

# Expressivism and moral independence

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## Abstract

Metaethical expressivism faces the perennial objection that its commitment to non-cognitivism about moral judgment renders the view revisionary of our ordinary moral thought. The standard response to this objection is to say that since the expressivist's theoretical commitments about the nature of moral judgment are *independent* of normative ethics, the view cannot be revisionary of normative ethics. This essay seeks to evaluate the standard response by exploring several senses of independence that expressivism might enjoy from normative ethics. I develop a taxonomy on which, at least by the expressivist's own lights, normative ethics is not dependent on non-cognitivism about moral judgment in a way that might render that claim itself normative ethical. The argument will require us to formulate a theory of *moral subject matter* according to the expressivist, a matter of independent interest. Although this discussion will essentially vindicate the standard response to the perennial objection, it will also highlight a major limitation thereof. This is that even for the expressivist, the *taxonomic* independence of non-cognitivism about moral judgment from normative ethics does not guarantee its *moral* independence from normative ethics; that is, showing that non-cognitivism about moral judgment

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is not a moral claim is not itself to show that it is not a morally *relevant* claim. I conclude by arguing that the question of moral dependence, usually discussed under the heading of *objectivity*, is ultimately first-order moral rather than taxonomic, and so can only be resolved on first-order moral grounds.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Metaethical expressivists maintain that moral language expresses non-cognitive attitudes: intentions or desires or states of approval and disapproval. Expressivism faces the perennial objection that its commitment to non-cognitivism about moral judgment renders the view revisionary of our ordinary moral thought. The standard response to this objection is to say that since the expressivist's theoretical commitments about the nature of moral judgment are *independent* of normative ethics, the view cannot be revisionary of normative ethics.

This essay seeks to evaluate the standard response to the perennial objection by exploring several senses of independence that expressivism might enjoy from normative ethics. Although the non-cognitivist claim is standardly assumed to be non-moral, in the present context this cannot simply be assumed. Accordingly, I develop a taxonomy to adjudicate this question. I argue that, at least by the expressivist's own lights, normative ethics is not dependent on non-cognitivism about moral judgment in a way that might render that claim itself normative ethical. The argument will require us to formulate a theory of *moral subject matter* according to the expressivist, a matter of independent interest that contributes to our understanding of the view generally.

Although this discussion will essentially vindicate the standard response to the perennial objection, it will also highlight a major limitation thereof. This is that even for the expressivist, the *taxonomic* independence of non-cognitivism about moral judgment from normative ethics does not guarantee its *moral* independence from normative ethics; that is, showing that non-cognitivism about moral judgment is not a moral claim is not itself to show that it is not a morally *relevant* claim, a claim whose truth or falsity might have implications within some normative ethical theory. This question, usually discussed under the heading of *objectivity*, is ultimately first-order moral rather than taxonomic, and so can only be resolved on first-order moral grounds.

## 2 | THE PERENNIAL OBJECTION AND THE STANDARD RESPONSE

I begin by presenting one version of the perennial objection, pressed by Ronald Dworkin (1996; 2011).<sup>1</sup> Dworkin's argument concerns the expressivist's project of *accommodation*.<sup>2</sup> This is the

<sup>1</sup> See (Blanshard, 1949) for an early version of this sort of objection, which is often put as the claim that expressivism amounts to a form of *subjectivism* that we have good first-order grounds to reject. (See n3.) In any case, these *normative* objections to expressivism should be distinguished from those arguing that expressivism is a form of subjectivism by appealing to considerations from the philosophy of language. The classic statement of this sort of objection is due to (Jackson & Pettit, 1998); for some responses see (Dreier, 2004a; Jackson & Pettit, 2003; Schroeder, 2014; Smith & Stoljar, 2003; Suikkanen, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The term is Blackburn's (1993a, p. 153). This way of understanding the upshot of Dworkin's objections roughly follows the discussion in Gibbard (2003, Chapter 9), although that discussion concerns (Dworkin, 1996) exclusively—(Dworkin,

project of providing non-cognitive interpretations not only of simple moral sentences such as ‘stealing is wrong,’ but also of fragments of our moral discourse that might have seemed available only to a metaethical realist, such as ‘stealing would be wrong even if I didn’t disapprove of it.’ For example, if ‘stealing is wrong’ expresses disapproval of stealing, then ‘stealing would be wrong even if I didn’t disapprove of it’ might express rejection of conditionalizing one’s disapproval on one’s own sensibility.<sup>3</sup> Dworkin argues that the project of accommodation is in principle unable to succeed, since it faces the following dilemma: if the expressivist cannot accommodate the entirety of ordinary moral discourse, the view fails; but if the expressivist can, then the view will no longer be a form of anti-realism. Inevitably, Dworkin thinks, whatever the expressivist says to distinguish the view from realism will be revisionary of ordinary moral thought.<sup>4</sup>

The standard response to the objection is this: The expressivist’s core theoretical commitment is non-cognitivism about moral judgment, the view that moral thought consists (ultimately) in having a conative or affective mental state rather than in a(n ordinary, representational) doxastic state.<sup>5</sup> Since the realist denies non-cognitivism about moral judgment, expressivism is distinct from realism.<sup>6</sup> But since non-cognitivism about moral judgment is not a moral claim, it is not revisionary of ordinary moral thought. Michael Smith offers this response to Dworkin’s version of the objection, explaining that the cognitivism that the expressivist denies is a “a distinctively *philosophical* thesis, ultimately, a metaphysical thesis about the constitution of moral belief,” (Smith, 2010, p. 519) where in context categorizing a claim as philosophical is a way of categorizing that claim as non-moral.<sup>7</sup>

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2011) not having been published—and Dworkin’s two discussions vary in several ways. (I will not, in the text, address these subtleties.) Expressivists such as Blackburn and Gibbard who take on the project of accommodation are known as *quasi-realists*.

<sup>3</sup> This is roughly Blackburn’s (1993b, pp. 172–174) suggestion. The interpretation of such counterfactual conditionals is central to Blackburn’s argument that his view does not posit a problematic dependence of the moral facts on our attitudes, one facet of morality’s objectivity. See (Berker, 2020; Cassam, 1986, pp. 450–451; Köhler, 2014) for a discussion of this strategy. I return to a discussion of objectivity and its relation to independence in §6.

