "open-question" objections; Ayer, at least, thought that this refuted the definitions. Epistemological definitions that are not said to reveal an analytic or synonymous relationship between terms are subject to the same kind of objections leveled against non-analytic ethical definitions, e.g., that they have false implications, that meeting their condition(s) is neither necessary nor sufficient for having some evaluative status, that they do not correctly identify the features that explain something's evaluative status, and so on.

Finally, debates about whether it's rational to believe something, something is genuinely known, or some evidence is sufficient evidence (and even if something *is* evidence) are often contentious, inconclusive and feelings can run equally high. Epistemic judgments also seem to be a kind of "value judgment" anyway: to say that a belief is justified or reasonable is to impart some kind of positive value to it.[56] There are judgments of epistemic virtue and vice, judgments that knowledge is intrinsically good, and assumptions that knowledge is *better* than "mere" (i.e., unjustified) true belief, all value judgments in themselves. As suggested above, the presumption that there is good

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[55] In *Logical Positivism*, Ayer claims, "[Moral] arguments do not work in the way that logical or scientific arguments do" (p. 22). That might be true, but if my arguments are sound, then logical and scientific arguments do not work the way Ayer thinks they do either.

[56] Allan Gibbard, quoting Hilary Putnam states, "The terms that ground our conception of rational acceptability—'coherent', 'simple', 'justified', and the like—are often used as terms of *praise*," and they

and bad reasoning seems to presuppose value judgments as well. So, if these general, non-positivistic-based considerations support ethical emotivism, as Ayer believed they did, they support epistemological emotivism as well.

3.4.4. Conclusions on Ayer's Epistemic Emotivism.

Thus, I have argued that if Ayer's reasons given for ethical emotivism are genuinely good reasons to accept it, then they are also good reasons to accept epistemic emotivism as well. But few are willing to think that there are (or, perhaps, even could be, in light of the views implications for itself) good reasons to accept epistemic emotivism. And if an Ayer-inspired epistemic emotivism is true, to say that "there are good reasons to believe that view" is merely to express one's feelings about believing it. That might be the truth about what epistemic evaluations are. But most philosophers, even positivists, think that epistemic emotivism *should* be rejected, and that's not just how they "feel" about it. They think this is a truth, a literal truth, and that it is quite reasonable to accept it. I have argued above that they are reasonable in rejecting it: the evidence in favor of it is stronger than the evidence against it.

Since epistemic emotivism (or some other non-cognitivist interpretation of epistemic discourse) seems to follow from positivism, positivists and so motivated ethical emotivists might have a dilemma on their hands: accept the consequence and go emotivist more broadly to include epistemic judgments (including the epistemic and non-logical judgments involved in reasoning), or drop positivism. If epistemic emotivism is true, it's not true that they should respond to this dilemma in any way. But a more global emotivism seems quite implausible and would be very difficult, if not impossible, to defend in a plausible manner (due to the fact that epistemic emotivism makes all epistemic judgments emotive), so for many that's an unattractive response. Dropping positivism wouldn't require dropping ethical emotivism since it could be retained on independent grounds. But many of these reasons would likely suggest epistemic emotivism as well, as I argued regarding Ayer's non-positivist motivations for emotivism.[57]

"have too many characteristics in common with the paradigmatic value terms for us to deny that that is what they are." See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 32).

[57] One way to avoid arguments for ethical non-cognitivisms being converted to argument for epistemic non-cognitivisms is to make the major premises so 'narrow' and non-general that they apply only to moral

The easiest response, the one that seems suggested by the best reasons, is to drop positivism, especially since there is no good reason to accept it in the first place. But this eliminates a traditional justification for ethical emotivism. But since other justifications for ethical emotivism likely suggest epistemic emotivism, those justifications should be dropped as well. So, I conclude that one should reject both ethical and epistemic emotivism and the cases Ayer offered in their favor, as well as the arguments that can be developed from his writings.

3.4.5. Some Objections and Replies.

As far as I can tell, there is no hope for retaining positivism and Ayer's case for ethical emotivism but resisting the conclusion that epistemic judgments are neither true nor false also: the positivistic principle clearly supports epistemic judgments being non-cognitive. The only response, besides agreement, then might be that epistemic emotivism is as palatable as ethical emotivism. Positivists thought the latter wasn't a problematic position, so why should they think the former is problematic? But it is very difficult to see how epistemic emotivism isn't anything but a very difficult position to hold. This is clear in light of the discussion above, where I argued that epistemic emotivism undercuts the possibility of truthful epistemic support for itself (and any other view, including ethical emotivism) and, more importantly, conflicts with so much that seems true about epistemic evaluations. Adopting epistemic emotivism makes it even more difficult to defend ethical emotivism also: adopting epistemic emotivism makes defending ethical emotivism from objections all the more challenging.

To see this, let us discuss the only objection to ethical emotivism that Ayer discussed in *Language, Truth and Logic*. This objection was that if it is true, there are no moral disagreements since there are no moral propositions for one party to accept and another reject. Since people seem to disagree, and if moral propositions are needed for disagreement, the objector concludes that emotivism is mistaken. Ayer responded, surprisingly, that people do not disagree about moral matters, strictly speaking.[58] He claimed that "we do not and cannot argue about . . the validity of . . moral principles. We

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judgments. This, of course, would make the arguments weaker since they would appear more and more 'question-begging.'
[58] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 110-112).

merely praise or condemn them in light of our own feelings."[59] He claimed in *all* cases of what are intuitively called moral disagreements, the dispute is about cognitively meaningful questions of logic or empirical matters of fact and their relevance to the moral question.

Positivism would seem to preclude their being truths about what empirical information is relevant to a moral issue,[60] but it will allow there being truths about empirical information and logical relations. But if epistemic emotivism is true, Ayer's even diminished account of moral disagreement is mistaken because we do not, strictly speaking, disagree on what we *should* think about logical and factual matters either: when someone says, "No, you are not believing what you should about the relevant empirical matters," one is never saying something that is true. Insofar as empirical and logical correction involves making epistemic judgments

Ayer claims that much moral debate consists in getting people's particular judgments to fall in line with the principles they accept. He claims that if "a man has certain moral principles . . he *must*, in order to be consistent, react morally to certain things in a certain way."[61] Ayer's remark here is surely more than the trivial claim that one has to be consistent to be consistent; he seems to be thinking that revealing some inconsistency to someone *should* result in her changing her moral views: she *should* do something to resolve the inconsistency. But that imperative does not appear to be an analytic or empirical truth, so it is presumably neither true nor false. If it is a moral principle, Ayer has only praised it in light of his own feelings. So logical correction, in terms of how one ought to reason, is not a cognitively meaningful resource for Ayer to appeal to.

Empirical correction is the "attempt to show that [someone] is mistaken about the [non-moral] facts of the case . . has misconceived the agent's motive . . has misjudged the effects of the action . . or has failed to take into account the special circumstances in

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[59] That seems mistaken since it seems we can reason about moral principles since it seems that they *can* figure into truth-functional logical operations.

[60] This is important insofar as many discussions of moral issues involve claims to the effect of "if such and such are the non-moral facts, then this ought to be done." If these kinds of claims are never true, as positivism implies, then moral argumentation and discussion – insofar as these kinds of claims are commonly made – is founded on many claims that are never true.

[61] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 111), emphasis mine.

which the agent was placed."[62] But this activity appears to presume epistemic standards, that, given certain experiences and other beliefs, someone *ought* to have some specified belief. As I argued above, these kinds of judgments are cognitively meaningless on Ayer's principles. There is no truth to claims that someone's beliefs *should* change if new information is presented or that there is something objectionable with someone dogmatically refusing to consider this new information.

Ayer claimed that, "one really never does dispute about questions of value." But insofar as judgments about how one ought to reason, that one should be consistent, and that one should accept some empirical judgments are neither true nor false, there are no cognitive disputes about them as well, on his principles. People can disagree, in the sense that they believe inconsistent propositions. But on his view, for any proposition p, when someone says "you should believe p" and someone replies, "no, you should not believe p" they do not, strictly speaking, contradict each other: they are expressing contrary emotions, but nothing more.

That's a more surprising, and damning, implication than what follows from ethical emotivism alone. Thus, his response to the objection that emotivism cannot account for moral disagreement fails: it can account for it only by appealing to other non-cognitive factors. And these we also do not and cannot argue about: we merely praise or condemn epistemic standards and principles about reasoning in light of our own feelings.

It's unlikely he would have accepted this consequence, but he might have. He might have replied that, yes, strictly speaking, *all* evaluative or prescriptive judgments – about what one *should*, *ought* or *must* believe, reason, or react – are neither true nor false. However, he might have responded that this was no objection to the view because he had no need for epistemic language. He could observe that it is fully legitimate on his principles to make descriptive statements, e.g., about what people believe if he's careful to not describe these statements in epistemic terms, e.g. "justified" or "rational" or about what one "ought" or "should" believe and so on. And he has logic, although perhaps not non-deductive logic, since judgments of probability might also be rendered non-cognitive by positivistic principles.

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[62] See Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic* 111).

So, in argumentative contexts, he can point out logical relations between propositions and what follows and does not follow from what people believe: he can note that some propositions are inconsistent with someone's beliefs or are entailed by them. He can observe how confident someone is in some beliefs and report that, oftentimes, when people are confident in some belief and see its logical consequences, they are confident in these consequences also. He might also make the empirical claim that some belief was, or was not, "arrived at by the methods which we now consider reliable" or that "a self-consistent accredited procedure" was employed in the formation of some beliefs. If he is talking to positivists, he can note that his kinds of positions fit well with their views; in fact, for some people he might observe that his positions *are* their views and that denials of these positions are inconsistent with their views and do not all cohere with what they think. He can attempt to find out what people's various goals are and make suggestions for what kinds of beliefs would best meet these goals.

Ayer might claim that making these kinds of observations is all that is needed for argumentative discourse: evaluative epistemic talk can be abandoned with no loss. However, it seems clear that there would be a loss. All these suggested methods of engaging in argumentative discourse without evaluative language consist in making naturalistic claims or observations about beliefs. These moves are thereby repeatedly subject to "open-question"-related concerns. Competent speakers could easily understand these claims have no clue what is supposed to follow from them: they might ask, "Why is Ayer telling me this, even if what he says is true? What is supposed to follow, in terms of what I believe, from my recognition of this natural feature?" If they are logically inclined, they might think that these remarks above are supposed to be premises in some argument.

In most or all cases, however, a second premise, linking the first to the sought conclusion, is left tacit. This premise will either have an evaluative consequent (e.g., "if some belief has *some natural feature*(s), then it is *justified*") or it will not (perhaps the consequent will be that the belief is true, or probably true). If there is an evaluative antecedent, then evaluative language has been admitted and so this response does not avoid evaluative language: it fails. If, however, the linking premise and conclusion are devoid of evaluative language, we might be left with another open question: what is supposed to follow, in terms of what we believe, now that we recognize these

propositions in this logical relation to each other? If someone thought that, given her understanding of Ayer's claims, she *should* then believe or do something then we have slipped back into illegitimate "shoulds."

Even if Ayer pointed out some inconsistency, the question of what to believe seems unavoidable: *should* they keep a premise, reject a conclusion, or reject Ayer's judgment that there is an entailment? That's a question that naturalistic descriptions alone couldn't answer and Ayer's positivism precludes there being a true answer to. Perhaps Ayer would hope that people care about avoiding inconsistency and that this would typically lead them to think as he wished, but surely even if a person lacked such concerns, epistemic questions about what she should believe, i.e., what is reasonable or justified, remain. Perhaps he could offer a theory about good reasoning (perhaps "good" is too evaluative, so this should be a theory of "sought" or "desired" reasoning) to the effect that person *A* has reasoned well just in case *A* has come to believe whatever *B* wishes her to. This theory might be couched in entirely naturalistic terminology, but, unfortunately, it would be a theory of persuasion or manipulation, not a theory of what would, to most people, be called good reasoning, since it would countenance even the most irrational and despicable methods of inducing belief change as "reasoning."

In sum, it seems that epistemic language is practically unavoidable: attempts to avoid it will often rest on evaluative presumptions typically along the lines of a belief's having some natural features yields some evaluative status, perhaps its being the case that it ought to be believed. Or attempts to avoid epistemic language will depend on our contingent desires that our beliefs have various natural features, e.g., that they be true, that they be part of a coherent set, that they be produced by reliable processes, and so on.

For practical reasons (i.e., boredom, frustration and the sense that we have better things to do), we might abandon attempts to argue with someone who refused to acknowledge any epistemic standards, and, as Ayer observes about some ethical disagreements, in some contexts might even resort to mere abuse.[63] But we would attribute failure of acknowledgment as a failure to *see* the truth about epistemic standards. And it's not merely that we *would* do this; rather, from an epistemic point of view, it's

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[63] Ayer notes that this is how we might respond to someone who fails to agree with us about some moral question, in spite of empirical and logical correction (*Language, Truth and Logic* 111).

true that we *should* do this. To deny this is, fundamentally, to accept a view that is unable to accommodate good reasoning, the common presumptions of epistemic judgments and seems to undercut whatever epistemic support it might have (which, if epistemic emotivism is true, is either none or only someone's emotional support).

Thus, I have argued that Ayer's case for ethical emotivism has deep and troubling implications for the cognitive status of epistemic discourse. I conclude that, for a variety of reasons, the standard, cognitivist, fact-stating interpretation of epistemic judgments *truthfully* should be maintained and Ayer's principles should be rejected. Thus, his case in favor of ethical emotivism is undercut.

3.5. C.L. Stevenson's Ethical and Epistemic Emotivisms.

I now turn briefly to C.L. Stevenson's ethical emotivism. Fortunately, Stevenson was not a positivist, so his perspective lacked that semantic and metaphysical baggage. His emotivism was much more developed and subtle than Ayer's, but the basic position was similar. He thought that ethical sentences typically *express* attitudes and invite others to share those attitudes. By "attitudes" he meant, "tendencies to be for or against something, as typified by liking, disliking, approving, disapproving, favoring, disfavoring, and so on."[64] On his view, attitudes contrasted with "beliefs." So, e.g., if A says that "*X* ought to be done" but B responds that "*X* ought not be done," then – according to Stevenson – they disagree in *attitude,* not in belief (however, this disagreement could be a consequence of a disagreement in non-moral belief, but not necessarily since Stevenson allows for fundamental disagreements in people's attitudes, i.e., what they approve of and so on).

Cognitivists agree that, sometimes (if not typically) when people judge something to be right or good, they have certain emotive attitudes about that thing and, were they to express their attitudes orally, they would often be trying to influence others. But Stevenson thought that the "function" of ethical sentences was the service of this expression: there wasn't a mere contingent connection. On his final analyses of "good,"

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[64] See Stevenson ("Ethical Fallibility" 199).

to say something is good is to say *that* one approves of something, but said in such a way that one's expression of approval would evoke favorable feelings in their hearer.[65]

This position might be illustrated by this case: suppose someone asks if some action was right. Someone might respond, "Well, I approve of people doing that!" This could be said in a way to *express* one's approval of what was done and attempt to influence others. This expression of feeling is a consequence of moral terms' meanings. Stevenson said, "The emotive meaning a word is a tendency of a word, arising through the history of its usage, to produce (result from) affective responses in people. It is the immediate aura of feeling which hovers about a word."[66] Given these meanings, moral judgments are not beliefs, since they have, strictly speaking, no emotive influence in themselves; rather, they are non-cognitive expressions.

Stevenson's analyses have been criticized as not capturing the correct meanings of moral terms, but I will not review those criticisms here.[67] I wish to only argue that his considerations in favor of emotivism also suggest epistemological emotivism. As I argued earlier about Ayer's emotivism, this is an undesirable consequence in itself and had problematic implications for the rational acceptability of emotivism. Stevenson's position (and its defense) has analogous difficulties.

Much of Stevenson's discussion consists of detailed descriptions of what it's like to engage in moral discourse and debate; e.g., what someone would say, how feelings might be roused, how one's interlocutor might respond, how confidence levels might change, when disputants might be satisfied and end the dispute, and so on. Thus, ethical discourse has what he calls a "dynamic" aspect.

If these observations were intended to provide support for emotivism (and if they are not, then they are merely descriptive moral psychology), they seem equally applicable to disagreements about what's epistemically justified or rational as well. One could do a phenomenology of epistemic disagreements and observe that heated emotions often get

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[65] See Stevenson (*Ethics and Language* 206-226). Some commentators (e.g., Hare [*Sorting Out Ethics* 103-104]) have suggested that Stevenson's initial incorporation of a naturalistic analysis, i.e., that the speakers likes (or dislikes) whatever is being evaluated, was unfortunate for the theory for all the reasons, discussed below, that naturalisms are problematic. Charitable critics have, therefore, understood Stevenson's theory as a pure expressivism, ignoring the naturalistic condition, which Stevenson eventually eliminated from his analysis.

[66] See Stevenson ("Emotive Meaning" 21).

[67] For a summary of these criticisms, see Feldman (*Introductory Ethics* 223-231).

expressed in debates over whether it's reasonable to believe empirical claims (about, for example, the causes of diseases, the utility of various research methods, the age of the earth, consequences of tax cuts, *philosophical* topics and many much more mundane issues). And calling a belief "irrational" or "unjustified" *can* be an attempt to influence others and "invite" them to share one's belief. There are, of course, many more "colorful" and obviously expressive terms of epistemic appraisal as well. If the fact that emotions often accompany a kind of discourse and it sometimes has a persuasive effect suggests an emotivist analysis of that kind of discourse, then epistemic language seems fit for that analysis as well.

Stevenson's main explicit argument for his emotivism was based on a claim about moral terms' alleged "magnetism." He asserted that, "A person who recognizes X to be 'good' *must* ipso facto acquire a stronger tendency to act in its favor than he otherwise would have had."[68] Following Hume's theory of motivation, he thought this showed that moral judgments are not beliefs since beliefs do not, in themselves, provide motivation to act or influence one's emotions. He thus concluded that moral judgments were emotive attitudes, not beliefs (or solely beliefs).

In a thorough discussion of these motivational issues, Russ Shafer-Landau concludes that, "We are misled if we move from the obvious fact that moral judgments are *usually* motivating, to the stronger claim that they *cannot fail to be*."[69] He suggests that Stevenson was misled in just this way. I agree and I might only add a brief response to arguments from motivation: I find them unmotivated. I just don't find any necessary, "internal" connection between moral judgment and motivational or affective considerations and find "amoralists," agents who make moral judgments yet are not affective moved or motivated by them, quite conceivable (and, in fact, actual).[70] Furthermore, explanations of moral motivation that acknowledge only a contingent relation between moral judgments and moral motivation seem much more plausible, all things considered.

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[68] See Stevenson ("Emotive Meaning" 13). Emphasis mine.

[69] See Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism: A Defense* 161).

[70] Michael Smith asserts that, "all else being equal, to have a moral opinion simply is to find yourself with a motivation to act." Unfortunately, he does not explain what might not be equal, but I simply deny his assertion: I lack this intuition and my moral experience suggests otherwise. See Smith ("Realism" 400).

However, for my purposes, it's only important to note that it seems that if someone were impressed by these "internalist" considerations in ethics, she might plausibly also think that there's some kind of necessary connection between epistemic judgments like 'p is not justified for me' and one's affective states as well. Consider someone, e.g., a religious believer, or a scientist, who comes to think that he doesn't have particularly good reasons for some of his beliefs. Someone convinced that the term "morally good" has a "magnetism" might easily, and plausibly, also think that this judgment of epistemic badness would *necessarily* be accompanied by a desire or motivation to not have that belief. Similarly, someone might think that judging a belief to be justified entails a desire to believe it.

If one thought either of these, then one might adopt something like a Stevensonian analysis of epistemic judgments and conclude that they too are not beliefs and that the meanings of epistemic terms is emotive. This position seems as motivated as the more common position regarding moral judgments. Thus, if motivational concerns suggest ethical emotivism, they suggest epistemic emotivism as well.

Finally, Stevenson considers a disappointed reader who wants to know the *truth* about whether something is morally good: she doesn't want mere correction about her judgments of various empirical facts or be subject to emotional persuasion, which is all Stevenson's position has to offer. In response, Stevenson asks:

> What is this truth to be *about*? For I recollect no Platonic Idea, nor do I know what to *try* to recollect. I find no indefinable property nor do I know what to look for. And the 'self-evident' deliverances of reason, which so many philosophers have mentioned, seem on examination to be deliverances of their respective reasons only (if of anyone's) and not of mine. I strongly suspect, indeed, that any sense of 'good' which is expected to both unite itself in synthetic a priori with other concepts and to influence interests as well, is really a great confusion.[71]

Later, he rejects what he calls the "ethical analogue of a fact," stating that he "find[s] nothing 'out there' for our attitudes to represent," copy or be faithful to.[72] Basically, he is

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[71] See Stevenson ("Emotive Meaning" 30-31)
[72] See Stevenson ("Ethical Fallibility" 212, 214).

saying that he cannot understand what a moral fact or property would be like or what a truth-maker for a moral judgment could be.[73]

> His position seems, in some ways, to echo Hume's. Recall his famous passage:
> Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice.* In whichever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it.[74]

Despite their differences, both Stevenson and Hume report that can only "see" natural properties; they can't find moral ones. But it seems that if one cannot find *moral* properties, epistemic properties, and facts about what one should and shouldn't believe, should be hard to find as well. This is because, to use Stevenson's terms, it seems equally hard to see what might be "out there" for our epistemic attitudes (or on the common, cognitivist presumption, our *beliefs* about what we *should* believe) to represent, copy or be faithful to. But, if that's so, it's not clear what could make it such that anyone rationally *ought* to accept Stevenson's emotivism, or Hume's views, or any other view. That too would seem to be a matter of feeling, not reason.

Thus, Stevenson's arguments from the phenomenology of moral debate, the 'magnetism' of good' and the mysteries of moral truth and properties suggest analogous arguments concerning epistemology: that there are no epistemic truths or properties and epistemic discourse is emotive. As I argued earlier, this is a difficult implication in itself, since it implies a view about the nature of epistemic evaluation that, for many reasons, seems false. And, like epistemic emotivism implied for Ayer's views, it makes it the case

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[73] Stevenson also says that he cannot understand what an intrinsically motivating fact would be. That *might* be incomprehensible, but cognitivists or realists needn't think that anyway.
[74] See Hume (*A Treatise of Human Nature* 468-469).

that it's untruthful to say we should believe the view, or any other view. Thus it again appears that the assumptions supporting ethical emotivism undercut their very defense. In light of, especially, these meta-epistemological considerations, I believe we should reject the premises that motivate what would be Stevenson's epistemological emotivism, and doing so leads us to reject his arguments for his ethical emotivism also.

3.6. Conclusion: Brief Remarks on Gibbard.

I have argued that the reasons Ayer and Stevenson offered in favor of their ethical emotivism suggest analogous epistemic emotivisms. This has important general epistemic consequences: first, since epistemic emotivism provides a possible way to understand the nature of epistemic evaluations, but a way that seems false and contrary to good reasons; second, it has interesting implications for the epistemic status of ethical emotivism since it implies that it's not true that it's a justified view.

As far as I know, Ayer and Stevenson did not realize that their arguments for ethical emotivism suggested these consequences. They seemed content confining emotivism to ethics and aesthetics, but I have argued that this is difficult since it naturally seems to spill into judgments about epistemology, probability, and critical reasoning. Insofar as Ayer and Stevenson, and most of their defenders, probably would not have been inclined to accept these kinds of emotivism, and for good reasons, this suggests that their cases in favor of ethical emotivism should be rejected.

Alan Gibbard, on the other hand, explicitly accepts both kinds of emotivism, or expressivism, that he calls "norm expressivism." Briefly, his view is that "[t]o call something rational is to express one's acceptance of norms that permit it. [It is] . . not to attribute some particular property to that thing—not even the property of being permitted by accepted norms."[75] He claims that since to call something rational is to endorse that thing, these judgments are expressive, neither true nor false. He claims that judgments with this "endorsing" aspect are not well captured by naturalistic or non-naturalistic (or intuitionistic) theories of moral judgment; he thinks his kind of expressivism does.

In my final chapter, I argue that the considerations Gibbard offers in favor of his "norm expressivism" are unconvincing and that, on Gibbard's own view, it is very difficult to understand why anyone *should* accept the view. Either it is true that someone

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[75] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 7, 8).

– given his or her understanding of the theory – should accept it, or it is not. If it is not, then, of course, it is not true that it should be accepted. But if it is true, that would seem to be inconsistent with the theory itself. Perhaps judgments about how logical inconsistencies ought to be avoided are mere expressions of acceptances of norms that don't permit some kinds of inconsistencies: perhaps there really are no truths like these. Perhaps judgments that these kinds of principles should be accepted are also expressions, as Gibbard says they are. And perhaps his views about endorsement provide *some* reason to reject all varieties of realism.

However, as I have argued, and will argue at greater detail later, it seems that we have better reasons than not, all things epistemic considered, to reject epistemic expressivisms than accept them. While Gibbard's view may avoid some of the objections to Ayer and Stevenson's theories, I will argue that it is not true that one *ought* to accept it. Gibbard's own norms *might* "permit" him to believe it, but that's no reason why anyone should to accept it, or come to share Gibbard's norms. Epistemic emotivism is as unwieldy in Gibbard's hands as with earlier emotivists. I argue for this this in my final chapter.

CHAPTER 4: Hare's Universal Rational Prescriptivism

4.1. Introduction.

For over half a century, R.M. Hare developed a non-cognitivist position on the nature of ethics called "universal prescriptivism."[1] Although Hare's position was developed in many books and articles over his long career, my focus will be on his most recent work, his final defenses of universal prescriptivism.[2]

The position and the arguments in its favor are complex due, in part, to the fact that universal prescriptivism is both a meta-ethic, i.e., a theory of the semantics, metaphysics, epistemology, logic and psychology of moral judgments, and a normative ethic, i.e., a theory about what morally ought to be done.[3] Thus, it's a view about what we are saying when we say that some action ought to be done, and a view about what we ought to do. Unlike many ethicists, Hare thought that answers to these two kinds of questions are highly interdependent. While I think Hare was right in thinking that these kinds of questions are so related,[4] I will argue that Hare's answers to both kinds of questions are mistaken. Thus, I argue that the arguments in favor of universal prescriptivism are unsound.

My first focus will be Hare's meta-ethic. He argues that universal prescriptivism provides a better account of the nature of moral judgments, compared to naturalist, intuitionist and emotivist meta-ethical theories. These theories attempt to explain what it is we are doing (or trying to do) when we make moral judgments: are we trying to state truths? If so, what kind of truths? Or are we (merely) expressing our emotions? Or are we doing something else?

At the time, philosophers who answered these questions saw them as intimately related to the question of the meanings of moral terms: different views on the meaning of

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[1] Although Hare resisted being called a non-cognitivist and an anti-realist, and said that there were perfectly good senses in which moral judgments were true and known (see Hare ["Universal Prescriptivism" 451]), I will still refer to his position as non-cognitivist and anti-realist because it is clearly inconsistent with moral realism.
[2] For Hare's early work, see Hare (*The Language of Morals*), Hare (*Freedom and Reason*) and Hare (*Moral Thinking*). His more recent work, which helpfully summarizes the main arguments of the early work, includes Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism") and Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics*).
[3] My uses of the terms "judgment" and "evaluation" are intended to be neutral between cognitivist and non-cognitivist understandings of moral evaluations.
[4] For arguments that one's meta-ethic has consequences for one's normative ethic, and vice-versa, see Sturgeon ("What Difference Does it Make").

moral terms yielded different understandings of what we are doing (or trying to do) when we use them. Hare argues that, although all these theories provide some true insights into the nature of the meaning of moral terms, universal prescriptivism is the superior theory. His argument for prescriptivism can be seen as, in part, an argument from the elimination of the other theories of the meanings of moral terms.

While, compared to ethics, there has been less concern about the meanings of moral terms and what we are doing (or trying to do) when we make epistemic judgments, comparable questions can be asked. I argue that Hare's objections to naturalist, intuitionist and emotivist meta-ethical theories suggest analogous objections to naturalist and intuitionist and emotivist meta-*epistemological* theories. I argue that since some of these implications for the meanings of epistemic terms are false, Hare's arguments against them are not sound. However, since parallel arguments to these were given against realistic meta-ethical theories, this shows that some of these arguments are not sound also. Thus, I defend *some* versions of moral realism from Hare's objections. As a moral and epistemic realist, I have no interest in defending emotivism of either kind, so my discussion of emotivisms will be limited to what is required to undermine Hare's arguments.

After I defend moral realism by way of objecting to Hare-like parallel arguments against epistemic realism, I consider the possibility that this defense fails and Hare-like arguments against epistemological naturalist, intuitionist and emotivism are sound. Suppose Hare showed that the meanings of epistemic terms are not that what an epistemological naturalist, intuitionist or even emotivist says they are. If that is the case, then, if epistemic terms are meaningful, we might be left with something like an epistemological universal prescriptivism. I briefly attempt to develop what such a view would look like, and then argue that is unreasonable to accept: we have better reason to think the meanings of epistemic terms are not what epistemic prescriptivism implies they are. But if it this is so, then the arguments in its favor (which are parallel to those given for ethical prescriptivism) are weak and so at least some of Hare's objections to ethical naturalism, intuitionism and/or emotivism are weak. Again, moral realism is defended by way of defending a kind of epistemological or intellectual realism.

Next I turn to Hare's normative ethics. The main concern of what we might call Hare's normative ethics was when a moral judgment, or a prescription, is "rationally acceptable."[5] Hare's focus was moral "oughts." Here I observe that Hare's position on what we morally ought to do, and what we should believe about what we morally ought to do, and the considerations he gives in its favor, seems to essentially depend on claims about non-moral oughts, in particular epistemic oughts and other intellectually evaluative language. This observation is similar to one of Sturgeon's observation about Hare's position on reasons for action:

> There is something anomalous about a position like Hare's . . noncognitivist about moral judgments but cognitivist and naturalist about reasons for action. For talk of reasons or rationality displays the same features—difficult controversy, plus a typical "endorsing" role for the terminology—that are supposed to support noncognitivism about morality; and it is hard to suppose that judgments about reasons for action (or for feeling) are so different in this respect from judgments about reasons for belief.[6]

I aim to exploit this anomaly to undermine Hare's position. The meaning of these non-moral oughts and evaluations needs to be understood: I argue that if they are understood in a manner comparable to how Hare understands moral oughts, then his overall position on the nature of morality is ultimately groundless: there is no reason why anyone should accept it. However, if Hare understands these oughts in a more robust, realistic manner, then there is no reason why moral oughts cannot, and should not, be understood in the same manner. So either Hare's position undermines its own epistemic justification, or it has room to understand moral values as a moral realist does, in which universal prescriptivism is false. Yet again, moral realism is defended.

4.2. Ethical and Epistemological Theory

Hare took himself to be developing an "ethical theory." What did Hare mean by that term? He explains:

> The expression 'ethical theory' covers attempts to say what we are asking when we ask moral questions. What do we mean by the words or the sentences that we

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[5] See Hare ("Foundationalism and Coherentism in Ethics" 191).
[6] See Sturgeon ("Critical Study of Gibbard" 403).

use in moral discourse: what is the nature of the moral concepts or of morality? If successful, these attempts will have implications for another, epistemological, question which also belongs to ethical theory: how should we set about answering our moral questions rationally? Or can there be no rational way – is it just a matter of how we feel or what the current mores dictate? On the other hand, if there can be rational discussion of moral questions, does it demand that there be a truth about them, or a set of facts, that can be discovered?[7]

To provide partial and quick answers to these questions, Hare thought that the meanings of moral words, sentences, and concepts is such that there can be, and *is*, a "rational" way to answer moral questions: their answers are *not* just a matter of how we feel or what current customs dictate. However, although there is a rational way to answer moral questions, he denied there are moral truths or facts to be discovered. So, to consider a possible example, if the question is whether any abortions are morally impermissible, Hare's answer *might* have been that at least some abortions are morally impermissible (and that this is answer is, or can be, "rational"), but that it's not, *strictly speaking*, *true* that some abortions are morally impermissible or a *fact* that some abortions are morally impermissible. This provides some negative understanding of his position (i.e., in terms of what it denies); a more positive understanding of how he understood judgment will be provided below.

If there are ethical theories, there are then, in the same sense, *epistemological* theories. Following Hare, we would think of the goals of epistemological theory, in this sense, in something like the following manner:

> The expression 'epistemological theory' covers attempts to say what we are asking when we ask epistemic questions. What do we mean by the words or the sentences that we use in epistemic discourse: what is the nature of the epistemic concepts? If successful, these attempts will have implications for another, *epistemological*, question which also belongs to epistemological theory: how should we set about answering our epistemic questions "rationally"? Or can there be no "rational" way – is it just a matter of what we happen to believe, or what most people believe? On the other hand, if there can be rational discussion of

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[7] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 451).

epistemic questions, does it demand that there be a truth about them, or a set of facts, that can be discovered?

A possible set of answers to these questions would include claims that the meanings of epistemic words, sentences, and concepts are such that there can be, and *is*, a "rational" way to answer epistemic questions: their answers are *not* just a matter of how we feel or what we currently believe. And, although there is a "rational" way to answer epistemic questions (say, e.g., about whether some belief is *rational*, or justified, or known, or some inference ought to be accepted, and so on), there are no epistemic truths or facts to be discovered. That is a possible view, and understanding and evaluating it (as well as its moral analogue) would require a fuller understanding of what is meant by "rational."

While many of these epistemic concerns in the above passage are familiar to epistemological inquiry, I should mention that some of the concerns about ethical theory do not obviously transfer to epistemological theory, in the analogous sense. First, while concerns about the nature of "morality" are common, it's not *obvious* what the analogous concerns are: they are certainly not the nature of "epistemology," since that is a philosophical discipline. Perhaps they are concerns about the nature of knowledge or justification, or what we ought to believe, or the nature of correct reasoning, or the nature of evidence. Perhaps the analogous concern would be the nature of all these concepts and all the claims we make using these concepts. Either of these options would make "epistemic theory," in *this* sense, quite similar to more common conceptions of epistemological theorizing, or those conceptions that many epistemologists would offer.

A second difference here, related to the epistemic upshot of a successful understanding of epistemic concepts, is that *epistemic* epistemology is a field of inquiry about itself whereas moral epistemology is an epistemic inquiry about another field or topic, viz. morality. Despite this difference, however, we can still ask epistemic questions about epistemic concepts and epistemic evaluations, e.g., whether we know that we know, and justifiably believe that we justifiably believe. Insofar as, on common views, epistemic judgments are of propositions with epistemic properties or predicates as constituents, and propositional knowledge is possible (and actual) there seems no deep reason why such epistemological knowledge or justified belief is not possible (and actual, if there is any knowledge or justified belief in the first place).

Thus, although there are differences between ethical and epistemological theory in Hare's sense, comparable questions can be asked. Since this is so, comparable answers might be given, although their plausibility might differ. And some comparable answers about the meanings of moral and epistemic terms have been given. Let us consider some of these answers and Hare's objections to them. Hare only asked questions about ethical theory, but questions very similar to his can be asked about epistemological theory.

4.2.1. Against Ethical and Epistemological Naturalisms

In this section I consider Hare's objections to ethical naturalism and intuitionism, the two kinds of what he calls "descriptivist" ethical theories. On these theories, the meanings of ethical terms are the same as the meanings of descriptive terms, terms for which their meanings are determined, as Hare says, entirely by the "syntax and truth conditions" of the descriptive expression.[8] The notion of a descriptive expression will be clarified below.

I argue that his arguments against this kind of ethical view suggest analogous arguments against epistemological naturalisms and intuitionisms. Thus, if Hare's arguments show that ethical descriptivisms are false, then they might show that epistemological descriptivisms are false also. And if epistemological descriptivisms are false, then epistemic terms, if they have meaning, have a meaning beyond their truth conditions. If this is so, that points us in the direction of an epistemic non-descriptivism, either an epistemic emotivism or an epistemic prescriptivism. Whether this implication should be resisted will be a focus of discussion later in the chapter.

First, let us consider naturalistic descriptivisms; later we will consider intuitionistic or non-naturalistic descriptivisms. In both ethics and epistemology, philosophers have argued that the meanings of ethical and epistemic terms are the same as, and exhausted by, the meanings of some naturalistic, in principle empirically-verifiable expression. These views are naturalisms. So, to say that an action is morally required is to say that it has some natural property (e.g., maximizing overall pleasure of all affected by the action), and to say some belief is justified or epistemically is to also to say that it has some natural property (e.g., being caused by a belief forming process that typically produces true belief) and there is no other aspect of their meaning: the terms'

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[8] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 42).

meanings are "wholly determined by [the] truth-conditions" for the naturalistic expression.[9] These theories are a kind of what Hare calls *descriptivist* theories: on them, to use a moral term is to describe something, i.e., to say that is has some specified property, in this case a natural one.

