

EXPRESSIVISM, PRAGMATISM, AND ANTI-REPRESENTATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

Alexander J. Campbell: Expressivism, Pragmatism, and Anti-Representationalism
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Expressivism is the dominant anti-representationalist metaethic. In this paper, I offer an alternative anti-representationalist metaethic that I call metaethical pragmatism. Section 1 provides a sketch of the view and explains why I dub the view a kind of pragmatism. Section 2 focuses on the problem of creeping minimalism in order to draw out the essential difference between expressivism and pragmatism. In section 3, I offer the particular kind of pragmatism that I favor. I then motivate why one might favor pragmatism over expressivism.

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Introduction

Expressivism has won a tremendous number of advocates at least in part because of its ability to avoid the difficulties that come from assuming that moral judgments and expressions are representational. When representationalism is assumed, moral predicates are said to represent (to denote or stand for) properties that are in the world. Moral judgments in predicative form are said to represent the objects that are denoted by their subject terms as having those properties that are denoted by the predicates occurring in them. When they represent things accurately, they are true. When they do not, they are false. One difficulty with this picture lies in the fact that it is not easy to reconcile with a naturalistic ontology. On the one hand, many have been skeptical that moral properties are reducible to natural properties of the kind studied by the sciences. Yet on the other hand, if moral predicates denote moral properties that are not reducible to natural properties, then it seems that they must denote *sui generis* non-natural properties, the acceptance of which conflicts with naturalism.

It is in part in an effort to avoid the reduction of moral properties to natural properties while preserving naturalism that anti-representationalism about moral language has been thought to be attractive. Yet once representationalism is rejected, the anti-representationalist must offer an alternative account of the meanings of moral expressions and what we are in doing in moralizing if not aiming to represent the way that the world is. Taking their cue from the fact that when a person makes a moral judgment, they tend to be motivated by their moral judgment at least to some extent, expressivists propose that moral judgments and expressions are

expressions of intrinsically motivating mental states, such as desires, plans, or commitments. According to expressivists, what we are doing in moralizing is expressing these mental states, and traditionally expressivists have said that these mental states are what provide moral expressions with their meanings.

Because expressivism is the dominant form of anti-representationalism in metaethics, there is a tendency to think that expressivism and anti-representationalism stand and fall together. In this paper, I argue that this is not so. I do so by offering what I take to be a promising non-expressivist anti-representationalist alternative. For reasons that will become clear in the next section, I call this view *metaethical pragmatism*. One complication that arises is that in light of recent challenges to expressivism, some have suggested recharacterizing expressivism in such a way that it counts as a kind of pragmatism given the criterion of pragmatism that I offer in the following section. In section 2, I consider these challenges, and I argue that although expressivism can indeed be recharacterized so that it counts as a kind of pragmatism, there is nonetheless room for non-expressivist pragmatism. In section 3, I suggest one particular kind of non-expressivist pragmatism that I find attractive. I then turn to motivate why non-expressivist pragmatism might in general be thought preferable to expressivist pragmatism.

1. Pragmatism

I call the view that I favor metaethical pragmatism. The reason for this is that it is a metaethical view that counts as a form of pragmatism given Huw Price and David MacArthur's characterization of pragmatism. As Price and MacArthur characterize pragmatism, pragmatism is defined by two constitutive commitments: linguistic priority and anti-representationalism.¹ Linguistic priority says that the appropriate place to start any philosophical inquiry is by focusing on linguistic items – the terms, expressions, kinds of sentences, or areas of discourse of interest – and asking about the function(s) that those linguistic items play in human life. That is, the pragmatist begins by asking of some linguistic item (or items) what that item (or those items) enable(s) us to do or do better that we could not do otherwise or do as efficiently without it (or them). This approach can be contrasted with a metaphysical approach that begins with questions about the existence and natures of things or properties, such as: “What is truth?” “Are there composite objects?” and “Are there really numbers, and if so, what are they?”² By contrast, the pragmatist says that we should not start by asking “What is truth?”, but rather “What is the function of the truth predicate – why have a truth predicate in our language at all?” So, a commitment to linguistic priority is a methodological commitment about where and how to begin philosophical inquiry.