<sup>4</sup> I should note that in *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Dworkin, 2011, Chapter 3), this version of the critique is not, strictly speaking, leveled against quasi-realist expressivism, but rather against earlier versions of non-cognitivism such as the views of Ayer (1946) and Stevenson (1937). In the (2011) treatment, Dworkin reads Gibbard and Blackburn (at least in their later work) as grounding their anti-realism in a distinction between two language games: that of ‘morality’ and that of ‘philosophy.’ As stated, this is implausible—it reads Gibbard and Blackburn more as fictionalists than as expressivists—so I will not address it here.

<sup>5</sup> Early forms of non-cognitivism (Ayer, 1946; Stevenson, 1937) held that moral sentences are not truth-apt and therefore cannot amount to knowledge, and for this reason Blackburn eschews the label for his own view. But Blackburn’s and Gibbard’s views may still be called non-cognitive in the non-pejorative, technical sense given in the text. The parenthesized elements highlight that the expressivist can—and does—maintain that there are moral beliefs, but that these beliefs are extraordinary rather than “prosaic” (Gibbard’s term), derivative of non-cognitive states and not representational.

<sup>6</sup> This briefly summarizes Dreier’s (2004b) “‘explanation’ explanation” solution to the problem of creeping minimalism, which is just the problem of distinguishing a fully successful expressivism from realism. Dreier’s solution is that for the expressivist, the explanation of facts of the form [S judges that X is N], where ‘N’ is some normative property, makes no mention of N-ness or having N among the explanantia, whereas the realist must cite among the explanantia something involving N. What the expressivist will cite in the explanation of [S judges that X is N], rather than anything about N, is the fact that S has some non-cognitive attitude concerning X. See also (Fine, 2001; Gibbard, 2003, Chapter 9; O’Leary-Hawthorne & Price, 1996) for related thoughts.

<sup>7</sup> Earlier, Smith appeals to the philosophical/moral distinction when defending the coherence of the error theory, writing that the premises of the error theorist’s argument are “all distinctively *philosophical* claims and not moral claims” (Smith, 2010, p. 514).

Expressivists have thought that their analysis of moral judgment is not itself a moral thesis because it makes a claim not about what has *N*, where *N* is some normative property, but rather about what it is for someone to judge that something has *N*. This move, which Jamie Dreier has called the “expressivist sidestep,” (Dreier, 2015, p. 283) features prominently in Gibbard’s classic argument for expressivism (1990, Chapter 1). There Gibbard argues that no analysis of normative concepts such as rationality adequately captures the role they play in our language and thought. For it seems that two parties can agree about all the straightforwardly descriptive facts and yet *genuinely disagree* about what is rational—that is, their difference counts as disagreement, and they can disagree without talking past one another and without conceptual confusion. So, even if we believe that an action is rational if and only if it (e.g.) maximizes expected utility, it seems mistaken to *analyze* the concept of rationality in terms of the concept of maximizing expected utility.<sup>8</sup> If so, then the only illuminating conceptual analysis in the vicinity, Gibbard concludes, must be one not of what it *is* for a thing to be rational, but rather of what it is to *judge* a thing rational.

Still, we might worry that the standard response essentially begs the question against the objection that expressivism is revisionary of our ordinary moral thought: why should we think that a metaphysical claim about the nature of moral judgment could not also be a moral claim? Opponents of expressivism are likely to maintain that it is precisely expressivism’s commitment to non-cognitivism about moral judgment that marks the view’s deviation from ordinary moral thought: that this commitment either involves or entails some problematic first-order content. To put the standard response to the objection on more solid footing, what is needed is a principled basis for the thesis that non-cognitivism about moral judgment is independent of any moral claim. Specifically, since this thesis is *taxonomic* in nature, what is needed is a set of criteria for classifying claims as ‘moral’ and as ‘metaphysical’—or at least, as ‘non-moral’—and these criteria must yield the result that non-cognitivism is a non-moral claim. I develop such a taxonomy in the following section.

### 3 | MORAL TAXONOMY

A natural way to develop a philosophical taxonomy is by appealing to the notion of *subject matter*, what a sentence or proposition is *about*. I develop my moral taxonomy within a generalized version of the theory of subject matter due to David Lewis (1988a).<sup>9</sup> On such a scheme, to call a claim or proposition moral is to say that it has a moral subject matter.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> This thought is closely connected to G.E. Moore’s arguments against naturalism (Moore, 1903, Chapter 1). For further discussion see (Jackson, 2008; Köhler, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> I am not the first to use Lewis’s theory of subject matter to construct a taxonomy of moral and non-moral claims (see Humberstone, 1996). Lewis himself (1988b) uses the theory to develop a taxonomy of observation-statements and non-observation-statements. There is a parallel between these taxonomic projects: many believed there to be an inference barrier between observational and theoretical claims, just as many believe there to be an inference barrier between ‘is’- and ‘ought’- claims. The latter principle is known as *Hume’s Law*, which I discuss in greater detail in §4. I thank an anonymous referee for raising this point.

<sup>10</sup> Some other recent moral taxonomies include the pragmatic-commitment proposal of (Dreier, 2002) and the ground-theoretic proposal of (Maguire, 2015). I should note that on both taxonomies, non-cognitivism about moral judgment comes out as a non-moral claim: for Dreier it is non-moral roughly because it is assertible no matter which moral theory one accepts, and for Maguire it is non-moral roughly because it is fully grounded in non-moral facts.

Subject matters can be designated using simple noun phrases, as in ⟨the seventeenth century⟩ or ⟨the number of stars⟩. But for our purposes it will be best to understand subject matters as *indirect questions*, such as ⟨what occurred in the seventeenth century⟩ or ⟨how many stars there are⟩.<sup>11</sup> On this conception, I propose we understand the general notion of being about a subject matter as follows:

(Aboutness) content  $c$  is about some subject matter ⟨ $S$ ⟩ iff  $c$  is an (exact)<sup>12</sup> answer to the question corresponding to ⟨ $S$ ⟩.

For example, *there are exactly one trillion stars* is about ⟨how many stars there are⟩ because *there are exactly one trillion stars* is an answer to the question of how many stars there are. Another notion we can define is *subject matter inclusion*:

(Inclusion) ⟨ $S$ ⟩ includes ⟨ $T$ ⟩ if and only if every answer to ⟨ $T$ ⟩ is also an answer to ⟨ $S$ ⟩.