Some ethicists, especially those from the early twentieth century, said that claims that relate a moral (or epistemic) property and a naturalistic one are analytic and so reasonably believed *a priori*: e.g., some *might* have said that reflection on the *meaning* of "morally right" reveals a naturalistic analysis. Other philosophers, particularly contemporary ones, who accept naturalistic analyses of ethical and/or epistemological terms, have claimed instead that these are synthetic claims that are reasonably believed not merely by reflecting on their meanings; they might argue that their (alleged) truth is seen by way of some argument to the best explanation, or inductive generalization, or some manner beyond merely reflecting on the meaning of the terms. Hare argues against both these kinds of naturalism in ethics; he doesn't seem to find the latter kinds of naturalism to be much of an improvement over the former. He writes:

> I have put the distinction between naturalism and intuitionism in terms of the different kinds of truth-conditions they impose on moral statements. My distinction is therefore broad enough to cover both the old-style 'refutation of naturalism' due to Moore . . , and the new-style naturalism whose chief habitat is Cornell. . . [T]he way I have put the distinction will make it apply to both the old and the new naturalisms.[10]

Thus, Hare does not seem to care whether a naturalist claims that her theory is a theory about the meaning of moral terms or whether it is a theory that posits an equivalence between moral and naturalistic terms (or properties), and yet is not a statement of meaning. For the sake of argument, since Hare believes his arguments are not affected by this distinction, I will assume he is right.

One of Hare's arguments[11] against naturalist descriptivisms is that if they are true, then many cases of moral disagreement are, in fact, not moral disagreements; since this is

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[9] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 452).

[10] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 65).

a false implication, this shows the theories to be mistaken.[12] To illustrate this kind of argument, suppose person A and person B accept different naturalistic analyses or definitions of "morally required": each accepts a different meaning of the moral terms and what its naturalistic truth-conditions are. Person A believes that "morally required" *means* "produces the most pleasure of all alternatives" and person B believes that "morally required" *means* "will contribute to the stability of society." Suppose A and B are discussing the morality of a token act of abortion. If A says this act was morally obligatory and B says that this act was not morally obligatory, then it would appear that they disagree about whether this act was morally obligatory.

However, as Hare understands naturalism, it falsely implies that they do not disagree. This is because, if naturalism is true, according to Hare, then A said that *this act produced the most pleasure of all alternatives* and B said that *this act contributed to the stability of society*. If that is what was said, however, then they are not disagreeing: they are simply talking past each other about the morality of abortion, and they even might both be saying something that's true. Or their conversation might lead them to a disagreement about the meaning of the term "morally obligatory." However, since they are disagreeing about the morality of this abortion, and this abortion is not both morally obligatory and not morally obligatory, this shows that naturalism is a false view about the meanings of moral terms. Since they are disagreeing, they are each saying more than, out of one's mouth, that the abortion produces the most pleasure and, from the other's, that this abortion will not contribute to social stability.

Hare illustrates this idea in the following using an example of two cultures who accept different naturalistic analyses of "wrong":

> . . if we follow the naturalists, we shall have to say that the sense of the word in the two cultures are entirely different. This will have the consequence that they are not contradicting one another; for fighting might be wrong in the sense of the

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[11] In his over fifty years of writings on these issues, Hare gives more arguments than I discuss here. My focus, therefore, is on his most recent arguments since we might think that he thought these were the strongest and most important.

[12] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 52-55, 58-60).

word used in one culture, but not wrong in the sense of the word use by the other.

The people in each culture will be right in their own sense of the word "wrong."[13] However, if each party to the dispute is right, then they are not disagreeing. But they are disagreeing so Hare concludes that naturalisms are false: the meaning of a moral expression is, at least, not solely that of the meaning of a naturalistic express (since if it were, then these wouldn't be cases of disagreement), and so to evaluate something morally is not merely to say that it is has some natural property. Hare might allow that attributing a natural property is *involved* in making a moral evaluation, but that it is not the entire truth, as naturalism says it is.

One might respond to this kind of reasoning by claiming that, in the dispute between A and B, at most only one has the correct definition of "morally obligatory" since it does not mean *both* "produces the most pleasure of all alternatives" *and* "will contribute to the stability of society": only one of those definitions could be right, at most.[14] On Hare's understanding of naturalism and "meaning," however, this seems to be false or irrelevant since they both fully *mean* what they say, respectively, even though their views on the meanings of moral terms are inconsistent.

Assume, however, that there are correct understandings of the meanings of moral terms, that B's definition is correct and that this abortion will *not* contribute to the stability of society. If so, then this abortion is, apparently, not morally obligatory and so B has said something that's true. And, A, the utilitarian, apparently has said something that is false because she accepts a false naturalistic equivalence between "morally obligatory" and "maximizes happiness": she he the wrong view on what the moral term

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[13] See Hare (*Sorting out Ethics* 69). Here is another of Hare's examples of this point: "If one lot of people say that abortion is wrong and another lot says it is not wrong, they are not differing merely in their linguistic usage. They are expressing different moral opinions. This shows very clearly what is wrong with naturalism. What is wrong is that it pretends that what are in fact substantial moral principles are nothing more than linguistic rules. Naturalism confuses learning morals with learning a language. But the two are very different. If I have grown up thinking that abortion is wrong, I have acquired more than a mere linguistic skill. I have acquired a moral principle, an attitude to abortion." See Hare (*Sorting out Ethics* 69).

[14] My discussion below is intended to address the worry that the above arguments presuppose (falsely, the objector claims) that if naturalism is true, then, perhaps, "right" means "maximizes pleasure" *and* "right" means "is approved by all." The objector claims that "right" *cannot* mean both these things. However, as Hare seems to understand naturalism, it allows that, *for person A*, "right" can mean one thing and *for another person*, "right" can mean something incompatibly different. Hare's objection is to naturalisms *of this kind*: the objection is that they do not allow for genuine disagreements between people who understand the meanings of moral terms differently.

means. She just doesn't understand what 'morally obligatory' means and that's why her moral evaluation is mistaken. Hare's reaction to this case, which is founded on the assumption that there are objective meanings to words, seems to be the following:

> What has happened in this case is that a substantial moral principle, that one ought to do what will contribute to the stability of society, has got promoted into an analytic truth, true in virtue of the meaning of 'ought.' But it is not an analytic truth. If it were, then the [pro-abortionist] would win the argument because the [anti-abortionist] would be contradicting themselves, by saying something which the very meaning of 'ought' establishes as false.[15]

Hare's thought seems to be that the meaning of a term is determined by how people use it, but that no substantive moral conclusions follow from this. Everyone should be able to agree that, when some people use the term "right," they *mean* "maximizes utility," and when others use the term "right," they *mean* "contributes to social stability." That's just a descriptive truth about linguistic behavior and people's conceptual backgrounds. Hare seems to be thinking, however, that none of these facts entail that rightness *is* any of these natural properties, and so none of the (apparently) disputing parties in the cases above can say to the others, "You are mistaken in your moral evaluation *because* you do not accept my definition of the moral terms."

So he apparently understands naturalism as a view about what people mean by various terms, allowing that different people can accept different meaning and there's no question for which claim about meaning is correct. Something like that is needed to avoid a response in the cases above to the effect of, "Person B simply does not understand the meaning of 'morally obligatory' so what he says is false. But person A does understand the meaning and is saying something that is true, so at least they are not both saying something that's true." If meaning is understood on an individualistic basis, then the "talking past each other" objection holds and shows that there's more to the meaning of moral terms than the meanings of natural terms. If this kind of objection does not show this, then objections below will do so in a clearer manner.

Before we consider these further objections, we might observe that analogous epistemological naturalisms have the same results regarding disagreement. Consider one

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[15] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 453).

naturalist, person C, who understands "justified" as "produced by a reliable belief-forming process." Consider another hypothetical naturalist, person D, who understands "justified" as "highly probable relative to the believer's observation." Let us grant that both these latter expressions are naturalistic ones; they could, in principle, be empirically verified. Suppose that they are discussing whether some token believer is justified in accepting some specified proposition. C says that he is, and D says that he is not. On an epistemological naturalism analogous to the moral naturalisms that Hare discusses (and thinks he refutes), C has said that a reliable process produced this belief and D has said that this belief is not probable, relative to this believer's observations. These claims might both be true: let's suppose that they are. If so, however, then they are not disagreeing: they are merely talking past each other. But since they are disagreeing about whether this belief is justified, this shows that epistemological naturalism, in this sense, is false. The meanings of epistemic expressions are not solely the meanings of naturalistic expressions, and to evaluate something epistemically is not merely to say that it is has some natural property. Perhaps attributing a natural property is involved in making a moral evaluation, but that it is not the entire truth, as this kind of naturalism says it is.[16]

A number of other considerations suggest that moral and epistemic terms' meanings are not equivalent to merely naturalistic expressions. First, coming to believe that some action or belief has some natural property does not seem to "close" the question of whether it ought to be done, or ought to be believed. Frank Jackson expresses this concern:

> . . the open question argument has equal putative force in both contexts. Just as no amount of information couched in purely descriptive terms seems to close the question of what is morally right to do, so no amount of information couched in purely descriptive terms seems to close the question of what it is rational to believe or do. It always seems to make sense to ask, even after all the descriptive

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[16] Hare allows for moral terms to have a naturalistic meaning and that these can vary – these are the non-moral considerations that a moral judgment depends on, or those to which we will appeal to in making or justifying a moral judgment – but that the "prescriptive" meaning (explained below) is universal for moral judgments. It's this prescriptive meaning that enables people from different societies to disagree, even though they relate moral terms to different natural terms.

information is in, what one ought to do [or believe], independently of whether the ought is given a moral or [epistemically] rational slant.[17]

This suggests that the meanings of, on the one hand, naturalistic expressions and, on the other, moral and epistemic expressions are not the same. If they were, then the question of whether some belief with some specified naturalistic feature(s) are justified, or have some other epistemic status, would be "closed," in virtue of the very meanings of the terms. But these questions are not "closed", i.e., it can make sense for competent speakers to ask them about any naturalistic property that a moral or epistemic property might be identified with, so these kinds of naturalisms are false.

A final concern that some have used to argue against naturalisms involves the motivational factors that they find strongly connected to evaluative judgment.[18] To many it seems that if one judges that one is morally required to do some action, then one must have some motivation towards doing that action. This suggestion has some plausibility, since, intuitively, it would be odd for someone to judge that he really ought to do something, but feel no "pull" at all towards doing that action. Similarly, we might think that it would be odd for someone to judge that some belief (which she currently does not accept) *is* rational or justified for her to have, but feel no pull or desire towards believing that proposition.

These phenomena suggest, however, that naturalisms are mistaken. This is because, according to many critics of naturalism, describing something in naturalist terms does not even seem to have this related motivational impact: to say that something has some natural property is, apart from background desires, motivationally inert. This seems true with moral naturalisms, and it also seems true with epistemological naturalisms. To think that a belief is produced by a reliable process, or is in conformity with the design plan for some module of the mind, or is highly probable, or has any other naturalistic feature does not have the motivational impact that thinking it has some epistemic property does. To the former, naturalistic observations, an indifferent, "So what?" response is unremarkable; for the latter, epistemic observations, an indifferent, "So what?" response would be remarkable. Motivational indifference to natural properties is

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[17] See Frank Jackson ("Non-Cognitivism, Normativity, Belief" 100).
[18] I develop this concern in Chapter 5 in a discussion of Mackie's views.

understandable, but motivational indifference to moral and epistemic properties is puzzling. This suggests that the two kinds of terms don't mean the same thing and so that naturalisms are false.

Thus, Hare provides some good reasons to think that naturalistic ethical theories are mistaken, in terms of capturing what "we mean by the words or the sentences that we use" in moral discourse and the nature of these concepts. These good reasons, however, seem to apply to epistemological theories also: the meanings of epistemic terms are not identical to the meanings of naturalistic terms. Thus, if any descriptivism is correct, it would have to be a non-naturalistic, intuitionist descriptivism.

Before I move on to these theories and Hare's arguments against them, I want to note that Hare gives an argument against naturalistic descriptivisms that is peculiar and unconvincing. (He gives a similar argument against intuitionist descriptivisms also, and I will present this below, after I present his strong arguments against intuitionism.) He claims that naturalism "collapses" into moral relativism, that moral relativism is false, and so naturalism is false also.[19] He seems to think that if *any* kind of naturalism is true, then "what will determine the truth or falsity or moral judgments will be the particular truth conditions accepted in a given society as determining the moral words"[20] or "the linguistic usage of native speakers of the language."[21] This, of course, would make moral truth relative to, i.e., metaphysically determined by, community acceptances or linguistic practices. And this might imply that what's right in one society would be wrong in another, *merely* because of different linguistic usage and what moral concepts are accepted. Hare thinks this result is false and that even descriptivists would agree.

Hare seems to assume, however, that on any naturalism the majority's view on the truth conditions of a term *determines* the truth conditions of the term, or somehow makes the analysis true *by definition* and thereby unquestionable. While some naturalisms might accept that, it's not clear that all naturalisms do or would have to. Furthermore, since it seems that some naturalists could easily think that the majority of society fails to understand what a moral term means or has a false understanding of what it is for something to be right (obviously, many utilitarians think that), Hare's criticism is

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[19] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 65).
[20] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 453).
[21] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 66).

misplaced: it might refute some naturalisms, but not all kinds of naturalisms that reject this assumption. Since this argument against moral naturalism is pointless, and there are so many other arguments to try to show that moral (and epistemic) terms do not mean natural terms, I will not consider analogous versions of it against possible epistemological naturalisms.

4.2.2. Against Ethical and Epistemological Intuitionisms

Hare argues that ethical non-naturalism, or intuitionism, is mistaken: it provides a false view of the meaning of moral terms. Hare describes intuitionism as "the view that [the truth conditions of a moral statement] are the possession [by actions, people, etc.] of specifically moral, *sui generis* properties which cannot be defined without introducing some moral terms into the *definiens*."[22] So, one possible intuitionism might say that the truth conditions for "rightness" are determined by the truth conditions for "goodness," and that the truth conditions for something being good (or the meaning of "good") can only be stated in other moral terms, e.g., perhaps being *valuable*, being *admirable* for its own sake, being such that it *ought* to exist, and so on. These latter moral terms, intuitionists claim, either cannot be defined, or they can be defined only in other moral terms.

There are analogously non-naturalistic, or intuitionist, epistemological views. On these views, the truth-conditions or meanings of epistemological terms likewise cannot be defined without introducing some epistemic terms into the *definiens*. So, on a *possible* non-naturalistic view, the meaning of "justified," or its truth conditions, is the truth conditions of "there is sufficient evidence for," which might be further explicated in terms of "ought to be believed," which, in term, might be either claimed to be not definable or definable only in further epistemic terms. These explications might lead to a web of interrelated epistemic concepts, none of which can be defined, or can reasonably be defined, in purely naturalistic terms.

Hare's objection to intuitionism in ethics is that he thinks it implies an objectionable sort of moral relativism. He thinks intuitionism provides a relativistic-resulting understanding of how we *tell* that something is good that can lead to logically incompatible, yet equally truthful implications, which is impossible. He explains:

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[22] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 82).

> Intuitionism is the view that the truth conditions of moral judgments, which give them their meaning, consist in conformity with the data on which we have to base our moral reasoning, and with which its conclusions have to square; and these data are the common moral convictions that all morally educated people have. Since these convictions will vary from one society to another, the effect of intuitionism is, again, to anchor our moral reasoning to something relative to particular societies. True, there are convictions which are common to most societies; but there are others which are not, and no way is given by intuitionists of telling which are the authoritative data.[23]

He thinks that to support their moral judgments, "intuitionists are appealing to nothing objective, but only to their own and other people's thoughts, and these will vary from one person and society to another,"[24] thus resulting in an unacceptable relativism. He basically thinks that intuitionists' view about the meanings, or truth conditions, of moral terms gives rise to a false moral epistemology that shows that the view of meaning is mistaken. If the meaning of "morally good" cannot be identified with the meaning of any naturalistic expression, then to identify that some state or condition (e.g., being happy) is morally good is, on some intuitionisms, just to carefully consider that state and just "see" that it is good. Moral terms' meanings are such that well educated people can just *see* when something is right or good: that's how they know or reasonable believe that something is good. But different people and societies sometimes just "see" things differently and intuitionism provides no way to adjudicate these competing visions other than by appealing to further intuitions. To add to the problems arising from moral conflict, Hare claims that intuitionists claim moral infallibility: he thinks they claim that, "the mere occurrence of the experience [i.e., a moral intuition] guarantees the truth of the moral statement."[25] However, it is doubtful that an intuitionist *has* to think that, that they *should* think that (since they surely realize that intuitions can conflict, which casts strong doubt on infallibility) and that many intuitionists even did (or do) accept this kind of infallibility.

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[23] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 454).
[24] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 454).
[25] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 94).

To return to the initial questions of "ethical theory," asked above, Hare thus thinks that intuitionism implies that there is no way to answer our moral questions "rationally" since (on Hare's interpretation of ethical intuitionism) what's right and good is "just a matter of how we feel or what the current mores dictate," and so nothing rational. Since Hare thinks moral questions can be answered rationally, and thinks this irrationalism follows from the intuitionistic theory of the meaning and truth conditions of moral terms (i.e., he seems to think that accepting epistemological skepticism about moral judgments is inconsistent with accepting the intuitionistic theory of meaning or truth conditions), he rejects intuitionism.

Ethical intuitionists would likely resist this argument, in part by arguing that Hare oversimplifies and misrepresents their positions. For now, however, for the sake of argument I will concede that it is a good argument against intuitionism in ethics, or at least against the kind of position that Hare calls intuitionism. However, if it is a good argument, then the comparable argument can easily be made against the analogous epistemological intuitionism. How can we tell that a belief is justified, or that there is sufficient evidence for some claim, or that some belief is rational, or that some inference is warranted, or that some theory ought to be accepted, or some explanation is the one we should believe, or that some belief is, in fact, known? A kind of epistemological intuitionist would argue that, given the meanings of these epistemic terms, we just look, reflect and *see* whether something – typically, some belief and believer-in-context – has any of these properties: intuition tells us so. Intuition, or what might also be called rational insight, seems to be the best way to describe the phenomena of coming to see that some belief has some epistemic quality.

A Hare-like response to epistemological intuitionism is to observe that since intuitions about what's reasonable, justified and known sometimes vary from one society to another, and among individuals, the effect of epistemological intuitionism is, again, to anchor our epistemic judgments to something relative to particular societies and individuals. While there are epistemic convictions that are common to most people and societies, there are others that are not, and no way is given by intuitionists of telling

which the authoritative data are.[26] Some might respond to this by observing that different people might evaluate beliefs differently because they have different evidence and that all these evaluations might be correct because of the differing evidence.

To avoid the full effect of this response, for one, we can observe that some epistemological intuitions can vary even among people with very similar backgrounds and so, we might think, have similar evidence. Second, we can focus our attention to cases where we might think the evidence is about the same for all, e.g., philosophical examples where what it sought is a verdict on whether some belief would be justified or known, or a judgment on what the person should believe, and so on: here intuitions about what epistemic evaluation is correct would vary also. A defender of epistemological intuitions, a critic of the Hare-like response above, would have to argue that there are no cases of competing epistemological intuitions. It is unlikely that this argument would succeed; the arguments might imply some kind of false epistemological infallibilism, and they might also falsely imply that evidence is essentially "private" so we cannot see and evaluate others' evidence. So it seems that Hare-like doubts about epistemic intuitions are as strong as his doubts about ethical intuitions.

Although this gets complicated since it turns epistemic theory upon itself, one might think that epistemic intuitionism implies that (to return to the initial questions of "epistemological theory," asked above) there is no way to answer our epistemic questions "rationally" since (on this epistemological intuitionism that is analogous to Hare's understanding of ethical intuitionism) something's epistemic status is *just* a matter of how we feel (or how things seem to us) or what the current epistemic standards or popular opinion dictate. If this kind of view should be rejected, *and* it follows from the kind of intuitionistic theory of the meaning and truth conditions of epistemic terms that we are discussing here, then this view about the meaning and truth conditions of epistemic terms should rejected. Since I am assuming, for the sake of argument, that the analogous argument against ethical intuitionism showed ethical intuitionism to be mistaken, I will assume that this parallel argument shows epistemological intuitionism to be mistaken.

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[26] For arguments from these considerations to the conclusion that epistemic intuitions are unreliable, see Weinberg, Nichols and Stich ("Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions") and Nichols, Stich and Weinberg ("Meta-Skepticism: Meditations on Ethno-Epistemology").

Epistemological intuitionism yields a false epistemology, which shows it to be a false view about the meaning and truth conditions of epistemic terms.

Some of the arguments against naturalism in ethics and epistemology suggest similar arguments against intuitionisms. First, two intuitionists who appear to be engaged in moral debate might actually be talking past each other if each accepts a different version of intuitionism and so is attributing (or denying) a different *sui generis* moral or epistemic property. Since we might suppose that these intuitionists would really be disagreeing, this would show, at least, that there's more to making a moral evaluation than attributing a non-natural property. Second, if moral and epistemic judgments have an intrinsically motivational quality about them, then there is more to the meaning of a moral term than whatever meaning *sui generis*, non-natural terms have, if these terms stand only for non-natural properties. On standard views, properties (or apprehension of them) do not have any motivational influence on their own, so if moral and epistemic judgment necessarily involves motivational factors, then there is always something going on more than attributing properties.

Thus, the considerations Hare gives against naturalistic and intuitionistic ethical descriptivisms suggest comparable arguments against naturalistic and intuitionistic epistemological descriptivisms. Since we have tentatively found the arguments against epistemological descriptivisms to be *as strong as* the arguments against ethical descriptivisms (which we have presumed to be strong, in part to see how Hare reasons to his universal prescriptivism), we are left only with the option of some kind of epistemological non-descriptivism, if we wish to acknowledge that epistemic terms are meaningful in some manner. Some might take this as a *reductio* against Hare's arguments: if arguments parallel to those he gives against ethical descriptivism take us to epistemological non-descriptivism, then something has gone wrong. While this response might be attractive, I hope to bolster it with positive concerns against epistemological non-descriptivism, which I develop below, as well as the considerations against epistemological emotivism – another kind of non-descriptivism – that I developed in the previous chapter.

In rejecting ethical descriptivisms, both naturalisms and intuitionisms, Hare concluded that "there is a further element in [moral terms'] meaning, the prescriptive or

evaluative. . which is not so determined [by truth conditions], but expresses prescriptions or evaluations or attitudes which we assent to without being constrained by truth-conditions."[27] My concern now is whether a position on the meaning of epistemic terms that incorporates such a feature is plausible. I will try to develop such a position and argue that it is not plausible. If epistemological non-descriptivism is not plausible, this suggests that there is something wrong with the arguments above against epistemic descriptivisms. But if there is something wrong with Hare's arguments against epistemic descriptivisms, this suggests that there is something wrong with Hare's arguments against *ethical* descriptivisms, since the arguments are parallel.

I will argue that Hare's arguments against both ethical and epistemological intuitionism are weak. The acceptability of a kind of ethical intuitionism is further bolstered by the fact that Hare's position *presupposes* a kind of epistemological intuitionism, and its defense depends on it. Since epistemological intuitionism (a version of epistemic realism) is an acceptable view (independently, and even according to Hare, apparently), ethical intuitionism (a version of moral realism) would seem to be acceptable also. The arguments against it were not as strong as they might have seemed and so Hare does not provide good reason to reject moral realism.

4.2.3. Against Ethical and Epistemological Emotivisms.

Before we consider Hare's preferred version of ethical non-descriptivism, we should briefly consider his arguments against emotivism: our treatment can be brief since I have no interest in defending emotivism of any kind. Furthermore, I developed and criticized versions of epistemic emotivism in my previous chapter.

According to Hare, emotivists believe that moral judgments are "the expressions of irrational or at least non-rational attitudes of approval or disapproval" and that "the only questions one can reason about are factual ones."[28] He claims emotivism implies then there can be no rational argument about fundamental moral questions: people have their emotional responses and no responses are better or worse than any others, none are more or less rational than others, and there is no way to argue that someone's responses are mistaken (because they cannot be mistaken). Emotivists like Ayer and Stevenson

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[27] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 452).
[28] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 455).

agreed, but since Hare thinks that there can be rational arguments about ethics, in virtue of the meanings of moral terms, Hare thinks emotivism is false: he calls it an "irrationalist" doctrine.[29] This assessment seems correct. If to judge something to be wrong or right is just to *express* one's positive emotions about it, as the "Boo! Hooray!" caricature of emotivism has it, then it is not at all clear how one might reason about fundamental moral matters.

In my previous chapter, I argued that the considerations Ayer and Stevenson give in favor of their emotivisms suggest epistemic emotivism also. I argued that we have better reason to reject such a view than accept it, once we reflect critically on what seems true about epistemic evaluations. I argued that this too is an irrationalist doctrine, since it implies that judgments about what's justified, known and reasonable are only expressions of emotion. That this is an irrationalist theory becomes is especially clear when we apply it to our understanding of the nature of argumentation. If epistemological emotivism is true, then to judge that some claims provide *a good reason* for another claim, or that some set of premises *justifies* a position (which is not merely to say that the position is a logical consequence of the premises), is just to express one's emotions in favor of having some belief, and to disagree with these assessments is just to express contrary emotions. Jonathan Kvanvig offers a related observation:

> [A]rguments and explanations presuppose the truth of epistemic norms, and if the norms themselves are given nonalethic status, then the explanations and arguments are simply defective in virtue of the fact that their presuppositions are not true. Good arguments presuppose logical and epistemic norms.[30]

In sum, if epistemological emotivism is true, then we are in fundamental error about the nature of reasoning, since there are no truths about how we ought to reasons: there are merely different emotional preferences that people have about accepting and rejecting various complex claims involving logical relations, none of which are better or worse than any other. This is a consequence that is hard to accept. If Hare accepts it, it will surely make a difference for how we should understand his insistence that we should be consistent in our judgments, as we shall see.

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[29] See Hare (*Sorting out Ethics* 117). Here Hare also mentions Gibbard's views and states that, in his view, they are not "irrationalist" like Ayer and Stevenson's are.
[30] See Kvanvig (*The Value of Knowledge* 176).

Fortunately, however, there is little antecedent reason to accept epistemological emotivism, since there is little to recommend the premises that might be given in its defense (and so there is little to recommend the premises given in favor of ethical emotivism). Fortunately, also, however, if epistemological emotivism were true, then there would also be little or no reason to accept it. If the doctrine were true, then to say that "epistemological emotivism is the most reasonable view," or one "we ought to accept," would be for that someone to merely express his or her positive emotions about our believing epistemological emotivism, or to say that to try to cause us to accept the view. But it wouldn't be true that, in response to such expressions, we *should* change our views, so there would be no problem in ignoring such expressions. Thus, epistemological emotivism generates many puzzling implications, none of which have any force beyond people's emotional expressions. In my previous chapter, I presented a number of reasons to think that epistemological emotivism is false, all of which are applicable here also.

Since these irrationalist implications follow from premises given in defense of ethical emotivism, this provides further reason to reject the view, and Hare might have agreed. Hare had more arguments against emotivism, but since I have no interest in defending emotivism, I will move on to his preferred version of non-descriptivism.

4.3. *"Rational"* Universal Prescriptivism?

Thus far, I have argued that Hare's arguments against ethical descriptivisms suggest analogous arguments against epistemological descriptivisms, and that if the former are sound, then the latter are sound. Someone might respond that since arguments against epistemological descriptivism are not sound, the arguments against ethical descriptivism are not sound either. For example, someone might think that a kind of epistemological intuitionism is true: there are some propositions which, when examined carefully, one can just "see" that they are justified and that they ought to be believed, just like (some might argue) that there are some states of affairs that that one can just "see" are morally good.

Although Hare thought otherwise, an advocate of this kind of epistemological and ethical intuitionism could be a fallibilist; she can, and should, admit that she might be mistaken in her intuitions: she can be open to the possibility that she has missed something and isn't seeing things as they are. If this intuitionist perspective is a viable

one about epistemic evaluations, then it would seem to be a viable one about ethical evaluations. If that is so, then Hare has not refuted ethical intuitionism.

I will attempt to develop this response in light of critical discussion of Hare's universal prescriptivism. I will argue that this position and the considerations Hare gives in its favor support this response. To do this, I must explain the main feature of universal prescriptivism.[31] The view is not as easy to present because it is not always ideally clear whether Hare intends to state, on the one hand, how moral terms *are* used and how they *can be* used and, on the other hand, how they *should* be used. I will argue that if Hare has claims about how they *should* be used, these claims ultimately undermine his ethical non-descriptivism.

However, if the position has no claims about how we should use moral language, then his position is a merely descriptive "logic" of the relations between moral terms and so has no implications for which moral evaluations we ought to accept, or how *we ought to reason* in light of our understanding of these logical relations between moral terms. If that's true, then universal prescriptivism does not appear to be an ethical theory in the sense Hare claims it is. Furthermore, Hare does not seem to take himself as a mere "moral logician": he does not seem to take himself to be merely observing various logical relations among moral evaluations, but never saying what judgments people ought to accept. Either way, universal prescriptivism is so doubtful that it should not be seen as a viable alternative to some version of moral realism.

One of Hare's main concerns is showing that moral thinking can be a "rational" enterprise. Exactly what he means by "rational" is never entirely clear (and so I must work with an intuitive, undefined notion of the term, although I think it can often be linked to a distinctly epistemic sense of the notion), but he thinks moral thinking can be rational, i.e., we can reason about the acceptability of various moral evaluations and principles because of the meanings of moral terms.

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[31] Another feature of prescriptivism is its motivational internalism. See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism 457-458): "A speech act is prescriptive if to subscribe to it is to committed, on pain of being accused of insincerity, to doing the action specified in the speech act, or, if it requires someone else to do it, to willing that he do it." Although this would establish, on standard assumptions about motivation, that moral evaluations are not (purely) beliefs, since my arguments below do not concern motivational issues, I will not address them any more.

Hare thought that the meanings of moral terms are such that they are "governed by logic."[32] This seems to be a descriptive claim; it is a claim that there can be logical relations between moral judgments: moral judgments might logically imply other moral judgments in conjunction with other moral judgments and non-moral premises. Hare thinks, as we have seen, that moral judgments are not descriptions; he thinks they are closely related to commands, or are a kind of command. And commands can have logical implications. Consider this set of sentences:

(1) Take all the boxes into the house.

(2) This is a box.

(3) Take this box into the house.

Sentence (3) is, in some sense, a logical consequence of (1) and (2), even though (1) is a command and so is neither true nor false. The claim that *this box should not go into the house* would be, in some quite plausible sense of the term, inconsistent with (1): they can't be jointly performed or satisfied.

As mentioned above, Hare thinks that moral judgments, which he calls "prescriptions," are like commands, i.e., that they are commands with special features that not all commands have (these features will be explained below). Consider the moral judgment "We ought not to hurt babies for fun." Hare would understand this judgment as *something* like the following:[33]

(1) No hurting babies for fun, please.

Consider this empirical, descriptive claim:

(2) Maggie is a baby.

And from (1) and (2) it follows, logically, that

(3) No hurting Maggie for fun, please.

Sentence (3) is, in some sense, a logical consequence of (1) and (2), even though (1) a command is neither true nor false. The claim that *Baby Maggie ought to be hurt for fun* is, in some sense, inconsistent with (1).

For those who would claim that, since a "premise" in these "arguments" is neither true nor false, the "argument" cannot be "valid" (or that it isn't even an argument, strictly

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[32] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 42).

[33] This locution is one concrete way to present what Hare thinks someone *means* when they make a moral judgment. This meaning can be presented with alternative formulations of the imperative, however.

speaking), Hare would likely suggest that this person needs to expand their notion of argument and validity beyond the common merely truth-functional notions. The common definition needs to be amended to reflect the fact that there are valid logical relations among prescriptions.

So Hare's basic claim is that there are logical relations among moral terms, and that set of sentences containing a moral prescription can be logically inconsistent or inconsistent. He writes:

> . . if (as is certainly the case) there can be logical inconsistency between contradictory prescriptions, someone who wants the totality of the imperatives, or in general prescriptions, that he (or she) accepts to be self-consistent will have to observe the rules which govern consistency.[34]

An important thing to note about this claim, however, is that it is only the observation that for a set of prescriptions to be consistent, these prescriptions have to conform to the logical rules that determine consistency. That's just to say that someone who wants consistency will need to have consistency to get consistency. These are uncontroversial claims about the logical nature of prescriptions. However, they are not claims about *prescribers*, or the people who make prescriptions. *Should* they want consistency in their imperatives, or *ought* their imperatives be consistent, or *should* they believe that their imperatives *should* be consistent? These questions need to be explained, but both affirmative and negative answers are not helpful for Hare. I develop this response in a number of ways below, in response to a variety of Hare's claims about consistency.

Negative answers to the question of whether our imperatives should be consistent suggest that, ultimately, all Hare has done is observed the natural fact there are logical relations among imperatives, but has not claimed that recognition of these relations should influence our behavior or which prescriptions we should accept. If that is all Hare has done, however, his theory has no implications for which moral evaluations we should accept. If that is so, then Hare (and others) have been very mistaken about the reach and power of his theory. His theory is only this: "here's what's consistent with what, but I have nothing to say about what you should do." This wasn't Hare's theory.

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[34] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 455)

If observation of these natural, logical features should influence our behavior, however, that might vindicate naturalism in ethics and epistemology because that would suggest that natural features can be identified with an evaluative characteristic. If this is true, this undercuts Hare's main arguments against ethical naturalism and, by extension, epistemological naturalism.

And if people *should* want consistency in their imperatives, i.e., their imperatives *should* be consistent, Hare has a dilemma on his hands: if this "should" is a moral "should," then, on Hare's view, it's an imperative. We can ask whether we, morally, should accept it. This question might take us down a regress of further moral "shoulds," i.e., moral imperatives, which are based on only further imperatives. This would be a puzzling consequence, and might also lead to the kind of relativism that Hare (and others) likely reject. The reason for this relativism is that imperatives are not an objective feature of the world: rather, they originate in people and people make different imperatives. If moral judgments were based in imperatives "all the way down" and different imperatives can be accepted all the way down, the incompatible prescriptions might be equally justified. This is hard to understand, and Hare's view is designed to avoid this result. So it is doubtful that moral imperatives depend on further moral imperatives "all the way down," so to speak.

If, however, people *should* want consistency in their imperatives, i.e., their imperatives should be consistent, and this is not a moral should, then we can ask what kind of should it is. Hare seems to describe it as a "should" of "rationality," albeit of an unspecified kind. We can then ask if these kinds of "shoulds" are imperatives/commands, or if they are ever literally true. If they are merely imperatives or commands, then "rationality" is founded solely on commands. Again, this is a counterintuitive and puzzling consequence, which might lead to a kind of relativism about rationality, which Hare seems to reject.

If, however, if it is literally true, as a matter of "rationality," that we *should* have consistent beliefs and imperatives, then there are going to be facts or properties that make propositions that express these truths true. But if there are such facts and properties, then, some kind of "rational" or epistemological realism is true and the arguments against versions of it, developed earlier, are not sound. But if some kind of epistemological or

rational naturalism or intuitionism is true, it is hard to see why an ethical naturalism or intuitionism could not also be true. These morally realistic views claim that there are moral facts or properties. Hare states, like Stevenson and Hume, however, that "as soon as we start asking what it is for a moral quality or fact to exist in the world, we get lost" (p. 451). But if we "get lost" looking for moral qualities and facts, we get equally lost looking for the epistemic, intellectual, or "rational" facts that Hare's position seems to appeal to in generating practical implications. But if these kinds of facts or qualities *can* be found, then it would seem that moral qualities can be found also.