¹ Price and MacArthur, “Pragmatism, Quasi-realism, and the Global Challenge,” p. 233.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

The second constitutive commitment of pragmatism is what Price and MacArthur call anti-representationalism. The pragmatist's anti-representationalism can be articulated by contrast to representationalism. Representationalists take a particular view about the meanings of linguistic expressions. In particular, they seek to explain the meanings of linguistic expressions by appeal to word-world semantic relations such as reference, and they characterize the meanings of linguistic expressions by the things or properties that they denote. Once we have the meanings of linguistic expressions, representationalists rely on these meanings to explain their use. So, for representationalists, word-world semantic relations are explanatorily primitive. Anti-representationalists reject this account of meaning, and specifically they eschew word-world semantic relations as explanatorily primitive. The pragmatist's anti-representationalism is distinctive in that they instead seek to explain the meanings of linguistic expressions in terms of their function and the use properties that they must have in order to fulfill those functions. Insofar as pragmatists and anti-representationalists more generally talk of reference and denotation, these notions do not do any work in explaining the meanings of linguistic expressions.³

Paul Horwich's approach to thinking about truth is a useful example to illustrate this kind of pragmatism in action. On his view, the proper place to begin in thinking about truth is by asking about the function of the truth predicate. He thinks that the truth predicate functions as a device that adds a significant amount of expressive power to our language by allowing us to generalize in particular ways.⁴ It allows us, for example, to say things like "Everything that Sara asserted was true," rather than having to say "If Sara asserted Φ , then Φ ; and if Sara asserted Ψ ,

³ Williams, "How Pragmatists can be Local Expressivists," pp. 128-139; cf. Price and MacArthur, "Pragmatism, Quasi-realism, and the Global Challenge," pp. 232-233.

⁴ Horwich, *Truth*, pp. 2-4; *Truth, Meaning, Reality*, p. 4.

then Ψ ; and if Sara asserted X, then X; etc.” Likewise, it allows us to say things that would otherwise be incredibly difficult to say quite simply, such as that “One should aim to have true beliefs.”⁵ With this functional analysis of the truth predicate in hand, Horwich relies on it to provide the meaning of ‘truth’. He suggests that the meaning of ‘truth’ is fixed by whatever it is that must be assumed about it in order for it to succeed in fulfilling its function. According to Horwich, that is no more and no less than that it is governed by the various instances of the equivalence schema. So, where P is any proposition and ‘<P>’ abbreviates ‘The proposition that P’,⁶ the meaning of the truth predicate is given by the schema:

<P> is true if and only if P.⁷

What is important for present purposes is Horwich’s strategy. First, he identifies the function of the linguistic item of interest. Next, he identifies the rules of use that must be assumed in order for that linguistic item to fulfill its function. He then relies on these rules of use to provide the meaning of that linguistic item. Horwich does not start by thinking about the property of truth, and use that property in turn to explain the meaning and the proper use of ‘truth’ by invoking word-world semantic relations. Instead, the meaning of ‘truth’ is characterized functionally in terms of its use properties. So, rather than word-world semantic notions being explanatorily fundamental, function and use are. The function of the truth predicate is fundamental in that it explains why the rules of use that govern the truth predicate are as they are. The use properties are fundamental in that they fully explain everything that we do with the truth predicate, including how it fulfills its function. So, function and use explain meaning rather than the other way around as the representationalist would have things.

⁵ Horwich, *Truth*, pp. 2-6.

⁶ I follow Horwich in using the notion <P>. Horwich, *Truth*, p. 19; *Truth, Meaning, Reality*, p. 5.

⁷ Horwich, *Truth*, pp. 2-7; *Truth, Meaning, Reality*, pp. 35-40.