For example, ⟨what occurred in the seventeenth century⟩ includes ⟨what occurred in 1688⟩ because any answer to the question of what occurred in 1688 is also an answer to the question of what occurred in the seventeenth century. Two more notions we can define are some content's *having no bearing* on a subject matter and of two subject matters' being *orthogonal* to one another:

(Having no bearing)  $c$  has no bearing on ⟨ $S$ ⟩ iff  $c$  does not rule out any answer to ⟨ $S$ ⟩.

(Orthogonality) ⟨ $S$ ⟩ and ⟨ $T$ ⟩ are orthogonal iff no answer to ⟨ $S$ ⟩ rules out any answer to ⟨ $T$ ⟩ (or vice versa).<sup>13</sup>

If ⟨ $S$ ⟩ and ⟨ $T$ ⟩ are orthogonal, then no  $c$  about ⟨ $S$ ⟩ has a bearing on ⟨ $T$ ⟩ and no  $c$  about ⟨ $T$ ⟩ has a bearing on ⟨ $S$ ⟩.

The stronger notion of orthogonality and the weaker notion of having no bearing are each suitable to serve as the basis for an independence thesis. For our purposes, we should focus for now on the latter, weaker notion: because the objection pertains narrowly to *expressivism* inasmuch as it is committed to non-cognitivism, it should be enough to show that non-cognitivism has no

<sup>11</sup> Lewis himself notes that subject matters may be understood as questions (1988a, p. 162), though Lewis officially analyzes subject matters as equivalence relations on possible worlds, or equivalently as partitions of logical space. (I assume that any subject matter that can be denoted by a simple noun phrase can alternatively be denoted as an indirect question. Even a subject matter such as ⟨Canada⟩ can be denoted as an indirect question such as ⟨how things stand with respect to Canada⟩.)

<sup>12</sup> My notion of being an exact answer corresponds to Lewis's notion of being *wholly* rather than *partially* about, where the relevant sense of partial aboutness is the *part-of-content* sense (Lewis, 1988b, p. 17). When  $c$  is equivalent to the conjunctive content  $m \wedge n$ , then  $c$  is in this sense partly about any subject matter that  $m$  is wholly about and partly about any subject matter that  $n$  is wholly about; for example, *grass is green and it's raining* is partly about ⟨what color grass is⟩ and partly about ⟨whether it's raining⟩. The definitions that follow should all be understood as pertaining to exact answers in this sense. But since none of the substantive discussion will turn on whether an answer to some question is exact or not, I will not venture a precise definition of exactness for answers. (See Cross & Roelofsén, 2022, sec. 2 for a discussion of how to construe the notion of an answer generally within the theory of questions.)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lewis's informal characterization of orthogonality: "two subject matters  $M_1$  and  $M_2$  are *orthogonal* iff, roughly, and way for  $M_1$  to be is compatible with any way for  $M_2$  to be" (1988a, p. 167).

bearing on normative ethical subject matter in order to show that expressivism is independent in the desired sense. This sort of independence is captured by the following principle:

(INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING)  $p$  is independent of  $\langle S \rangle$  if  $p$  has no bearing on  $\langle S \rangle$ .

According to this principle, non-cognitivism about moral judgment is independent of normative ethics if it has no bearing on normative ethical subject matter. Of course, if the subject matter of non-cognitivism, namely  $\langle$ what is moral judgment $\rangle$ , were orthogonal to the subject matter of normative ethics, that would entail the weaker claim that non-cognitivism about moral judgment has no bearing on normative ethics. Indeed, this seems to be the claim of the standard response, which is that *no* claim about the nature of moral judgment—and so not just the claim that moral judgment is non-cognitive—has a bearing on normative ethics. But this claim is stronger than what is needed to vindicate expressivism's independence from normative ethics, on INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING.

### 3.1 | Normative ethical subject matter

To discover whether expressivism is independent of normative ethics in the sense of INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING, we must ask whether expressivism rules out any answer to the question corresponding to the subject matter of normative ethics. So, what is the subject matter of normative ethics? We can construct an expressivist theory of normative ethical subject matter using materials from Gibbard's *Thinking How to Live* (2003). Consider the following passage:

Questions of what we ought to do are questions of what to do. Finish your deliberation, conclude what to do, and you've concluded what you ought to do. These crude sayings will, of course, need qualification, but the distinctive claim of an expressivist is that dicta like these, suitably worked out, account for the subject matter of ethics. (Gibbard, 2003, p. 19)

Gibbard here is essentially explicit in identifying the subject matter of ethics with  $\langle$ what to do $\rangle$ , which is itself equivalent to the titular subject matter of  $\langle$ how to live $\rangle$ .<sup>14</sup> Moral subject matter narrowly construed—what I have been calling normative ethical subject matter—will then be some smaller subject matter included in this larger subject matter: perhaps  $\langle$ what to do $\rangle$  restricted to some class of situations (e.g. situations in which certain kinds of interests are at stake) or, following a suggestion in Gibbard's earlier work,  $\langle$ what to blame for $\rangle$ .<sup>15</sup> (In what follows I choose for concreteness to take  $\langle$ what to blame for $\rangle$  to be the subject matter of normative ethics, but nothing will depend on this choice.)

<sup>14</sup> Gibbard's identification of 'what I ought to do' with 'what to do' generally is the basis of his (2003) theory of normative content. Gibbard claims that we can clearly distinguish between planning to  $\varphi$  on the one hand and believing that  $\varphi$ -ing has a *sui generis* property of to-be-doneness on the other, and he argues that judgments of what I ought to do must be identified with the former rather than the latter. I discuss this identification more in n21.

<sup>15</sup> (Gibbard, 1990, pp. 40–48). Or, following the amendment of (Schroeder, 2008),  $\langle$ what to be for blaming for $\rangle$ . For a discussion of how to analyze other moral notions in this framework, see (Darwall, 2022).