Hare says something that might be seen as a response to the kind of objection I am raising to his position. He says:

> [T]here do not have to be moral facts in the world in order for us to develop a theory of moral reasoning any more than there have to be logical facts to substantiate logical reasoning. The necessities which constrain our reasoning are formal necessities.[35]

Logical claims are made true by formal necessities. However, claims (if they are claims) to the effect of *our beliefs ought to conform to these formal necessities*, or *we are unjustified in accepting claims that do not conform to them* are not formal necessities. If claims like these pertaining to belief are true, they are not true in virtue of form or syntax. If they are true, however, then there are aspects of the stance-independent world that make them true. And if there are such aspects of the world to make claims like these true, then it would seem that there could also be aspects of the world that can make it the case that some moral judgments are literally true. If that is so, then Hare's arguments against descriptivism are unsound.

Related to the claim that moral prescriptions can be in logical relations is Hare's claim that moral judgments are "universalizable." Hare explains this notion in the following manners:

> A statement is universalizable if and only if it commits anyone who assents to it, on pain of inconsistency, to accepting that there is a universal principle which holds, and which applies equally to any situation exactly similar in its universal properties. . . [Universalizability] has the consequence that one cannot without

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[35] See Hare (*Sorting Out Ethics* 7).

> self-contradiction say that someone ought to do something in a situation, but that a precisely similar person ought not to do it.[36]

Again, we see in this statement a *descriptive* claim about the logical relations that hold between prescriptions and the "universal principles" that hold between them. However, Hare *seems* to assume that someone's assenting to inconsistent prescriptions would be that is bad and ought to be avoided: perhaps it is for this reason that he describes inconsistency as a "pain," not a merely neutral state. However, if inconsistency is bad and ought to be avoided, and this is literally true or a fact, then that might suggest that all the arguments against there being moral truths or facts were not unsound after all.

> Let us consider another statement of universalizability:
>
> One cannot with logical consistency, where *a* and *b* are two individuals, say that *a* ought, in a certain situation specified in universal terms without reference to individuals, to act in a certain way, also specified in universal terms, but that *b* ought not to act in a similarly specified situation. This is because in any 'ought' statement there is implicit a principle which says that the statement applies to all precisely similar situations. This means that if I say, 'That is what ought to be done; but there could be a situation exactly like this one in its non-moral properties, but in which the corresponding person, who was exactly like the person who out to do it in this situation, ought not to do it' I contradict myself. This would become even clearer if I specified my reasons for saying why it ought to be done: 'It ought to be done because it was a promise, and there were no conflicting duties.[37]

Should we not contradict ourselves? If not, then there's no problem doing so: Hare has made the novel observation that moral commands can contradict and be consistent, but it is not true that consistency should be sought, or that consistence is better than inconsistency. If we should avoid contradicting ourselves, and we should strive for consistency, and these claims are literally true, i.e., they do not consistent in someone's urging "All commands being consistent, please!" then it would seem that there can be room for moral judgments being straightforwardly true also.

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[36] See Hare ("Foundationalism and Coherentism in Ethics" 192-193).
[37] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 456).

Let us consider one final statement of Hare's, to better understand the view:

These purely logical features of moral statements have the consequence that if we accept a set of universal moral principles, and accept that the facts of the situation are as they are, then we cannot avoid assenting, at the bottom end of the structure to a set of singular prescriptions for actions. To refuse to assent to these would be to involve ourselves in self-contradiction. . . [W]e are constrained to assent to the prescriptive conclusions if we assent to the premises. If we do not want to assent to the conclusions, we have to alter the premises; and if we do not want to do that, we have to put up with the conclusion.[38]

Again, we can ask whether Hare is merely making a descriptive point about the logical relations among moral concepts, or if he is saying that it is *better* for one's prescriptions to be in one logical condition (e.g., consistency) over another (e.g., inconsistency, especially recognized as such). If he is merely doing the former, then his position has no substantive implications for how we ought to reason about moral matters. But if he's doing the latter, and making a "rational" evaluation, *and* this is not itself a neither-true-nor-false prescription, then, again, we might wonder why moral evaluations couldn't be either true or false also, and so either ethical naturalism or intuitionism is true.

What I have tried to argue is that, if Hare's position is true, then there are truths or facts about rationality. This notion of rationality has been left undefined (since Hare does not define it), but it seems to be related to epistemic or intellectual evaluations. And I have suggested if epistemic or intellectual evaluations can be literally true on Hare's position, then that would make room for moral evaluations being literally true. That would, of course, imply that Hare's position is false. I have also argued that if Hare's position does not allow for epistemic or intellectual truths or facts, then it is an irrationalist position: if that is so, then it should not be accepted either.

I have not yet considered, however, what an epistemic prescriptivism would look like. Alan Millar and Jose Luis Bermudez suggest a characterization of such a view. They explain:

On this account if, for example, you condemn someone's reasoning as irrational you are saying, in effect, 'Let me not reason that way if in his shoes.' Two people

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[38] See Hare ("Foundationalism and Coherentism in Ethics" 193).

could agree on the naturalistic properties possessed by a thinker but disagree on whether that thinker is rational. What would they be disagreeing about is how to reason in that thinker's shoes. But the disagreement may not be one which can be resolved by appeal to norms which are treated as objectively authoritative by everyone.[39]

This is a possible view that is somewhat similar to Hare's prescriptivism since it yields epistemic imperatives. It is hard to see how it could be conclusively refuted, especially in what some would describe as a non-question begging manner, as the theory might call into question some of the most basic assumptions about reasoning. The final claim of the passage is unclear: perhaps everyone would not *treat* some epistemic or intellectual norms as objectively authoritative: perhaps there are no norms that everyone would *treat* as objectively authoritative. But those are empirical claims about people's acceptances.

The important question is whether there *are* epistemic or intellectual norms that are objectively authoritative for everyone. The common view is that there are; and if there are not, then some kind of intellectual or epistemic relativism or nihilism would be true. Elsewhere in this work I discuss these kinds of views and reject them, in part because they are epistemically self-undermining: if they are true, then it's not (objectively) true that they are reasonable to hold. I also presented reasons to regard them as false: there are many epistemic phenomena for which they do not easily jibe with and the realist picture more readily accommodates.

However, since there is little positive reason to accept the kind of Hare-like epistemic view that Millar and Bermudez suggest (but do not defend), then it is reasonable for most people, probably, to continue believing that there are epistemic norms that are objectively authoritative for everyone. However, if the semantics, metaphysics and epistemology of these claims can be adequately secured, then comparable semantics, metaphysics and epistemology for moral claims can likely be adequately secured also.

4.4. Normative Ethics and Normative Epistemology.

In my introduction I said I would discuss Hare's normative ethic, i.e., his theory on which moral judgments we ought to accept and what we morally ought to do. This is useful and

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[39] See Millar and Bermudez (*Reason and Nature* 9).

necessary since there are normative epistemologies, or theories on which beliefs ought to be accepted. Hare's theory about what we ought to do stemmed from his view about universalizability. Basically and *very, very roughly*, he thought that like cases should be treated as like cases and so, given the "logic" of moral terms, we should make the moral evaluations we would be willing to make, were we in the shoes of anyone affected by our actions. In effect, it's a kind of "golden rule" ethics. Hare states it simply:

> What maxims we can adopt, or what moral judgments we can accept, will then depend on what we are prepared to prescribe for all like situations (whether, for example, were we the unfaithful husband or his deserted wife.[40]

This is not entirely clear since Hare does not seem to want to be making only a descriptive claim about what maxims we "can" adopt, but rather which maxims we *should* adopt. The idea is that if one can accept a principle and its results from all affected perspectives, then it is "rationally" acceptable, and if, and only if, it is rationally acceptable should one accept it. Hare got into trouble with the "can" in this claim because it seems possible that someone *could* accept principles that would cause him or herself severe harm: e.g., perhaps a committed Nazi would be willing to accept principles that would require him to be executed even if he turned out to be a Jew. Hare's theory might not have adequate resources to say why this is a bad principle; if so, some would regard this as a refutation of the view. This might lead us to reconsider morally realistic positions, and re-assess Hare's arguments against them.

My objections to this kind of "golden rule" ethics is not that it is false, but that, first, if it is true and, second, we intellectual ought to believe it, then it is hard to see why there couldn't be true moral evaluations also. If we ought to judge like cases as like cases and this is true – it's not merely a prescription or an expression of emotion – then it is hard to see why there couldn't be true moral evaluations also. If Hare's theory is epistemically justified for somebody or rationally ought to be believed by somebody, then there are facts of this kind also. But, as I argued earlier, if we recognize evaluative facts of this kind, then it's hard to see why there could not be facts of a distinctively moral kind as well.

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[40] See Hare ("Universal Prescriptivism" 460).

If, on the other hand, it's not true, or neither true nor false ought that one to be consistent, then Hare's position might be ultimately groundless. If no evaluative "oughts" or "shoulds" of *any* kind are true, the implications of this would be astounding. I've argued, however, that we have good reasons to think that some evaluative judgments are true. I think that these often simple reasons are far stronger than the complex ones Hare gives in favor of his universal prescriptivism. Thus, while the evaluative world *might* be prescriptions "all the way down" so to speak, we have better reason to deny this than accept this. And if is correct, then while we might find great epistemic value in golden-rule considerations and trying to see things from others' points of view, the truth might well be these maneuvers can put us in a better position to *see* the independent moral facts.

4.5. Conclusion.

I have argued for all of the following: first, that Hare's universal prescriptivism and the arguments in its favor presuppose epistemic or intellectual evaluations: Hare's understanding of the nature of moral evaluations depends on an understanding of epistemic or intellectual evaluations. I have argued that Hare's arguments against ethical descriptivism suggest analogous arguments against epistemic descriptivism. I have argued that understanding epistemic or intellectual evaluations in a non-descriptivist manner leads to rational unacceptable consequences; my discussion from the previous chapter on Ayer supports this also. Since epistemic evaluations are meaningful and rational, they therefore should be understood along descriptivist lines. But since this is so, then moral evaluations can be understood along descriptivist lines also. Thus, the arguments against ethical descriptivism are not as strong as Hare thinks: the various considerations he has offered against these theories can, and should be, resisted.

CHAPTER 5: Mackie's Epistemic Nihilism

5.1. Introduction.

John Mackie argued that no positive moral judgments are ever true, that every positive attribution of a moral property is false.[1] This is because, he argued, there are no moral properties, no moral facts, to make them true: nothing in the "fabric" or "furniture of the world" "backs up" and "validates" any moral claim.[2] His thesis was that "there do not exist entities or relations of a certain kind, objective values or requirements, which many people have believed to exist."[3]

Mackie's position is called "moral nihilism" because it effectively annihilates morality. If it is true, then nothing is morally right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, or virtuous or vicious. If true, the world is without moral value. We make moral judgments, but they uniformly fail to state truths since there is no metaphysical foundation of morals, nothing for them to correspond to or represent.[4]

His view implies that any version of moral realism is false. Moral realists believe that moral judgments are sometimes true and that they are made true by moral properties or facts that are "objective." This objectivity of moral properties is most readily characterized in the negative: they are *not* constituted or determined by the attitudes of any actual or idealized believer(s) towards any moral proposition; they are ontologically independent of that.

Here I examine Mackie's arguments for his moral nihilism. They focused only on moral evaluations, but I investigate what their arguments' major premises suggest for

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[1] What is meant by "positive" is illustrated with the following: on Mackie's view to say, "Pleasure is morally good," is to say something false since there is no property of *being morally good* for anything to have. However, to say, "Pleasure is *not* morally good," is to say something that's true, on Mackie's view.

[2] See Mackie (*Ethics* 16, 22). This is the common interpretation of Mackie's overall thesis. Other passages of his, however, suggest that he thinks there are moral properties (e.g., to be good is to be "such as to satisfy requirements of the kind in question") but that nothing has these properties and so all (positive) moral judgments are false. Here I ignore this interpretation since all other contemporary commentators do so as well and it does not make a substantive difference to Mackie's overall thesis that moral judgments are founded in an erroneous metaphysical presupposition.

[3] See Mackie (*Ethics* 17).

[4] Mackie realizes that we can distinguish acts that are typically called "cruel" from those typically called "kind" on their basis of their empirical, descriptive differences. He considers this a "hard fact," but asks "is it an equally hard fact that actions which are cruel in such a descriptive sense are to be condemned?" See Mackie (*Ethics* 17). Since he thinks there is no property "deserving condemnation," his answer is no. Similarly, he thinks that we distinguish justice from injustice but denies that "there is any objective requirement to do what is just and refrain from what is unjust." See Mackie (*Ethics* 27).

non-moral evaluations,[5] focusing on epistemic or intellectual judgments and principle (*not* moral judgments and principles) such as, but not limited to:

"You *should* believe this."

"You *ought* to believe that."

"This is *evidence* for that."

"This is *good, sufficient*, evidence for that."

"This belief is *justified*, or *reasonable*, or *known*."

"There is *good reason* to believe that."

"You *should* believe something if, and only if, you have *good evidence* for it."

"Given that you believe this, you *ought* to also believe that."

"This implies that, so you *should* not believe this."

I argue that Mackie's premises suggest an understanding of evaluative epistemic judgments that is comparable to his understanding of the nature of moral judgments. Thus, his arguments in the moral realm suggest analogous arguments for *epistemic* nihilisms: that epistemic judgments are never true because there are no epistemic properties or facts. Whether his position and any arguments that might be given on its behalf *should* be accepted (an epistemic judgment in itself) will be a focus of this chapter.

I will argue that his arguments should not be accepted, for many of the reasons I articulated in my previous chapter. There I provided reasons to think that meta-epistemological views that imply that epistemic judgments are *neither true nor false* are false. The reasons I developed in the previous chapter were reasons to think that epistemic judgments are sometimes true; these reasons – or many of them – imply that positions like Mackie's are false and the arguments for them unsound. If we have better reason to think that epistemic judgments are sometimes true than never true, then we have good reasons think that Mackie-style arguments for an epistemic nihilism are not sound. The arguments from my previous chapter, as well as my discussion of Mackie's views in this chapter, provide support for these conclusions about what we should think about moral and epistemic nihilisms.

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[5] Mackie says that his arguments would apply to non-moral values, but he only mentions aesthetic values as an example of non-moral values. See Mackie (*Ethics* 15). I suspect that Mackie would have resisted

5.2. Mackie's Conception of Moral Properties.

Earlier non-cognitivists, like Ayer, Stevenson and Hare, agreed with Mackie that moral judgments are never true, but they believed this for reasons different than Mackie's. They argued that the meanings of moral terms are such that, when one makes a moral judgment, one is doing something other than attempting to describe, or attribute properties, or state a proposition, and, thus, that sentences like these are neither true nor false. Of course, if moral judgments are neither true nor false, they are never true.

These non-cognitivists' arguments often hinge on controversial semantic claims about the nature of moral language and detailed, sometimes tedious, analyses of how people use it. Mackie, however, described his view as an "ontological thesis, not a linguistic or conceptual one."[6] Unlike the non-cognitivists (but like the realists), he pretty much accepted moral language at face value: he did not delve deeply in the questions of meaning that, he thought, distracted the non-cognitivists from the real issue. He thought the real issue is the ontological status of moral truth-makers.

Mackie thought, like many do, that when we judge, for example, that something is morally right, we are at least *trying* to say something that is true and true because there is a quality or property actions can have – in this case, "being right" – and that this action has it. So Mackie accepted a somewhat ordinary understanding of what people are trying to do when they make moral judgments; at least, his account was cognitivist. He argued, however, that this ordinary understanding was in error because there are no such moral properties, qualities, or facts: moral discourse presupposes entities that do not exist.

Mackie's case against moral properties depends on a conception of what moral properties are like. He develops what he thinks is the common conception of moral properties, or the common view about moral properties would be like, were they to exist. He then argues that things like that, things with those features (or that combination of features), do not exist. So what are moral properties or facts like, according to Mackie? His position – which he thinks is supported by much of the philosophical tradition (Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Sidgwick, Clark) and common moral thought – might be summed up as the view that moral properties are, first, "objective" and, second, that "seeing" them will

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extending them to epistemic matters.
[6] See Mackie (*Ethics* 18).

influence one's motivations and affections, irrespective of one's antecedent psychological dispositions. A number of considerations go into unpacking these notions, especially those concerning motivation.

First, for moral properties to be objective is, to use Mackie's textile metaphor, for them to be "part of the fabric of the world": they exist independent of our beliefs about them. When we judge that something is morally required or obligatory, we hope that our belief is true and true *because* it's required or obligatory; it's not required or obligatory *because* we judge it to be so. According to Mackie, the idea of moral properties is that they are "requirements which are simply there, in the nature of things, without being the requirements of any person or body of persons, even God."[7] To think that moral qualities are objective is to think that there is a moral reality that is, as he puts it, "simply there," independent on our attitudes and beliefs about it.[8] A Kantian expression of this idea about objectivity is that apprehension of moral properties yield moral demands that are "categorically imperative . . action-directing absolutely, not contingently . . upon the agent's desires and inclinations."[9] Moral properties make it the case that there are things we ought to do, whether we want to or not.

This objectivity might contrast with views that Mackie calls "subjective." Were someone to think that moral properties are "subjective," he might think that moral judgments are, as Mackie puts it, "simply attitudes and policies . . that he and other people held"[10] with no pretense that they are true or accurate or in any way represent the way things are, morally.[11] Or perhaps another kind of subjectivist would think that moral judgments are sometimes true, but true because he, or his community, or whoever, says so. On this kind of view, moral truth would depend on the subject's, or subjects', evaluations.

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[7] See Mackie (*Ethics* 59).

[8] This independence is not easy to characterize. Many think that moral reality is such that causing innocents to suffer for the entertainment of others is wrong. If this is true, this depends on contingent facts about those who are able to suffer; what suffering is like, for one. However, the thought motivating this independence of the moral is that it's not *because* of anyone's attitudes towards the proposition "causing innocents to suffer for the entertainment of others is wrong" that this is true. Its truth is independent of that.

[9] See Mackie (*Ethics* 29).

[10] See Mackie (*Ethics* 16).

[11] To me, this view seems incoherent – perhaps thinking that, e.g., although such and such *is* wrong but that there really is no quality 'wrong' that things might have – but I will not press this since nothing discussed here depends on challenging it.

The second feature of moral properties that Mackie believes is built into both ordinary and the philosophical conceptions of them is that apprehending, perceiving or seeing them will necessarily influence one's motivations. He reports that many philosophers – Plato, Kant, Sidwick, and others – have said about moral properties that "just knowing or 'seeing' them will not merely tell men what to do but will ensure that they do it, overruling any contrary inclinations."[12] Although Stevenson did not think that there are moral properties, this motivational suggestion is similar to his claim that moral judgments have a "magnetism": judging something to be right or good will, like a magnet, have a pull on one's affections and desires. Another suggestion from Mackie, which he claims is part of the traditional concept of moral properties, is that those who "see" that something is good, right or morally obligatory will, "without any further motivation, be impelled to pursue and promote these ideals."[13] And this motivation will be "absolute, not contingent upon any desire or preference or policy or choice, his own or anyone else's."[14]

Thus, Mackie thinks that the ordinary conception of moral properties is that of objective entities that have incredible powers over people's desires, motivations, and affective concerns. Merely thinking that something has a moral property such as being good or wrong will necessarily cause one's attitudes and feelings about it to change; if an action is involved, one will feel pulled toward doing that action.[15] And, again, this is supposed to be true regardless of how one felt before having this alleged moral vision.

If "seeing" moral properties necessarily motivates us in these ways, they are quite remarkable. If they are like this and "objective," so that their existence is independent of our beliefs about them and attitudes toward them, they are even more remarkable: were there existence somehow due to our beliefs and attitudes, their alleged influence on our emotions and motivations might be easier to explain. Mackie thinks the ordinary and

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[12] See Mackie (*Ethics* 23).
[13] See Mackie (*Ethics* 24).
[14] See Mackie (*Ethics* 33).
[15] This sort of view is probably most plausible when applied to judgments about one's own activities at the present time. It is odd when applied toward moral judgments about the actions of others, especially in the very distant past or future, or with rather unspecific moral judgments. Say I judge that Socrates was treated wrongly; it's clear I can't do anything about that now, so it's not clear what I might be moved to do or how any of my motivations would, or should, change. Also, say I expect that in a few hundred years someone will do something horribly evil. I think I can have that thought but, again, it's not clear how it might motivate me to do anything, since I would have no idea what to do.

philosophical conception of moral properties has these two elements. He argues that this conception is in error: there are no such things like this, so common moral sense presupposes things that don't exist, so it is founded on error, and thus (positive) moral judgments are uniformly false.

5.2.1. Responding to Mackie's Conception of Moral Properties.

Before I present Mackie's arguments for conclusions that imply that all positive moral judgments are false, I should note that Mackie's claims about the common conception of moral properties can be resisted.

One could deny that moral properties are objective by arguing that the ordinary and philosophical conception of moral properties is that they are subjective, or that they are relative, or that that some kind of non-cognitivism better captures the features of moral thought and discourse. If any of these arguments were sound (or their conclusions true), then Mackie would be mistaken in thinking that the ordinary conception of morality is that it is objective because there are objective moral properties. But these arguments are not likely to be successful, in terms of capturing the empirical facts about what most people and most philosophers have thought about the nature of morality, e.g., that there are correct answers that we can discover, that we can be mistaken, that moral truth isn't necessarily identified by doing an opinion poll, etc. And this route to respond to Mackie wouldn't be one a moral realist would want to take, since realists think that morality is objective in Mackie's sense. Since I intend to defend moral realism, I won't develop this response.

An easier route to respond to Mackie, especially for a realist, is to deny that moral properties have the motivational qualities he claims they do. To do this, one might argue that Mackie's conception is false since it appears that people at least *can* (and, it seems, sometimes *do*) make moral judgments but lack related motivation and emotional affect. "Amoralists," beings who make moral judgments yet are not at all moved by them, seem conceptually possible, if not actual. If this is the case, this refutes Mackie's sense that there is a necessary connection between motivation and moral judgments.[16]

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[16] For complete developments of this kind of response, see Brink (*Moral Realism and The Foundations of Ethics* 37-80) and Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism: A Defence* 119-164). Both provide thorough taxonomies of possible motivationally internalist positions and argue the possibility of amoralists shows that moral motivation, in any important sense, is not an essential aspect of a moral judgment.

To reinforce this argument one could also point out that Mackie has done very little to make a convincing case in favor of motivational internalism. His case basically consists of some arguments from authority: he notes that some famous philosophers have said that this is what "seeing" moral properties is like. But famous philosophers have been mistaken, and they might very well be mistaken here. Also, some famous philosophers have surely denied these claims, so these arguments from authority might end in a stalemate. And many of these claims from tradition, although obscure in meaning and dubious in themselves, are not obviously applicable to most moral actual agents anyway. Perhaps seeing moral properties necessarily motivates only those who have undergone decades of philosophical training and moral development. So even if this elite group would be become motivated by moral judgments in themselves, it wouldn't obviously imply anything for the rest of us who haven't undergone such an intense philosophical workout.

While these are the responses to claims about motivational internalism that I favor, for my purposes here they stop the discussion too soon. On this response, we don't even get to Mackie's arguments against moral properties: a realist might think, "Since Mackie wrongly assumes that moral properties are necessarily motivating, or necessarily impact one's emotions and desires, he has a mistaken notion of moral properties. Therefore, there's no need to look at his arguments designed to show that things like this don't exist (for we might even agree with him). This is because, even if he is right, that has no implications for whether moral properties, under a better conception, exist or not." This response comes down to thinking that Mackie has not made a strong case for his position, starting with his conception of moral properties. His arguments are unsound because he has a false description of what it's like to make moral judgments.

I will, however, initially grant that Mackie's conception of moral properties is correct. I will concede that the concept of them is that they are objective and intrinsically motivating. I will then argue, however, that the ordinary conception of epistemic properties is comparable to Mackie's conception of moral properties: the concept of epistemic properties is such that they also have the features Mackie finds ontologically problematic for moral properties. I then develop arguments for an epistemic nihilism or "error theory" that are parallel to those Mackie makes about the moral. I argue that if the

arguments for moral nihilism are sound or strong, then the arguments for epistemic nihilism are sound or strong also.

I argue that these arguments for moral nihilism are unsound or weak, so his arguments for his meta-ethics are weak also. I argue that since some (positive) epistemic judgments are true (because there are objective epistemic properties), the arguments against them are not sound and so neither are their analogous arguments against moral judgments (and objective moral properties) either. Thus, I conclude that Mackie's arguments do not show that there are no moral properties: if they do, comparable arguments show that there are no epistemic properties either. But there are epistemic properties, so Mackie's arguments do not show there are no moral properties.

5.2.2. Epistemic Properties: Objective *and* Motivating?

While, compared to moral properties, much less has been said about conceptions of epistemic properties and their metaphysical basis and psychological characteristics, I believe a case *as strong* (which might not be very strong) can be made that epistemic properties are also "objective" and "motivating," in Mackie's senses. Recall some of the epistemic judgments from above:

"You *should* believe this."

"This is *good, sufficient*, evidence for that."

"This belief is *justified*, or *reasonable*, or *known*."

"There is *good reason* to believe that."

"This implies that, so you *should* not believe this."

Ordinary and philosophical thought often presumes that judgments like these, and their negations, as well as other "deontic" epistemic evaluations, are sometimes true.

If common thought is correct about this, does common thought suggest that their truth is "objective," or non-objective? Non-objective views to the effect that epistemic evaluations are true when, and only when, and *because*, the believer accepts them or feels good about them, or her community does the same, are not very popular. Perhaps this unpopularity is due to the fact that, for any epistemic evaluation, we can ask why it is the correct one. Various answers that appeal to "objective" considerations – factors and features that seem to explain why epistemic evaluations are correct (if and when they are) – will imply that the answer, "because I (or we) believe it," is false. Perhaps these views

are also not so popular because of a sense that we can be mistaken in what we take to be good reasons, or adequate justification for a belief, and these sorts of non-objective theories might make accommodating that sense very difficult, if not impossible.

However, non-objective epistemic views might be true, but insofar as we are seeking the common conception of what makes epistemic judgments true, ordinary thought does not endorse a non-objective basis for epistemic truths.[17] Rather, it appears that people tend to think that epistemic and intellectual demands are, as Mackie puts it about moral demands, "requirements which are simply there, in the nature of things, without being the requirements of any person or body of persons, even God."[18] Some of these demands, or plausible candidates for epistemic demands, include demands that one's beliefs fit the evidence, that one have reasons for one's beliefs, that one's beliefs be justified or reasonable, and that one's views change when inconsistencies are identified. These demands apply to particular contexts: for some believer, in some context, with some particular experience, the demand is that p is believed, that p is disbelieved, or it is that judgment be suspended on p. And the natural understanding of these requirements is that they are due to properties or facts that are part of the world, parts beyond our attitudes taken towards the propositions in question.

To think that epistemic qualities are objective is to think that there is an epistemic reality that is independent of our attitudes and beliefs about it. On many views, this objective reality, in conjunction with the varying non-epistemic facts about our experience – i.e., how things seem to us, our memories, our experiences, and so on – which determines what we each ought to believe. But part of this independent reality is, on some views, that we ought to believe what, and only what, we have good reason or sufficient evidence to believe. Hard as it is to analyze these terms, they refer to an aspect

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[17] Some people sometimes endorse a non-objective basis for epistemic or intellectual evaluations. This is most common when people feel personally threatened by some new claims that conflict with their present beliefs. These new claims trouble their convictions that their present beliefs deserve high epistemic marks and so they might exclaim, "Well, this is what I believe!" Apparently, this remark is meant to amount to an either "Leave me alone! I don't like these criticisms!" and/or a suggestion that since the person believes it, he or she should be criticized since her belief is justified. I mention this since the fact that moral discourse has, as Stevenson put it, a "dynamic" aspect is sometimes used to try to justify some kind of non-cognitivism. If it is relevant there, it is also relevant in the epistemic case, since intellectual discourse is equally dynamic: high emotions often accompany discussions of epistemic evaluations.
[18] See Mackie (*Ethics* 59).

of objective reality nevertheless. Thus, ordinary epistemic discourse seems to presuppose its own objectivity.

Does it presuppose a motivational quality? That is, is the ordinary conception of epistemic judgment such that we tend to think that epistemic judgments, like moral judgments, will influence motivation? Of course, unlike some moral judgments, judging a belief to be justified, or that one ought to believe something, or that some view is most reasonable, does not obviously suggest an action be done. But, many moral judgments do not obviously suggest an action either, so this goes to show that associating this alleged motivational influence only with action is to too narrowly construe the phenomena. In its broader form (which would explain its impact on action, when it might have some), it concerns one's desires and the affective or emotional "pull" one might feel towards certain states of affairs being the case.

This is just a sketch of what this motivational phenomena is like, but typical descriptions of this alleged phenomena are not much less sketchy: often a philosopher just notes that it would be it be odd or puzzling for someone to judge that she ought to do something but have no motivation or inspiration to do it, or judge that something is good but be totally indifferent to whether it exists or not.[19] The thought inspiring this sense that these would be odd situations is the thought that, necessarily, moral judgments engage our emotions and desires and attract or repulse us from the objects of moral judgment.

This, of course, is a rough statement of the basic idea, and this kind of position about the natural moral properties is the one that that Mackie claims is the common one. For the sake of argument, I am granting that it is plausible. And I am granting that it is the common one, although I do not think it is: I think it is a philosophical fantasy created by those who lack concrete experience of finding out what most people think about morality. Many ordinary people do not find it at all surprising that people are not motivated by their own moral judgments.

The question for my purposes, however, is whether an analogous view about epistemic properties is plausible also, or whether if one thought that moral judgments are motivating, one should (or would) find this motivational element in epistemic judgments also. I believe this is plausible: if one found the motivational claims about moral

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[19] See Michael Smith (*Moral Problem* 6-7).

judgments to be plausible, one should also find motivational claims about epistemic judgments plausible also.

My defense of these claims is primarily intuitive, but it is comparable in strength to typical defenses of the analogous view about moral judgments. This defense consists primarily in asking whether assertions like the following would seem odd and surprising:

- "I believe that p is strongly supported by the evidence, but I have no inclination at all towards believing p."
- "I see that p is implied by many other propositions I confidently believe, but I feel no 'pull' towards accepting p (or rejecting some of my antecedent beliefs)."
- "I believe p but realize that I don't have good reason to believe p, yet I don't at all feel like I shouldn't believe p."
- "I realize this is the justified belief here, but I have no interest in believing it."
- "My believing p is simply irrational, but I have no desire to stop believing p."

For the person who thinks that moral judgment are intrinsically motivating and so thinks that, e.g., a claim like, "I morally ought to do this, but I have no inclination, motivation or desire to do so" is (at least) odd, I suspect that this person would find the analogous epistemic claims above to be odd also.

And I think she should: there is some intuitive plausibility to the thought that epistemic evaluations – purported perceptions of epistemic properties – necessarily influence motivation and desire. To see this, one can tell more very short stories like those above where someone sees that what she believes (or does not believe) is at odds with her epistemic judgments about those beliefs. It is plausible to suggest that, necessarily, this person would have some motivation to change her beliefs, or a desire that this happen. If someone lacks this motivation, it's plausible to conclude that she just isn't sincerely making the epistemic evaluation: if she completely lacks the desire to stop believing p, even though she professes that believing p is irrational for her, then we might doubt her sincerity, just as we might doubt that someone who lacks any motivation to do action A, but claims that he ought to do A, is sincere also. These claims are also

reinforced by the expectation that, if we convince someone that her view is unreasonable, we expect her to change her view, or at least her attitude about her view.[20]

Our inability to, in various senses, decide what to believe does not seem to make a difference here to whether it can be true that we, or someone, ought to believe something. People make epistemic evaluations all the time. Some people, especially philosophers, offer cases for why their preferred epistemic evaluations of various propositions are the correct ones. Other people sometimes make positive suggestions for more reasons to add to the case, while others criticize these reasons, arguing that they are not as strong as they might seem. These critics expect that their objects should change their mind in light of the objections, unless they have an adequate response. A response to criticism, "Sorry, I am unable to control what I believe, so I don't see why your criticisms – even if I happened to become convinced that they are sound and that my position is utterly baseless – should influence what I believe," would reveal confusion: the fact that our beliefs should be influenced by reasons does not depend on whether we have control over our beliefs. And sometimes, we *can* at least indirectly control what we believe: extended reflection on the epistemic qualities of a belief can, and *should*, lead to corresponding change in belief. This fact might be supported by an inchoate sense that, necessarily, judging a belief to have a negative (or positive) epistemic value will result in a motivational desire not to have it (or to have it) and that's at least a start to a better overall epistemic state. So doubts about stronger forms of "doxastic voluntarism" do not seem to make a difference to the plausibility of the claim that epistemic judgments are as motivating as moral judgments are.

I concede that this discussion is murky and phenomenological: it appeals to one's sense of what it's like to make evaluative judgments, in both moral and epistemic realms, and the feelings, desires and motivations that typically accompany them. The position I am sketching claims that there is a *necessary* connection between evaluations and motivations. While I deny that there is such a connection – whatever connection to be

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[20] On this theme, Paul Horwich writes, "There appear to be facts about what it is rational to do, to want, to feel and *to think*. . . We are far from impervious to such facts. That is, our recognition of them has motivational force; . . However . . we cannot find any account of the underlying nature of the normative facts that would explain this motivational force. We do not see what it is about the nature of rationality that makes it conceptually anomalous—perhaps even incoherent—to think that someone might regard a norm as rational and yet have no inclination to conform to it." See Horwich ("Gibbard's Theory of Norms" 69).

found here is only a contingent one – I am asking the reader to try to see things from the perspective of someone who finds such a necessary connection between moral evaluations and moral motivation. My suggestion is that a person like this, like Mackie and those who have followed him in thinking that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating, would (and should) find this phenomena in epistemic evaluations also. If Mackie and those who agree with him don't find this position intuitively attractive, they should at least have some sympathy for it, since it is plausible that comparable cases can be made for the intrinsically motivational character of both moral and epistemic properties.

If this case can be made, or if this case can be made in a manner at least as strongly as Mackie's case for moral motivational internalism is, then this provides reason to think that that the common and philosophical concept of moral and epistemic properties is that they are similar in the ways that Mackie finds suggestive for his moral nihilism. Both are thought to be objective, and both are thought to have a motivational quality. Since Mackie has arguments designed to show that moral properties don't exist, since nothing has these qualities, analogous arguments can be developed to try to show that epistemic properties don't exist also. He offers what seem to be sufficient conditions to think that some judgment is never true and both moral and epistemic judgments seem to meet these conditions.

Here I develop these arguments for epistemic nihilism and attempt to criticize them. These arguments have interesting consequences, however, since if they are sound or cogent, then all positive epistemic evaluations are false. So, any claim to the effect that one *should not* accept these arguments will be false, if epistemic nihilism is true. But, if epistemic nihilism is true, so also will any contrary claim that one *should* accept them. So if epistemic nihilism is true and our ordinary practices of epistemic evaluation are founded on the false presupposition that there are objective epistemic properties, then many of the claims made in argumentation and reasoning are uniformly false claims. While there will be truths about the truth values of propositions and the deductive and, let's grant, even non-deductive logical relations between them, there won't be any truths about how one ought to respond to them when one recognizes these truths. This might be the truth since, again, it's hard to find any reasons why there must be truth-makers for

epistemic judgments, including "intellectual oughts." However, as people who reason, accepting this position might put us in an awkward situation, since to accept it is to think that, really, there are no ways we ought to think, no ways how people ought to respond to our claims, and no ways we ever should change our beliefs. I will discuss how we might best respond to this possible awkwardness once I argue that Mackie's arguments against moral realism suggest analogous arguments against epistemic realism. I turn to that task now.

5.3. From Disagreement to Nihilism.

To see how Mackie's arguments for moral nihilism suggest analogous arguments for epistemic nihilism, we must briefly present the arguments for moral nihilism. So far, we have only been trying to understand his basic position, not the arguments in its favor. We know that Mackie thinks that moral properties, if they existed, would be objective and intrinsically motivating: he claims this is part of their ordinary and philosophical conception. Thus, the conclusion of these arguments is that there are no moral properties or facts or, as Mackie puts it, objective moral values. Why are we supposed to think this? Mackie seems to think he offers two main arguments, but he offers many more considerations than that in favor of his position. I will consider this first argument in great detail and then address the other arguments.

His first argument he calls "the argument from relativity," which has come to be known as an argument from disagreement.[21] It is a non-deductive argument for the conclusion that there are no moral properties. It is based on empirical observations about the variety of moral judgments and principles people accept, and have accepted. It might be presented in the following manner:

(1) There are "radical" disagreements, or differences in belief, about which moral properties actions, societies, people, and so on have; these moral disagreements are within and between contemporary societies, as well as societies from the near and distant past.