I will argue that this kind of pragmatic approach can provide a distinctive way of thinking about the meanings of moral expressions that avoids the problems that many have found with representationalism while avoiding any commitment to expressivism. The particular view that I am interested in does *not* begin with the function of particular moral expressions, such as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘obligation’ and ‘duty’, but rather with an investigation into the function of moral discourse as a whole. It then relies on this function as a means of determining the function of particular moral expressions. The guiding thought is that in order for moral discourse to fulfill its function, the expressions that make up that discourse must serve certain functional roles. Once the function of a particular expression has been determined, then the rules of use that govern and constitute the meaning of that expression can be inferred. These rules are as they need to be in order for that moral expression to serve its particular function. Given the complexity of moral expressions, there is no guarantee that these rules will be easy or even possible to specify, but that is fine. What matters is not that we are able to explicitly state the rules that govern the use of moral expressions, but that we are able to deploy them in accordance with their constitutive rules. So long as we can do that, moral discourse can serve its function and all is well.

This intended as a rough sketch of the view on offer and an explanation of why I am thinking of it as a kind of pragmatism. Toward the end of the next section, more details will come, but first I want to consider expressivism and how expressivist’s have gone about denying that moral expressions are representational. This discussion is intended to isolate the essential disagreement between the pragmatist and the expressivist.

2. From Expressivism to Expressivist Pragmatism

Expressivists also deny that moral expressions and judgments are representational but they do so in a different way than pragmatists. This contrast can be drawn out by focusing on a set of related problems that expressivists encounter in light of the way that they go about denying that moral expressions and judgments are representational. In response to these problems, some have advised expressivists to follow the pragmatist's alternative strategy. If expressivists take this advice, their view counts as a kind of pragmatism. Since I want to defend an anti-representationalist alternative to expressivism, it is crucial to distinguish expressivism and pragmatism or at least show that there is room for a kind of non-expressivist pragmatism. The ultimate aim of this section is to show that there is indeed room for such a view.

To motivate the problems that expressivists face that have led to the suggestion that they recharacterize their view as a kind of pragmatism, it is worth starting with an early form of expressivism. Consider, for instance, A.J. Ayer's emotivism, an early form of expressivism.⁸ On Ayer's view, moral expressions are mere expressions of emotions. Unlike subsentential descriptive expressions, which are to be understood by considering what they denote, moral predicates like 'good' are to be understood by considering what people are doing when using these expressions – namely, evincing their feelings and trying to provoke responses in others. The feelings that are ordinarily expressed by a moral expression, and the responses that it is

⁸ I suspect that not everyone would agree that Ayer's emotivism is a form of expressivism. Nothing hangs on this for my purposes. While I will continue to refer to Ayer's view as a form of expressivism, it is fine to think of Ayer's emotivism as a predecessor to expressivism rather than a form of expressivism itself.

calculated to provoke, are what give it its meaning.⁹ So, the only descriptive content that a moral judgment has comes from the non-moral descriptive expressions that occur in the sentence.¹⁰ For instance, my utterance that ‘it was good that we made a plan’ has no more descriptive content than the assertion that ‘we made a plan’. In attributing goodness to our making of a plan, I simply evince my approval of our having made a plan. This approval is what gives ‘good’ its meaning, so that the meaning of my judgment that ‘it was good that we made a plan’ might just be: ‘hooray for us having made a plan!’

This account of moral expressions and moral judgments led Ayer to construe the representational/non-representational distinction semantically by asserting that whereas descriptive representational statements express propositions, moral statements do not. The motivation for this way of drawing the representational/non-representational distinction was that Ayer thought that only statements that are either analytic or in principle verifiable express propositions,¹¹ and moral statements are neither given Ayer’s analysis. Since propositions are the bearers of truth, Ayer thought that moral statements are not truth-apt (and that there are no ethical facts).¹² So, whereas descriptive statements are propositional, truth-apt, and factual, moral statements are not.¹³ The problem with construing the representational/non-representational distinction in this way is that it makes it difficult to explain the semantic similarities between

⁹ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, p. 108.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 15-16.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

¹³ Note that Ayer rejects simple subjectivism, which says that in calling a thing good we are saying that we, or the members of our society, approve of it. Sentences that do that are not moral sentences according to Ayer, but psychological, or sociological, sentences, respectively. These sentences *do* express propositions since they are about one’s own state of mind or one’s society, and are therefore verifiable in principle. As such, they are descriptive and truth-apt. In contrast, when moralizing, we express our feelings rather than describe them. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, pp. 104-109.