Until the past paragraph, our example subject matters had all been *descriptive*. But notice that subject matters such as ⟨what to do⟩, ⟨how to live⟩, and the smaller subject matters they include are not descriptive but *practical*. (It is because Lewis's theory does not address practical subject matters that we needed to generalize the theory.<sup>16</sup>) Descriptive questions are answered with *propositional content* which, in an intensional framework, is given by sets of possible worlds.<sup>17</sup> What sort of content answers a practical question the way that propositional content answers a descriptive question? Again following Gibbard, let us take the basic notion of practical content to be a *plan*: a possibility for action.<sup>18</sup> If I am deliberating about *what to eat for dinner* in my actual situation, my deliberation will conclude with a plan: a plan to eat salmon, a plan not to eat pasta, etc. Modeled formally, this sort of content would demarcate an area not of *logical* space, but rather of *practical* space: the space of possible actions, ruling some out while not ruling out others.<sup>19</sup> Just as the practical analogue of a proposition is a plan, the practical analogue of a possible world—a complete description of ways things might be—is a *hyperplan*, a plan for what to do in any possible situation.<sup>20</sup>

With our theories of practical content and moral subject matter, we can see that expressivism will be independent of normative ethics in the sense of INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING iff non-cognitivism about moral judgment does not rule out any plan for what to blame for.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The classic logical study of questions (Hamblin, 1958) similarly neglects non-descriptive subject matters. See (Balcerak Jackson, 2019) for an extended discussion of practical questions.

<sup>17</sup> This identification yields as special cases the Lewisian definitions for being (wholly) about, inclusion, having a bearing, and orthogonality. For Lewis,  $p$  is *wholly about* ⟨ $S$ ⟩ iff the truth of  $p$  supervenes on ⟨ $S$ ⟩, i.e. iff  $p$ 's truth value never shifts within any pair of worlds  $w$  and  $v$  such that  $w$  and  $v$  agree on all matters pertaining to ⟨ $S$ ⟩ (written  $w \sim_S v$ ).  $p$  is *partially about* ⟨ $S$ ⟩ iff part of  $p$  is wholly about ⟨ $S$ ⟩.  $S$  *includes*  $T$  if and only if the equivalence relation  $\sim_S$  entails the equivalence relation  $\sim_T$ .  $p$  has no bearing on ⟨ $S$ ⟩ iff for every  $q$  wholly about ⟨ $S$ ⟩, there is a world  $w$  where  $p$  and  $q$  are both true. ⟨ $S$ ⟩ and ⟨ $T$ ⟩ are *orthogonal* if and only if for any two worlds  $w$  and  $v$ , there is another world  $u$  such that  $u$  is exactly like  $w$  with respect to ⟨ $S$ ⟩ and exactly like  $v$  with respect to ⟨ $T$ ⟩.

<sup>18</sup> In Gibbard (1990) the basic notion of practical or normative content is that of a *norm*, but this distinction will not matter for our purposes. For more on normative content as planning content, see (Gibbard, 2012, pp. 18–21, 169–177). This conception has an important precursor in the metaethics of R.M. Hare, who held that normative 'ought'-claims are those that entail some imperative (Hare, 1952, pp. 163–172).

<sup>19</sup> It might well be possible to reduce the notion of a plan to a set of possible worlds. Plans are most often denoted by infinitives (e.g. *what to do* and *how to live*), but there is no deep syntactic distinction between infinitival and other noun phrases. Indeed, we can even make sense of what it is to plan or decide *that*  $p$ , allowing us to plan or decide for others (Ayers, 2022). But I am not committed to there being any deep distinction between planning content and propositional content; in the accounts of plans ruling each other out and of propositional content ruling out planning content that follow, plans will essentially be identified with the set of worlds in which the plan is carried out. (Actions, understood as properties of agents, however, do differ in a principled manner from propositional content. This is a point made often by Mark Schroeder; see his 2011; 2021a; 2021b, Chapter 2). I thank Sarah-Jane Leslie for pressing me to clarify this.

<sup>20</sup> (Additionally, just as propositions may be thought of as sets of possible worlds, plans may be thought of as sets of hyperplans.) The most important work that the notion of a hyperplan does for Gibbard is in the formulation of a semantics for moral language. In standard possible world semantics, the meaning of a sentence is modeled by the set of possible worlds it rules out. In Gibbard's semantics, the meaning of a normative sentence is modeled by the ruled-out sets of *plan-laden* or *fact-prac* worlds, ordered pairs which combine a possible world with a hyperplan.

<sup>21</sup> One might worry: does it not stack the deck in favor of the expressivist to claim that the view escapes the perennial objection if expressivism is independent of normative-ethics-as-conceived-by-the-expressivist? Although my aim here is to clarify what the expressivist should say about independence rather than simply to defend the view against the charge of revisionism, it is certainly worthwhile to ask whether the expressivist might hope to convince an observer undecided on the truth of expressivism that the objection fails. In this context, it is worth pointing out that Dworkin himself seems to

### 3.2 | Ruling out practical content

How should we understand the notion of ruling out that figures in the definition of having no bearing for the case of practical content? Since the ruling out relation holds between contents, it must be distinguished from any related relation that holds between mental states.<sup>22</sup> It also cannot be conflated with the more specific relation ruling out amounts to in the special case of descriptive content. In that case, where the relevant sort of content is propositional,  $p$  rules out  $q$  just in case  $p$  and  $q$  cannot be true together, i.e. when their conjunction entails a contradiction. One plan rules out another plan not by entailing a contradiction strictly speaking, but by being *not jointly realizable*, where plans are jointly realizable just in case there is some possible world where they are both carried out. The maximally specific plan to  $\varphi$  and the maximally specific plan not to  $\varphi$ , for example, rule each other out because there is no possible world in which any agent both  $\varphi$ -s and does not  $\varphi$ .

When does propositional content rule out planning content? To fix ideas, consider combinations of beliefs with planning states that are not rationally co-tenable. It is irrational for me to plan to walk to the twentieth floor of my apartment building if I believe it only to have fourteen stories. Why is this irrational? Plausibly, it is irrational because the aim of a plan is to realize some possible state of the world, and if that state of the world is not possible given my beliefs, then by my own lights I cannot bring it about. So the irrationality of combining these beliefs and plans seems to be derivative, ultimately, on a relation of exclusion that their contents bear to one another, a relation like non-joint-realizability:

(FACT-PLAN INCOMPATIBILITY) propositional content  $p$  rules out the plan to  $\varphi$  just in case if  $p$ , then  $\varphi$  would be unrealizable.

Although not quite identical with the ruling out relation discussed above,<sup>23</sup> I take it that FACT-PLAN INCOMPATIBILITY is suited to play the same role as the genuine ruling out relation in our general definition of having no bearing.

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accept a practical account of normative ethical subject matter. This can be seen from the following passage, where Dworkin distinguishes between ethics and morality:

“An ethical judgment makes a claim about what people should do to live well... A moral judgment makes a claim about how people must treat other people. Moral and ethical questions are inescapable dimensions of the inescapable question of what to do” (Dworkin, 2011, p. 25).