(2) If there were moral properties, then, probably, there wouldn't be such "radical" disagreements about which moral properties actions, societies, people, and so on

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[21] See Mackie (*Ethics* 36-38).

have. E.g., if there were a property 'being morally right', then there wouldn't be such radical disagreements about what *is* morally right.

(3) Therefore, probably, there are no moral properties.

This argument might be challenged in a number of ways. First I will consider some objections to quasi-empirical premise (1) and Mackie's responses them. I will agree with Mackie in thinking that (1) true but argue that it is plausible to think that some analogous premise concerning epistemic properties is true also. So, I argue that there are at least some, perhaps many, propositions for which there are comparably intractable disagreements over their truth values. I will then consider some objections that moral realists might raise to premise (2) and some possible replies Mackie might offer. I will argue that someone who accepts (2) above should also accept the analogous epistemic premise, and that this person *should* conclude that, given the facts about epistemic disagreement, that this new argument strongly supports the conclusion that there are no epistemic properties.

Thus, I argue that the considerations that might be given in favor of the argument above suggest an analogous argument, an argument for epistemic nihilism from "epistemic relativity." This argument might be presented in this manner:

(A) There are "radical" disagreements or differences in belief about which *epistemic* properties beliefs and patterns of reasoning have; these epistemic disagreements are between contemporary people and within contemporary societies, as well as people and societies from the near and distant past.

(B) If there were epistemic properties, then, probably, there wouldn't be such "radical" disagreements about which epistemic properties beliefs, believers and patterns of reasoning have. E.g., if there were a property 'being known', then there wouldn't be such radical disagreements about what *is* known.

(C) Therefore, probably, there are no epistemic properties.

This argument has a surprising consequence in that if it is sound, it is not true that anyone should believe that it is sound. After explaining this argument, I will then discuss how we might respond to it, whether there's any truth to how we should respond to it, and whether this should influence our evaluation of Mackie's argument for moral nihilism.

Before we consider this argument for epistemic nihilism, let us first consider the argument for moral nihilism above.

First, however, let me note that, as Mackie and most others formulate it, the initial argument from moral disagreement to moral nihilism is not presented in very precise terms. It is, in part, due to this imprecision that an analogous argument for epistemic nihilism has some plausibility or, at least, is worthy of consideration. This consideration might, in turn, lead us to reconsider, and reformulate, arguments from moral disagreement in more precise terms. Let me explain this imprecision and its significance for the arguments.

While everyone should all agree that there is *some* moral disagreement, Mackie seems to think that there is a great breath of disagreement, i.e., much disagreement about many kinds of issues and disagreement about many moral claims at all levels of generality and particularity. He also seems to think there is great depth to such disagreements: it's not that most people accept similar moral principles, but disagree on the relevant non-moral facts. The disagreement is such that, even if nearly everyone agreed on the non-moral facts, there would still be a great breadth of disagreement.

It is not easy to measure the breadth and depth of moral disagreement. It is not easy to measure the breath and depth of moral *agreement* either. And it's not easy to measure the breadth and depth of epistemic disagreements. Given this, it is hard to tell if disagreements about epistemic matters are as wide or as deep as disagreements about moral matters. For this reason, it might be easy to doubt that the arguments for moral and epistemic nihilisms would be strongly analogous. I concede this, but believe that, nevertheless, since there are at least *some* epistemic disagreements that seem as intractable as some moral disagreements, this is enough to make the issue worth exploring. This exploration, I hope, should at least force us to recognize that more work could be done to formulate arguments for moral nihilism in a more precise manner, in terms of being more careful about what exactly the alleged data concerning moral disagreement is.

Besides this fruitful upshot for ethics, questions about epistemic disagreement are independently interesting: given that there are some disagreements about epistemic evaluations – both particular evaluations and in terms of moral general principles – what

explains this? E.g., do global epistemological skeptics *truly see* that the standards for knowledge are never met? Or do non-skeptics see the truth about knowledge? This is just one example, but it raises interesting questions: if the skeptics are right, do they have a kind of "philosophical perception" that enables them to see truths that few others can? Or does the fact that things seem to them this way explained by factors other than "philosophical perception," e.g., temperament, influences of their teachers and peers, psychological gratification from holding perverse views, or what? Insofar as there are, at least, *some* seemingly deep disagreements about *some* epistemic judgments, this is enough to raise our interests. And since there has been much discussion of this kind of issue in ethics, perhaps thinking through some of the parallels will be useful for both fields.

Let us now return to the argument from moral disagreement, articulated above. First, regarding premise (1), one might ask what Mackie means by "radical," since he does not explain this and one might doubt that there is such radical disagreement. At least in contemporary society, while we disagree about many complicated moral issues, we agree in a lot of our moral judgments also. E.g., there is little disagreement about the moral status of torturing babies for fun, raping three year old girls, abusing nursing home residents, and husbands' killing their pregnant young wives. There is "radical" *agreement* that all these actions are wrong and that the people who do them are bad: anyone who seriously disagrees with any of these judgments is considered to be "beyond the pale." We don't know what Mackie means by "radical," but this at least suggests that disagreement is not as great as he thinks it is.

Perhaps he would argue that, at some time in history, some societies made the morally opposite evaluations of all these actions, but we would need to learn much more about these societies to be confident that he is right and these cases help make his point. Mackie, might, however concede that there is "radical" agreement about many issues, but note that there is still radical disagreement about many other moral judgments, say those involving issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and whether the rich are obligated to help the poor. And this seems to true: there is a lot of disagreement about many aspects of these complicated moral issues.

Someone might respond that resolving these issues depends on understanding complicated non-moral information and knowing the relevant non-moral facts, that too few people possess this knowledge, and this is why there is such disagreement. This is a decent reply, but Mackie would respond that sometimes more non-moral information results in agreement, but that in other cases moral disagreement survives between parties even when they are fully, or equally, informed on and agree about the non-moral facts.

He might argue that this disagreement is sometimes due to basic disagreement about general moral principles, for examples, such as whether killing is worse than letting die (and if there is a genuine moral distinction to be made between those actions), how much we are obligated to help others (if at all), what the value of humans' lives depends on, and whether (and to what extent) we might give moral preference to our friends' and family's interests over those of strangers. And there are disagreements about which (if any) ethical theory is correct and which methods are the best to use in thinking about moral matters. So there are moral-theoretical disagreements to account for; all moral disagreements are not due to empirical disagreements.

Mackie might also might note that, as a matter of moral psychology, moral judgments are typically not made by explicit reasoning from moral principles in light of judgments about the non-moral facts: he writes, "'Moral sense' or 'intuition' is an initially more plausible description of what supplies many of our basic moral judgments than 'reason.'"[22] And it seems that, for many moral propositions – at all levels of particularity and generality, abstractness and concreteness –one person (or a society) just "sees" that they are true, while another person (or a society) just "sees" that they are false. This is true regardless of whatever moral principles a person accepts.

Thus, premise (1) seems secure: there is some "radical" disagreement. Furthermore, there is little reason to think that there *could not* be radical disagreement: maybe if everyone was more acquainted with the relevant non-moral facts all disagreement would go away, but it is not at all safe to suspect that that would happen. After all, it seems that there could easily be incompatible moral outlooks that fundamentally resist convergence, and there seems to be little reason why that couldn't be the case. Thus, Mackie's premise (1) seems quite plausible. We might make it more

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[22] See Mackie (*Ethics* 38).

precise by revising it to state that it applies only to a limited, but still large, class of moral judgments. This avoids the possible misinterpretation that Mackie thinks that nearly every moral judgment is highly controversial.

5.3.1. A Case for Epistemic Disagreements.

Before we consider Mackie's premise (2) in his argument for moral nihilism, we should consider whether a premise like (1) but pertaining to epistemic evaluations can plausibly be developed. This is important since we will be developing an argument for epistemic nihilism that is structurally analogous to Mackie's argument for moral nihilism. If moral disagreement is a good starting point for moral nihilism, then epistemic disagreement, if it exists, might be a good starting point for epistemic nihilism also. To determine whether there is such disagreement, we might as whether a premise like the following is true:

(A) There are "radical" disagreements or differences in belief about which *epistemic* properties beliefs and patterns of reasoning have; these epistemic disagreements are between contemporary people and within contemporary societies, as well as people and societies from the near and distant past.

To assess this, we need to ask whether there are and have been (and if so, to what extent) disagreements about what's *reasonable to believe*, *justifiably believed*, *known*, or such that we (or someone) *ought to* or *should* believe it. We should also consider disagreements about whether some something is *evidence* for something else, or *a reason* for something else, and, if so, whether it is *sufficient*, or *good*, or *conclusive*, *evidence* or *reason* for the other thing. We can also consider whether there is disagreement about epistemic principles, judgments about what's intellectually valuable, judgments about what kinds of beliefs we should be most confident in and the cogency of certain manners of reasoning.

For many judgments that express epistemic judgments like these, it seems that there is great disagreement about their truth value. And this is true about judgments pertaining to a wide range of issues, not just a few subject matters. People often claim to know or reasonably believe claims made within the domains of politics, sports, religion, history, philosophy, dieting, cosmology, medicine, and science, to name just a few areas. And there are other people who will deny these knowledge claims, or affirm that the opposite claim is what is, in fact, known or justifiably believed. For nearly any topic,

there are claims which some will affirm as reasonable but others will say are unreasonable.

Disagreements between people over extended periods of time might not be the best examples, since one can plausibly say that each was working with such different information, or things seemed so different, so it might be best to work with contemporary disagreements where all the parties share more, if not all, information. Some respond that, in light of all this disagreement, we should suspend judgment on many (or all) propositions, or not make any epistemic evaluations about them, but, again, there would be serious disagreement about the truth values of that suggestion also. Some epistemological skeptics – contemporary and historical – might make a suggestion like the former, and there is disagreement about the epistemic credentials of that kind of view itself.

Thus, *prima facie*, it appears that disagreements among epistemic judgments are as common as disagreements about moral judgments. This is especially true for philosophers, including epistemologists who, presumably, are quite well acquainted with what is said for, and against, various philosophical, including epistemological, claims. Earlier I mentioned responses to skeptical arguments as possibilities that there is some deep disagreements about. This case would be strong if there were more actual skeptics, but even among non-skeptics there is disagreement about whether *there is very good reason to reject skepticism*. Some philosophers think this, but others think that, although they reject skepticism, they don't think there is particularly good reason to reject it.

Other possible examples concern response to the internalism/externalism debates and the status of reliabilism. Regarding the latter, internalists think their views are reasonable, despite being familiar with nearly everything externalists offer as evidence in favor of their position, and externalists think the same about their views. Probably there are even "turncoats," philosophers who have switched sides and have experienced what it's like to hold either kind of position; even with these experiences, they come to regard one position and reasonable and the other unreasonable. These disagreements seem as intractable as any in ethics; perhaps these, and other philosophical examples, constitute disagreement of depth and breadth comparable the disagreements about moral evaluations and principles.

Like moral judgments, however, there is a core of epistemic judgments that most people accept and find uncontroversial, e.g., the seemingly trivial judgments that we *know* other people have minds and that we are *reasonable* in believing we have hands (for those of us who have hands). But there are some who reject the common epistemic judgments that most people accept, and there is a wide range of controversial cases where we find wide disagreement.

Just as there are disagreements about moral principles, there seems to be comparable disagreement about epistemic principles also. One commonly suggested principle is that, for any proposition, we should believe it only if we have good reasons for it. Setting aside the controversial, and disagreement-inducing, questions of what "reasons" and "good reasons" are, some people accept this principle, others reject it completely, and others apply it for some beliefs but allow that some kinds of propositions are exempt from its reach. So there is disagreement here. A rival epistemic principle popular among some philosophers is that we should believe only that which is produced by "reliable" belief forming processes. But there are disagreements as to whether this proposal has ever been stated in a satisfactory manner, and disagreements about whether it has (or would have) the right epistemic implications, so there are disagreements about whether anyone should accept it. For many topics, there is disagreement about whether something is a reason pertaining to it, whether it's a good enough reason to believe what's in question, and whether some knowledge claim is, in fact, true.

Concerning reasoning, there are disagreements about whether certain forms of argument are cogent or not. And there are disagreements about whether, and when, one should accept the logical implications of one's own beliefs. For example, some say that we should respond to arguments for skepticism by claiming that since we are more confident that we know something than we know nothing, we should reject arguments for skepticism, even if the premises are ones we find attractive and can find no fault with. That might be a case where many would judge that we should not accept what follows from what we already believe. Other people might disagree and claim that we should "follow the argument" wherever it leads, even if that requires rejecting previously held beliefs. Whether, when and why we should ever change what we believe is a matter of considerable disagreement.

Thus, given all this disagreement, it seems that much can be said in defense of premise (A). The premise states that these disagreements are "radical" in nature and, while Mackie did not explain what he means by this term, it seems that epistemic disagreements – again, at all levels of particularity and generality – are as radical as moral ones. This is especially the case if we consider skeptics, who claim that little, or nothing, is justifiably believed or known. But this disagreement remains even if we consider the epistemic judgments of a wide range of non-skeptics.

However, it should be noted that while there is great epistemic disagreement, just as there is great moral disagreement, there is also quite a lot of epistemic agreement. For example, most people agree, or would agree, that our ordinary empirical beliefs about medium sized items are justified. And there is a core of considered-reasonable beliefs about historical, scientific, psychological, and economic matters that most people to agree on, at least in contemporary American society. So, if someone were to deny some of these beliefs, say by becoming a serious global skeptic, they might be considered as beyond the epistemic pale as someone who denied that there was anything wrong with molesting children would be in the moral realm. The point is that, in terms of our moral and epistemic evaluations, there are many things we agree on, but also many things that we disagree on.

If, despite the agreements we have, there also exist "radical" epistemic disagreements, then we are half-way to an argument for epistemic nihilism that might be as strong as Mackie's argument for moral nihilism. I have argued that the suggestion that there is deep and wide epistemic disagreement is plausible and worthy of consideration. Before we consider the second premises of this argument, and the premise from the analogous moral argument it is parasitic on, let us consider some objections to premise (A). Maybe it only appears that there are epistemic disagreements, but there really are none. Some of these objections will be analogous to the objections to premise (1) and others will not.

5.3.2. Responding to the Case for Epistemic Disagreements.

First, someone might deny that there are epistemic disagreements by observing that epistemic evaluations often take the form of an "epistemic operator," a sentential operator, such as "It is reasonable that", "It is known that", "It ought to be believed that",

and so on, applied to a believed sentence.[23] Once this is recognized, the objector might claim, we see that epistemic disagreements are over the truth value of the object of the operator, not whether the operator "fits" the believed sentence. If this is the case, then, the objector claims, the disagreements are just over the truth value of the belief in question, not its epistemic status, so there aren't epistemic disagreements.

So, for just one example, there is considerable disagreement about whether religious beliefs are epistemically rational. Although these disagreements are often public, a private example will help. Consider some philosopher who wonders if his own theistic belief is rational. He is on the fence: sometimes he thinks is and other times thinks it is not. So he is having something of an internal disagreement about whether this proposition is true: 'it is epistemically rational for me to believe that God exists.' But, the objector might claim, his internal disagreement is not about whether *that* claim is true, it's just about whether God exists or not: his internal disagreement about whether it's reasonable to believe that God exists is just a disagreement about whether God exists. The suggestion would be, in general, epistemic disagreements (internal and, more importantly, public) are not over the which epistemic evaluations apply to various propositions and believers; rather they are just over the truth values of the proposition that are the objects of the epistemic operators themselves.

This thought might be motivated, in part, by the thought that, for any proposition p, it would odd for someone to affirm p, but fail to affirm, or even outright deny, that her believing p has some positive epistemic status, and vice-versa. Thus, the objector might claim, if someone believes p then, invariably, she is going to believe that p is justified for her. So once the question of whether she affirms or denies a given proposition is answered, so is the question about what epistemic evaluation she will give to it. So, there really are no epistemic disagreements, there are just disagreements about the truth values of the beliefs that we evaluate epistemically.

In friendly response, I concede that this might sometimes be the case, but not always, for every believer and for every kind of epistemic evaluation. For it clearly seems that someone could believe p, but not believe that her believing p is justified for her. For

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[23] To present these operators in a more plausible manner, we would pack believers and their context in, e.g., "For S, in context C, it is reasonable to believe that __".

example, someone might realize that he believes he has a hand, but not believe that his belief is justified. Or perhaps he would wind up thinking that his belief is downright unjustified. He might lament that fact since he realizes that he believes something that he thinks she ought not. Some might think that lamentation would suggest an 'internal" connect between epistemic appraisal and motivation. Or he might not be troubled by this at all. So this critical response to the claim that there are epistemic disagreements is founded in a mistake: assessments of truth (and falsity) and positive (and negative) epistemic evaluations can diverge.

Possible objections to the effect of, "Worrying about an belief's epistemic credentials is just to worry about its truth," can be defused more vividly by focusing on third-person epistemic evaluations where, e.g., two parties disagree about whether something (say, a wall's looking red) is, say, sufficient evidence for someone else's belief that the wall is red, or if it is justified. Surely here we find such disagreements, in actual life and with "toy" philosophical examples where all and only the relevant details of the case are stipulated for all to see, yet disagreements remain. Evaluating cases from outsiders' perspectives can make the divergence of belief (and disbelief) and positive (and negative) epistemic evaluations salient in a way they might not be if one reflects merely on one's own beliefs and evaluations of them. Thus, objections based around these concerns to not show that there are no epistemic disagreements.

A second objection to the claim that there are epistemic disagreements is to respond that, although people give different epistemic evaluations to beliefs, these seemingly-contradictory evaluations needn't be contradictory and so disagreements are merely apparent, not real. This is because, sometimes, different epistemic evaluations of the same proposition can all be true: e.g., for someone, p is justified, but for another person p is not justified, yet for another person suspending judgment is the justified attitude. On this response, epistemic evaluations depend on the relevant non-epistemic facts, and since these facts vary, the truth about which epistemic evaluations are true varies also.

So, the objector urges, in disputes about whether p is justified (or has whatever epistemic status is in question), we need to realize that these judgments are elliptical for whether p is justified *for S*, given S's situation. So, if someone says "p is justified," while

another says in response, "No, p is not justified," they might both be saying something true about themselves, or some different people or groups. And if that's the case, then they are not disagreeing and so there aren't radical disagreements.

This objection might apply to some *cases* of apparent disagreement about epistemic evaluations and, in effect, it dissolves the disagreement. However, this "dissolution" solution has the cost that, in these cases, the parties to the dispute are simply talking past each other. This is sometimes an accurate assessment of a case, but it does seem that we can sometimes directly engage each other about the epistemic merits of our beliefs. And this objection does not go as far to show that there are *never* disagreements about the epistemic status of a particular proposition for a subject.

The objection seems to presuppose that we can never share evidence or provide others with sufficient access to our evidence so that they might make a reasonable assessment of whether our beliefs are reasonable or not. But this seems to be a mistake: different people can sometimes get the same conclusion in mind and be adequately acquainted with the arguments for and against that conclusion in order to make a judgment about whether that conclusion ought to be accepted (or whether we ought to, at present, suspend judgment on that that conclusion) on the given basis. If we couldn't ever do this because evidence is essentially "private," public inquiry into the epistemic credentials of a belief would always be pointless since everyone would be "talking past" each other. But public discussion is not always pointless; we can sometimes engage each other and see each others' reasons. But even then, we can disagree.

Peter van Inwagen illustrates this point using philosophy as the subject matter, but it could be made with nearly any other field or topic, from the mundane to the esoteric. He asks:

> How can it be that equally intelligent and well-trained philosophers can disagree about the freedom of the will or nominalism or the covering-law model of scientific explanation when each is aware of all of the arguments and distinctions and other relevant considerations that the others are aware of? How . . can we philosophers possibly regard ourselves as justified in believing much of anything of philosophical significance in this embarrassing circumstance? How can I believe (as I do) that free will is incompatible with determinism or that unrealized

possibilities are not physical objects or that human beings are not four-dimensional things extended in time as well as in space, when David Lewis--a philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and ability--rejects these things I believe and is already aware of and understands perfectly every argument that I could produce in their defense?[24]

He then immediately responds to his questions:

Well, I do believe these things. And I believe that I am justified in believing them. And I am confident that I am right.

van Inwagen's point is he thinks we can sometimes fully share our evidence (or, at least, he could share his evidence with Lewis), but yet still disagree. And he thinks that, despite this recognized disagreement, his beliefs are still justified. Presumably he thinks this not because of anything special about him (although that might be true), but because he thinks it's possible for many people's beliefs in such circumstances to be justified: recognized disagreement does not, in general, preclude justification.

Others will surely disagree with him on that point, and argue that in these cases that we should suspend judgment since these are cases where the evidence is about equal in strength for incompatible propositions. Some might fully understand that perspective, but yet agree with van Inwagen because they just don't "see" why they ought to suspend judgment in these cases. So there again would be disagreement, even when there is shared understanding of everything that might be offered in defense of each perspective.

Some of this understanding might be tacit, and unable to be articulated, due to what we might call our different "frames of mind" around the evidence. van Inwagen expresses this idea as some "sort of philosophical insight" that he has, but Lewis lacks (but Lewis might have appealed to his own philosophical insights that, for all his merits, is denied to van Inwagen). Perhaps this "frame" should be considered part of one's evidence itself, and an important question is whether any "frames" are objectively better or worse than others and, if so, why. However, we ordinarily do not think that this "framing" prevents us from pursuing, together, the question of what we ought to think about something, or whether someone knows something, or whether any other epistemic evaluation applies in some case. We don't think that even though we each have different

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[24] See van Inwagen ("Quam Dilecta" 41-42).

minds and see things in slightly different ways, these differences always prevent us from assessing others' reasons. So, again, these considerations do not show that there are no epistemic disagreements.

Some might respond to the case for epistemic disagreement by arguing that although there is radical disagreement about some particular epistemic judgments, most people *do* accept the same objective epistemic principles. This person might claim that most people accept, e.g., that they should believe what, and only what, is supported by the evidence, but then claim that there are disagreements about what the evidence is and that this is the basis of the disagreement. So, this objector claims that if people were to see things in light of the epistemic principles that they all accept, there would be far less disagreement. This response is intended to be analogous to the response to moral disagreement that involves claiming that all, or many, moral disagreements are due to disagreements about the non-moral facts and that if these were corrected moral disagreement would fade.

But this response for the epistemic case is inadequate and, in fact, supports the epistemic nihilist's position. This is because part of his case involves the observation that that there often are disagreements about what the evidence is, what it is evidence for, how strong the evidence is, what would defeat the evidence, and so on. And the nihilist is asking what explains *these* disagreements, in addition to what explains disagreements over epistemic principles. And the empirical suggestion that everyone accepts evidentialism, or any other particular epistemic principle, is just empirically false. At best, most people are selective evidentialists, demanding evidence and reasons for some kinds of beliefs and ignoring it for other kinds. So this response to the claim that there are epistemic disagreements fails. The case for epistemic disagreement can be made with disagreements about particular epistemic judgments as well as fully general epistemic principles.

A related response to the claim that there is epistemic disagreement is to argue that there is such disagreement, but that it's based on surface considerations that could be cleared up. So, it might be claimed that there would be less epistemic disagreement if people had more information, or the same information. This might be true, depending on what is meant by "having more information." That phrase has to be understood in a non-

epistemic manner: it can't be that understood as the suggestion that people would agree more on epistemic matters if they all believed what they *ought* and reasoned the way they *should*. While an epistemic realist thinks that that is true (e.g., in cases where people have very similar evidence, if they all believed what they ought, then they would all accept the same epistemic evaluation), but since the ultimate question here is whether there is any truth to the notion of "believing how one ought to," this response will not do for the epistemic nihilist. It assumes that there are true epistemic evaluations, which is what's at issue.

If the suggestion is that there would be less epistemic disagreement if people had more of the same beliefs, this would be trivially true: there is disagreement only when people do not agree on the same beliefs, or enough of them. If the suggestion is that there would be less disagreement if everyone believed the truth about whatever propositions they considered, then, yes, there would be less disagreement about many propositions since, again, attitudes toward many propositions would be the same. Would they agree on epistemic evaluations? If there are truths about them, then they would.[25] So this response to disagreements about epistemic evaluations comes down to "there is such disagreement about which epistemic evaluations are the correct ones because too few people, if any, are making true epistemic evaluations."

This response to the nihilist again merely *assumes* that there are such truths. This is illegitimate. The nihilist tries to use disagreement as a basis for thinking that there are no epistemic truths. This realist response concedes that there is disagreement, but that there wouldn't be if everyone believed the truth about what ought to be believed (is justified, is known, etc.) by them, in their context. But the nihilist is asking what explains the fact that there is such disagreement about epistemic evaluations: this disagreement cannot be explained by the claim that some of them are making incorrect evaluations since the question is whether any such evaluations are correct in the first place.

Thus, it seems that premise (B) above is true: there are "radical" disagreements, or differences in belief, about which epistemic properties beliefs and patterns of reasoning have. So there is disagreement in ethics *and* epistemology about particular

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[25] And they might agree that they are in an epistemically sorry position since they are believing the truth about any proposition they consider, even when they ought not believe the truth (say, because their evidence does not support belief).

judgments and general principles. Mackie claims that this disagreement is the basis of a strong argument for moral nihilism. I will argue that if it is, it is also the basis for a strong argument for epistemic nihilism also.

5.3.3. Explaining Moral Disagreements.

We have agreed with Mackie that there are such radical differences in people's moral judgments, and I have argued that the same is true of epistemic judgments.

The question for us now is whether we might argue, in at least equally plausible ways, from these facts about disagreements to the absence of any moral properties and to the absence of epistemic properties. Of course, one might think that Mackie's argument from moral disagreement to moral nihilism is weak and so, probably, also think that any analogous argument for epistemic nihilism is weak also. Or one might think that this sort of argument would be plausible in the moral case, but not in the epistemic case; this is probably what Mackie would have thought. Or one might think that both kinds of arguments are equally strong and so that moral and epistemic evaluations are never true.

As I discussed above, it is not easy to compare the strength of these arguments since it is not easy to determine, in any precise manner, how comparable moral and epistemic disagreement are in their depth and breadth. However, I will argue that, especially given this imprecision, it is plausible to think that Mackie-style arguments from disagreement for moral and epistemic nihilisms are comparable in strength. This is because the same considerations given against moral properties can plausibly be given against epistemic ones. Thus, if these considerations do not amount to a successful case against epistemic properties, they do not amount to a successful case against moral properties either. If this is mistaken, my discussion at least suggests that much more work would need to be done by the advocate of an argument from moral disagreement to show that the arguments are not comparable. This moral nihilist would have to make his or her argument more precise, in its estimation of the nature of moral disagreement, to show that there is not comparable epistemic disagreement. Again, my hope is that discussion of epistemic disagreements might help illuminate the nature of moral disagreements.

Let us now consider the premise that Mackie combines with his observations about moral disagreement to reach his nihilistic conclusion. Mackie suggests that, "radical differences between first-order moral judgments make it difficult to treat those

judgments as apprehensions of objective truths."[26] He claims that if there were moral properties, then, probably, there wouldn't be such "radical" disagreements about which moral properties things have: whether the war is just or not, whether some soldier deserves such a harsh punishment, and so on. He thinks that such disagreement is evidence that there are no moral properties: if there were such properties, more people would "track" them. More people would perceive moral properties and perceptions of them would guide their thinking, feelings and actions. These ideas are expressed in premise (2) above.

Mackie does not offer much explicit in favor of this premise. He seems to assume that all properties would be equally salient, or that the conception of moral properties is that they are equally salient to everyone. But these are only assumptions and, perhaps, dogmas of some moral traditions (but not others). And this assumption, that if there were moral properties more people would perceive them, can be denied. If there are moral properties, it is not obvious why they would have to be equally salient to everyone, or nearly everyone.[27]

Perhaps moral properties can be seen clearly only by those who have undergone decades of philosophical or moral training. Perhaps this is not quite right, but on the right track in that moral properties can be seen more clearly, typically, only by those who have had some training in logic and acquaintance with ethical theories and the kind of reasoning taught in philosophy courses. Training in discerning what non-moral considerations are, and are not, relevant to ethical issues often helps people think about ethics, so maybe that training helps people see moral properties. A better recognition of the possible emotional, visceral and financial and political-induced psychological barriers to better moral thinking – e.g., arrogance, smugness, depression, apathy, being dogmatic, having one's job depend on the moral positions one takes, and so on – can be helpful also

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[26] See Mackie (*Ethics* 36).

[27] Perhaps considerations about "fairness" would motivate the idea that moral (and epistemic) properties are equally salient: if it is "fair" to evaluate people morally, then they must have epistemic access to the moral status of their acts, intentions, characters, etc. If they do not have such access, then negative evaluations are unfair because the people could not have realized they were doing something wrong or being bad in some way and corrected themselves. But moral and evaluations are fair, so people do have such access. This kind of argument could be developed in many ways (and these notions of "fairness," "access" and the relevant sense of "could" would have to be explained), but however it is developed it is not clear how it could in any way support moral nihilism since it, ultimately, seems to be an argument for objective moral properties that all have access to.

in understanding why people sometimes disagree on moral matters. And this recognition might again help us see what's right and wrong, good and bad, and so on.

Perhaps moral properties can be seen more clearly only when one has had traumatic personal experiences of (what many would call) evil, either as a victim or as a witness. And perhaps often one has to have personally done something seriously wrong to better see the nature of morality (the story of David and Bathsheba comes to mind here): perhaps doing evil can put one in a better position to see evil. On the other hand, perhaps experiencing doing something courageous or compassionate has a similar effect in terms of improving one's moral perceptions. There is no reason to assume that one's emotions cannot ever improve one's moral beliefs or reasoning abilities; one's moral outlook is more than just the moral propositions and arguments one accepts.

Thus, there are responses to Mackie's assumption that moral properties would be more visible to all and that there would be more agreement. There are reasons to doubt his premise (2), especially since little positive was said in its favor. Mackie would likely reply, however, that even when actual people are, what we might call, "improved"[28] in nearly every non-moral way we can think of (especially in terms of acquiring the relevant non-moral information), some (albeit fewer) moral disagreements still remain. And he would wonder what explains that: why is it that people who agree on all the non-moral facts can still disagree about the final moral evaluation of a case? He would again argue that these especially cases suggest that there are no genuine moral properties and so the nature of morality must be understood in a nihilistic manner. The plausibility of such an argument might depend on how many deep moral disagreements remained after these various non-moral improvements.

A realist can respond. One less than ideal response is to insist that, in these cases, what we need is yet still *more* non-moral improvements in people: once get more empirical information, take more logic courses, and watch more tragic documentaries to

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[28] My main argument of this chapter would imply that, on Mackie's view, judgments that someone has "improved" (or regressed) in these ways are, ultimately, false, or rest on false presuppositions. One could stipulate a set of ideal non-moral conditions for moral thinking and say that as one approaches those conditions on is "improving." Mackie's view could allow that. But it could not allow any truth to the judgment that one *should* improve or *should* try to move toward those standards. And, of course, any thought to the effect of "If I meet these standards my moral thinking is likely to *improve*, i.e., I will more likely discern what I am *supposed to do*," implies that there is something you are supposed to do, which Mackie argues is false.

cultivate their sympathies, they will finally agree. While this might be true (and we might hope it is), one risk is that the realist will be painting a picture of possible persons who would have *exactly* the same experiences, beliefs, feelings and patterns of reasoning. And if they really are exactly alike in all ways (except being in different possible worlds), it's not at all surprising that they would agree on moral matters.

So this response, that people would agree if they were (nearly) exactly alike, does not address disagreement as it stands among actual people. And it also only expresses a mere hope that people would agree were these non-moral changes to happen. But it's surely possible that disagreements would remain: it's surely possible that people could have fundamentally different moral outlooks that resist convergence even with empirical agreement. Thus, to respond to Mackie, the realist needs to allow that people can be maximally informed and "improved" in non-moral ways (yet not so much that they are not identical in all beliefs, feelings, perceptions, etc.), but still allow the possibility that they will still disagree morally even after that.

To this possible case, the realist might only be able to say that, for some moral issues, some people just aren't well placed to see the true answers to some moral questions: they just have an undeveloped or warped moral sense or way of seeing things morally. Some people just can't "see" mathematical or logical truths, and perhaps there are people who just can't see moral truths (or epistemic truths either). Perhaps this is because of emotional issues, or they deeply desire that some moral truth be false, or somehow they just aren't able to process all the relevant information, or for some other reason they are "blind" to some moral truths. So, realists might claim that in some cases of moral disagreement, something (perhaps unidentifiable and unable to be altered) accounts for some party (or all parties) failing to see the truth of the moral matters. But, in these cases, if there is a moral truth (which there might not always be if, due to vagueness, truth-value gaps are allowed in the moral universe), the fault is with those trying to see it, not with moral reality itself.

So the realist has a response to understand what's going on in some cases of fundamental moral disagreement: sometimes people just fail to see what's really there, morally. The question is whether this response is better than the nihilists' response, viz. that these cases support the hypothesis that there is nothing, morally, to be seen and

moral experience really consists in people understandably "seeing" things that really aren't there. While Mackie clearly thinks the nihilistic explanation is the better one, his reasons for thinking this are not as explicit as they could be. To raise an epistemological issue, he also surely does not make it clear why one *should* accept what one regards as a better explanation either. Later I will try to use that fact to undermine Mackie's arguments for moral nihilism.

5.3.4. Explaining Epistemic Disagreements.

To help assess the plausibility of the realists' final response to moral disagreement, we might consider how it fares in response to epistemic disagreement. If analogous debate about what best explains epistemic disagreement leads a similar response and this response is plausible, this suggests that it might be an acceptable response in the moral case also. If in epistemic cases it is more reasonable to think that some people just fail to see the truth about which epistemic evaluation fits a particular belief and believer, or that one epistemically-ought to have evidence for one's beliefs, then this response might not be as unpalatable in the moral case as some might think it is. If this is so, then realist has an adequate response to Mackie's argument from disagreement. And if this is so, then Mackie's argument for moral nihilism from moral disagreement is not so strong. On the other hand, if, for independent reasons, an error-theoretic explanation of epistemic disagreement is a good one and ought to be accepted instead of the realistic explanation, this might buttress an error theoretic explanation of moral disagreement also.

I have argued that, like disagreement about morality, there is at least some radical disagreement about what's *rational*, *justified*, *known*, how one *ought* to reason, what is *good* and *valuable* from the intellectual point of view, and so on.[29] Like Mackie, we can ask what explains this: why isn't there more agreement about particular and general epistemic evaluations and principles, principles of reasoning, intellectual goals and

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[29] Mackie states that "disagreement on questions in history or biology or cosmology does not show that there are no objective issues in these fields for investigators to disagree about. But such scientific disagreement results from speculative inferences or explanatory hypotheses based on inadequate evidence." See Mackie (*Ethics* 36). This pushes scientific disagreement to *epistemic* disagreements about whether some inference is "speculative" or whether a hypothesis is based on "inadequate evidence" or not. And here we can ask what explains these disagreements: does "the fabric of the world" include that an inference is "speculative," or that a hypothesis is based on "inadequate evidence," and some just fail to see this? And is "seeing" that an inference is speculative or a hypothesis based on inadequate evidence supposed to motivate one to change one's beliefs? These are important questions that Mackie overlooked.

values, and so on? If there are truths about such matters, why don't more people "see" them? The epistemic nihilist's view is that there is such disagreement, such differences in what people "see," because there are no epistemic properties for people to perceive: since there are no such properties to guide or restrain people's thinking, their evaluations diverge greatly. This is why people disagree about what ought to be believed, what is known, whether we should reason in various ways, and so on.

This nihilistic response contrasts with the realist hypothesis that epistemic judgments, in Mackie's words, "express perceptions, most [or, at least, *some*] of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective [epistemic] values,"[30] or properties. The realist claims that there are, or could be, cases where all parties are maximally informed on the relevant non-epistemic information, but some people see the truth about the epistemic status of a belief (for a person, in a context) and others simply do not (or everyone fails to see it). So, to put the matter in a concrete manner, two people can agree about all the non-epistemic factors of a case, but disagree about the epistemic evaluation that applies to the case, and what explains this is that one party "sees" the epistemic truth while the other, for all her merits, does not.

The epistemic nihilist claims that this is *not* the best explanation of why there is epistemic disagreement. The nihilist would argue that better explanations of this disagreement imply that this "epistemically realist" hypothesis is false. This nihilist claims that if there were epistemic properties, then more people would see when these properties are instantiated and there would be less disagreement about them. But since there is such disagreement, the nihilist concludes that there are no such properties.