moral and descriptive statements. For instance, both moral and descriptive sentences seem to be built out of subsentential components. They both seem to admit of systematic syntactic transformations of tense, mood, and number. And despite Ayer's claim to the contrary, they both seem truth-apt, as well embeddable in logically complex contexts, and capable of bearing logical relations to other statements. By denying that moral statements are propositional and truth-apt, Ayer's view seems to lack the resources to account for these semantic similarities.¹⁴

The inability of Ayer's view to account for these similarities perhaps would not have bothered Ayer since his main goal was to defend his positivism,¹⁵ but positivism is unattractive today, and contemporary expressivists have different motivations. Nowadays, expressivists are interested in accommodating our ordinary practice of moralizing on expressivist grounds, and part of this project involves explaining how moral discourse behaves as if it were representational despite that it is not. Expressivists engaged in this project often call themselves quasi-realists.¹⁶ To carry out the quasi-realist project, the expressivist does two things.

First, they modify Ayer's characterization of expressivism by drawing the representational/non-representational distinction in different terms. In particular, expressivists today psychologize all meaning and draw the representational/non-representational contrast in terms of the different kinds of mental states that descriptive and moral sentences express. By committing themselves to a general psychological theory of meaning, expressivists say that the meaning of any linguistic expression is given by the mental states that it expresses. But whereas descriptive statements express cognitive mental states, like beliefs, moral statements express non-cognitive mental states, like desires. Whereas cognitive mental states are representational,

¹⁴ Chrisman, "Expressivism, Inferentialism, and Saving the Debate," pp. 337-338.

¹⁵ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, p. 102.

¹⁶ Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, p. 171.

non-cognitive mental states are not.¹⁷ To fill this distinction out, expressivists typically rely on the direction of fit metaphor due to Elizabeth Anscombe.¹⁸ Cognitive mental states, they say, aim to fit the world. They attempt to represent it. When they fail to do so, something is defective about them, and when a person realizes that they do not match the world they tend to go out of existence. Non-cognitive mental states aim to get the world to fit them. They do not even attempt to represent the world. When the world fails to fit them, they tend to endure and the person who has them tends to try to bring the world in line with them.¹⁹

By construing the distinction between moral and descriptive statements in these terms, the expressivist draws the representational/non-representational distinction psychologically. This puts them in a position where they do not have to construe the distinction semantically as Ayer did, and so they do not have to deny that moral declaratives express propositions. This paves the way for the expressivist to assert that moral declaratives do express propositions, that they are truth-apt, and that there are ethical facts. To do so, the expressivist relies on minimalism about each of these notions, which in turn allows them to explain the semantic similarities between moral and descriptive statements. For instance, consider how minimalism enables the expressivist to allow that moral declaratives express propositions, are truth-apt, and factual just as non-moral declaratives are.

The minimalist about propositions says that propositions are merely logical-grammatical devices for forming noun-phrases out of sentences. In order for propositions to fulfill this function, all that needs to be assumed about them is that for any meaningful declarative sentence P:

¹⁷ Chrisman, "Expressivism, Inferentialism, and Saving the Debate," pp. 338-340.

¹⁸ Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 56.

¹⁹ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, p. 115.

‘P’ expresses <P>.

Following the general pragmatic strategy outlined in the previous section, the minimalist says that this schema fixes the meaning of ‘proposition’. Since both moral and descriptive declaratives are embeddable into that schema regardless of the kinds of mental states that they express, the expressivist can allow that both moral and descriptive declaratives express propositions. Similarly, by endorsing minimalism about truth, the expressivist can say that moral judgments are truth-apt. For if both moral and descriptive declarative sentences express propositions, then since both moral and descriptive propositions are embeddable into the equivalence schema, the expressivist can allow that both ethical and descriptive statements are truth-apt. And by opting for a minimalist view about facts, according to which facts are no more than true propositions, the expressivist can then allow that there are moral facts.²⁰ Since the expressivist can allow that moral declarative have all of these properties, they are in a position to explain the semantic similarities between moral and descriptive declaratives.