If ethics and morality are “inescapable dimensions of the inescapable question of *what to do*” (emphasis mine), then these seem to be practical. (One chapter earlier, Dworkin defines ethics as “the study of how to live well” (p. 13), which is expressly practical.) Admittedly, the case for attributing to Dworkin the claim that moral subject matter is practical is not ironclad, inasmuch as it depends on identifying ‘how we must treat others’ with ‘how to treat others,’ and at one point Dworkin explicitly *rejects* the Gibbardian identification of ‘what I ought to do’ with ‘what to do’ (Dworkin, 2011, pp. 434–435 [n22 to Ch. 3]). This rejection, however, is based on a confusion: Gibbard’s analysis pertains to the ‘ought’ of deliberation in its broadest sense, but Dworkin clearly misunderstands Gibbard’s dictum, understanding it as pertaining to the narrowly moral ‘ought.’ (See Hawthorne, 2002 for non-confused skepticism about Gibbard’s identification.)

<sup>22</sup> In particular, the relation of ruling out should not be conflated with the relation that holds between two mental states just in case a person cannot rationally possess both mental states (in the same place at the same time). Such a relation is borne, for example, by the mental states of *believing that p* and *believing that not-p*. These states are not rationally co-tenable, but that is not the same thing as those states’ ruling one another out.

<sup>23</sup> FACT-PLAN INCOMPATIBILITY is plausibly distinct from the genuine ruling out relation for the following reason. Ruling out is a *symmetrical* relation: propositions rule each other out when they cannot be jointly true and plans rule each other out when they cannot be jointly realized; but it seems strange to speak of a plan *ruling out* a proposition.



The propositions that seem capable of making a plan unrealizable are those that are incompatible with what I will call its *presuppositions*. The plan to walk to the building's twentieth story, for example presupposes that it has at least twenty stories, and the plan to grab coffee with my friend Josh presupposes that Josh exists. These plans are made unrealizable by any proposition incompatible with the building's having at least twenty stories, and by any proposition entailing that Josh does not exist, respectively.<sup>24</sup> Crucially, this seems to be the *only* way for propositional content to rule out planning content, such that if a plan's presuppositions are all met, then that plan cannot be ruled out by any proposition. If this is right, then expressivism will be independent of normative ethics if no plan about what to blame for presupposes the falsity of expressivism.

There might well be funny cases of plans that presuppose the falsity of expressivism, such as the plan to blame Jones for accepting Blackburn's false theory of moral judgment. But these funny cases are beside the point, since they presuppose the falsity of expressivism in the same way that any proposition *p* is presupposed by the plan to blame Jones—or, for that matter, to praise or smile at Jones—for accepting the false proposition that *not-p*. However exactly the objector believes expressivism is revisionary, it does not seem that it could be through a relation that any arbitrary proposition might bear to a plan. Such funny cases aside, it is difficult to think of how *any* plan, including a plan for what to blame for, might presuppose the falsity of expressivism in the way that my plan to grab coffee with Josh presupposes his existence. And if there are indeed no such cases, then we may tentatively conclude that expressivism is independent of normative ethics in the sense of INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4 | ASSESSING INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING

To resist this tentative conclusion, the objector might propose the following counterexample to the claim that no plan for what to blame for is ruled out by the truth of expressivism:

(X) Stealing is wrong, but nothing would be wrong if expressivism were true.

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I think this is because the notion of propositional content ruling out planning content is just a special case of the notion of an impossible plan, a plan that it is impossible to realize. Plans can be impossible in different ways, corresponding to difference senses of necessity: the plan to go to the store and not go to the store is logically impossible, the plan to travel faster than the speed of light is physically or nomologically impossible, and the plan to walk to the building's twentieth floor is impossible given the way things actually are. The idea that propositional content rules out planning content by constraining the space of possible plans in this way would explain the observation about presuppositionality I discuss in the text presently.

<sup>24</sup> There is also a sense in which my plan to  $\varphi$  presupposes that I am able to  $\varphi$ . I take it that this sense of presupposition is not, however, a relation that holds between contents, but rather a *rational precondition* of intention, one which obtains no matter the value of  $\varphi$ . I thank Alice van't Hoff for raising this concern.

<sup>25</sup> What if the expressivist's claims about the semantics of moral language are themselves plans of some sort? This would be the case, given the expressivist's analysis of moral belief in terms of plans, if meaning were itself a normative notion. Gibbard himself defends such a view in his *Meaning and Normativity* (2012), on the grounds that claims about what a term or sentence means analytically entail 'ought'-claims. On this view, meaning-claims express plans for belief, plans for which sentences to accept under a range of epistemic circumstances (2012, Chapter 8). Since plans for belief seem jointly realizable with a range of plans for what to blame for, the two subject matters appear to be largely orthogonal. So the expressivist's semantic commitments will still be independent of normative ethics even if the former is also understood to be normative and therefore practical. I thank an anonymous referee for raising this challenge and suggesting this response.

Since (X) entails the falsity of expressivism, it seems a good candidate for a genuine, non-funny counterexample to our tentative conclusion. To see whether we have a counterexample, we must identify the plan(s) that (X) expresses. Supposing that moral subject matter consists in plans about what to blame for, (X) expresses the following plan:

$(\varphi_X)$ : to blame for stealing, and not to blame for anything if expressivism is true

Does expressivism rule out  $(\varphi_X)$ ? It will be helpful here to distinguish between *pure* and *impure* plans. Our concept of a plan is the concept of some course of action available to an agent *in some situation*: planning to  $\varphi$  is really elliptical for planning to  $\varphi$  in some set of circumstances *C*. *Pure* plans, then, are always conditional, they are plans to  $\varphi$  in *C*. *Impure* plans are plans that are *actionable*, where an actionable plan is a plan for a set of circumstances that include the agent's actual circumstances. To accept some impure plan  $\varphi$ , then, is in part to have—or more precisely, to be rationally committed to having—a self-locating belief that the circumstances that  $\varphi$  are for include one's own.

We can see that  $(\varphi_X)$  is a conjunction of two sub-plans. The second sub-plan (not to blame for anything if expressivism is true) is clearly *pure*: it is for the circumstance in which expressivism is true. But the first sub-plan (to blame for stealing) is *impure*. (This much is conveyed by the 'but' conjoining the two clauses in (X), which indicates that the second sub-plan is for a counterfactual set of circumstances.) The first sub-plan, it seems clear, is a plan to blame for stealing in worlds where expressivism is false. So an agent who accepts at least the first sub-plan of  $(\varphi_X)$  is rationally committed to believing that expressivism is false in her actual circumstances.