Thus, this nihilist would be arguing for this conclusion from premise (A), articulated above and concerning epistemic disagreement, and this premise, the epistemic analogue to (2) above:

> (B) If there were epistemic properties, then there wouldn't be such "radical" disagreements about which epistemic properties beliefs, believers and patterns of reasoning have.

From (B) and (A) we can infer, albeit non-deductively, that there are no epistemic properties, just as we could infer that there are no moral properties from (1) and (2).

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[30] See Mackie (*Ethics* 37).

Should we, or anyone, accept premise (B), and thus the conclusion that there are no epistemic properties? Premise (B) seem to be rooted in the assumptions motivating (2), viz. that all properties are equally salient, or that epistemic properties would be among the salient properties. Again, this assumption can be denied, and we can ask why we should accept it since it's not at all clear why we should: it's not at all clear why epistemic properties, if they exist, would be such that (nearly) everyone would see them.

But those who find (B) unconvincing, especially since it seems that few reasons might be given in its behalf, will likely also find its moral analogue, premise (2), unconvincing, and for similar reasons: why assume that everyone would see moral reality with equally clear vision? For those who haven't seen what they regard as a good answer to this question, neither of the arguments for nihilism from moral or epistemic disagreement will be convincing. They will think that there are objective moral and epistemic properties but that not everyone sees them accurately. They might also think that nobody has given much in the way of a good reason to doubt this.

5.4. Accepting and Rejecting Epistemic Nihilism.

My target, however, is a philosopher who thinks that Mackie's argument from moral disagreement to moral nihilism as a strong argument. I claim that this moral nihilist should also see the analogous argument from epistemic disagreement to epistemic nihilism as strong also. This is because epistemic judgments seem to have the features of moral judgments that the Mackian thinks are relevant to making the case for moral nihilism: epistemic judgments appear to be as "objective" and "motivating" as many moral judgments are. Thus, the epistemic argument might be *as strong as* the moral argument: I say "as strong" because it is hard to tell how strong the moral argument is, given our imprecise understanding of the breadth and depth of moral disagreement.

So, those who think the moral argument is strong should thereby think the same about the epistemic argument, and those who think the epistemic argument is weak should thereby think that the moral argument is weak also. I claim that someone who is a moral nihilist because of a Mackie-style argument from disagreement should also be an epistemic nihilist. This is because the features about moral judgments that are presented as evidence against moral realism (and in favor of nihilism) apply to epistemic judgments also. The analogy is not perfect, but it is plausible to think that there are some strong

similarities, especially since it seems as plausible to think that there is *some* intractable epistemic disagreement as it is plausible to think that there is *some* intractable moral disagreement. Those who deny this have their important work cut out for them, in terms of showing in a precise way that the depth and breadth of moral and epistemic disagreements are not comparable.

The Mackian moral nihilist can either agree or disagree with that claim about what he should believe about moral and epistemic nihilisms. However, neither response helps his position. First, consider the ways he might agree. This response will consider a few possible branches in reasoning. First, he might agree that moral and epistemic properties are similar in the ways that Mackie detailed as interesting about moral properties. But then, second, if he agrees that, in light of this similarity, he is *justified* in accepting epistemic nihilism, he has said something which, if epistemic nihilism is true, is false. If epistemic nihilism is true, then it's not true that *any* view is justified: all positive epistemic evaluations are false because there are no epistemic properties to make them true. On epistemic nihilism, people have their beliefs, but there is no truth to claims that some beliefs are epistemically better than others.

Of course, some beliefs will be true, or perhaps even probably true (in various senses, and given logical relations to other propositions), or meet some other conventional epistemic standards, but it will not be true that we ought to have true beliefs, or should believe what's probably true, or that our beliefs should meet any of these standards in the first place. These assumptions seem to be based on there being objective epistemic values, and nihilism says there are none. Just as there is no moral goodness, badness, and better and worse-ness, nothing that morally ought to be, there's objectively good, bad, and ought be the case in the realm of belief and reasoning either.

This is a surprising view, since, among other implications, it that implies that it's not true that anyone should believe it or that it is ever justifiably or rationally believed. It *might* be true, but insofar as we have reasons to think that epistemic judgments are sometimes true, i.e., that an epistemically realistic theory better captures more of what reasonably seems correct about the nature of epistemic evaluations, this provides reasons to reject epistemic nihilism. The mere fact that epistemic nihilism *might* be true and that it implies that our reasons are no good is no threat to the quality of our reasons now,

given our current evidence. We already know that if it's true, then the common realistic meta-epistemology is mistaken. However, if we don't have good reason to think it's true, then we don't have good reason to doubt that epistemic judgments are sometimes true.

If a moral nihilist were to accept epistemic nihilism, he would be accepting a view that implies that it's not true that anyone should accept moral nihilism. This would put him in a very odd and, perhaps, an epistemically self-undermining position, since if he were to tell himself the truth about what he thinks, he would say would be that he believes moral nihilism to be true, but that it's not true that he believes it reasonably. He would also say that if he were to tell anyone else that they should believe it (say, instead of realism) he would be saying something false also. But perhaps these would all seem strange only if one thought that, except in certain circumstances, one should be truthful and one should believe what, and only what, is reasonable. But epistemic nihilism implies that there is no truth to those common epistemic assumptions: are all in massive error but, interestingly, it's not true that we should do anything about it about it or that we should rethink our views.

Thus, it appears that accepting epistemic nihilism, especially in clear view of its implication, leads one to a bizarre position that either undermines its own epistemic status or yields a highly non-standard epistemic view. If epistemic nihilism is true, then it is not justified or reasonable or ought to be held, and that's what a truthful advocate of the position would say. At the very least, the position would be highly at odds with common, realist assumptions about the nature of reasoning and rational belief: these might be mistaken, but the mere fact that epistemic nihilism implies that they are false is not a good reason to reject these assumptions, especially since much can said in their favor. One could deny these assumptions and claim that these epistemic value assumptions are not made true by anything objective, but rather that they are, as Mackie thought about moral values, "constituted by our choosing or deciding to think in a certain way,"[31] or are "simply attitudes and policies"[32] with regard to belief, and nothing more.

Perhaps that's true. But if that is the way the epistemic world is, then it's not true that anyone (especially anyone who isn't Mackie) should accept Mackie's epistemic

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[31] See Mackie (*Ethics* 30).
[32] See Mackie (*Ethics* 16).

standards and what he thought was required by them. He apparently thought moral realism provides an inferior explanation of moral experience and so concluded that he shouldn't accept it, or neither should anyone else who carefully looked at the arguments against it. But if epistemic nihilism is true, someone could just "choose" or "decide"[33] to accept different epistemic standards and perhaps think that inferior explanations *should* be accepted, since they are the justified ones; on nihilism, neither epistemic outlook is any better or worse than the other.

This is very hard to believe. And it seems that Mackie didn't believe it either. He said about his moral error theory that it

> goes against assumptions ingrained in our thought and built into some of the ways
> in which language is used, . . it conflicts with what is sometimes called common
> sense, [and therefore] it needs very solid support. It is not something we can
> accept lightly or casually and then quietly pass on. If we are to adopt this view,
> we must argue explicitly for it.[34]

He might have thought that these statements (and the intellectual principles that might be developed from them) were *merely* his own intellectual preferences, but it doesn't seem like that. He seems to think that they were objective truths, and other epistemic nihilists think that also. They think that whoever rejects these intellectual values is failing to *see* something that is really there: it's objectively true that counterintuitive ideas with startling implications *must* be argued for and *need* to be defended, not merely assumed, and that people who reject this standard are objectively intellectual inferior.[35]

But if this is true then epistemic nihilism is false, and the argument for it is no good. And if it's reasonable to think that there are ways we ought to reason and believe (as I have argued earlier), then this provides reasons to reject the argument as unsound. We should reject it at premise (B), the claim that, if there are epistemic properties, they are equally salient to all. But if premise (B) is false, then it's not clear why the moral premise (2) – which asserts that moral properties are salient to all (or many) – is not false

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[33] To avoid worries related to doxastic voluntarism, this point could be made by just noting that *if* someone has standards that don't jibe with anything Mackie says, it's not true that these standards should change.

[34] See Mackie (*Ethics* 35).

[35] Something like this might also be true for some people who do not accept (what they take to be) the best explanation of some phenomena. As I noted earlier, Mackie seems to think that people should accept what

also. And if that's so, then the argument for moral nihilism from diversity is no good either.

Thus, if a Mackie-style moral nihilist accepts epistemic nihilism, then he adopts a position that implies it's not true that he should accept moral nihilism, as well as other unattractive implications that many would regard as false. But if he rejects the argument for epistemic nihilism because he rejects premise (B), then it would seem he also has to reject his premise (2) in the argument for moral nihilism. At least, if we should be consistent (and it seems that sometimes we should), then he should reject (2), or revise the premise to eliminate the inconsistency. But if he rejects (2), then he rejects his argument from moral disagreement to moral nihilism. Thus, he is no longer a moral nihilist (or, at, least, not for this reason). If he thinks that he should revise (2), then, apparently, he thinks that there are objective epistemic requirements. And if thinks that, it's hard to see why he couldn't also think that there are objective moral requirements also since they seem equally mysterious from an ontological point of view. Whichever way the reasoning goes, it does not bode well for the arguments for moral or epistemic nihilisms.

Let us briefly return to our possible options of response, which can be addressed more quickly in light of the discussion above. A moral nihilist might respond to my arguments with the claim that moral and epistemic properties are not similar in the ways that Mackie detailed as interesting about moral properties, or that there is some relevant difference that I have overlooked. From this point, the nihilist could argue that Mackie's major premises yield no implications about the nature of epistemic properties or facts because of these differences in the kinds of judgments. This moral nihilist would then likely think that, were I to become aware of these claims and could find no fault in them, then my claim that Mackie's case for moral nihilism suggests an epistemic nihilism also would be unjustified, and one that I ought not hold.

However, this response would seem to ultimately presuppose that there are objective epistemic principles about epistemic evaluations and how we ought to reason and that those who disagree, or fail to see these principles, are simply blind to them.

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they take to be the best explanations; this seems to be his reason for accepting moral nihilism, since he argues it's a better explanation of disagreement than realism.

Here the relevant principle would be, very roughly stated, that if someone believes p for certain reasons and so thinks he is justified in believing p, but then comes to believe that these reasons are not strong (and has no response to these reasons), then that someone's believing p is no longer be justified and he should no longer be confident that p is true. But if there can be truths like this, truths about what beliefs and attitudes people *ought* to have and how they *should* change in response to new information, it would seem that there can also be comparable truths about morality.

So this moral nihilist's response might undermine the arguments this moral nihilist accepts as the basis of his position. The response presupposes basic normative truths about reasoning and justified belief, but if one's metaphysics allows for this kind of normative truths, then that metaphysic would allow for moral truths also. If the epistemic nihilist concedes that, on his view, there are no truths about how he should reason, then we can rightly ask this nihilist why we should accept his reasoning in favor of his position. For those who have reasons to think that epistemic evaluations are sometimes true, they have reasons to think that the nihilistic position is mistaken. The fact that it entails the falsity of their view makes no difference, unless there are stronger reasons to believe nihilism than deny it. I have argued that there are no such reasons; furthermore, its not clear how there could be such reasons, since epistemic nihilism suggests such a bizarre view of reasons such that there never are ways anyone ought to reason about such matters.

My arguments might also send a moral nihilist back to the drawing board to develop less sweeping arguments than Mackie's which would catch only moral values and leave epistemic values as objective properties. But, again, if the nihilist thinks that he *should* do this (or that it is *bad* for him to accept a position but on the basis of an argument that he now views as *no good*, because his view is not *unjustified*), then he must either understand these evaluative notions in objective terms or subjective terms. But if there are objective values here, it's not clear why there couldn't be objective values in the moral realm also, or why this couldn't be objective true: if you believe there are objective epistemic values (and you should), then you should believe there are objective moral values also.

If these values are merely subjective, it's not clear why anyone else should care about them since it's just someone's idiosyncratic quirk that he doesn't like believing things without arguments that he doesn't feel good about any more. But that's his problem, not ours, an epistemic nihilist might think, since he thinks that any standards are as good as any other, since none are objectively good. However, epistemic realists, and even most moral irrealists, disagree with that evaluation.

Thus, in conclusion, I have argued that if the argument for moral nihilism from (1) and (2) above is a strong argument, then the argument for epistemic nihilism from (A) and (B) is strong also. I have tried to argue that this argument for epistemic nihilism is not strong, and that I suspect that most moral nihilists would agree. They would reject moral nihilism in light of its bizarre and, especially, self-undermining epistemic implications; I have argued that nearly anyone should think that it should be rejected because of these implications, which are unreasonable, given what else they reasonably believe. It should also be rejected because its premise (B) is false: it seems that some people can sometimes see the epistemic truth while others cannot. Denials of this – that either that all epistemic evaluations are true, or that none are – lead to absurdities which few even moral antirealists are apt to accept. However, if some people have better "epistemic vision," and moral irrealists can concede this, then this opens the door to some people having better "moral vision." And this conclusion effectively undercuts Mackie's argument for moral nihilism from moral disagreement.

5.5. Mackie's other Arguments for Moral Nihilism.

The other considerations Mackie presents in favor of moral nihilism can be presented in a much briefer manner. This is because these considerations are, for his part, often only merely suggested, not fully developed or defended. However, for each suggestion intended to help show that there are no moral properties, we see that analogous suggestions can plausibly be given to try to show that there are no epistemic properties either. These suggestions are not fully developed, but they could be. We have seen the bizarre consequences that follow from there being no epistemic properties, or follow from thinking that, e.g., that there's nothing that ever ought to be believed (including that claim itself). Hopefully these consequences go to show that the position that there are no epistemic properties is false and ought to be rejected. But since epistemic nihilism

follows from the same considerations Mackie gives for moral nihilism, this goes to show that the assorted considerations that Mackie offers in favor of moral nihilism are not compelling, or should not be compelling.

Second to his argument from moral disagreement, Mackie has what he calls "the argument from queerness." This argument is actually a number of arguments along both metaphysical and epistemological lines, and their basis is this assertion:

> If there were [moral] objective values, they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.[36]

Mackie does not state the premises that need to be added to these assertions to validly conclude that there are no objective moral values. But he clearly thinks there are no such "entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe": he thinks nothing is objective and intrinsically motivating in the manner he claims the common conception of moral properties says they are. And he thinks that we have no "special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else." From these claims, in conjunction with those of the quote above, we can infer that there are no objective moral values.

In response to this these arguments, we could, either genuinely or for the sake of argument, agree with the first set of premises – which are statements about what moral values would be like – but ask why we should accept this second set of premises. Since Mackie does not say why, if we wish to resist moral nihilism, we might offer parallel suggestions directed against objective epistemic properties, or values. If these suggestions are palatable in the epistemic case, they might be more palatable in the moral case than Mackie thought they were.

First, if epistemic properties exist, it would seem that they too would be quite different from many other things in the universe. The properties of "being justified" or "being such that one ought to believe it" seem to be a quite different kinds of property than, say, being solid, or five pounds, or red. They appear to be like "necessary relations

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[36] See Mackie (*Ethics* 38).

of fitness" between situations and beliefs, and Mackie rejects analogous moral relations between situations and actions.[37] However, that these properties and relations are different from ordinary, mundane empirical properties doesn't seem to be much of reason to think that they don't exist, especially since, as discussed above, bizarre conclusions seem to follow from thinking that there are no epistemic properties and, thus, that no epistemic judgments are ever true.

Second, it seems that if we are ever aware of epistemic properties, it would be by some "special" faculty, perception or intuition that is different from our "ordinary" ways of knowing things. While Mackie thought this was a "lame" position about moral properties, it seems highly plausible for epistemic properties: if we "see" that we are believing as we ought (or ought not), or that we should have reasons for our beliefs, this perception seems best described as something like intuition, or reasoning based on principles that are based, ultimately, on intuition. Mackie rejects these notions, but they seem indispensable. Epistemic evaluations certainly are not wholly empirical: there is no scientific experiment that can be done to determine if a belief is reasonable, or known, for someone. In fact, science presupposes that epistemic evaluations can be made, but not made wholly on the basis of science. Again, the best way to describe the source of epistemic evaluations seems to be intuition, or intuitions about principles in conjunction with non-epistemic information.

Thus, although Mackie didn't realize it, it seems that moral and epistemic properties are, as he put it, "companions" in guilt, in terms of these metaphysical and epistemic features. Mackie mentioned that some philosophers have claimed that metaphysical notions like number, identity, substance, necessity and possibility, and causation raise the same epistemic challenges that moral notions do. He denies this, however, claiming that "satisfactory accounts of most of these can be given in empirical terms."[38]

But it's not at all clear that "satisfactory accounts" of epistemic terms can be given in empirical terms: if someone judges a belief to be reasonable or justified, it's not at all clear what empirically detectable property is being attributed to that belief. Perhaps

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[37] See Mackie (*Ethics* 40).
[38] See Mackie (*Ethics* 39).

there is such a property, but it's safe to say that there is no consensus on what this property is. Some theories of justification analyze that notion in wholly empirical (or quasi-empirical) terms, but however successful these analyses are, the questions of whether one ought to have justified beliefs, or the beliefs with those natural features, are still open and not amenable to empirical resolution. Mackie states that any metaphysical notion that resists understanding in wholly empirical terms "should [be] included, along with objective values, among the targets of the argument from queerness."[39] This principle would seem to pertain to epistemic values and eliminate them. But, again, if epistemic values are eliminated, and so no epistemic judgments are true, that has the bizarre implications discussed above. If these bizarre implications should be rejected, then so should Mackie's rejection of intuition, in the moral or epistemic realms.

Mackie has another kind of metaphysical objection to the traditional conceptions of moral properties. The objection is that, on most views, moral properties depend on or supervene on the natural features of an act or object: these natural features determine whether it is good or bad or right or wrong, and so on. But Mackie finds this relation between the moral and the non-moral mysterious. He asks:

> What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty – say, causing pain just for fun – and the moral fact that it is wrong? It cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic fact. Yet is not merely that the two features occur together. The wrongness must somehow be 'consequential' or 'supervenient'; it is wrong because it a piece of deliberate cruelty. But just what *in the world* is signified by this 'because'?[40]

He also asks how we could "see" this entire relation, the "mysterious consequential link between the two," i.e., the natural and the moral. Plainly, he thinks we can't, and his sense that we can't is motivated by his empiricist presuppositions. And he finds supervenience all too metaphysically and epistemologically mysterious to be believed and so opts for what he considers a simpler view which is that moral judgments are merely subjective responses (with no analogously complicated moral epistemology).

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[39] See Mackie (*Ethics* 39).
[40] See Mackie (*Ethics* 41).

One could meet this objection, or this response, with an explanation of what supervenience is and why it is not as mysterious Mackie thinks it is (perhaps, because it is not mysterious at all, some might argue). My response to Mackie avoids this hard work. I respond that if ethical properties should be rejected because they are presumed to be supervenient, since epistemic properties are also presumed to be supervenient, then they should be rejected also. However, they should not be rejected; we should believe that there are epistemic properties that make some epistemic evaluations true, even if these properties are supervenient. I have argued earlier than we should think there are epistemic properties. So it's not true that moral properties should be rejected because they are supervenient.

Remarks from Jaegwon Kim provide some support for this quick argument. He writes:

> . . we believe in the supervenience of epistemic properties on naturalistic ones ..
> [I]f a belief is justified, that must be so because it has certain factual, non-
> epistemic properties, such as perhaps that it is "indubitable," that it is seen to be
> entailed by another belief that is independently justified, that it is appropriately
> caused by perceptual experience, or whatever. That it is a justified belief cannot
> be a brute fundamental fact unrelated to the kind of belief it is [i.e., in terms of its
> natural features]. There must be a reason for it, and this reason must be grounded
> in the factual descriptive properties of that particular belief.[41]

Clearly, supervenience is central to epistemic evaluations: the truth of an epistemic evaluation depends on psychological facts about believer's mind (e.g., her perceptions, memories, thoughts, and so on) or on the processes that her beliefs resulted from or some other non-epistemic features of the situation. Kim claims that the role of supervenience in ethics and epistemology is entirely parallel; this seems true. And he concludes that, "Unless we are prepared to disown normative ethics as a viable philosophical inquiry, we had better recognize normative epistemology as one, too," and that "epistemology and normative ethics share the same metaphilosophical fate."[42]

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[41] See Kim ("Naturalized Epistemology" 235).
[42] See Kim ("Naturalized Epistemology" 236).

If Kim is right, then Mackie's arguments have interesting and troubling implications for epistemic evaluations. Kim claims that we should recognize normative epistemology as a viable philosophical inquire *only if* we are willing to recognize normative ethics as one. Mackie was unwilling to do so, and he thought the "metaphilosophical fate" of ethics is nihilism. If Kim is right about the parallel between ethical and epistemic evaluations, then Mackie's view implies that normative epistemology should be understood in a nihilist manner also and not recognized as a viable philosophical inquiry either.

Why think normative epistemology is not viable, on the view suggested by Mackie's remarks about supervenience in ethics? Because, on standard views, epistemic properties depend on natural properties: a belief has the epistemic properties it has *because* of its natural properties. But a Mackian thinks that there is nothing in the world signified by this 'because': the relation here is mysterious, and they don't see how to explain how epistemic features could be consequential or supervenient on natural features.

This epistemic nihilist would also ask how we could "see" this entire relation, the "mysterious consequential link between the two," i.e., the natural and the epistemic. He would think that we can't, and conclude that supervenience of this kind is too mysterious to be believed. While someone might claim that there are no epistemic properties, but if this is true then the view, for anyone, lacks the property of being reasonable, or justified, or having anything to recommend it as *worthy* of belief, since there are no such properties. And if that's so, then it's not true that anyone should believe it, or its negation, either. Hopefully these consequences are unacceptable enough, and conflict with enough of what we reasonably believe about epistemic evaluations, to show that the fact that some notion employs supervenience is not good reason to reject it. But if that's so, then Mackie's argument for nihilism from the mysteriousness of supervenience is no good.

Mackie makes a number of other brief remarks that seem to be relevant to his case against moral properties. However, these same gestures can be made against epistemic properties also. If they are not good reasons to think that there are no epistemic properties, then, in absence of further reasons, they wouldn't appear to be good reasons to think that there are no moral properties either.

First, Mackie notes that Hare said that he "cannot frame for himself any clear, detailed, picture of what it would be like for [moral] values to be part of the fabric of the world." Mackie then suggests that, "The difficulty of seeing how values could be objective is a fairly strong reason for thinking that they are not so."[43] These suggestions are common: people are often puzzled by what a moral fact would be like, since they seem so different from other facts.

Some might respond to this claim with the observation the just because something is hard to see doesn't entail that it's not there. But what's important for my purposes is that many philosophers would agree that they cannot, or cannot easily, "frame" for themselves a clear picture of what it would be for *epistemic* values to be "part of the fabric of the world" either. Just what exactly is one supposed to "picture" to display the facts, if they are facts, that some belief is known, or justified, or reasonable, or that something is a reason or some evidence, or that we should make interferences in certain ways, or that we should reasons for what we believe? What kinds of things would make these judgments true is not at all clear; in fact, it's about as opaque as what would make moral judgments true. So, for many, it's difficult to see how epistemic properties could be part of the world. However, denying that they are has bizarre consequences. And moves to avoid these consequences broaden one's metaphysical and epistemological framework so that moral values are allowed in also. But if one does this, then this consideration is not a good one to use to try to show that there are no moral properties.

Mackie writes that, "If there were something in the fabric of the world that validated certain kinds of concern, then it would be possible to acquire these merely by finding something out, by letting one's thinking be controlled by how things were."[44] Presumably, he thinks that it is not possible to find out what validates certain kinds of concern merely by letting one's thinking be controlled by how things were, and so would conclude, based on this remark, that that there are no moral properties. These remarks are obscure, but it's doubtful that anyone has ever thought that "seeing" moral reality would be easy as, perhaps, "spacing out" and letting one's thinking be "controlled" by how things are, morally. Few have thought that moral knowledge or understanding is so easy,

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[43] See Mackie (*Ethics* 24)
[44] See Mackie (*Ethics* 22).

or so mystical. But maybe Mackie is mistaken and it is, in some sense, *possible* to gain it by merely letting one's thinking be controlled how things are. To evaluate this suggestion, we would need to know more about the relevant sense of "possible" was at work here, of course. If some people are able to sometimes see moral truths, then it surely it possible that this can be done.

Setting these considerations aside, suppose this was a good objection to moral properties. If it were, then it would be a good objection to epistemic properties also. Consider someone concerned about having evidence, or who thinks that knowledge is more valuable than unjustified, yet true, beliefs. These are concerns and one might think they are "validated," by the facts that one *ought* to have evidence and that justified beliefs are *better* than unjustified beliefs, even when they are false. The thought is that these are aspects of the "fabric of the world" which back up these concerns. But then one might object that, "If there were something in the fabric of the world that validated certain kinds of [*epistemic*] concern, then it would be possible to acquire these merely by finding something out, by letting one's thinking be controlled by how things were." One then could claim that this is not possible and so conclude, analogously to the argument above, that there is no epistemic fabric of the world. However, again, if there are no epistemic facts, unacceptable consequences follow, so this gives reason to reject the previous suggested argument against moral properties.

Finally, Mackie states a number of consequences that follow from accepting objective moral values:

> It would make a radical difference to our metaphysics if we had to find room for objective values – perhaps something like Plato's forms – somewhere in our picture of the world. It would similarly make a difference to our epistemology if we had to explain how such objective values are or can be known, and do our philosophical psychology if we had to allow such knowledge . . to direct choices and actions."[45]

These claims are all true, but analogous claims are made with equal plausibility about epistemic values and properties and their metaphysical, *epistemological* and psychological status. If these consequences are intolerable for moral values and

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[45] See Mackie (*Ethics* 24-25).

properties, they are intolerable for epistemic ones also. But they are not in the epistemic case, so, in absence of further reasons, they are not intolerable for moral properties either.

5.5. Conclusion.

In his conclusion, Mackie sums up four basic kinds of reasons to think that there are no moral properties. I have argued that, for each of these reasons, analogous reasons can be given against evaluative epistemic properties. Insofar as there are good reasons to think that there are epistemic properties, and earlier I argued that there are such reasons, this provides grounds to reject Mackie's arguments for moral nihilism.

First, for both kinds of evaluations there is seems to be a diversity of evaluations at all levels of particularity and generality, and these disagreements seem to resist convergence. A related, although not discussed, claim is that one's moral and epistemic commitments, as well as the evaluations and principles one makes and accept, tend to be influenced by one's "way of life": different communities and families sometimes accept different standards. So, as just one example of this, people with some backgrounds are apt to view religious leaders as both moral and epistemic authorities, whereas people from anti-religious backgrounds are apt to view religious leaders as morally and intellectual incompetent. If empirical truths like these about moral matters support moral nihilism, then they might also suggest epistemic nihilism.

Second, ordinary conceptions of moral and epistemic values seem to presuppose that they are "objective": someone's, and even everyone's, believing something to have some moral or epistemic property does not *make* it have that property, since this is determined by objective conditions. Thus, the conceptions are similar. Also, if one concedes that it's plausible that some kinds of moral evaluations are intrinsically motivating, then it's also plausible to think that some kinds of epistemic evaluations have a comparable necessary consequence in terms of affective or motivational change. Insofar as Mackie argues that objectivity and having motivational qualities are an ontologically problematic combination of features, both moral and epistemic evaluations raise similar concerns.

Third, both notions employ supervenience, so if that is damning in one case, it is damning in the other. Fourth, both moral epistemology and *epistemic* epistemology give rise to similar problems and challenges. However, if a response to moral epistemology is

that the challenges of the subject are so great that there probably are no moral properties, then the analogous conclusion – that there are no epistemic properties either – would seem to follow also. However, again, if epistemic nihilism is true, this conclusion or inference would not be justified, or reasonable, or warranted, because there are no such properties to make these claims true.

Thus, for everything Mackie says against moral properties, analogous claims can be made against epistemic properties to try to show that they don't exist. Since, as I argued earlier, we have stronger reason to think that there are epistemic properties, we have reason to reject his arguments. But trying to show that epistemic properties do not exist is a mighty challenge since, as far as I can tell, it can't easily be done without epistemic presuppositions and epistemic language. What's particularly indispensable are judgments about what one *ought* to believe, how one *should* reason, what conditions of mind are *better* than others (e.g., recognized consistency versus recognized inconsistency), and so on.

To try to persuade without using epistemic language, an epistemic nihilist could, of course, just yell at people, "Don't accept any epistemic evaluations!" or walk around crying, telling people how unhappy he is about people's accepting epistemic evaluations. But we could ask why epistemic evaluations make him sad, what's so *bad* about them and why we *should* reject them. If he explained his view, we would see that it's not true that we should accept it. And we would see that, even if we really liked it and provided the best explanation, it would not be true that we should accept it: that's a consequence of the view.

Hopefully, all these consequences are so intolerable that we would, and should, reject the premises that were given its support. And that's just to reject Mackie's case for moral nihilism and against moral realism.

Chapter 6: Harman's Epistemic Relativism

6.1. Introduction.

Gilbert Harman rejects moral realisms, Mackie's moral nihilism, and the non-cognitivisms like those developed by Ayer, Stevenson, and Hare. Harman's view is that, contrary to all these positions, there are moral truths, but they are "relative" truths, not "objective" truths. Harman is thus a moral relativist.

On moral relativism, the truth-values of moral sentences are (metaphysically) determined by the speaker's moral framework, i.e., her set of moral values, standards and principles. A result of this theory is that since which moral frameworks are accepted can (and do) vary over distance and time, what is true, morally, is also relative: there are no universal, necessarily true moral claims. Thus, what's morally required in one community might be morally impermissible in another and this might be due *solely* to each accepting different moral frameworks.

Here I examine Harman's arguments for this form of moral relativism, as well as his arguments for some earlier forms of moral relativism that he has defended. While Harman advocates relativism for moral evaluations, I investigate what these arguments' major premises and motivating concerns suggest for *non-moral* evaluations, focusing on epistemic or intellectual judgments and principles (*not* moral judgments and principles) such as, but not limited to:

> "You *should* believe this."
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> "You *ought* to believe that."
>
> "This is *evidence* for that."
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> "This is *good, sufficient*, evidence for that."
>
> "This belief is *justified*, or *reasonable*, or *known*."
>
> "There is *good reason* to believe that."
>
> "You *should* believe something if, and only if, you have *good evidence* for it."
>
> "Given that you believe this, you *ought* to also believe that."
>
> "This implies that, so you *should* not believe this."

I argue that Harman's premises suggest an understanding of evaluative epistemic judgments that is comparable to his understanding of the nature of moral judgments: his various arguments for moral relativism suggest analogous arguments for *epistemic*

relativism, a view that epistemic judgments are sometimes true but that their truth is "relative," not objective or stance independent, as epistemic realists hold they are. If epistemic relativism is true, then epistemic realism is false. Since I think epistemic realism is true, it is worthwhile to defend it from reasons related to relativism.

On an epistemic relativism comparable to Harman's moral relativism, the truth value of an epistemic judgment is determined, in part, by the "epistemic framework" the believer, or perhaps her community, accepts, i.e., her epistemic or intellectual values, standards and principles. The truth values of epistemic judgments would not be determined by epistemic facts, properties or principles that are *not* constituted by anyone's attitudes towards epistemic propositions.[1]

I argue that these epistemic relativisms are false and the arguments for them weak: insofar as we can develop an understanding of what epistemic relativism would be like, we have reasons to reject it, especially if we are not epistemic relativists now, since much of it and its implications reasonably seem untrue to the facts about epistemic evaluation. Since these arguments are weak, I argue that analogous comparable arguments for moral relativism are weak also. Thus, I argue that Harman has not shown that moral realism is defective and that moral relativism is a more plausible alternative to it.

Unlike the other authors I have discussed, Harman realizes that the considerations he gives in favor of moral relativism point toward epistemic relativism. He rejects epistemic relativism, however, but I argue he rejects it for inadequate reasons.

6.2. A Moral Relativism Consistent with Moral Realism.

In Harman's earliest writings on these issues, the version of moral relativism he advocates is consistent with moral realism.[2] This version of moral relativism and its defense are worth discussing, however, because themes developed in its defense play into Harman's defense of a later form of relativism that is, in fact, inconsistent with moral

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[1] This distinction is not easy to formulate since, on any plausible epistemic realism, the epistemic principles – or one's intellectual worldview, we might say – can make a difference to what one epistemically ought to believe. These kinds of beliefs can contribute to one's total evidence. Epistemic relativisms, however, suggest a more dramatic role for epistemic principles, worldviews and "frameworks," a role that I argue is mistaken.

[2] See Harman's "What Is Moral Relativism?" and "Moral Relativism Defended" in Harman (*Explaining Value* 3-19, 20-38*).*

realism. Understanding this earlier version of relativism will help us understand the later version.

Harman claims that there's *a* sense of "morally ought" such that, *to his ear*, it sounds "odd" to say that Hitler *ought not* to have killed the Jews and Southern slaveholders *ought* to have let their slaves go free.[3] This is because this sense of "ought" is fixed by the agents' beliefs and desires: its truth conditions are determined by what is consistent with them, or what actions are supported by them or, we might say, "make sense" in light of them. So Harman claims that if Hitler's beliefs and desires provide no "reason" to not kill Jews then it would be false, or "odd," to say that he ought not to have killed them. Similarly, if upon critical reflection on their beliefs and desires, slave owners found nothing that would support their freeing their slaves, then it would be false to say that they ought to have set them free. This is Harman's insight on one sense of term "ought."

We could agree with Harman that there's *a* sense of "ought" for which this is true: there is the "ought" that is fixed by, and relative to, the evaluated agent's beliefs and desires. The claim can certainly be made that, for Hitler, perhaps nothing in his mind suggested to him that what he was doing was wrong, and that that no moral evaluations like that would have occurred to him even if he had had more information about all the relevant non-moral considerations, had thought about his plans more, had tried seeing things from his victims' points of view, and so on. That might be a fact about Hitler's mental life: perhaps his views were so fixed that he would have never found any belief or desire that would lead him to change them or alter his behavior. Perhaps relative to his own beliefs and desires, nothing else besides killing the Jews would have "made sense," so to speak: changing his plans would have been, in some sense, "inconsistent" with who he was, in terms of his "core" beliefs and desires.

But showing that this sort of claim is true, i.e., that there is this sense of "ought," is no threat to moral realism. For Harman's theory allows that, in spite of the truth of these relative-ought judgments that he identifies, we can still truthfully say that Hitler was objectively evil and that slaveholding is objectively wrong, irrespective of how Hitler and the slaveholders might have ever felt about it. So it's not at all clear how

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[3] See Harman (*Explaining Value* 7).

Harman's observing that there is this sense of "ought" which is relative is a threat to moral realism, since there are other moral evaluations that are not relative to the perspectives of the agents in questions.

Harman's critics could appease him by just granting him this useful sense of "ought" but then just use other morally evaluative vocabulary to make the objective moral evaluations they'd like to make. They could see Harman's claim as an interesting, but not very morally significant, observation that we can ask whether someone is doing what is consistent with, or supported by, her beliefs and desires and whether her mental state would support doing anything else. When there are affirmative answers to either of these questions, we might stipulate a sense, i.e., Harman's sense, in which the person is doing what she "ought" to do: perhaps we might say that her actions *harmanonize* with her beliefs and desires. But even in these cases of harmonization, we can still realize that there are other senses of the term "ought" on which someone objectively ought to not be doing what she's doing, regardless of whatever she might believe or feel about it. Thus, moral realists should find no serous threat in this version of moral relativism. Let us now consider versions of moral relativism that are inconsistent with realism.

6.3. A Moral Relativism Inconsistent with Moral Realism.

Some later versions of Harman's moral relativism include the above version of relativism, but unlike it, include a rejection of moral realism. These defenses of relativism echo Harman's previous suggestion that a moral judgment, or a moral principle, applies to someone only if that person has "reason" to accept it. Although he is not entirely clear on what he means by a "reason," Harman seems to think that for someone to have a reason to accept something is for her existing beliefs and desires to support it, or that they would support it with minor changes.[4] Harman argues that since people's reasons differ, what moral demands they are subject to differ as well. This is a form of moral relativism and, unlike the previous version of relativism, Harman considered it to apply to all moral judgments, not a restricted class, as it was earlier. So this version of relativism is inconsistent with moral realism.