So far, so good. But now comes the problem, which stems from the combination of the goal of quasi-realism, relying on minimalism to achieve that goal, and the expressivist’s reliance on the representational/non-representational distinction to state their view. The thought is that if the goal of the quasi-realist project is to explain the descriptive and realist seeming appearances of moral language on non-representationalist grounds, it seems that the quasi-realist should endorse minimalism about other notions as well. Of particular importance for current purposes, it seems that the quasi-realist should endorse minimalism about beliefs, representation, and

²⁰ Notice that endorsing minimalism alone would not solve the expressivist’s problem. For these minimalist commitments are incompatible with Ayer’s expressivism, since they are incompatible with his substantive views about propositions, truth, and facts which he relies on to characterize his expressivism. By reformulating expressivism by psychologizing all meaning, the expressivist is able to characterize their view in such a way that it avoids any reliance on these substantive semantic commitments. This allows them to accept minimalism about propositions, truth, and facts, which in turn puts them in a position to explain the semantic similarities between ethical and descriptive sentences.

descriptiveness.^{21 22} For we typically do say that people have moral beliefs just as we say that people have beliefs about ordinary medium-sized objects. For instance, we might say that we all believe that stabbing an animal in the eye for fun is morally wrong. Similarly, we do sometimes use moral sentences descriptively. In describing a villain, we might say that they are an evil person or a moral monster. And once the quasi-realist has accepted minimalism about facts, it seems hard to deny that our moral judgments and the mental states expressed by those judgments represent those facts.²³ So, it seems that given that the whole point of quasi-realism is to accommodate the representationalist and realist seeming features of ordinary ethical discourse, the quasi-realist should endorse minimalism about these notions as well.

The problem with doing so, however, is that this leads to immediate problems for the expressivist engaged in the quasi-realist project. For one, by allowing that moral judgments have all these properties, it becomes difficult to see what the difference is between the realist and the quasi-realist. By endorsing minimalism across the board, it seems that the realist and the quasi-realist can agree on everything. As Dreier succinctly sums up the problem, “Minimalism sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts. If successful, it can help Expressivism recapture the ordinary realist language of ethics. But in so doing it also threatens to make irrealism indistinguishable from realism. That is the problem of Creeping Minimalism.”²⁴ Quite apart from this concern, the spread of minimalism leads to another problem for the expressivist.

²¹ Minimalism about beliefs just says that any state of mind expressed by a declarative sentence is a belief. Minimalism about descriptiveness just says that for any meaningful declarative sentence P, ‘P’ describes <P>. Minimalism about representation just says that for any meaningful declarative sentence P, ‘P’ represents the fact that P, and any state of mind expressed by a declarative sentence is representational.

²² Dreier also notes that the expressivist should accept minimalism about properties and assertion. Dreier, “Metaethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism,” pp. 26-27.

²³ Dreier, “Metaethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism,” pp. 29-31; Asay, “Truthmaking, Metaethics, and Creeping Minimalism,” p. 218.

²⁴ Dreier, “Metaethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism,” p. 26.

In particular, it seems that minimalism about descriptiveness, representation, and belief is incompatible with expressivism. If so, the end result of the minimalist sweep is the rejection of expressivism.

The reason for thinking that minimalism is incompatible with expressivism is that once a given notion is given a minimalist treatment it is no longer substantive enough to bifurcate language into two classes by appeal to that notion. For instance, with respect to propositions, once they are deflated, there is no room to maintain that certain declarative statements do not express propositions. For the minimalist about propositions says that all that there is to propositions is captured by the collected instances of the schema: ‘P’ expresses <P>. But since all meaningful declarative sentences are embeddable into that schema, the minimalist about propositions cannot hold that some meaningful declaratives do not express propositions. Hence, they cannot bifurcate the class of declarative sentences into the propositional and the non-propositional. Such bifurcations require more substantive semantic notions than minimalism allows.²⁵

With respect to minimalism about propositions, the quasi-realist need not be concerned. The move to minimalism was made precisely to allow that moral declaratives express propositions. The problem though is that this same argument generalizes to each notion that is given a minimalist treatment. So, once beliefs are given a minimalist treatment, the expressivist cannot distinguish moral and non-moral statements on the grounds that the former do not express beliefs whereas the latter do. The state of mind expressed by any meaningful declarative sentence is a belief once beliefs are deflated. Nor can moral and non-moral statements be distinguished by appeal to the notions of representation and descriptiveness. Minimalism