Here, then, is what we should say about the relation between expressivism and  $(\varphi_X)$ . The pure planning content expressed by (X), the pure plan from which the impure plan  $(\varphi_X)$  is derived, is:

$(\varphi_X)^*$  to blame for stealing if expressivism is false, and not to blame for anything if expressivism is true

The pure plan  $(\varphi_X)^*$  is clearly not ruled out by the truth of expressivism or its falsity. In fact, neither is the impure plan  $(\varphi_X)$ , at least not in the sense of FACT-PLAN INCOMPATIBILITY: although *accepting* an impure plan rationally requires the planner to *believe* that the relevant circumstances obtain, that does not make it *impossible* for an impure plan to be carried out in worlds where those circumstances fail to obtain. If I accept  $(\varphi_X)$ , for example, it is irrational, but not metaphysically impossible, for me to blame for stealing and for expressivism to be true; by contrast, it is metaphysically impossible to walk to the twentieth floor of a building that has only five stories. So  $(\varphi_X)$  fails to provide a counterexample to the claim of independence construed as INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING. (Should the objector argue that expressivism does rule out the impure plan  $(\varphi_X)$  in some relevant extended sense? I discuss this gambit in §5.)

Having shown the independence of expressivism in the sense of INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING from normative ethics, we can now make the following observation: the considerations we have adduced in favor of this conclusion seem to support the standard response's stronger claim that  $\langle$ what is moral judgment $\rangle$  is *orthogonal* to  $\langle$ what to blame for $\rangle$ . (Or at least, it seems to support the stronger conclusion that no plausible answer to  $\langle$ what is moral judgment $\rangle$  rules out any non-funny answer to  $\langle$ what to blame for $\rangle$ .) Upon reflection, since this sort of independence seems to hold for a wide range of descriptive and practical subject matters, it seems that the independence of expressivism or  $\langle$ what is moral judgment $\rangle$  from  $\langle$ what to

blame for) is merely an instance of a much more general phenomenon, which I call **HUMEAN INDEPENDENCE**:

(HUMEAN INDEPENDENCE) A practical subject matter  $\langle \Phi \rangle$  and a descriptive subject matter  $\langle S_p \rangle$  are Humean independent iff no plan wholly about  $\langle \Phi \rangle$  presupposes any proposition wholly about  $\langle S_p \rangle$ .

The principle is so named because it seems closely related to two Humean doctrines of interest to metaethicists. The first doctrine is the view that there is a principled distinction between beliefs—mental states with propositional content—and desires—mental states with practical content: beliefs have a *mind-to-world* direction of fit, whereas desires have a *world-to-mind* direction of fit.<sup>26</sup> The difference in these two sorts of psychological states tracks the difference between the kind of contents they have: desires have practical contents, and (ordinary) beliefs have descriptive contents. The second doctrine is Hume's Law, roughly, that no sentence about what ought to be the case or what someone ought to do can be inferred from any set of purely descriptive sentences. It is a matter of controversy whether there exists a true and informative version of this principle, suitable to serve as a kind of constraint on metaethical theorizing. Whether or not this is so, the *expressivist* is well positioned to accept some version of this principle and to provide a principled basis for its truth by appealing to the distinction between descriptive and practical content.<sup>27</sup>

## 5 | INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY

I have argued that non-cognitivism about moral judgment is independent of normative ethics in the sense of INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING, vindicating the standard response's claim that expressivism is not itself a moral thesis. If this result is just an instance of the phenomenon of HUMEAN INDEPENDENCE, then the independence of expressivism from normative ethics turns out to be almost trivial. That puts pressure on the objector to find some other sense of independence on which normative ethics turns out not to be independent of expressivism.

<sup>26</sup> For classic discussions see (Anscombe, 2000, sec. 32; Smith, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> It is worth saying a bit more here about the project of formulating an adequate version of Hume's Law—most importantly, one immune from the classic counterexamples due to (Prior, 1960)—and how it relates to my taxonomy. Some theorists have sought to vindicate the 'autonomy of ethics' by modeling semantic content with something like Gibbard's factual-normative/fact-prac worlds (see Humberstone, 1996, pp. 153–154; 2019, p. 1400). One recent attempt to do so is due to Daniel J. Singer (2015), who argues that if non-ethical content is understood as norm-invariant content, then the correctly formulated version of Hume's Law will be a theorem of any normative semantics relevantly similar to Gibbard's. In response, Jack Woods and Barry Maguire (2017) contend that to know whether norm-invariance correctly characterizes the descriptive, we need a theory of norms; and that any such theory will make metaethical assumptions likely to be rejected by philosophers unsympathetic to Hume's Law. Unlike Singer's defense of Hume's Law, I seek only to understand the relation between descriptive content and practical content—that is, normative content as construed by the expressivist and those who share the relevant expressivistic assumptions. It would be unwarranted to assume the practical conception of moral content in arguing for Hume's Law as a logical or semantic thesis, but this is not my aim. Skepticism has been voiced about whether the expressivist should be concerned about the autonomy of ethics (Behrens, 2021, p. 13182); my discussion shows that, *au contraire*, the theoretical considerations motivating expressivism strongly suggest a principle very much like Hume's Law.

The discussion of impure plans might suggest to the objector the following alternative conception of independence:

(INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY) A practical subject matter  $\langle \Phi \rangle$  is independent of  $p$  if no plan wholly about  $\langle \Phi \rangle$  is for the circumstance that  $p$  (*not-p*).

On this principle, the plan to blame only if expressivism is false renders  $\langle$ what to blame for $\rangle$  dependent on expressivism. Although it would be natural for the objector to retreat to INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY at this point in the dialectic, it is unclear what significance this sort of independence has for the objection that expressivism has revisionary first-order consequences. For one, since the principle as formulated does not discriminate between plans that we accept and plans we do not accept, bizarre plans contingent on the truth or falsity of expressivism—e.g. the plan to blame for breathing only if expressivism is false—would suffice to spoil the independence of  $\langle$ what to blame for $\rangle$  from expressivism. This trivial sort of dependence seems irrelevant to the objection. And the principle remains too strong even when restricted to plans we *do* accept, since it would render normative ethics dependent on a wide range of propositions about subject matters which intuitively *do* seem independent of normative ethics. In particular, if the objector wanted a sense of dependence that might underlie the claim that non-cognitivism about moral judgment (and therefore expressivism) is itself a moral thesis, INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY could not provide that sense.