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[4] I ignore the difficulties that Harman would have in spelling this idea out and explaining why and when, in cases of perceived doxastic tension (due, perhaps, to recognized inconsistencies), one ought to resolve this tension, as well as on what basis this tension should be resolved (e.g., why retain p and drop some other proposition[s] rather than rejecting p and retaining some other proposition[s]?).

This version of moral relativism is based on two of Harman's assumptions: the first is a highly controversial moral assumption; the second is a quasi-empirical claim about people's beliefs and desires. This first assumption is that, "Moral demands have to be acceptable to those whom they apply to in a way that legal demands do not," i.e., that "a moral demand applies to someone only if it is rational for that person to accept that demand."[5] Harman's second assumption is that, "it can be rational for different people to accept different moral demands 'all the way down.'" From these two assumptions we can conclude that fundamentally different moral demands can apply to different moral people; that there are no universal, necessarily applicable or binding moral demands or requirements.

Harman's first assumption, that moral demands have to be acceptable to those whom they apply to, is striking. It contrasts with common views that claim that some moral demands apply to every moral agent, irrespective of their antecedent beliefs and desires or what is rational for them to accept. On this common view, even if there were someone whose beliefs and desires were supportive of, e.g., child-molesting, he still ought not to do it. Harman might say that this person has no "reason" to refrain from molesting children, but some critics would see this as simply irrelevant to the fact that he shouldn't do that: the fact that this molester fails to find any reason why he should not molest children, and would not see these reasons with further information, imagination, and thought, might be seen as just further indication of this person's faults.[6] So Harman's first assumption, that moral demands have to be acceptable to those whom they apply to, is not one that many people would share. It would be acceptable only if a very strong argument was given in its favor, but Harman provides no such argument. Thus, this assumption is quite out of line with most people's assumptions about moral demands; most people have little reason to accept it.

Harman's favorite characters to illustrate his second premise, that "it can be rational for different people to accept different moral demands," include "successful criminals," "cynical politicians," and certain business executives whom Harman claims

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[5] See Harman (*Explaining Value* 30, 33).
[6] I should note that Harman is not arguing that what we *can* do is determined by our reasons, i.e., our epistemic situations, and that some epistemic situations would make it seem that *not* molesting children is

might not have any "reasons" to conform their behavior to the moral norms that most people accept.[7] Harman claims that these people might have fundamentally different moral outlooks that would resist change in light of more information, careful reflection and reasoning, and any other non-moral improvement. For these people, *because they accept different demands*, Harman thinks it's not true that they ought not perform their criminal deeds and lie and steal from their constituents and shareholders. Harman again claims that since they have no "reason" not to do so, i.e., they are not moved by the same moral concerns that many of the rest of us are, it's not true that they should not lie, steal and cheat.

This is a very surprising perspective. Many would find Harman's arguments for this kind of relativism and its resulting implications entirely unconvincing. But this is because his assumptions are entirely unconvincing: you don't get off the moral hook, so to speak, by it being the case that none of your beliefs and desires would support doing something. Judith Thompson has an amusing illustration of this point in response to Harman's relativistic analysis of moral statements:

> It is a good heuristic in philosophy to be suspicious of views that would shock your grocer. [Suppose] I order a bushel of applies from my grocer and he send them round straightaway. The following week he sends round his bill. I phone and say "Something interesting just happened. I now find that my wants have changed: I now find that I have no wants that would be met by my paying your bill, and that I have wants that would be met by not paying your bill." . . "Moreover," I go on, "my mental state is not due to any epistemic failure, as I have gone into this manner very carefully." I explain: "After all, you haven't any proof that you delivered the apples, and even if you did, there's nothing you could do about the matter since I'm leaving for Bolivia in the morning [and so no harm will come to me by not paying the bill]" . . "So it follows that morality doesn't require me to pay you."[8]

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impossible and so it's false to say that, for this person, he ought not molest children. Harman's arguments do not explicitly appeal to any "ought-implies-can"-type concerns.
[7] See Harman (*Explaining Value* 33).
[8] See Thompson (*Moral Relativism* 211-212)

Thompson regards this case as a *reductio* of Harman's claim that a person morally ought to do something only if her beliefs and desires support doing it or, as Harman sometimes also suggests, it is in one's own interest to do something. While there are likely *some* kinds of standards that apply to a person only if his or her own beliefs and desires support that application, moral ones do not seem to be that kind. It does not seem that the truth (and falsity) of moral evaluations depends on whether the evaluation serves the acting agents' beliefs and desires. Perhaps they are, but Harman gave very little reason to think otherwise; he did not defend his assumptions. Given their shocking implications, it's unfortunate that he did not do so.

One way to defend Harman's moral assumptions, however, is to argue that they follow from, or are an instance of, a general principle that is justified. Why do moral demands have to be acceptable to those whom they apply, or why does a moral demands apply to someone only if it is prudential for that person to accept that demand? This is because, it could be said, in general, *all demands – all normative requirements – have to be acceptable to those whom they apply; they apply only if it is prudential for that person to accept those demands.* Although there is little to recommend this principle, it is a possible view. And if it were justified, then Harman's view about moral demands might also be justified.

However, this general principle, insofar as there are normative epistemic and intellectual requirements (and I have, along with many other philosophers, argued that there are), suggests that, like moral requirements, these epistemic and intellectual requirements apply only when they are acceptable to the evaluated person. This view would imply that *an epistemic judgment, or an epistemic principle, applies to someone only if that person accepts it, or has "reason" to accept it, i.e., her existing beliefs and desires support it, or it is in her interest to believe it.* Since "support" appears to often be an epistemic term, we would want to understand it in a manner that has no normative or evaluative implications; so, for someone's beliefs and desires to "support" an epistemic principle is merely for the person to believe that it does, or it be the case that (upon reflection) she would believe it, or perhaps that it's entailed by what she believes. "Support" could be understood along these lines all with no question as to whether this believing would be justified or reasonable or have some other positive epistemic status.

This sort of claim above would be analogous to Harman's first assumption about moral evaluations, viz. that they apply only if the evaluated person accepts them. We could to this assumption the further assumption that is analogous to Harman's second assumption about moral demands, i.e., that it can be rational, i.e., prudential, for different people to accept different epistemic demands or principles "all the way down." If we combine these two assumptions we would have a version of epistemic relativism.

So, what should someone believe, if an epistemic relativism like this is true? The relativistic answer would be that it would depend on the person. First, it would depend on what epistemic demands a person has "reason" to accept. Second, the relativist would claim that since people accept different epistemic demands, there is no universally correct answer for what people should believe, even in cases where, intuitively, their experiences – what we might think of as their evidence – are very similar, if not phenomenologically identical.

This perspective, however, leads us to what seem to be false implications for epistemic evaluations. Consider two possible people who have very similar beliefs and experiences at a time, but one accepts very high epistemic standards (say, Cartesian standards) and the other accepts very low epistemic standards (say, a standard to the effect that, necessarily, if she believes something then it's justified). On epistemic relativism, the believer with high standards would have few, if any, justified beliefs. The believer with very low standards would, presumably, have many justified beliefs, but her accepted epistemic principle might also result in many (intuitively) unjustified beliefs being falsely counted as justified. This would be the case if she has, like many people do, many beliefs that are actually unjustified: on epistemic relativism, her merely believing an exceedingly "low standards" epistemic principle would *make* these beliefs justified.

These differences in epistemic evaluation in this case would be *merely* because of what standards they accept; the case is set up so that they have comparable evidence, or things seem the same to them, from each of their points of view. On common non-relativistic epistemic views, what standards one accepts *can* change what one is justified in believing, since accepting some standards, i.e., accept some epistemic propositions, involves believing new propositions. That might change, at least subtly, one's evidence or how things seem. Despite these facts, however, it does not seem that one can *make* all

of one's beliefs unjustified *merely* by accepting very high epistemic standards, or by believing that the demands for justified belief are so high. Similarly, it does not seem that one can *make* one's beliefs justified, or make (intuitively) unjustified beliefs justified, merely by accepting very low epistemic standards.

Some who are epistemic contextualists might disagree here. However, there is a distinction here that might be relevant to addressing their concern. First, coming to accept very high epistemic standards could serve as a defeater for the justification of one's beliefs: one could come to believe that justification requires very high standards (e.g., the impossibility of error) and see that one's beliefs generally do not meet these standards and so come to believe that one's beliefs are not justified. But for this to be a defeater it's not *merely* that one accept these high standards that might defeat one's justification: it's that one accepts the standards *and* that one *sees that* these new standards preclude justification because one sees that one's beliefs fail to meet the standard. I maintain that this sort of claim about how accepting standards can defeat justification is plausible: if epistemic contextualists accept this point, then good for them. Contrast this view with the view that the *mere* acceptance of higher (and lower) standards can make all the world of an epistemic difference, even when the acceptance of these standards is not recognized.[9]

As I am developing the position, epistemic relativism includes this claim. I claim that this is false. But this version of epistemic relativism seems to imply that it is not. According to epistemic relativism, there are no universal, necessarily true epistemic standards, such as those that theories like evidentialism or reliabilism at least attempt to identify; the only standards are those which the believer accepts (or would accept), which can vary and these varying, relative standards determine the epistemic status of a token belief. However, epistemic standards do not vary in the manner, or to the degree, that epistemic relativism implies they can and do. Therefore, epistemic relativism is false.

Since this sort of epistemic relativism is motivated by an obvious principle that one might give in defense of Harman's moral relativism, this shows that the basic idea that normative demands apply to people only if they accept them is mistaken. This

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[9] This will become clearer as the presentation of Harman's moral relativism unfolds below, but Harman does not seem to require that one *recognize* what moral framework one accepts for that framework to apply to, or generate moral implications for, oneself.

undercuts a possible defense of Harman's moral relativism. Since no other defense was provided, this makes relativism all the more doubtful, especially in light of its highly counterintuitive implications.

Let me re-present these considerations in a more concrete manner using an epistemic principle. Consider some epistemic principle to the effect that *for any proposition, one (epistemically) should believe it if, and only if, one has sufficient evidence for it*. For many people, that principle implies, in conjunction with other truths about their situation, that there are some propositions that they now believe which they should not believe, and that there are propositions they should believe which they do not.

Someone might resist this conclusion, or any other epistemic evaluation, by claiming that it does not apply to her because she does not accept the initial epistemic principle: this person would claim that these judgments about what she should believe are not true *because* she does not accept what we might call "evidentialism." She might claim that that she has no "reason," in Harman's sense, to accept evidentialism and would not find a reason even if she had more information, thought more about the issue, and so on. She might therefore claim that it is not true for her that she should always believe only what fits the evidence. She might say about epistemic demands what Harman says about moral demands, viz. that they have to be acceptable to those whom they apply to in a way that legal demands do not and that they apply to someone only if it is rational for that person to accept that demand.

However, it is not clear why an epistemic requirement applies to someone only if that person accepted it. Some skeptic might refuse to accept any epistemic standards that will allow for some justified beliefs in the actual world, yet it seems that it still might be true that some of his beliefs are justified. A foolish person's beliefs do not become justified merely by his thinking that "anything goes" in terms of belief. But if one assumed that moral requirements applied only when the person has a "reason" to accept them, it seems easy enough to make this assumption about epistemic requirements also. If Harman's observations that some people (criminals, executives, etc.) don't accept the basic moral principles that the majority of society does accept is supposed to support his moral relativism, then comparable observations that there are people who don't accept

common epistemic and intellectual principles would seem to provide comparable support for an epistemic relativism.

However, again, it does not seem that one can make it the case whether some epistemic judgment is true (or false) of oneself *merely* by adopting, or having, different epistemic standards. This response is analogous to Thompson's reply to her grocer and the point is similar: you can't get out of a demand, moral or epistemic, by merely ceasing to accept a principle or it not being in your interest for you to conform to it.

Thus, I find this motivation for relativisms, moral and epistemic, implausible. Were stronger cases made in their favor, and a more direct, careful case given why exactly it's implausible to think that there are moral and epistemic requirements that apply to everyone, then these relativisms might be worthier of greater consideration. As it stands, there is little to recommend this version of Harman's moral relativism. Moral realists should find no threat in it, and epistemic realists should find no threat in the analogous epistemic relativism.

6.4. From Disagreement to Moral & Epistemic Relativisms.

I now turn to a second strategy Harman uses to defend moral relativism. Like Mackie, Harman is impressed by moral disagreements. He thinks that such disagreement casts doubt on moral realism, although, like Mackie, he does not explain why he thinks moral properties would be so salient that nearly everyone would agree in their moral evaluations.

Moral realists are not as troubled by moral disagreement; Harman notes that they might respond to moral disagreement, even when all the relevant non-moral disagreements that cause some moral disagreement are resolved, with the claim that "some people are simply not well placed to discover the right answers to moral questions."[10] Realists would use this response to argue that this, ultimately, explains what is going on in some cases of fundamental moral disagreement: some people, for various reasons, just fail to see the objective moral values that are there. Although he does not explain what is faulty with this realistic response, Harman rejects it.

Harman thus rejects morally realistic claims to the effect that some moral framework is, as Harman puts it, "objectively privileged as the one true morality." But

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[10] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 12).

Harman also rejects Mackie's moral nihilism and its related explanation for moral disagreement, viz. that there are no moral properties to constrain moral thinking and so this is why there is so much disagreement. He rejects nihilism because he thinks it implies that morality should be "abandoned."[11] Unfortunately, Harman does not explain what he means here. Even Mackie did not seem to think this; he thought that moral judgments would, and even *should*, continue, even when its false presuppositions are recognized. Mackie's response might not easily gibe with Mackie's own theory, i.e., there is perhaps some tension in a view that says no moral judgments are true yet we should (from a moral point of view?) go on making moral judgments, but Harman rejects it nevertheless.

Instead, Harman advocates what he calls "moral relativism," which he claims "is a reasonable inference from the most plausible explanation of moral diversity."[12] According to Harman, moral relativists accept the following:

> For the purposes of assigning truth conditions, a judgment of the form, *it would be wrong of P to D*, has to be understood as elliptical for a judgment of the form, *in relation to moral framework M, it would be morally wrong of P to D.* Similarly for other moral judgments.[13]

And moral relativists like Harman also think that:

> There is no single true morality. There are many different moral frameworks, none of which is more correct than the others.[14]

Moral relativists believe there are moral truths. But they think what is true, morally, depends on the moral framework. A moral framework is, in Harman's terminology, a set of values, standards and principles. Relative to some moral frameworks, a judgment will be true, yet on other frameworks it is false, but no framework is objectively true or false. So if someone were to ask if something is wrong, what can be said is that it's wrong in relations to some frameworks and not wrong in relation to others. There is no wrong, *period*, or wrong apart from a framework, or wrong according to the objectively true, correct framework.

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[11] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 6).
[12] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 8).
[13] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 4).
[14] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 8).

Harman sees an analogy to judgments about motion: nothing is moving, *period*; all judgments about motion are relative to a particular spatiotemporal framework: relative to some framework, something might be moving, yet relative to another it is standing still. Similarly, relative to one set of values, standards and principles, an action might be allowed, yet it would not be permitted relative to another set. Realists, of course, can make this observation ("Relative to a common Catholic morality, abortions are almost always wrong, but relative to utilitarianism, abortions are often not wrong") but they think that at least one of these positions – Catholic morality or utilitarianism – is objectively false. Relativists, of course, deny that there are any objectively, universally true or false moralities.

This is a basic statement of moral relativism. I will attempt to elucidate the position in greater detail below, but for now I will suppose that an adequate understanding of the basics of the view has been provided. My focus will be the argument that Harman provides in its favor. I will consider the main argument he provides and argue that a parallel argument can be given to support an analogous "epistemic relativism," a view like the following:

> For the purposes of assigning truth conditions, a judgment of the form, *it would be epistemically reasonable, rational or justifiable for S to believe p*, has to be understood as elliptical for a judgment of the form, *in relation to epistemic framework E, it would be epistemically reasonable, rational or justifiable for S to believe p.* Similarly for other epistemic judgments.

Epistemic relativists who hold a position analogous to Harman's moral relativism would also think that:

> There is no single true epistemology. There are many different epistemic frameworks, none of which is more correct than the others.

I will argue that if Harman's argument for moral relativism is a strong one, then the analogous argument for epistemic relativism is strong also. I argue that the main considerations that Harman offers in favor of his moral relativism apply to epistemic judgments also and so would provide comparable epistemic relativism as well. I have already argued that a version of epistemic relativism is false, and some of these arguments would seem to transfer to this new version of relativism, but I will offer

additional considerations to reject this version of relativism. Since this epistemic relativism follows from the same kind of reasoning given for moral relativism, and this epistemic relativism is an implausible position, this shows that the analogous reasoning given in favor of moral relativism is weak. Thus, I undercut Harman's main argument for moral relativism. Since Harman's position has been deemed worthy of attention and is considered by some to be a live alternative to morally realistic positions, showing that the main argument in its favor is weak is a significant accomplishment.

6.4.1. Arguments for Moral Relativism.

Harman's argument for moral relativism is brief, and not developed or defended in great detail. In fact, the argument is strikingly simple. It has two steps: first, he argues that moral realism is false, given moral disagreement: he argues that "the rejection of moral absolutism . . is a reasonable inference from the *most plausible explanation* of the range of moral diversity that actually exists."[15] We have seen how these arguments go, and how realists might respond to them. For now, I will assume, for the sake of argument, that these arguments are strong.

Second, he argues from the falsity of moral realism and so there not being "objectively" true moral judgments to there being "relatively" true moral judgments. To complete this step, Harman surveys the alternatives to absolutism, which he sees as nihilism, emotivism and relativism. He rejects nihilism, since he thinks it falsely implies that morality should be "abandoned"[16] and so concludes in favor of relativism. He briefly discusses emotivism, and he seems to reject it for Frege-Geach type problems, i.e., since it does not provide a plausible way to understand conditionals with moral terms and valid arguments that contain moral terms it is false.[17] He then concludes that moral relativism is true.

This inference from the falsity of "absolute moral truth" to the truth of "relative moral truth" is, unfortunately, not well defended: Harman really does not say why, if we think that no moral judgments or moral principles are "absolutely" true, we should think that some judgments are "relatively" true. The inference from the former to the latter appears to be a great leap. Let us try to think this through, to try to see how a reflective

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[15] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 10).
[16] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 6).

relativist might get from the rejection of moral realism to relativism. This might lead us to be puzzled about what the doctrine of moral relativism is; our puzzlement might be so great that it might be hard to judge the view as *false*, since we wouldn't have a clear view in mind.

Suppose one came to reject moral realism and so believed that there are no objective moral truths. This idea might be explained as, in part, the idea that there are no moral principles that apply to everyone. While some of us might have thought that torturing babies for fun is *necessarily* wrong, if we rejected realism we would believe that that is a mistaken belief: this conviction is not an objective truth about the world, rather it is merely a feature of our own moral framework. And our framework, our moral perspective, is only one of many moral perspectives, none of which are objectively, or necessarily, true. A moral nihilist would agree with this statement so far, and many non-cognitivists would agree also.

A moral relativist, however, believes that although there are no objective, necessary truths in ethics: there are only "relative" truths. So, if someone thinks, "Torture for fun is always wrong," then the relativist would understand this person as saying, if speaking sincerely, that torture for fun is always wrong on *her* moral framework. The relativist would realize that there are, or could be, other frameworks where torture for fun would not always be wrong. A relativist could say that *for those who accept frameworks where torture is condemned*, torture is wrong, or *on some frameworks, it is true that* torture is wrong, and on other frameworks it is *false* that torture is wrong.

One question is why to use a "is true relative to a framework" and similar locutions. A reflective moral nihilist can recognize that people have moral frameworks and that there are logical relations among the various (what she regards as false) propositions that make up people's moral frameworks and the various moral judgments they make. And nihilists can recognize that we can discern the implications of false principles: falsehoods, in conjunction with other premises, can imply further falsehoods. Why not leave it with the recognition that there are a multitude of false frameworks, instead of introducing this notion of relative truth, which seems to amount to little more than *belief*? Harman's answer here is not clear. So it's not clear why rejecting realism

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[17] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 33).

should lead us to relativism, instead of a nihilism that recognizes different moral frameworks.

Sturgeon responds to this by arguing that moral relativism "may just be moral nihilism plus circumlocution. It's the view that there is no such property as moral wrongness, so that no actions have it: no actions are morally wrong."[18] The relativistic circumlocution is to describe people's judgments as true "relative to" their framework (and, somehow, that a framework is true "relative to" itself), but that no framework is objectively true. This locution is obscure, and it's not at all clear how this relativistic circumlocution is an improvement over the nihilist's way of understanding comparable phenomena, especially if, as Mackie does, nihilists are able to continue making moral evaluations. The nihilist can, like Harman, observe that certain moral judgments will be supported by, or at least consistent with, some frameworks but not others, and that some judgments will *seem true* to those who accept some frameworks but *seem false* to those who accept other frameworks. This is way of describing the phenomena is clearer than with the notion of relative truth. Thus, it seems a nihilist can say everything that Harman would like to say, but in a clearer and more plausible manner.

Is there any reason to prefer relativism over nihilism? Again, Harman rejects nihilism because he thinks it implies that we should not make moral judgments. Harman, however, thinks that we should make moral judgments and thinks that his notion of relative truth enables us to do this. But since Mackie thought that we should make moral judgments, so we can think that we should continue to make moral judgments even if we come to believe that moral realism is false. Harman thinks that morality is "needed for reasons similar to the reasons for which law is needed."[19] This sounds like a normative, perhaps moral, judgment, viz. that *we ought to keep making moral judgments*. Why is this? Perhaps *because it would be bad for us if we didn't*. These too, presumably, on Harman's view are "relative" judgments, and they won't be true on all frameworks. Perhaps they are true on Harman's, but not others' frameworks. Thus, if the claim that we need to make moral judgments is a motivation for relativism, it appears to itself be relativistic: on some moral frameworks, we should make moral judgments and on others

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[18] See Sturgeon ("Harman on Objectivity and Moral Relativism" 7).
[19] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 6).

we should not. If Harman's claim is not a relativistic judgment, and is based in some absolutist sense that we ought to make moral judgments, then we might wonder why we shouldn't just accept absolutism.

But since we clearly quite literally *can* make moral judgments if nihilism is true or even if we believe nihilism to be true, Harman's objection to it along these lines is no good. A nihilist, in effect, might say something very much like what a relativist would say:

> I believe that moral realism is false and there are no (necessary or contingent) moral truths. However, as a matter of fact, I still have my moral framework: I still have my preferences for how I would like to see things go, how I think things ought to be. I believe that there's nothing in the world that "backs up" my preferences, but I have them nonetheless. And I certainly prefer *my* preferences over the preferences of others. Although it's not true that my (or anyone's) preferences should be satisfied, I will try to see that mine are satisfied. That's part of what I do when I make moral judgments, but all the while I clearly realize that there is no literal truth to any of this: things only *seem true*, morally-speaking, to me, but that's almost just what it is to have a moral belief, i.e., for it is to *seem true* that something is right or wrong. And my theory about ethics does not imply that it is *morally bad* that I continue doing this (i.e., making judgments that, upon reflection, I uniformly judge to be false) or that it's *wrong* that I do this, since my theory says there is no such thing and, furthermore, I can't help myself from having the reactions I do.

Since a nihilist *could* say something like that, Harman is mistaken in thinking that nihilists must "abandon" making moral judgments. So this argument from elimination, by ruling out nihilism, does not help relativism. There is little reason to accept it over nihilism, once we come to accept nihilism.

Harman also tries to support relativism by claiming that relativism jibes well with some common moral convictions, e.g., that it's worse to initiate harm than to not help someone and that it's worse to exploit animals than human persons.[20] He thinks that if morality is entirely conventional, as relativism implies since it makes moral truth

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[20] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 23-27).

dependent on the accepted moral framework, we would expect that these kinds of moral judgments would often be accepted. This is because these judgments are in the interest of those who have the power to influence which moral standards are widely accepted.[21] This might be true, but these kinds of judgments are also consistent with moral absolutism also, and other absolutists regard them as false and unjustified. So it's not clear how these considerations help relativism.

Harman also thinks that there is a strong analogy between relative judgments about motion and relative moral judgments. However, an important disanalogy between relativistic judgments about motion and morals is that nearly all people are perfectly comfortable with motion being relative, but very few are comfortable with morals being relative. Arguments from analogy are often weak, and they are weaker the more differences there are between the two kinds of things that are said to be similar. Insofar as moral judgments and judgments about motion seem, despite whatever similarities they share, quite different, Harman's argument based on the analogy does not seem to be strong.

This is a basic statement of the considerations Harman gives in favor of moral relativism. As I mentioned above, the argument is that since moral realism, moral nihilism and non-cognitivism are false, moral relativism is true. Critics have found this argument wanting; in particular, they have wondered, as I have, what the justification is for the inference to moral relativism from the alleged failure of all these other positions. Sturgeon has concluded that that "even if moral disputes are rationally unresolvable, I don't see that [Harman] has a compelling argument from that premise to what he calls moral relativism. In particular, I don't see that his relativism contributes anything to his explanation of rationally irresolvable disagreement."[22] As far as I know, Harman has not addressed any of these concerns about his argument for relativism. All and all, it is not a well-defended position.

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[21] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 26). He writes, "morality represents a compromise between different people of different powers and resources." Since animals have no power, Harman suggests this is, in part, what explains, why they are often considered to have an inferior moral status. He writes, "animals cannot get together to put pressure on people" to change their morality (p. 26).

6.4.2. Arguments for Epistemic Relativism.

Harman claims that moral relativism "is a reasonable inference from the most plausible explanation of moral diversity" but, as we have seen, it is not at all clear why this inference is reasonable. However, *if* it is a reasonable inference, then *epistemic* relativism is also a reasonable inference from the most plausible explanation of epistemic diversity. I will argue that this is not a reasonable inference, so the inference from moral disagreement to moral relativism is not reasonable either.

In the previous chapter I argued that there is epistemic diversity: people disagree about what's reasonable, justified, and known, and some of these disagreements survive even when we share our evidence. One explanation for some of these disagreements is that some people are not well placed to see the epistemic facts. Harman rejects this explanation about moral disagreement, although we are not told why. We might suspect, however, that someone who rejects this explanation regarding moral facts would also reject this explanation for epistemic facts: if one thought that moral facts, if they existed, would be quite salient to most people, one would easily also think that epistemic facts, if they too existed, would also be quite salient to most people. Observations about epistemic disagreement would then suggest that there are no epistemic facts, i.e., that epistemic realism is false.

From here, it's a short step to epistemic relativism, as (too) short a step as it was to moral relativism as it was from moral disagreement. It is plausible to think that are different epistemological frameworks, i.e., sets of epistemic or intellectual values, standards and principles. E.g., some people attach great value to reason and evidence, while others do not; among philosophers, some accept evidentialist principles whereas others accept various kinds of reliabilism; some people give great weight to science, while others do not; some people think that much evidence is required for rationality, whereas others think far less is required; some continually fret about the possibility of error, whereas others do not care much about this. All these ways to spell out an epistemological framework could be presented as differing propositions that some people accept and others do not.

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[22] See Sturgeon ("Harman on Objectivity and Moral Relativism" 10).

People can (and do) accept difference epistemological frameworks, and these frameworks will have different results for particular beliefs. For example, one might observe that relative to some *possible* Plantinga-inspired epistemological framework (or theory), belief is God is *always* rational without any explicit argument. And one might also observe that relative to some, say, "classical foundationalist" epistemological frameworks, argument is *always* required for belief in God to be rational. To put this in another way, on some frameworks, belief in God is always properly basic, and on other frameworks it never is and cannot be. For another example, relative to some reliablistic epistemic frameworks, beliefs of those who are victim of skeptical scenarios are not justified; relative to many non-reliablist epistemic frameworks, these same (or very similar) beliefs are justified. To move away from frameworks that have specific epistemologies in them, some frameworks will give evidential weight to what scientists, politicians, and/or religious leaders say, and others accept different epistemological frameworks. Some frameworks will give high greater evidential value to one's own experiences and reasons; others will defer to the experiences and reasons of various authority figures. These are just some possible dimensions on which a framework could be described.

Everyone can accept that different standards or frameworks, both moral and epistemic, can have different implications for particular cases. Everyone can agree that some beliefs would "make sense" on some epistemological or intellectual frameworks, and not make sense on others. People who reject *moral* relativism and think there are universal moral truths – moral absolutists – however, think that once it is observed that different moral frameworks often justify different moral conclusions, there is the further question of which framework is the correct, or more correct, one. For example, are frameworks that could allow framing the innocent morally correct or is any framework that could allow that a false moral framework? Moral relativists, however, deny the legitimacy of these questions. They believe that there are many different moral frameworks, none of which is more correct than the others.

Epistemic relativists would have the analogous response: relative to one epistemic framework, a particular belief will be justified; but relative to another framework, that belief would not be justified, and there is no question of which framework is more

correct. How would someone arrive at this kind of view? Perhaps by reasoning parallel to that which was given in defense of moral relativism: epistemic disagreements make it implausible to think that there are objective epistemic properties; but since epistemic nihilism would (falsely) imply that we should not make epistemic judgments it is false; epistemic non-cognitivism has Frege-Geach problems that show it to be false[23]; and, therefore, there are *relative* epistemic truths, in the sense articulated above.

Most epistemologists are not epistemic relativists in any sense analogous to Harman's moral relativism: they think either that (for a particular believer, in his or her situation) belief in God is either properly basic or it isn't, and that someone's beliefs in a skeptical scenario are justified or they are not. They do not think that, "According to Plantinga's theory, belief in God *is* properly basic *for this person in this context*, but according to some other theories it *is not* properly basic *for this person in this context*, and according to some versions of reliabilism, the demoner's beliefs are unjustified, but on some non-reliabilist frameworks they are justified and *there's no question which epistemic framework is objectively correct*." Of course, what is justified, and even "properly basic," can differ from person to person, but this is not explained by appealing to anything like epistemic relativism: plausible explanations of this are consistent with the falsity of epistemic relativism.

So most epistemologists reject an epistemological relativism that is analogous to Harman's moral relativism. They do not believe that there is no single true epistemology, or theory about what knowledge and justified belief are, and that although there are many different epistemological frameworks none are more correct than the others. As far as I know, nobody advocates these statements of epistemic relativism, even Harman. I only offer it as a possible view. Most epistemologists are epistemic absolutists: they think that there is a single true epistemology, and that it is often difficult to discern exactly what it is. Most epistemologists think that it is clear that some epistemological frameworks are more correct than others: e.g., a framework on which affirming the consequent and denying the antecedent were deemed reliable methods of inference would, all else being equal, an inferior epistemic framework.

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[23] See Geach ("Ascriptivism") and Geach ("Assertion").

This is what most epistemologists think, but, beyond this appeal to their opinions, are there good reasons to think that epistemic relativism is false? That is, are there are good reasons to think the following claims are false?

> For the purposes of assigning truth conditions, a judgment of the form, *it would be epistemically reasonable, rational or justifiable for S to believe p*, has to be understood as elliptical for a judgment of the form, *in relation to epistemic framework E, it would be epistemically reasonable, rational or justifiable for S to believe p.* Similarly for other epistemic judgments.

And:

> There is no single true epistemology. There are many different epistemic frameworks, none of which is more correct than the others.

There are good reasons to deny these claims, although it is most important to acknowledge that there is no good, positive reason to accept them, and since the reasons given to try to justify it also do not justify its moral counterpart.

But epistemic relativism should be rejected because, first, it seems clearly true that some epistemological frameworks are "more correct" than others: the suggestion that all epistemological frameworks are on equal par is deeply implausible. The frameworks of flat-Earthers, astrologers, and Holocaust deniers is less correct than those who deny their frameworks, in terms of those particular judgments and whatever epistemic principles and reasoning that would support those judgments. Possible frameworks that affirm that it's *better* to believe a contradiction (if one can) than to not believe a contradiction are worse than frameworks that deny this.

Harman sometimes explains a notion of a moral framework as someone's "corrected" values, principles, and judgments, i.e., "the values that would result if the person were rationally to revise his or her values in light of the facts, adjusting the values in order to make them more coherent with each other and with the facts."[24] Perhaps "rational" revision would prevent this (we cannot tell because we are not told what this is), but other than that it seems that there is no reason to think that a "corrected" framework could not still include positive evaluations about rape and torture for entertainment. Similarly, a "corrected" epistemic framework could include deeply

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[24] See Harman (*Moral Relativism* 14).

implausible epistemic judgments and principles: a cult member might be convinced that all that is certain is what the cult-leader says and revise, or "correct," all his other epistemic convictions around that core belief. Insofar as epistemic relativism implies that no other epistemic perspective is "more correct" than this one, epistemic relativism is clearly false and conflicts with what we have good reason to believe about epistemic evaluations. This kind of example could be made with a number of minimally acceptable epistemic frameworks also; we do not need to only concern ourselves with totally implausible frameworks to make the point that frameworks can be better and worse in various ways.

Second, if epistemic relativism is true, then epistemic disagreement is difficult. This is because, on epistemic relativism, when we state our epistemic evaluations, we are only stating that, relative to some epistemic framework (likely our own) some belief is, say, justified. The truth conditions for our statements are determined by these relative facts. But this theory could allow that, when evaluating a case, I say that "S is justified in believing p" and someone else says that "S is not justified in believing p," and we have not contradicted each other, we have not disagreed. This is because we have each only reported what epistemic evaluations our own frameworks support, and both our claims might be true. However, we can genuinely disagree about epistemic evaluations; we can even disagree about which epistemic framework is correct (or more correct), i.e., which particular epistemic judgments, epistemic principles and which views about the nature of knowledge and justification are more justified. Since epistemic relativism seems to imply that in such cases we are not engaging what each other says, and this is false, this is another reason to regard epistemic relativism as false.

These are two reasons to reject epistemic relativism, in addition to the basic reason that there is little to recommend epistemic relativism in the first place. The "reason" to accept epistemic relativism was a leap from the rejection of epistemic realism, which was based on the recognition of fundamental epistemic disagreement. This leap is implausible, and since this leap is implausible here, it is also implausible in the moral case. Facts about disagreement provide no support for relativism, moral or epistemic. Harman did not show that moral relativism is a reasonable inference from moral disagreement or a rejection of moral realism.

6.4.3. Harman on Epistemic, or Evidential, Relativism.

In one essay, Harman attempts to, in a fully general way, "indicate the conditions under which relativism is a plausible hypothesis." [25] He then "argue[s] that these conditions are met in morality." In this same essay, he briefly discusses "evidential relativism," a kind of epistemic relativism, and rejects it. I argue that he rejects evidential relativism for arbitrary reasons, given his general claims about when relativism is a plausible hypothesis and the facts about epistemic diversity and disagreement.

Harman's general claim about when relativism is a plausible hypothesis is the following:

> It makes sense to appeal to relativism under the following conditions. [1] We
> envision certain differences of opinion about the application of an absolute notion
> like absolute simultaneity or absolute goodness, [2] differences that we cannot see
> how to resolve. [3] We can see how these differences might arise because of the
> differing salience of certain relations. Simultaneity with respect to one's own
> reference frame might be more salient than simultaneity with respect to another.
> Goodness with respect to one's own moral framework might be more salient with
> respect to a different moral framework. This suggests that it may be an illusion
> that an absolute notion of goodness or simultaneity has any application, an
> illusion that arises through confusing the absolute notion with a salient instance of
> the relative notion.[26]

This thought process applies well to epistemic evaluations. First, we can "envision" differences of opinion about the application of an "absolute" notion like justification, or knowledge, or reasonableness, or it being the case that a belief epistemically ought to be accepted, or the judgment that something is evidence or strong evidence. We can envision this because there are genuine epistemic disagreements and we are aware of some of them. Second, it can seem that we cannot see how to resolve some of these disputes: insofar as, regarding some issues (especially epistemic ones) there seems to be intractable debate concerning which epistemic evaluations are more reasonable than others, this condition seems satisfied. Third, we *can* see how these differences *might* arise

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[25] See Harman ("Moral Diversity as an Argument for Moral Relativism" 14).
[26] "Moral Diversity as an Argument for Moral Relativism," p. 18.

because of the differing salience of certain relations: we can see how some people would judge a belief's relation to "objective" evidence to be the salient relation that determines epistemic status, while others might regard (what we might call) non-evidential relations to be the salient relation: faith-based relations, emotional considerations, reliability of belief-forming processes, and so on. For some people, one relation seems more salient and, for others, different relations will be salient. Following Harman, we might conclude that this suggests that it *may* be an illusion that an absolute notion of any epistemic evaluation has any application, an illusion that arises through confusing the absolute notion with a salient instance of the relative notion.