Consider for example the plan to blame for investing in the fossil fuel industry. Agents who accept this plan accept it for worlds like the actual world, where the fossil fuel industry contributes to climate change and all its sequelae. They do not plan to blame for investing in the fossil fuel industry in counterfactual circumstances where, e.g., burning fossil fuels does not harm the environment. If so, then  $\langle$ what to blame for $\rangle$  will be *dependent* in the sense of INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY on the climatological facts in the same way as it is dependent on expressivism, given the plan to blame for stealing only if expressivism is false. But it is not plausible that what makes expressivism revisionary of normative ethics is that normative ethics depends on the falsity of expressivism in *this* way, the way that normative ethics depends on the climatological facts; certainly, this would not make the climatological facts into normative ethical facts themselves.<sup>28</sup> So the objection to expressivism should not be formulated as the claim that expressivism is not independent of normative ethics in the sense of INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY: even if the plans we accept do make blaming for stealing contingent on the truth or falsity of expressivism, this contingency does not convert metaethical content into normative ethical content.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, at least one purveyor of the objection, namely Dworkin, positively believes that expressivism is independent of domains like the domain of climatological facts. Dworkin professes a “radical” belief in “the metaphysical independence of value” (Dworkin, 2011, p. 9) and avers that “morality is a distinct, independent dimension of our experience” (Dworkin, 1996, p. 128). What’s more, Dworkin seems to hold these views because of Hume’s Law; in his words, “Hume’s principle, properly understood, supports not skepticism about moral truth but rather the independence of morality as a separate department of knowledge with its own standards of inquiry and justification” (Dworkin, 2011, p. 17, and see also pp. 44–46). So it seems plausible to conclude that even for Dworkin, there is a good sense of moral independence guaranteed by INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING.

<sup>29</sup> Notice that the expressivist’s analysis of normative content as planning content played no role in this discussion. Even for a metaethicist who rejects this analysis, it is not plausible that metaethical content becomes moral just because there

## 6 | MORAL DEPENDENCE AND OBJECTIVITY

To review: neither INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING nor INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY captured a sense in which normative ethics might be *logically* or *formally* dependent on expressivism in a way that might render expressivism revisionary of normative ethics. INDEPENDENCE AS HAVING NO BEARING could not show any dependence of normative ethics on expressivism, and the sort of dependence captured by INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY did not seem of the right sort to inform the perennial objection. But although the standard response to that objection maintained that expressivism could not have revisionary consequences because it is independent of normative ethics, it was never obvious that the charge of revisionism should be understood so narrowly. Perhaps there is a way to understand how the truth of expressivism might be revisionary of ordinary moral thought *without* needing to furnish a problematic relation of dependence that normative ethics might bear to expressivism. The suggestion I now explore on behalf of the objector is this: expressivism is revisionary because many of our normative ethical views are committed to the falsity of non-cognitivism about moral judgment and therefore to the falsity of expressivism.

This version of the objection is distinct from the version that invoked INDEPENDENCE AS NON-CONTINGENCY. That version of the objection held that contingency on the truth or falsity of expressivism itself constituted the way in which normative ethics might be dependent on expressivism, and it was found inadequate because that sort of dependence seemed innocuous. The current proposal, by contrast, *embraces* the contingency of the normative ethical views we accept on the falsity of expressivism, and concludes on that basis that expressivism must be false. We can say that expressivism would be revisionary, on this view, because some normative ethical claims we accept are *morally dependent* on the falsity of expressivism, allowing us to reason from our acceptance of those moral claims to the falsity of expressivism itself.<sup>30</sup>

Construing the complaint in terms of moral dependence affords a dialectical benefit to the objector, since nothing in the expressivist's argument for the formal or *taxonomic* claim that non-cognitivism about moral judgment is a non-moral thesis addresses this *first-order moral* concern. Yet I take it that this version of the objection, even if ultimately successful, marks a dialectical retreat for the opponent of expressivism. This is because the original, taxonomic version of the objection was not beholden to any particular first-order moral views. But now, since the objection hinges on claims about the content of the *true* moral views, it is a partly moral one.

I now turn to a brief discussion of this version of the perennial objection. My aim here is not so much to argue against the moral version of this objection as it is to distinguish it from the taxonomic versions discussed earlier and to highlight its connection to the vexed question of *moral objectivity*.

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are possible, or even true, claims of the form 'if *M*, then *N*,' where '*M*' is metaethical and '*N*' is moral. See n34 for more discussion.

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that the objection does not beg any questions against the expressivist: the objection could be formulated in terms friendly to the expressivist, even as it seeks to show that the expressivist's conception of normative content as planning content is untenable given our first-order moral views. Put in such terms, the objection would be that since some of the plans we accept as actionable are for the circumstance that expressivism is false, we can reason directly from the actionability of our plans contingent on expressivism's falsity to a conclusion about the world we are in, namely the falsity of expressivism. Expressivism would be revisionary, on this view, because it would force us to abandon at least some of the impure plans that we accept as actionable.

A clear statement of this sort of first-order moral worry may be found in an early passage from *Justice for Hedgehogs*:

Politics is coercive: we cannot stand up to our responsibility as governors or citizens unless we suppose that the moral and other principles on which we act or vote are objectively true... So the old philosopher's question—Can moral judgments really be true?—is a foundational, inescapable, question in political morality. We cannot defend a theory of justice without also defending, as part of the same enterprise, a theory of moral objectivity. (Dworkin, 2011, p. 8)

Dworkin here evinces a *moral* uneasiness with non-objectivist views, on the grounds that our political arrangements, which involve the marshalling of state power to enforce its laws, would be *morally wrong* if morality were not objective.<sup>31</sup>

Dworkin does not himself parlay these thoughts into an objection directly; in context, the relation of morality to politics is portrayed more as *motivating* the relevance of the arguments to come against anti-realism than as *constituting* that argument itself. But others have pressed this sort of objection explicitly, by identifying specific actions we take to be morally permissible that, it is claimed, would be morally impermissible if morality were not objective. Jeremy Fantl (2006), for example, argues that violent interference could only be justified in order to prevent harm that is objectively wrong, and so we have reason to reject subjectivism if we think that violent interference in order to prevent harm is sometimes morally justified. In a similar vein, David Enoch (2011, Chapter 2) argues that when two parties disagree about what to do concerning some matter of taste, it is morally impermissible to “stand [one’s] ground” (2011, p. 17), i.e. to fail to come to a solution in which all parties’ interests are respected; but since in the case of moral disagreement standing one’s ground is permissible, we may conclude that moral judgments are not mere preferences or desires.<sup>32</sup> In the first instance this argument is meant to refute a view Enoch calls Caricatured Subjectivism, and Enoch argues that it can be extended to refute expressivism, as well.

I take no stand here on whether these particular arguments are successful, either against expressivism or against the simple forms of subjectivism they most directly threaten.<sup>33</sup> What I do claim is that since these arguments proceed from the normative ethical views we (allegedly) accept, they are *moral* arguments, not taxonomic ones. This point has, I think, not been sufficiently appreciated, though it is crucial for understanding what these arguments come to and how they might be addressed.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Dworkin’s overarching concern with objectivity is clearer in (Dworkin, 1996), though the notion there is undertheorized: Dworkin seems to take ‘objective(ly)’ as synonymous with ‘real(ly),’ and to the extent that we get a theory of objectivity, it is Blackburn’s theory: “The claim that abortion is objectively wrong seems equivalent, that is, in ordinary discourse, to [the claim] that abortion would still be wrong even if no one thought it was” (Dworkin, 1996, p. 98). See Blackburn’s (1996) response to Dworkin for further discussion.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Kalderon (2005, Chapter 1) has made a structurally similar argument for the opposite conclusion, arguing that unlike in the case of factual discourse, moral conversation exhibits what he calls *intransigence*: though these conversations concern the interests of others, participants do not seek more information in the face of disagreement. Kalderon maintains that the best explanation of this norm governing moral conversation is that moral disagreement is non-cognitive.

<sup>33</sup> See (Sinclair, 2014) for an argument that Enoch’s argument cannot be extended to refute expressivism, and see (Atiq, 2016) for an argument that Enoch’s argument does not even refute subjectivism.

<sup>34</sup> Fantl and Enoch each discuss the bearing their arguments have for the question of metaethics’ normative neutrality, but this latter question seems importantly distinct from their main arguments against subjectivism. On Fantl’s view, a

Dworkin, Fantl, and Enoch all maintain that the moral views we accept are sensitive to the question of *moral objectivity*; it is the question of whether morality is objective that might have normative ethical implications. The notion of objectivity is something of a placeholder in these arguments, standing in for the underlying feature(s) of moral thought and language (or of the moral facts) to which our normative ethical views are ultimately sensitive, the underlying feature(s) that make(s) some metaethical view count as objectivist by respecting. Rather than adjudicating the debate over which senses of objectivity are available to the expressivist,<sup>35</sup> my aim here is to highlight that the debate over objectivity is essentially an instance of first-order moral inquiry: specifically, of identifying the moral views we do or should accept surrounding, *inter alia*, coercion, intervention, and joint action. If these first-order moral questions have been somewhat obscured by taxonomical debates, I hope they can now be seen more clearly.

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response to (Dreier, 2002), no metaethical position is normatively neutral because any metaethical view *M* rules out a combination of a moral view *not-N* together with a conditional of the form ‘if *M*, then *N*.’ Fantl (pp. 38–39) notices that his view entails that no proposition is morally neutral, and so fails to identify a sense of moral commitment lacked by, e.g., Newtonian mechanics, which Dreier (2002, p. 247) explicitly takes to be a desideratum of any such theory. But Fantl writes that since there are not many *true* conditionals of this form whose antecedents are (e.g.) physical rather than metaethical, the lack of neutrality of other domains with respect to morality is not of concern. This last claim seems false. There are many such true conditionals; recall the example of the wrongness of investing in fossil fuels (planning to blame for investing in fossil fuels) from §5. For another example, consider the triad: ‘arsenic is poisonous,’ ‘if arsenic is poisonous, then it is wrong to put arsenic in someone’s food,’ and ‘it is not wrong to put arsenic in someone’s food,’ where the conditional rendering the arsenic-facts non-morally neutral is also true. So Fantl’s best argument against subjectivism is simply that there is a true moral claim conditional on the falsity of subjectivism; the question of the normative neutrality of metaethics is beside the point. Enoch’s argument against Characterized Subjectivism is followed by a discussion (pp. 41–49) of the normative neutrality of metaethics. Enoch’s preferred characterization of this neutrality is in terms of a notion like *conservative extension*; officially, the view is that metaethics is normatively neutral if and only if “there are good, discriminating arguments with a moral conclusion, and at least one indispensable metaethical premise” (p. 46), and Enoch notes that if his argument against Characterized Subjectivism is successful, then metaethics does not conservatively extend normative ethics in his sense. I take no issue with these claims, but I do disagree with Enoch’s claim that being morally non-neutral is distinct from being (merely) morally relevant, on the grounds that what is “in dispute between those taking metaethics to be morally neutral and those denying this neutrality is about some internal connections, as it were, between metaethics and morality, or some non-contingent, at least morally necessary connections of this sort” (p. 48). But there is a morally necessary connection between, e.g., the dangerousness of arsenic and the wrongness of lacing someone’s breakfast with arsenic, which seems to render the arsenic-facts a non-conservative extension of morality, as well. (If arsenic had the chemical properties of sugar it would not be wrong to “lace” someone’s breakfast with it.) So I fail to see the distinction that Enoch wishes to draw. In any event, all Enoch’s argument against subjectivism requires is the claim that the metaethical question of whether moral judgment (or, more precisely, moral disagreement) is cognitive or non-cognitive is morally relevant to the norms of joint deliberation and action.

<sup>35</sup> See the citations in n3, as well as (Blackburn, 1993a; 1998, Chapter 9; 1999; Gibbard, 1990, pt. III) for important classic discussions. For a recent discussion of Gibbard’s views about objectivity and their background in the expressivist tradition, see (Railton, 2022). One prominent candidate for the relevant kind of objectivity unavailable to the expressivist is meta-physical objectivity; this proposal, however, is not available to Dworkin, who mocks the view that moral facts are made true by moral entities (“morons”) as a philosopher’s fantasy (Dworkin, 2011, p. 9).

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