If this reasoning is promising in the moral case, then it is promising in the epistemic case. However, it is not at all promising in the epistemic case. People do have different epistemic frameworks and some relations seem more (and less) salient to people in their epistemic evaluations, but this in no way indicates that there are no objectively correct relations that make epistemic evaluations objectively true or not. In the epistemic case, it's plausible to think that some people are sometimes not well placed to see these relations: perhaps they lack the relevant experiences or training, perhaps they have psychological or emotion problems or perhaps they are just epistemically blind to epistemic qualities that exist. The fact that they fail to see them is not good reason to think that they are not there. If this response is plausible in the epistemic case, then it is plausible in the moral case. Therefore, Harman has not "indicate[d] the conditions under which relativism is a plausible hypothesis."

Later in this essay, Harman discusses epistemic relativism in light of consideration of the possibility that all normal people who were fully and vividly informed of the relevant non-moral facts would converge on the same moral evaluations, no matter which moral framework they initially accepted. Harman say that if this were the case, then the moral evaluations would depend solely on – or be relative to – "human nature" alone, not on which moral frameworks are accepted. Harman does not explain what he means by this, but he then discusses epistemic judgments in light of this concern:

> A view such as this, seeing relativity to human nature but nothing beyond that, has some plausibility for normative epistemology. What counts as good evidence or good reasons in ordinary real life situations may be fixed by a common human

nature that has resulted from evolution. (The genes of people with inferior standards of evidence may simply lose out in the evolutionary battle for survival). Given your beliefs, your innate procedures for evaluating evidence may determine what further things you have reason to believe. We can imagine that there are people with different procedures who would not have reasons to modify their views in the way we do; if so, evidence would be relative to human nature but not to anything more.

For myself, I am inclined to accept a strong form of moral relativisms and only a weak form of evidential relativism. In my view, what is right and wrong is not just relative to human nature, it also varies with particular moral frameworks; but what counts as evidence depends only on innate mechanisms that are part of human nature. But in this paper I will not say anything more about evidential relativism.[27]

There is much that is not clear or explained in this passage, including exactly what the issue is. Insofar as there *are* people with inferior standards of evidence, they clearly have not lost out in the "evolutionary battle for survival." This suggests that it is doubtful that, "What counts as good evidence or good reasons in ordinary real life situations may be fixed by a common human nature that has resulted from evolution." Perhaps this suggests that there is not a common human nature that, as Harman suggests, determines whether something is good evidence for some belief. Perhaps Harman is correct that "what counts as evidence depends only on innate mechanisms that are part of human nature," but epistemic disagreements might make that hypothesis implausible. Is it that there are these innate mechanisms that determine whether something counts as evidence, but – since estimates of the existence and quality of evidence can vary greatly, even when much evidence is shared – some people's mechanisms are not working well, or other concerns are able to influence them for the worst? Since Harman's remarks are short, and their meaning obscure, it is not clear how we should answer these questions.

What is most important, however, for my purposes here, is to observe that Harman at least seems to have considered the possibility of epistemic relativisms and rejected them. I have argued that concerns about disagreements and the application of

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[27] See Harman ("Moral Diversity as an Argument for Moral Relativism" 19-20).

Harman's general conditions for the plausibility of relativism support belief in epistemic relativism, *if* they support belief in moral relativism. The fact that Harman at least discusses epistemic relativism gives some support to my claim that the reasons for moral relativism point toward, or are suggestive of, epistemic relativism. If Harman had explained and developed "evidential relativism" and gave his reasons to reject it, this might have helped us see what faults my arguments might have. This also would have helped us see, in more precise detail, under what conditions Harman thinks relativism is a plausible hypothesis since, apparently, he does not accept his own criteria since they seem to apply in epistemic case, but he rejects epistemic relativism.

As it stands, however, although the arguments for moral relativism have little positive to recommend them, they seem to have unacceptable implications for epistemic relativism, a view that conflicts with so much that we reasonably believe about epistemic evaluations. Therefore, we should reject these arguments. Again, Harman's moral relativism is no threat to moral realism.

6.5. Moral and Epistemic Explanations.

To conclude my discussion of Harman's moral irrealism, I will briefly address his much-discussed concerns about whether moral facts explain or cause natural facts and what difference it might makes either way for whether we should believe there are moral facts.[28] I argue that a comparable worry can be raised about epistemic properties and facts: it not obvious that they explain or cause any natural facts. However, an important consequence follows from rejecting epistemic facts on this basis: if there are no epistemic facts, then any standard that would rule them out is *not* justified or reasonable to accept. Since many, like Harman, have tried to use this very standard to argue that there are no moral facts, but this standard would imply that the standard itself is not justified, these arguments fail to justify the rejection of moral realism. Again, moral realism is defended: Harman provides no reason to reject it.

The issue of moral and epistemic explanations can be discussed in great detail and with complex metaphysical sophistication, but I intend to discuss it in the most basic, metaphysically neutral manner I can. My goal is to merely present the issue in its most simple form and develop one plausible response to it. Those who favor alternative, and

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[28] See Harman (*Nature of Morality* 1-10) and Harman ("Moral Explanations").

more combative, response to Harman might develop responses that rely on explicitly defended moral and epistemic ontologies: e.g., those who are especially interested in defending a kind of "naturalism" in ethics (or epistemology) might feel the need to develop a naturalist ontology of moral (or epistemic) properties. My response, however, will be metaphysically neutral since this neutral response is all that's needed to undercut Harman's arguments.

Harman argues that moral facts do not explain or cause natural facts, or that they are not needed to explain natural facts, or that they do not figure into the best explanation of natural facts. These claims are all different, and Harman can be interpreted as making any of them, but for my purposes these differences do not matter. What is important that, on the basis of (any of) these claims, Harman concludes, at most, that there is insufficient reason to believe that there are moral facts and, at least, that this is a problem for those who think there are moral facts. To make the issue more concrete, let us consider a sample non-moral fact: that *Jim believes that all wartime beheadings are wrong*. This fact pertains to moral matters, but it is a non-moral fact insofar as it is a merely descriptive fact about what Jim believes. Harman asks what *explains* this non-moral fact or what *causes* it to be the case that Jim has this belief. An especially good time to ask these questions is just after Jim watches another wartime beheading on the Internet and now confidently believes that what he saw was wrong. Harman's question is why Jim believes this.

Here is one possible kind of answer: Jim believes that beheadings are wrong *because* beheadings are wrong. It is a fact that beheadings are wrong: beheadings have the property of being wrong. Furthermore, Jim has *observed* this: the *perception* of this moral property or fact *caused* him to have this belief. Thus, the non-moral fact that Jim has the beliefs he does is explained, in part, by appeal to independent moral facts or properties that cause him to have the beliefs he does.

Here is a second kind of answer to the question of why Jim believes what he does: Jim has a set of moral principles such that, whenever he sees beheadings, or killings or acts of brutal violence that seem needless to him, he concludes that they are wrong. His principles are be quite deeply embedded in his psyche, so much that the reasoning, i.e., his processing this non-moral information in light of his moral principles, might be done

non-consciously and so quickly that it seems that Jim just immediately judges that what he's seeing is wrong. This kind of explanation is importantly different from the previous explanation. On this explanation, the non-moral fact that Jim has the moral beliefs he does is explained only by Jim's moral principles or moral sense, his non-moral observations, and other background information. There is no appeal to independent moral facts or properties: they are not required to explain why Jim has the beliefs and feelings he does about beheadings.

Harman claims that all our moral beliefs and feelings can be explained in this manner: for any moral belief, we might best explain the fact that we accept it only by appealing to facts about our psychological make-up, our perceptions about the relevant non-moral information and whatever mental processing results from the conjunction of these two sources. The claim is not merely that we *can* explain non-moral facts these ways, but that these explanations are *better* than those that appeal to moral facts. Why are these explanations better? Presumably, this is because to introduce moral facts is to introduce a new *kind* of fact to our ontology and Harman thinks, following Occam's razor, that we should do only this if we need to. And Harman thinks we do not need to: positing moral facts and properties does not provide any edge in explaining any non-moral phenomena. He therefore concludes that there is this is a problem for those who believe that there are moral facts.

Harman think that the failure to pass the "explanation" test undercuts one important kind of reason to think that a thing does not exist. Some philosophers, in particular, Nick Sturgeon, have argued that moral facts *do* explain non-moral facts, or that they are required to explain non-moral facts, or that they provide better explanations of various non-moral phenomena than a morally nihilist ontology would provide.[29] All these claims are slightly different, but for my purposes these differences do not manner. So, Sturgeon argues that Hitler's *being evil* figures into explanations, good explanations, for why he orchestrated the Holocaust and slavery's *injustice* contributes to explaining why the Civil War occurred: an explanation that appeals to injustice is better than one that does not. This response does not challenge Harman's claim that the failure to pass

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[29] See Sturgeon ("Moral Explanations") and Sturgeon ("Harman on Moral Explanations").

the "explanation" test shows that a thing does not exist; it accepts this test and claims that moral facts pass it with flying colors.

I will return to Sturgeon's response shortly. My main concern is whether epistemic facts or properties explain or cause natural facts, or whether they are needed to explain natural facts, or whether they contribute to the best explanation of natural facts. Again, I will overlook the important differences in these concerns, as the differences are not important for this general discussion and the points I wish to make. Consider a candidate non-moral fact, viz. my believing that *it is rational, or justified, for me to believe that I am typing at a computer*. What explains the fact that I believe this? What causes this fact to obtain?

Here is one possible kind of answer: I believe that my belief is rational or justified *because* it is justified or rational. Perhaps certain types of beliefs are rational or justified, I somehow perceive this, and somehow perceive that my current belief falls under that type. So it is a fact that this token belief is justified in my circumstance: it has the property of being justified. Furthermore, I have this belief because I have *observed* this: I have somehow *perceived* this epistemic property – perhaps with a kind of intellectual intuition – and the property then, among other things, *caused* me to have this belief. Thus, the non-moral fact that I believe my belief is justified or rational is explained, in part, by appeal to independent epistemic facts or properties that are part of the causal ancestry of the beliefs I have.

Here is a second kind of answer to the question of why I believe what I do: I have an epistemic framework, a set of principles and values, such that when I have these kinds of experiences and form beliefs about them, I believe that these beliefs are justified. These principles are deeply embedded in my psyche, so much that the reasoning, i.e., my processing my perceptions in light of my epistemic framework, might be done non-consciously and so quickly that it seems that it immediately seems to me that my belief is justified, if I reflect on whether my belief is justified.

This kind of explanation is importantly different from the previous explanation. On this second explanation, the non-moral fact that I have the epistemic beliefs I do is explained only by my epistemic principles and sense of what I ought to believe, my non-epistemic observations, and other non-epistemic background information. There is no

appeal to independent epistemic facts or properties: they play no part in the explanation for why I have the epistemic beliefs I do about by current beliefs; my epistemic beliefs are not caused by my perception of epistemic properties.

I have only developed two examples: a moral example concerning beheadings and an epistemic example concerning my present belief that I am at a computer. But these examples are arbitrary; other beliefs could have been used to motivate the concern about whether moral or epistemic properties explain natural phenomena or whether they cause any natural phenomena. The epistemic case might be made more vividly by considering a belief with more controversial "content," such as a belief in the positive (or negative) epistemic status of a political or religious belief. Perhaps for these kinds of epistemic beliefs we would sometimes be more willing to explain their occurrence by appealing to people's epistemic frameworks and background beliefs, not that they perceive objective epistemic properties.

But ordinary mundane epistemic beliefs can work as well: some, especially ancient, skeptics might explain our making positive judgments about rationality and justification *not* by claiming that we (successfully) somehow perceive the epistemic facts, but because we have "internalized" highly permissive epistemic frameworks. It's these frameworks, in conjunction with our experiences, which cause us to judge beliefs as justified. This type of skeptic would typically see this type of framework as a false framework, and would think that, on a more demanding framework, we would see epistemic reality for what it is.

But someone who is thinking about epistemic explanations along the lines Harman thinks about moral explanations might come to similar conclusions. Upon reflection upon numerous cases, we might conclude that epistemic facts and properties are, at least, not *needed* to explain any non-epistemic facts. For any non-moral facts that we might typically explain by appealing to what someone *knows*, or is *justified* in believing, or is reasonable, or *should have* concluded and so on, we might think that we can explain these facts purely by appealing to what is believed, believed with a sufficient level of confidence, with the truth of the belief and, perhaps, with luck (e.g., "They were confident that p and by luck p turned out to be true"). We often try to explain what people do by appealing to what they know and reasonably believe. But it appears that

these notions *could* be dispensed with in favor of purely psychological descriptions and the truth of what's believed. Some might think that the *best* explanation of the relevant non-epistemic facts would appeal only to these further non-moral facts about our psychologies and epistemic frameworks.

If one thought either of these things, one would have come to a conclusion about the explanatory power of epistemic facts that is parallel to Harman's conclusions about moral facts. That is, one would conclude that neither kind of fact or property explains or best explains or is needed to explain non-moral phenomena. One might think that moral properties do not explain or do not provide explanations comparable in quality to those that don't appeal to moral properties and, on that basis, conclude that there are no moral properties or we are not justified in believing that there are any or that there is some problem for those who think there are moral properties. But if epistemic properties do not explain, then similar conclusions would seem to be warranted: there are no epistemic properties or we are not justified in believing them or those who think there are epistemic properties have a problem.

I will argue that this surprising conclusion shows the entire "explanations"-based approach to eliminating properties, moral or epistemic, is mistaken. Even if moral or epistemic properties do not explain non-moral or non-epistemic facts that is not a good reason to think that they do not exist.

As I mentioned above, some have challenged Harman's claim that moral facts are non-explanatory of non-moral phenomena: they have replied that moral facts do explain, or best explain, various non-moral phenomena. Evaluating these responses is challenging in part because these responses depend on the plausibility of various sophisticated naturalistic metaphysics of moral properties; here I will avoid these metaphysical details. However, I will register my skepticism with these approaches: it is not implausible to think that all non-moral phenomena, including people's moral beliefs and feelings, can be explained without positing objective moral properties. That is a plausible view.

I only sketched a case in favor of thinking that epistemic facts are non-explanatory. I find this case plausible, since that it seems that the existence of our epistemic beliefs and attitudes *can* be explained in a manner that denies the existence of epistemic properties. However, this case could be challenged. One could argue that there

are some natural phenomena that would not obtain, or would not be caused, if there were no epistemic facts. Developing a response like this might require one to develop a metaphysics of epistemic properties, and again, I will avoid these details and hard work. However, I will again register my skepticism with this approach: it is not implausible to think that all non-epistemic phenomena, including people's epistemic beliefs and feelings, can be explained without positing objective epistemic properties. This view is counterintuitive and has surprising implications, which I discussed in previous chapters, but it's a possible view.

My favored response, however, to the overall issue of whether moral or epistemic facts would explain non-moral facts (and what difference is would make if they do not) is not *to* argue that they do explain, or that they provide the best explanation, or that non-natural phenomena cannot be explained without them. My response is to argue against principles used to get *from* the failure of a kind of fact to explain non-moral facts *to* the conclusion that we are unjustified in believing in this kind of fact, or facts of these kinds are ontologically problematic. I argue that these principles are not justified, not reasonable, and such that it ought not to be accepted: we have better reason to reject them than accept them. Since this is the case, there is no need to worry about any arguments against moral realism from the failure of moral facts to explain, since we are not justified in accepting these arguments, since we are justified rejecting this kind of premise.

Harman's many commentators and critics have argued that he is not optimally clear in presenting his principle motivating his discussion of moral explanations, so they develop versions of this principle that seem to be supported by Harman's discussion. These principles differ, but they point to a similar idea. Sayre-McCord presents it in this way:

> A hypothesis should be believed *only if* the hypothesis plays a role in the best explanation we have of our making the observations that we do.[30]

Joel Pust presents the principle as the following:

> S is justified in accepting a proposition p only if the truth of p plays a necessary role in the best explanation of the occurrence of one or more of S's observations or intuitions.[31]

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[30] See Sayre-McCord ("Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence" 267).

And Shafer-Landau has developed it in the following two similar manners. First:

> If a putative fact causes nothing, then we lack any reason for justifiably believing that it exists.

And, second;

> If a putative fact purposes to cause something that is better explained by something else, then we have good reason to deny the existence of any such fact.[32]

Call these principles *the Test*. The Test, in its various formulations, offers a necessary condition for it being the case that we *should* believe some proposition, are *justified* in believing it, or have a *good reason* to accept it and the existence of all that is entailed by it. We might agree, sincerely or for the sake of argument, that moral *and* epistemic facts do not meet this test: they do not explain anything that might be better explained without appealing to them. If this is true and a premise that stated The Test is true also, then these two premises would imply or make it likely that there are no epistemic facts.

But should we think that the premises that might be derived from the Test are true? Is there good reason to accept the test? Or is there better reason to reject it? Some reasons to reject it follow from seeing what its implications are, in conjunction with the claim that epistemic properties do not cause or explain. From this it follows that there are no such properties or that we should not believe there are such properties or that some other negative epistemic evaluations of beliefs that entail such properties are true. From this it follows that no positive epistemic evaluations are true or that no epistemic evaluations ever themselves should be evaluated positively, since there are no epistemic properties to make these true.

This might be true – perhaps there no epistemic properties and perhaps no epistemic evaluations are reasonable or unjustified – but it is a highly skeptical view. Insofar as we have reason to think that epistemic evaluations are sometimes true, and that the best explanation of what makes them true is that there are stance independent epistemic properties, we have reason to reject premises that would support the denial of this. Thus, I argue that we have better reason to reject the Test than accept it. Thus, we

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[31] See Pust (*Intuitions as Evidence* 77).
[32] See Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism* 105).

have better reason to reject arguments against both moral and epistemic properties on the basis of their alleged explanatory or causal impotency. These arguments provide insufficient reason to reject moral realisms.

Joel Pust also argues in favor of rejecting the Test. He first notes that Harman, and others who have advocated similar views (he calls them "explanationists"), gives very little positive argument in the Test's favor: very few reasons are given for why we should accept this criterion for properties, and few philosophers investigate its implications for a wider range of properties, especially epistemic ones.[33] Pust then argues that the Test is "reflectively self-undermining," by which he means that if someone adequately understands the Test, one will see that the Test provides its own reasons for its rejection. This is because it fails to meet its own standards: if the Test is true and epistemic properties are non-explanatory or non-causal, then there are no such epistemic properties that would make it such that the Test ought to be believed. He writes that the Test "cannot be justifiably believed by explanationists [like Harman] even if they (wrongly) eschew the need for any positive support of it. [W]hen conjoined with other propositions the explanationist skeptic accepts, [the test] *generates its own defeater* and is therefore epistemically self-defeating. So even if one could come to rationally believe it, one could not reflectively maintain such belief."[34] This is, at least, a problem for philosophers like Harman who try to use this to raise doubts about moral realism.

Russ Shafer-Landau makes a similar point:

> . . if normative facts do not exist, because of their lack of independent causal
> power, then there is not fact to the effect that we *ought* to believe the causal test,
> disbelieve moral realism, etc. But if there are no such facts, then those who reject
> the causal test may be epistemic faultless. All the evidence and argument there is
> would point in no direction at all—for such pointing would amount to *a case for*,
> a *justification of*, *a warrant to believe*, the causal test (or its rejection). Yet such
> things are normative facts. If we bar them from the ontology, we eliminate the
> possibility of accrediting any belief about such matters. Once we recognize that
> the epistemic standard associated with the causal test—that one ought to believe

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[33] See Pust (*Intuitions as Evidence* 84).
[34] See Pust (*Intuitions as Evidence* 91).

only what the test warrants—is itself normative, then (following Harman et al.) the standard can only have the non-cognitive or relativistic force. Yet on this alternative, opponents need be making no error [in the sense that they should change their views] in rejecting it.[35]

He concludes by noting that if explanationists were to allow epistemic facts into their ontology, or allow them to be an exception to the Test, then there's nothing to bar moral facts from the same ontology. If there are epistemic facts, truths about what we ought to believe, that don't explain any non-moral phenomena, which opens the door to moral facts that are equally unexplanatory. If epistemic facts are, at least, ontologically tolerable, then moral ones should be as well.

Sayre-McCord notes that explanationists already accept the existence of epistemic facts: they think that recognized as better or, ideally, best, explanations *should* be accepted over inferior explanations. He then writes that, "Either there is a fact of the matter about which explanations are best, or there is not. If there is then there are at least some evaluative facts (as to which explanations are better than others); if not, then the criterion will never find an application and so will support no argument against moral theory."[36] Here we must be careful to not think that by "best explanation" he merely means an explanation that has some (often hard to specify) natural features, in terms of simplicity, fruitfulness, entrenchment, and so forth.[37] These natural features are important, but also essential to something being the best explanation for Sayre-McCord's purposes is that if some explanation has these natural features, then it *should* be accepted over an explanation that lacks them: we are justified, or more justified, in accepting explanations with these features than those that lack them. His point is that if we are willing to acknowledge that there are truths like that then there is no reason to not acknowledge moral truths either. He writes, "Once it has been granted that some explanations are better than others, many obstacles to a defense of moral values

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[35] See Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism* 113).

[36] See Sayre-McCord ("Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence" 277).

[37] Sayre-McCord also considers and rejects psychological and sociological notions of "best explanation" such that what determines whether an explanation is best is whether we, or someone, "like" it or approve of it. He notes that if "explanationists" were to take this route, they would simply be reporting that they don't *like* or *approve of* trying to explain non-moral phenomena by appealing to moral considerations. He notes that, even if that were true, that isn't a reason for anyone else to agree with them. See Sayre-McCord ("Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence" 278).

disappear. In fact, all general objections to the existence of value must be rejected as too strong. Moreover, whatever ontological niche and epistemological credentials we find for explanatory values will presumably serve equally well for moral values."[38]

In light of these many objections to the crucial premises in moral explanations argument, it is clear that it is *not* clear anyone should accept them, especially those who are not antecedently committed to it. Since this is the case, arguments from concerns about explanation can be reasonably rejected, and we can reasonably think that they do not provide good grounds for rejecting moral or epistemic facts. Thus, moral and epistemic realists have nothing to fear from Harman's arguments, and nothing to fear even if arguments like Sturgeon's fail to show that that moral (and epistemic) facts are explanatory. There are other ways to argue for this similar conclusion, but this kind of argument suffices to make the point.

6.6. Conclusion.

In this chapter I have discussed a number of considerations Harman gives in favor of his preferred brand of moral irrealism, i.e. his moral relativisms. I have argued against these arguments for moral relativism by raising objections to epistemic relativisms that are analogous to moral relativisms. I have argued these epistemic relativisms would appear to be justified, if they can be justified, by the same kind of reasoning Harman gives for moral relativism. By constructing parallel arguments for epistemic relativism, I have argued that epistemic relativisms are false and that we have reasons to reject them. I have argued that none of the arguments he gives in favor of moral relativism are strong: earlier relativisms are based in entirely implausible assumptions that should be rejected; later versions of relativism are poorly defended since we are given no reason why we should prefer relativism over a sophisticated nihilism if we were to reject moral realism. Finally, I have argued that the crucial premise in Harman's argument to the effect that there are no moral facts because they are fail to explain non-moral phenomena is epistemically self-undermining and so there is no good reason to accept it. If an epistemic relativism that is inspired by Harman's arguments for moral relativism is false and unreasonable, then Harman's arguments for moral realisms are unsound and unreasonable to accept

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[38] See Sayre-McCord ("Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence" 278).

also. Again, nothing in Harman's work provides a good reason to reject moral or epistemic realism.

CHAPTER 7: Contemporary Moral and Epistemic Irrealisms

7.1. Introduction.

In this work, I have presented and explained the arguments that Ayer, Stevenson, Hare, Mackie and Harman give in favor of their moral irrealisms. Since nearly all contemporary work on moral realism and irrealism is done in reference to these positions, we might call these figures "classical" moral irrealists. I have argued that their arguments suggest analogous arguments for epistemic irrealisms. I have presented reasons to think that epistemic irrealisms are false and the arguments for them unsound. Since these arguments share major premises with arguments for moral irrealisms, I hope to have undercut the common arguments given against moral realism.

As far as I know, all these figures would have resisted (or, in Harman's case, resist) the implications I argue follow from their premises, and they would not have accepted epistemic irrealisms of any kind. And most contemporary moral irrealists (most of whom are emotivists or expressivists of various kinds[1]) would resist also: they would claim that although moral judgments are never literally true, epistemic judgments are sometimes literally true. They would maintain that there are important differences in moral and epistemic judgments and so, despite possible appearance to the contrary, their reasons for moral irrealisms have no implications for the semantic, metaphysical and epistemic status of epistemic judgments.[2]

However, Russell Shafer-Landau and others have argued that this response is unsustainable and that, contrary to the judgment of many contemporary moral irrealists, their positions are subject to the same kinds of objections I have raised against classical irrealisms. Shafer-Landau has raised this objection to the contemporary moral irrealisms developed by Mark Timmons, Simon Blackburn, Crispin Wright and others.[3] Below I

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[1] There seem to be few contemporary moral nihilists. One might wonder why expressivism has come to be the more popular version of moral irrealism.

[2] I have argued that this resistance can be used to undercut their arguments: if they think there's a way they *should* respond my arguments concerning epistemic irrealism, e.g., intellectual integrity somehow "demands" a response (e.g., recasting their major premises so they do not suggest epistemic irrealism), then that judgment will be ultimately inconsistent with the major premises used in their arguments for moral irrealisms: if they truly *ought* to respond some way, then their initial premise is false. See below for a summary of this strategy.

[3] See Blackburn (*Spreading the Word*, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* and *Ruling Passions*), Timmons (*Morality Without Foundations*) and Wright (*Truth and Objectivity*). And see Shafer Landau (*Moral Realism*) and Terence Cuneo (*Normative Web*).

summarize his method of attack and conclusions on these positions. Both are similar to those that I have developed regarding the meta-ethical positions I have focused on in this work.

My focus of this final chapter, however, is to present and evaluate the views of two contemporary moral irrealists who, unlike most of their peers, *accept* epistemic irrealisms. These two philosophers are Allen Gibbard and Hartry Field.[4] They think that, given the moral and epistemic discourses' similarities, i.e., they are both what they call "normative" or "evaluative" discourses, arguments for either position suggest comparable arguments for the other, or that the same kind of argument justifies a general kind of irrealism about the normative or evaluative. Gibbard is an epistemic expressivist, and Field is a kind of epistemic relativist, and they both explicitly endorse these positions and deny epistemic realisms. Since they think this, I do not need to summarize their arguments for their positions in great detail; unlike earlier figures who do not advocate epistemic irrealisms, I do not have to display Gibbard's and Field's premises to show that they suggest epistemically irrealists conclusions since they accept this implication.[5] I don't need to convince them, or anyone, that their premises suggest epistemic irrealism, since they realize this.

For those who have reasons to think that some kind of epistemic realism is true, they will see that those reasons imply that epistemic expressivisms and relativisms are false. In my previous chapters, I developed some of these reasons. I argued that the hypothesis that epistemic judgments are, first, either true or false (i.e., cognitivism) is more plausible than its denial (i.e., non-cognitivism) and that, second, that there's more reason to think that epistemic judgments are sometimes true than never true and, third, that the best candidates for these truth-makers are stance-independent epistemic facts. If these are good reasons, then there are good reasons to regard Gibbard's and Field's meta-ethics and meta-epistemologies as false, and their arguments for them as not strong.

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[4] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* and *Thinking How to Live*) and Field ("Apriority as an Evaluative Notion" and "Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse"). Blackburn purportedly accepts epistemic irrealism (or epistemic "quasi-realism," as he would prefer to call it), but since he has not developed this position in print, I will not discuss it.

[5] Even if, due to some logical blunder by Gibbard and Field, their premises in fact *do not* yield these epistemically anti-realist conclusions, i.e., they have somehow misunderstood their own arguments, they accept these epistemically irrealisms. I will argue below that these epistemically irrealisms have false and

These reasons for these claims also can provide reasons to think that at least some of their arguments' premises are false. In this chapter I will look at these arguments and evaluate them.

It's possible that Gibbard and Field might not have given good positive reasons for their views: perhaps they haven't offered enough in favor of their position to move a neutral observer. They might provide proposals for how things *might* be, but not much to think that this is how things are actually in the moral or epistemic realm. This is not a criticism I wish to directly make. This is because that criticism could have been raised to any of the moral irrealists I have discussed, since each position rested on, at least, doubtful arguments and assumptions: positivism for Ayer, motivational "magnetism" and a dubious phenomenology of moral judgments for Stevenson and Mackie, the assumption that moral properties are equally salient for Mackie and Harman, Hare's assumptions about the value of consistency and rationality, and so on. If, for each theory, we responded merely that inadequate positive reasons were given on its behalf and then left it at that, we wouldn't have found any positive reasons to reject these positions. I have tried to find positive reasons to reject these positions in terms of their, what many would regard as, false and unjustified implications for meta-epistemological concerns.

In this chapter, I will do attempt to do this for Gibbard and Field's theories. I will ask what would follow, logically, if this theory of the nature of epistemic and intellectual judgments were true. I will argue that rationally unacceptable consequences follow and, therefore, that their views constitute a false and rationally unacceptable understanding of the nature of epistemic judgment and reasoning itself. Thus, their views about the nature of epistemic judgments ought to be rejected. Since these views about the nature of moral judgments follow from the same considerations, this shows that their meta-ethic ought to be rejected also. Thus, moral and epistemic realisms are again defended from the most direct attacks against them yet.

7.2. Summary of the Arguments Against Classical Moral Irrealism.

Before I turn to Gibbard and Field, I wish to summarize the main strategy of argument I have used against classical moral irrealists. I then note that other philosophers have used

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rationally unacceptable implications; if this is so, then this undercuts whatever arguments are given in their favor.

a similar strategy against many contemporary moral irrealists. I will then see if a comparable strategy will work against Gibbard's and Field's epistemic irrealisms.

For each classical moral irrealist, I have observed that we can understand him, most simply, as arguing that, *because moral judgments have certain features*, his preferred version of moral irrealism is true. So, although each figure had more reasons than these, we might recall *some* of the main features of moral judgments that these philosophers focused on: e.g., Ayer observes that moral judgments are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable; Stevenson observes that moral discourse often has a "dynamic," emotionally-engaging quality and suggests, along with Mackie and Hare, that moral judgments have a motivational "magnetism" about them; Hare claims that moral terms' meanings are not adequately captured by descriptive theories of meaning; Mackie and Harman observe that there are fundamental moral disagreements; and Harman argues that moral facts do not explain any non-moral facts.

From each of these kinds of premises, each irrealist concludes, either deductively or non-deductively, that moral judgments are never literally true, that moral realism is false. For each of these arguments, however, there were typically unstated premises that are essential to logically link up what we might even concede as true premises stated in the preceding paragraph to the various moral irrealist conclusions. I have suggested that the obvious candidate for this kind of premise is the universal claim that *any judgment with these features is never literally true*.[6] Combine this premise with the claims above and we can conclude that moral judgments are never true.

However, I have argued that epistemic judgments – judgments about what's *reasonable*, *justified*, *known*, *should* or *ought* to be believed, *must* be concluded given one's other beliefs, and so on – have these features identified above also. Clearly, particular epistemic judgments are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable; epistemic discourse often has a "dynamic," emotionally-engaging quality to it; epistemic terms are not analytically equivalent to empirical terms; and there are fundamental epistemic disagreements. More controversially, I have argued that its plausible to think that epistemic judgments also have a motivational "magnetism," that they also do not refer to

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[6] I never explicitly articulated this premise, but all my arguments could be recast in a form utilizing a premise like this.

sui generis terms, and that epistemic facts do not explain any non-moral facts either, especially *if* it is plausible to accept the analogous claim about moral judgments (although I have stated my doubts about some of these claims about the nature of moral judgments).

If we combine premises that state these features of epistemic judgments with the major, general premises used, or presupposed, in arguments for moral irrealisms, these sets of premises yield comparable epistemic irrealisms on which no epistemic judgments are ever literally true either. This, however, is just a fact about the logic of the arguments for epistemic irrealisms. Those who accept epistemic realism (and think they are justified and doing so) might immediately reject these arguments against moral realism on recognition of this fact, since they believe that these premises yield false conclusions. On standard assumptions about reasoning and argumentation, this might be the proper response: if you see that a proposition that you justifiably believe is false, but that it follows from some principle, then that principle ought to be rejected as false also.

But an important, and interesting, question is whether there is any way we *ought* to respond to these arguments, as an intellectual matter, once they are understood. *Should* we accept them? Would anyone be *justified* in believing that they are sound or unsound, strong or weak? If a moral irrealist rejected my arguments them, *must* he then, at least, revise his major premises or reject some of my claims about the nature of epistemic judgments so that his beliefs do not validly imply epistemic irrealisms? If he did not, would that somehow be bad or worthy of some kind of criticism or disappointment? To answer any of these questions is to make an epistemic judgment, and epistemic irrealisms have interesting implications here.

Each question above can be answered affirmatively or negatively. Negative answers have a surprising implication. Suppose there are no truths about what's reasonable or justified or what you ought to believe.[7] If that's true, then it's not true that anyone ought to accept moral irrealisms. This result undercuts any epistemic support for moral irrealisms; at least none of the moral irrealists I have discussed have wanted to

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[7] One suggestion that I won't pursue here, due to its obscurity, lack of motivation and the fact that I discussed this view earlier in my chapter on Harman, is that there are epistemic truths but that they are "relative" truths, or there are epistemic truths "relative" to an epistemic framework. This view might

admit that their views are *not* reasonable, *not* justified, and *not* such that they should be accepted, from an intellectual point of view.[8] All seem to want to maintain that there are such epistemic properties or facts and so that judgments about what has these properties can be literally true. And they maintain that their position about what's a reasonable view about the nature of moral morality is the reasonable, justified one, not the views of moral realists. Perhaps what they say here is true, and evaluative epistemic judgments are never true, but I have argued that we have good reasons to reject that view. These reasons are stronger than the reasons to think that they, and even moral judgments, are never true.

Positive answers to these epistemic questions about what's reasonable and justified, however, might undercut the arguments for moral irrealism. Positive answers show that a major premise akin to the above claim that *any judgment with these features is never literally true* is a false premise: if there are true epistemic evaluations, then it's neither true nor reasonable to believe that *any judgment with these features is never literally true* because epistemic judgments have these features and they are literally true. This result undercuts the crucial premise in arguments for moral irrealism.

And suppose the existence of epistemic facts and properties shows a premise like this (that *any judgment with these features is never literally true*) is false, and false because there is an "epistemic reality" that *makes* our epistemic judgments true, when they are true. If there is an epistemic reality, i.e., objective facts and properties that make it such that we *ought* to believe certain things (given our experiences, and context, and so forth) and *should* reason in other ways, and, especially, if it is *reasonable* to believe that there is an epistemic reality, then it seems that there can be a moral reality also, i.e., objective facts and properties that make it such that we ought to do some things and not others and some states of affairs are more valuable than others, and so on. If it is reasonable to believe that there are evaluative or normative truths pertaining to belief and one's mental operations, there is little reason why there are not evaluative or normative

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conflate "relative truth" with "belief" and this view would be highly revisionist. It is certainly not the kind of view that any traditional anti-realist, even Harman, wants to appeal to.

[8] Perhaps there are some moral anti-realists who advocate their views from such a perspective; perhaps they see the "point" of philosophical theorizing as some kind of entertainment or as an enjoyable way to provoke people (actually, the very small set of people that are interested in meta-ethics). In response to these possible perspectives I can only suggest that if they are looking to entertain and provoke, there are surely more entertaining and/or provocative things to do than meta-ethics.

truths pertaining to all that morality encompasses (e.g., moral evaluation of actions, states of affairs, characters, motives, and so on).

I am not denying that this epistemic reality is semantically, metaphysically, psychologically and *epistemologically* mysterious and hard to understand. If, e.g., we epistemically ought to believe what, and only what, we have good evidence for, what *makes* this the case is, I think, not at all clear. I am only arguing that if we acknowledge, and should acknowledge, such an epistemic reality, then there is no reason to not acknowledge a moral reality also: each is mysterious and hard to understand in similar ways. So if epistemic facts and properties that make epistemic evaluations true are, at least, ontologically, semantically, psychologically and *epistemically* tolerable, there is little reason to think that moral facts and properties are not tolerable.[9]

I have tried to develop these kinds of objections throughout my discussion of the arguments for the various classical moral irrealisms. I have argued that the main arguments for each position, in their own ways, suggest a rationally unacceptable and irrealistic understanding of the nature of epistemic and intellectual judgments. We have better reason to reject these understandings than accept them. Also, these epistemic irrealisms seem to be self-undermining: they undercut their own epistemic support in terms of it being true that anyone *ought* to believe it, or is justified in believing it or any other view, including moral irrealisms. If some epistemic irrealist said that her does not undercut its own epistemic support because, e.g., to say that something has support is just to express preferences or desires, we should agree that that *might* be true, but resist until strong reasons have been given to think that. I suspect that there are no such strong reasons.

I have also sometimes argued that each moral irrealist presupposes a realistic understanding of such epistemic and intellectual judgments that is not easily reconciled with the premises used to argue for moral irrealism. I have tried to force a dilemma: either go irrealist all around (which has unacceptable implications, even from their points of view), or resist my arguments by rejecting the major premises used to defend moral

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[9] I have argued that admitting epistemic facts and properties is not only merely tolerable, but a precondition for argumentation and reasoning since their denial could not be coherently argued for by reflective people. So, if someone claims that "it is unreasonable to believe in any epistemic facts," or "we are unjustified in

irrealism. This latter response is to reject current arguments for moral irrealism, to concede that they are weak, which, for those who wish to defend moral realism, is an acceptable concession.

7.3. Shafer-Landau on Some Contemporary Moral Irrealisms.

I wish to now note that these kinds of objections have been leveled against many contemporary moral irrealists, like Simon Blackburn, Mark Timmons, and Crispin Wright. Despite their innovations, the position has not been improved in this regard. In a thorough study of the contemporary arguments for moral irrealism, Shafer-Landau has (independently) argued for conclusions very similar to mine. I provide an extended quote from him to illustrate how our strategies and insights are similar. This is not intended as an argument from authority but rather to show that someone else who has thought at length about these issues has argued in similar ways as I have. He writes, specifically in response to arguments for contemporary non-cognitivisms:

> The ontological motivations that prompt the development of non-cognitivism should incline the non-cognitivist to be suspicious of all normative claims. If brute normativity is a problem in ethics, it should be a problem anywhere else. And this means the non-cognitivist must either try to [naturalistically] reduce such normative notions as reasons, rationality, legitimacy, justification, relevance, appropriateness, and warrant, or supply a non-cognitivist analysis of them. [10]

He then notes, as I have done, that naturalistic "reductions" or analyses of these epistemic notions would be as problematic, from non-cognitivists' point of view, as naturalistic analyses of moral notions. Their objections to the latter would be equally strong objections to the former. This leaves epistemic non-cognitivisms as the remaining option. But he offers this response to that option:

> Yet such [epistemic non-cognitivist] diagnoses seem far-fetched when it comes to the normative concepts just mentioned. Are we really doing nothing more than just expressing a non-cognitivist commitment when assessing a belief as justified, an inference as warranted, an argument as sound [i.e., perhaps, ought to be

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believing in epistemic properties," that position is rationally self-undermining: someone who understands these positions must believe that believing these positions is not reasonable or justified.
[10] See Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism* 36-37).

accepted[11]]? When a person believes a conditional and its antecedent, we say of her that she ought to believe the conclusion, that she is warranted in doing so, that she has good reason to accept the consequent. We certainly seem to be describing her situation, and conveying our assessment by means of beliefs. We think there really is such a thing as being epistemically justified; some agents and beliefs merit the tag, and when they do, we speak the truth by describing them as justified. If non-cognitivism is correct, however, then this picture is all wrong. There really aren't any such things as reasons (for belief, for action, etc.). We talk and think as if there were, but there really is nothing in the ontology that answers to this notion. What we do when we deploy the concept is to express a favorable attitude toward something or other. And nothing more.[12]

So Shafer-Landau's strategy is similar to mine, although I think I do more to give reasons to think that epistemic realism is true. Also, I pay greater attention to the evaluative intellectual or epistemic presuppositions involved in reasoning and argumentation: e.g., moral irrealists tend to make all sorts of claims, as realists do, about what they *must* do in developing their arguments, how they *should* respond to various objections, how *better* explanations are preferable, how their views would be *unjustified* were they to not respond to various alleged problems with their views, and so on. I have argued that these claims and presuppositions are ultimately inconsistent with their major premises used against moral realism, but that if claims like these can be (and are) literally true, then there no good reason to that that there are no moral truths either.

There is one challenge for understanding many contemporary moral irrealisms that I will briefly address. This challenge is that, unlike their classical counterparts, contemporary irrealists are often willing to say that there are moral truths, moral facts, and moral properties; some might even say that there are justified moral beliefs and moral knowledge. It used to be that only moral realists were willing to say things like this, and moral irrealisms could be defined, in part, by their rejections of claims like these. Many contemporary moral irrealists are now willing to use these terms, however, because they

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[11] Strictly speaking, Shafer-Landau should have found no problem here with assessing an argument as *sound*, since that is to say that has the perfectly natural property of being valid with true premises. Perhaps he was thinking that when we assess an argument as sound, we are also saying that we ought to accept it.
[12] See Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism* 36-37).

have come to embrace "minimalisms" about these notions. On minimalism, there isn't much to say about the nature of truth: on minimalism, the proposition that 'p' is true if and only if p. This explication contrasts with non-minimalist explications about truth to the effect of, e.g., the proposition that 'p' is true if and only if there is a *fact* that p and 'p' *corresponds* to that fact. Given the challenges involved in understanding and defending such non-minimal theories of truth, some have come to embrace minimalism since it might be all that needs to be said about the nature of truth.

The upshot of accepting minimalisms (about truth, and other notions) is that to say that 'p is true' is just to say 'p'. The locution 'is true' does not convey any more information than just asserting 'p'; it is just a way of making an emphasis. A result of this is that, for those who are willing to affirm moral sentences, i.e., say 'p', then they are also now able to affirm moral truths, properties, facts and so forth. Moral irrealists who are willing to say 'this is wrong' can now say 'it's true that this is wrong' or 'this has the property of wrongness' or 'it's a fact that this is wrong,' and these all follow from the minimalist understanding of truth.

This willingness to say more things that moral realists are willing to say only complicates things. It makes the kinds of positions harder to distinguish. One result, however, is that if a moral irrealist is willing to say *everything* that a moral realist affirms then the positions cannot be distinguished. Since irrealists *do* want to distinguish their positions from realists', although they are willing to co-opt much of the realist vocabulary. So, although Blackburn is, on the one hand willing to say almost everything a moral realist will say, he also writes that he is "opposed to giving an ontological status to moral and modal facts" and that his theory is "visibly irrealist, for the explanations offered make no irreducible or essential appeal to the existence of moral 'properties' or 'facts'; they demand no ontology of morals."[13] So minimalism results in moral irrealists being a bit cagey and saying things a bit hard to understand: e.g., although Blackburn will say that there are moral truths, he will sometimes deny that there are moral facts or properties. This might make for a hard to understand view since, on more traditional views, truths and truth-makers go hand-in-hand.

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[13] See Blackburn (*Essays in Quasi-Realism* 57, 175).

Shafer-Landau has interesting observation about the consequences of irrealists'
minimalisms:

> According to Blackburn and Timmons [and Wright], 'abortion is wrong' (for
> instance) is true if and only if abortion is wrong. But they give us little help when
> it comes to understanding what it would be for the right hand to hold—what sorts
> of conditions would have to be fulfilled, what kinds of states of affairs would
> have to be realized in order for something like that to be the case. Given their
> naturalism, their rejection of any representational function of moral discourse, and
> their rejection of moral properties (of the sort whose instantiations could serve as
> truth-makers for moral claims), the nature of the right hand side of moral
> equivalences is quite mysterious.[14]

Although minimalism provides moral irrealists with a principled reason to *say* that some
moral judgments are sometimes true, to say that there are moral facts, and so on. But their
views, ultimately, preclude any moral judgments being what we might call "literally"
true, or some moral claim accurately describing how things are, morally.

However, since irrealists are willing to use truth-talk, it is important to look at *all*
the things that contemporary moral realists are willing to say to see if they mean the same
things that realists are willing to say: the kinds of positions will have to be distinguished
at other locations. If they do agree with *everything* realists are willing to say, then their
positions are no longer irrealist. So, to evaluate the positions we need to look at where
they disagree with realists.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss Gibbard's and Field's views. They
are both minimalists about moral and epistemic truth, facts and properties. So they are
willing to say almost everything moral and epistemic realists will say. However, I suggest
that they should be understood as not making these claims in the literal way that a realist
does. This should be kept in mind we as investigate their views.

7.4. Gibbard's Epistemic and Moral *Norm Expressivism*.

In Gibbard's *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, he develops a theory of what it is to judge or
consider something to be rational: this kind of rationality has implications for both moral

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[14] See Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism* 32).

and epistemic evaluations.[15] He calls his theory the "norm expressivist analysis." He claims that the notion "rational" is a part of a cluster of what he calls "normative" notions, and he thinks that a "notion is normative if we can paraphrase it in terms of what it *makes sense* to do, to think, or to feel."[16] Rationality is meant to pertain to moral evaluations (he relates moral rights and wrongs to the rationality of various sentiments, like guilt and resentment, e.g., that an act is wrong when, and because, it is rational to feel guilty about it[17]), to beliefs, and to anything else that might be appraised as rational or irrational. For belief, the notion of rationality has close connection to the notions that a belief "ought" to be held, is "warranted, and is "well grounded."[18]

So Gibbard has a general theory of what it is to call something "rational" which has implications for both moral and epistemic evaluations: his resulting analysis of both stand or fall together. What is it to call something "rational" on the norm expressivist theory? Gibbard's answer, which he admits is "cryptically put," is that to "call something rational is to express one's acceptance of norms that permit it."[19] He explains that a norm is a "rule or prescription, expressible by an imperative,"[20] which is neither true nor false. Thus, to put these two notions together, to call something rational to *express* one's acceptance of rules, prescriptions, or imperatives that permit that thing.

Gibbard elaborates on what it is to express a norm:

Normative talk is part of nature, but it does not describe nature. In particular, a person who calls something rational or irrational is not describing his own state of mind; he is expressing it. To call something rational is not to attribute some kind of particular property to that thing—not even the property of being permitted by

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[15] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 8). Gibbard repeatedly claims that his theory is *not* a theory about what it is for something to *be* rational (9, 46). Apparently, it's possible that his theory about what it is to *judge* something rational is correct, yet it *completely misses* what rationality *really is*. So this might be true: to *judge* something to be rational is to X, but for something to *be* rational is for Y (and not to X). This is an odd result; compare "this is what it is for (litterally) *anyone* to *judge* something to be good, but for something to *be* good is a totally different matter." It's hard to see how we could approach the thing itself, what it is to *be* something, but through our conception of it. But allowing that these can radically diverge opens up the possibility for a radical skepticism.

[16] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 35).

[17] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 6). He writes, "morality concerns moral sentiments: the sentiments of guilt and resentment and their variants. Moral wrongs are to be avoided on pain of these sentiments."

[18] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 7, 49). He also relates "coherent" and "justified" to this set of concepts (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 32). Gibbard is fond of the term "notion", hence my use of the term.

[19] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 7, 9).

accepted norms. . . . The analysis is non-cognitivist in the narrow sense that, according to it, to call a thing rational is not to state a matter of fact, either truly or falsely.[21]

Gibbard spends much of his book attempting to explain what it is for norms to permit things and what it is to express norms. Understanding these notions is a challenge. Even he states that he suspects that "were all philosophers to turn to analyzing the 'acceptance of norms,' all would fail."[22] That he says this about his own theory is discouraging for those who would like to understand and evaluate it: if a theory's creator thinks that all will fail, including himself, in trying to analyze his concept, then pessimism about understanding it in a satisfying manner might very well be warranted.

Despite these difficulties in stating the view, Gibbard thinks his norm-expressive analysis of what it is to call something rational "strains the concept less than do the alternatives."[23] One kind of alternative includes naturalistic analyses: he argues these views are mistaken because they lose the "endorsement" carried with along calling something rational. He thinks that to call something rational is to "endorse" it, but to say that something has some natural property is not to endorse it, so naturalisms are mistaken in their understanding of the notion of rationality.[24] This seems true for both ethical and epistemological naturalisms and related notions of rationality: e.g., saying of some action will produce the most pleasure, or saying that some belief is produced by a mechanism belief-forming reliable is not the same as saying that an action is right or that the belief is justified. The later have an endorsing function that the natural description lacks.

As a self-proclaimed naturalist, Gibbard thinks that non-naturalistic theories of rationality are mistaken: He writes, "Nothing in a plausible, naturalistic picture of our place in the universe requires these non-natural facts and these powers of non-sensory

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[20] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 46).

[21] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 8). In his new book, Gibbard develops this theory by, among other things, incorporating "minimalism" and so being willing to speak of moral (and rational) truths, facts and properties. See Gibbard (*Thinking How To Live* x).

[22] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 55).

[23] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 32).

[24] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 6). Gibbard thinks naturalism doesn't capture the ordinary notion of judging something to be rational, but, oddly, seems to think that maybe his theory doesn't either. He sometimes seems to say that he is merely stipulating a sense of the term that he find interesting and fruitful. He writes, "My real claim is not for the word 'rational', but for a meaning I want to exploit" (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 49).

apprehension."[25] If naturalistic and non-naturalistic theories of what it is to judge or consider something to be rational are inadequate, and yet the notion of rationality "makes sense," as Gibbard puts it, we likely are left with some kind of non-descriptivism. This is especially plausible if judgments about rationality have this "endorsement" function that cannot be captured by mere property attributions, whether natural or non-natural.

A concise statement of the arguments given in favor of norm expressivism is not easy to provide. There is what I mentioned above, but Gibbard's discussion is dense and the considerations for his position and against others are developed in subtle, not very explicit, ways. Much of his discussion, like Stevenson's, is descriptive. It concerns what people would say, how they would respond in certain situations and what they assume; other parts of his discussion consist of speculations about how humans might have come to develop and accept various norms throughout evolutionary history and what various benefits would have come from that.

Whatever the considerations Gibbard offers in favor of his norm-expressivism, however, and whatever the view's exact nature, it clearly has epistemically irrealistic consequences for judgments about the rationality of beliefs. It implies that judgments about what's rational to believe are neither true nor false, and that to judge that something is rational to believe is to not attribute a particular kind of property to that belief, or describe that belief, or attempt to state a fact. Norms that might permit beliefs are rules or prescriptions, expressible by imperatives, which are neither true nor false. Thus, norm expressivism yields a kind of epistemic or intellectual non-cognitivism, and so is an epistemically irrealist position: there are no epistemic truths, facts, propositions or properties.[26]

As mentioned above, it's possible that Gibbard has not given adequate reasons for his position: he suggests it, and sketches it, but does make a very good case for it. If that's so, then perhaps it's not true that anyone has good enough reason to accepting it (perhaps, including Gibbard). I do not intend to try to argue for this point, although I will

[25] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 154).
[26] Although this is Gibbard's received view, at times he might deny it: "Take the stock example of the man who has evidence his wife is unfaithful. Whether it is still rational for him to believe her faithful—whether such a belief would be warranted—depends on his evidence, and on his evidence alone [although it might be emotionally desirable for him to believe otherwise] .. The rationality of belief and its desirability, then,

argue that careful reflection on Gibbard's position can reveal that there is not good reason to accept it: there is little reason for a reflective moral realist to accept his theory.

However, thinking about whether the theory ought to be accepted in light of a vivid awareness of the theory's implications, including its implications for *thinking about whether the theory ought to be accepted*, I argue yields an undercutting defeator for accepting the theory, reasons to think that the theory is not true. This strategy will not yield a direct argument that norm expressivism is false, but rather that many people who understand it, but do not already accept it, have no good reason to accept it and good reason to reject it.[27] If nearly any reflective person who understands Gibbard's theory can be in this situation then, for nearly anyone who considers his position, there is no good reason to accept it. If this is true, then norm expressivism is no threat to moral realisms: it's not true it ought to be preferred over realism. This is especially the case if this reasoning suggests that Gibbard's analysis of what it is to judge something rational is just mistaken, and so there's more to these judgments than the mere expression of norms, and so Gibbard's norm expressivism is false.[28] I have developed this reasoning earlier: I argued that epistemic judgments have features that are better understood on a realistic model and that epistemic expressivisms have an especially hard time accommodating these features.

To see this kind of objection we must work through the implications of norm expressivism for whether we, or anyone, should accept norm expressivism. Gibbard apparently thinks that norm expressivism is epistemically rational to accept, at least for him. He presumably thinks it would be rational for others to accept, were they to carefully read his book and consider the arguments fairly and honestly. After all, he is

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are different, if ordinary thought is to be trusted (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 36-37). Perhaps Gibbard is also "expressing a norm" in this case, so there is no tension between it and his main theory.

[27] This strategy, however, will suggest that the norm expressivism analysis is false as an understanding of what we are doing when we judge something to be rational. We can endorse norms, but wonder if our endorsements are rational. We can express norms that permit some thing, but wonder if it is rational to do. If we can sensibly do these things, this suggests that norm expressivism is false, as a view about what it is to judge or consider something to be rational. Although we are never given a precise claim about what it is to express such norms, so this is hard to tell, it seems that when we do express norms, it's at least often an "open question" as to whether our expressions are rational or not. Perhaps a safer observation is this: one can even recognize that one has expressed norms in favor of something, but still wonder if one *really* judges something to be rational: perhaps one's emotions got in the way and one is not judging as one ought.

offering a rival theory to, at least, moral and epistemic realisms, and so he must think that realisms have various liabilities that should be avoided, and he thinks that his theory avoids them better than the other options.

Someone who understands norm expressivism, however, understands that, according to Gibbard's theory, when Gibbard, or anyone, judges that *he* ought to accept norm expressivism, Gibbard has expressed his acceptance of norms that permit his believing his own theory. He has not said anything that is true, or described the theory or himself *vis a vis* his believing the theory (as it having some properties such that it ought to be believed by him, etc.) or stated a fact about the theory's epistemic status. Similarly, if Gibbard judges that moral realists (even just those familiar with his theory) ought to drop their theories and accept his, again, he has again not said anything that's true or factual. He has expressed norms that do not permit believing moral realism.

Suppose we are reflective realists and vividly understand these points just made. Suppose we ask Gibbard to explain why we should accept norm expressivism, perhaps to start over from the beginning and explain all his assumptions that he used in arguing for the view. Say we also tell him that we had a hard time understanding his book and that we are seeking, again, the basic reasons, as plain and as simple as can be, for why we should accept epistemic expressivism. Suppose Gibbard provide these further reasons, these further claims about why the view "makes sense," as he puts it. He might say that, given various basic intellectual goals and methods to achieve them (such as a goal to understand the world in the simplest way possible, with theories that explain as much as possible, in coherent and consistent manners) we should accept norm-expressivism, since it meets these goals best.[29] If he did this then, on his theory, he has expressed "his

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[28] Below I argue that if we believe that evaluations of rationality have objective "authority" over us (this is Gibbard's term), but we realize that norm expressivism implies that they really do not, then, we ought to reject norm expressivism.

[29] Jonathan Kvanvig argues that Gibbard's arguments preuppose Occam's Razor, but that since Occam's Razor cannot be considered a truth on Gibbard's view, his arguments are defective. He writes, "arguments and explanations presuppose the truth of epistemic norms, and if the norms themselves are given nonalethic status, then the explanations are simply defective in virtue of the fact that their presuppositions are not true." See Kvanvig (*The Value of Knowledge* 174). This objection, however, might be weak since, insofar as there can be, in some plausible sense, "valid" arguments with an imperative as a major premise, arguments of comparable logical 'validity' can be given regarding what we would ordinarily consider to be epistemic matters. Below I object to Gibbard by arguing that extended reflection on a diversity of incompatible epistemic norms and the fact that, on Gibbard's view, none are in any way objectively

acceptance of higher order norms that tell everyone to accept [the] lower order norms" that permitted his accepting norm expressivism, as well as the more basic judgments that norm expressivism is based on.

A reflective person will want to know why to accept any of these norms, at all levels. A reflective person will realize that, on Gibbard's theory, that, again, none of these norms are true or factual: all are equally lacking in truth or factuality or correctness. She might even accept these norms, but wonder if she *ought* to: they might seem to "make sense" but she might wonder if they really do make sense. She might wonder what their, as Gibbard puts it, "claim to authority" is: *why* should she accept them and whatever is permitted by them?[30] If she asks this about her own norms, she might also wonder what claim to authority Gibbard's norms are and what claim to authority his norms should have over her. She might think that Gibbard has his norms, she has her norms, they are different and so it's not true that she *ought* to accept anything Gibbard says, especially since she realizes that this would be just another expression of a norm that permits something. If she thought that this train of thought was leading her somewhere that she didn't want to go (perhaps towards mistrust and a rejection of what other thoughtful people say) and that she *ought* not to have these attitudes or responses to others, she would recognize that as another expression of norms. Yet going down that previous track, and thinking that it was the rational way to be reasoning, would have just been to express a different norm. Would either expression of norms have been better or worse? She realizes that, on Gibbard's theory, an answer is yet another expression of norms.

Thinking through normative judgments on Gibbard's account can lead to normative vertigo: when we see that norms are accepted only on further norms, and that to judge norms is just to invoke further norms, we can lose confidence in any of them, since to judge a norm as better or worse is just to express further norms. We accept norms, but we can ask whether we ought to accept these norms, especially when we recognize that others express contrary norms. We have our norms, others have different norms, and there are conflicts, but no norms are ultimately any better or worse.

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superior to any other can undercut the sense of a norm's objective authority. From this position of normative vertigo, we see that, on Gibbard's theory, there is no reason to endorse his theory.

[30] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 173). This chapter is entitled "Normative Authority."

Recognizing the contingency that although I currently express some norms that permit some things yet, were my situation only slightly different, I probably would have expressed different norms with still different permissions, can suggest that one's norms "track" nothing objective: they are merely the norms I have, but they are no preferable to any (or many) others I might have had. This provides reason to doubt one's own norms: I have my norms, further norms that support this norms, and still further norms, but there needn't be anything better or worse about any other set of norms that anyone else might accept. Judgments that there are better norms are just further expressions of norms, which would raise the same concerns about arbitrariness.

But at least realists believe that some norms (both moral and epistemic) are better than others, and necessarily so: norm expressivists say this, but reflection reveals that all they can say is that some norms are licensed by higher-order norms. If realists believe what they do this reasonably, then they have reasons to reject Gibbard's account. It appears that norm expressivism cannot as plausibly or as simply accommodate the sense that some norms are better than others. This gives realists reason to reject it: the force of whatever reasons Gibbard provides for norm expressivism is not greater than the reasons to think that some norms are necessarily better than norms and so there are some literal normative truths, or facts, or properties.

Let us return to Gibbard's claim that realists would be justified in accepting norm expressivism, or that they would not be justified in accepting realism were they to carefully examine his theory. Gibbard has expressed a norm. He claims that norms *demand* influence: if a normative judgment is made (and someone hears it), this should influence the speaker. Why is this? His answer seems to bridge an 'is' to an 'ought.' He claims that making demands of each other this is part of conversation, and is part of a social practice that has evolved to support human life. He writes:

> To claim authority [as we do in making judgments about what's rational] is to demand influence, and influence is part of what leads normative discussion to consensus. I say, implicitly, 'Accept these norms!' and if you accept them because I have made a demand, I have influenced you. If we influence each other, that moves us toward consensus in the norms we accept.[31]

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[31] See Gibbard (*Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* 173).

This might be the last straw for our reflective moral realists. They see that, ultimately, Gibbard's position about what we ought to do and what we ought to believe rests upon an order, a command (with an exclamation point at that!). Is this what reasoning comes to? The realist thinks not. Suppose someone ordered that contrary norms be accepted. On Gibbard's view, to say that one set of orders are the rational one's to follow (and preferable than a contrary set) is to express one's norms that permit those orders, not the other orders; why we should accept this involves further orders: it is orders and commands all the way down.

A realist might respond that if there are no truths, no facts, no way things ought to be here, then none is genuinely preferable and so there's no good reason to prefer Gibbard's theory over any other, especially her own. Gibbard can say that what's "genuinely preferable" for someone is that which ranks higher by the norms the speaker accepts, but this seems to lead to mere contingency and relativism for that which is genuinely preferable. It is contingent in that it depends on whatever norms someone happens to accept, and it is relative in that different people can accept differing and inconsistent ultimate norms. This could, on Gibbards view, result in contradictory judgments about rationality, and hence morality, and no position could be judged as stance-independently superior or inferior.

For someone committed to the view that there are some necessary truths about morality, epistemology and rationality, this consequence provides reason to reject Gibbard's views. So this person rejects norm expressivism, whatever epistemic and moral consequences it might have, and keeps realism, and it does not appear that Gibbard can truthfully say that she has made any mistake. Again, he might express norms against coming to this conclusion, but it is not at all clear why his norms should have any purchase over at least those who understand his theory but reject his norms.

7.5. Field's Epistemic and Moral *Evaluationism* or *Non-Factualism*.

Hartry Field claims to take inspiration from Gibbard's norm expressivism in developing his own ethical and epistemological "evaluationism" or "non-factualism."[32] However, the view is actually quite similar to, nearly identical to, to the later version of Harman's moral relativism, and so subject to similar objections. It has none of the complications of

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[32] See Field ("Factually Defective Discourse" 243) and Field ("Apriority as an Evaluative Notion" 370).

Gibbard's theory, since it is not a non-cognitivism, but it inherits the obscurities of Harman's "relative truth."

Let us first understand the view. Consider two sentences that Field considers "evaluative":

"Voting for the lesser of two evils is a bad idea,"

and

"Belief in quarks is justified on current evidence.'[33]

He claims that these claims have a "not-fully-factual" status; they are true, but true or factual (or false or not factual) only relative to a norm.[34] The judgment that "we morally ought to respect our neighbors" is true relative to some norms, but false on other norms; on some norms, the judgment that "belief in quarks is justified" is true, but on other norms it is not. But no norms, of any kind, are, strictly speaking, correct, "objectively correct" or a correct in a non-relative manner.[35]

Some of us prefer some norms over other norms, but these judgments about what's preferable are also licensed only relative to norms: they are not objectively correct either. Field writes that, "we can say that *an evaluative utterance is disquotationally true for me iff it is true relative to the norms I regard appropriate to associate with the evaluative* terms,"[36] and this applies to norms about norms also. Two parties who accept different norms can disagree about, e.g., particular evaluative judgments, even when they both realize that one judgment is true on one set of norms (e.g., my norms), but also true on a different set of norms (e.g., your norms): this is a disagreement in "attitude," not a factual disagreement.

Field's main argument for his view is that "we can accommodate all the [relevant moral and epistemic] phenomena using only the norm-relative notions, together with both preference among norms and norm-relative beliefs."[37] By denying that there are epistemic and moral properties (in his view, 'reasonableness' is not a 'factual property'[38])

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[33] See Field ("Factually Defective Discourse" 242).

[34] Field has a technical explanation of what a norm, a "complete," and an "incomplete" norm are, but an intuitive notion of a norm is adequate for my purposes here. See Field ("Factually Defective Discourse" 244).

[35] See Field ("Factually Defective Discourse" 248).

[36] See Field ("Factually Defective Discourse" 247).

[37] See Field ("Factually Defective Discourse" 249).

[38] See Field ("Apriority as an Evaluative Notion" 381).

he can also avoid challenging epistemological questions for how we might detect them. In response, a factualist, i.e., a moral and epistemic realist, claims that Field's evaluationism yields an "impoverished caricature of evaluative discourse," but Field's opinion is that "the nonfactualist will win" the debate.[39]

Thus, Field judges that non-factualism or evaluationism is the more reasonable view. On the theory, however, this is for Field to say that, relative to his norms, evaluationism is justified. That might be true, but what about those who understand what Field has said in favor of non-factualism, but reject it, perhaps because we do not share all of Field's norms? Relative to Field's norms, our belief in, say, realism, will be unjustified; relative to realists' norms, realism will be justified.

Although, intuitively, different people can be justified in accepting different views, the situation changes when they get together and try to share their evidence and reveal their norms and engage in critical discussion. Non-factualism says that all evaluations are true or false only relative to a norm, and that all evaluations of norms are true or false only relative to a norm, and that no norms are necessarily correct. Recognizing this would seem to result in one thinking that one's moral and epistemic evaluations are *merely* one's own, with no authority for those who do not accept the norms that you accept: each moral and epistemic evaluation is (or often is) true relative to the speakers' norms, and that's as good as it gets. And if each speaker has got what's as good as it gets—the truth relative to his or her own norms, then there is no room for improvement, except for mere change in relation to a new set of norms that, although might be preferred, are not objectively preferable to any others.

Field recognizes that non-factualism seems to have these implications and that it might lead to a conclusion he rejects:

> A view like this raises the specter of extreme relativism. For mightn't it be the case that different people have different basic standards of evaluation? If so, aren't I saying that there is no fact of the matter as to which standard of evaluation is correct? And doesn't that mean that no standard is better than any other, so that those who 'justify' their belief in reincarnation on the basis of standards that positively evaluate just those beliefs that they think will make them feel good

[39] See Field ("Factually Defective Discourse" 250).

about their cultural origins are no worse epistemologically than those with a more

'scientific' basis? That of course would be a totally unacceptable conclusion.

To provide Field's answers to his questions, he thinks that it might be the case, and in

fact probably is the case, that different people have different basic standards of

intellectual and moral evaluation. And he clearly thinks that there is no fact of the matter

as to which standard of evaluation is correct, at least no objective fact or fact apart from a

set of norms. But he does think that, e.g., reincarnationists are worse off, epistemically,

compared to those who accept a scientific world view.

Is what he thinks here true? Since this is an epistemic evaluation, it is true only to

a set of norms. And Field says that he accepts intellectual norms and goals that, first, lead

to more truth and less falsehood than the reincarnationists' norms, and so his evaluation

of their practice presupposes this norm. Is a standard relating what is justified or what we

ought to believe with the truth (and not with what feels good) *correct*, and those that deny

it *incorrect*? Field responds:

> I doubt that any clear sense could be given to the notion of 'correctness' here. If
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> there were a justificatory fluid that squirts from evidence to conclusions, we could
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> say that correct standards were those that licensed belief in proportion to the fluid
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> that they received from available evidence; but absent that, it is hard to see what
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> can make standards correct or incorrect.[40]

It is not so hard to see what could make epistemological standards correct: one obvious

candidate is their relation to truth. To preserve the intuition that meeting epistemic

standards needn't entail truth, we might plausibly think that epistemological standards are

standards for belief that, if followed (or if our beliefs conform to it) our beliefs will

probably be true, or it is likely they will be true, or they will cohere well with what seems

true to us and not conflict with that which seems false. All these suggestions have been

developed in great detail, so it is not so hard to see what could make standards correct or

incorrect. At least, we can develop some good general ideas to address the issues.

So, apparently, on Field's view, scientific standards, or norm, are not more correct

than the reincarnationists' standard. However, Field says that we can *say* that some

standards are correct, in terms of achieving certain goals, and insofar as we adopt these

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[40] See Field ("Apriority as an Evaluative Notion" 383).

goals, we will say that some standards are better, but it is not correct that there are any goals that objectively ought to be adopted, or any goals that are better, objectively-speaking.

Field realizes that some might think his view comes down to an "extreme relativism," but perhaps it should be seen as a kind of nihilism. It implies that no moral or epistemic norms or standards are objectively true, and that no moral or epistemic judgments are true, objectively. All there is is truth-relative-to-a-norm (and norms relative to norms), but a nihilist can allow for that, in terms of allowing there to be logical relations between particular judgments and sets of principles, yet no truth to any of the judgments beyond the statement of the relation ("It's true that this follows from my norm, but the norm is not true and neither is the judgment").

The important question is what a moral or epistemic realist should think of Field's arguments for his view that realism is unjustified. Again, his argument is based on the claim that "we can accommodate all the phenomena using only the norm-relative notions, together with both preference among norms and norm-relative beliefs," together with the claim that his theory has metaphysical and epistemological advantages that should be taken advantage of. A realist who understands his theory should see that Field has only stated that, relative to his norms, realism is unjustified. A realist might not be troubled by that; a realist might think, "Field thinks that, but that's not my problem. Since I accept realism, apparently I don't accept Field's norms, so that's no worry for me." A realist might also think that, on Field's theory, realism is often justified for those who accept the norms that realists accept. But if that's so, then the realist should wonder why she should consider dropping realism in favor of non-factualism, since realism is justified for her.

A realist of a more "evangelical" persuasion might wish to try to "convert" Field to realism; she might help him articulate his norms, and his norms about norms, and show that when he thought realism was false relative to his norms, he had made a mistake. The process of thinking through norms, and norms about norms, and still further norms for norms, might lead Field to the kind of normative vertigo I tried to induce earlier. Furthermore, many of the reasons I gave earlier against epistemic expressivisms point toward understanding some epistemic judgments as objectively true: e.g., relativism doesn't as easily accommodate the sense that we can make epistemic mistakes, can

accept the wrong epistemic standards, can engage those who accept different standards in actual debate, and various other concerns that are better understood on the model of epistemic realism.

Although Field has various norms, and cares about these norms, and cares that he cares about these norms, and so on, he might come to see that, on his theory, no norms are genuinely preferable: he might continue preferring his, but see no sense in which others ought to prefer his norms. If he came to think that, then he wouldn't (as easily) think there realists were unjustified in accepting realism.

But this normative vertigo might lead him to the rejection of non-factualism, since it really seems that some norms are preferable than others, and necessarily so: it does not seem that these norms merely are those that would be sanctioned by higher norms and still higher norms. A careful, reflective evaluationist cannot say that without denying her theory. If a norm to the effect of "if something that seems clearly true conflicts with your (controversial) theory then you should drop the theory" is true (and, especially, if it's objectively true) then perhaps Field should drop his theory in favor of a realistic view that better captures the seeming necessity and objectivity of moral and epistemic norms.

7.6. Conclusion.

In this chapter I have summarized my main kind of argument against what I have called classical moral irrealists. I noted that this kind of argument has been raised against a number of contemporary moral irrealists. I discussed the views of Allen Gibbard and Hartry Field, the only figures who advocate, in print, both moral and epistemic irrealisms. I argued that reflection on Gibbard's expressivism and Field's relativism and application of the theory to the claim *that moral and epistemic realists should accept either of these theories and drop their own realistic theories* reveals that this claim should have no force for realists since it simply is not true or preferable to its denial. Since that is the case, realists should find no threat in Gibbard's and Field's theories and the considerations they present in their favor.

To summarize the entire work, throughout this dissertation I have defended moral realism, the thesis that there are objective moral truths, by defending "epistemic realism." Epistemic realism, again, is the thesis that epistemic judgments, e.g., judgments that some

belief is epistemically *reasonable*, or *justified*, or *known* or *should be held*, are sometimes true and made true by stance-independent epistemic facts and properties.

While one might think that epistemic realism needs no defense because it is obviously true and nearly universally accepted, there are influential arguments against moral realism, which is analogous to epistemic realism: moral realists think that moral judgments, e.g., that something is *morally good*, or *ought to be done*, are sometimes true because there are stance-independent moral facts and properties. Moral irrealists deny this for a variety of semantic, metaphysical, psychological and epistemological reasons. They argue that moral judgments are neither true nor false since they are non-cognitive expressions of emotion or commands, or are never true since they fail to refer, or that their truth is "relative."

Drawing on the moral irrealisms of Ayer, Stevenson, Hare, Mackie, Harman, and more recent thinkers, I have constructed parallel arguments for epistemic irrealisms. On these views, epistemic judgments are also merely expressive, a kind of command, always false, or relativistic in truth conditions: even "epistemic platitudes" like "justified beliefs are *better than* unjustified beliefs" and "ideally, one's beliefs *ought* to be consistent" are understood not as epistemic propositions that might be believed (much less believed *truly*), or as attempts to accurately represent epistemic facts, or as attributions of epistemic properties.

I have argued that the implications of these claims are highly at odds with common epistemological assumptions, even those that moral irrealists tend to accept, and athwe have reasons to reject these implications. I argue that these implications are rationally unacceptable and that, therefore, the premises that support them should be rejected. Since these premises are those given in defense of moral irrealisms, I thereby defend both moral and epistemic realism. Thus, I argue that "oughts," "shoulds" and other evaluative judgments are equally legitimate in both ethics and epistemology.

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