²⁵ This kind of argument can be found in: Price and MacArthur, “Pragmatism, Quasi-realism, and the Global Challenge,” pp. 240-242; Boghossian, “The Status of Content;” Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, ch. 1; and McDowell, “Anti-realism and the Epistemology of Understanding.”

prevents bifurcating language by appeal to these notions in exactly the same way. This is problematic for the expressivist since expressivism seems to presuppose these very bifurcations. After all, one of the constitutive theses of expressivism is that moral declaratives are non-descriptive and do not express representational mental states like beliefs. Hence, it appears that minimalism about representation, descriptiveness, and belief is incompatible with expressivism.

Some expressivists have tried to block the spread of minimalism, suggesting that though the expressivist should accept minimalism about propositions, truth, and facts, they should reject minimalism about representation, descriptiveness, and beliefs.²⁶ As Jamin Asay puts it, the proposal is to get minimalism to stop creeping before it gets to descriptiveness, representation, and belief. But, as Asay points out, this just ignores the problem, which is that given the goal of quasi-realism, the quasi-realist should endorse minimalism about these notions. Given that there are ordinary senses of these terms that apply to moral discourse, and given that the goal of quasi-realism is accommodate our ordinary practice of moralizing, it would be *ad hoc* for the quasi-realist not to accept minimalism about representation, descriptiveness, and belief.²⁷

Alternatively, it might be suggested that the expressivist should bifurcate the very notions of representation, descriptiveness, and belief. This proposal concedes that there is an ordinary deflated sense of these terms that apply to moral discourse, but maintains that there is also a deeper substantive sense of each of these notions as well, and ethical declaratives lack these properties in the deeper sense. In effect, the proposal says that there are beliefs and then there are BELIEFS. There is representation and then there is REPRESENTATION. There is descriptiveness and there is DESCRIPTIVENESS. The lowercase letter words denote deflated senses of these terms and the capital letter words denote substantive senses of the terms. While

²⁶ Blackburn, "Anti-realism, Expressivism, and Quasi-realism," pp. 160-161.

²⁷ Asay, "Truthmaking, Metaethics, and Creeping Minimalism," p. 218.

the expressivist should allow that moral declaratives have all of these properties in the deflated sense, they should deny that they have them in any substantive sense. This allows the expressivist to rely on the substantive versions of these notions to state their view.

One difficulty with this proposal is that it would require spelling out what exactly the difference is between the uppercase and lowercase versions of versions of each of these terms, and this task is more difficult than it might seem for the quasi-realist.²⁸ But the more fundamental problem with the proposal is that it rests on a misunderstanding of the pragmatic methodology that underlies and motivates minimalism. According to the minimalist, the meanings of the notions that are given a minimalist treatment are fully explained by their function and the rules that govern their use so that they can fulfill these functions. This what allows the quasi-realist to deny the charge that quasi-realism entails that moral judgments are not *really* true but only true in a deflated sense. According to the quasi-realist, true moral judgments are true in the only sense of truth that there is – the minimalist sense. Since this proposal suggests that there is some deeper metaphysical meaning to these notions that goes beyond their ordinary use properties, it flies in the face of minimalism.²⁹ So, it is not a strategy that the minimalist can take advantage of.

It is important to notice that the distinction between the mental states that are expressed by moral and non-moral sentences cannot be merely a pragmatic matter. For there are all kinds of pragmatic differences between the mental states that are expressed by different kinds of sentences, and these differences do not by themselves suggest that we ought to treat the sentences as non-representational. For instance, requests like ‘I would like a beer’ express

²⁸ See Dreier, “Metaethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism,” pp. 28-31; Asay, “Truthmaking, Metaethics, and Creeping Minimalism,” p. 216.

²⁹ Asay, “Truthmaking, Metaethics, and Creeping Minimalism,” p. 216.

desires. First-person avowals of emotions like ‘I love you’ express certain emotions. But that these kinds of statements express these kinds of mental states does not suggest that we should treat these statements as non-representational. What is needed, it seems, is the distinction between those mental states that attempt to represent the world and those that do not. But it is precisely this distinction that minimalism precludes.³⁰

Several philosophers have independently suggested that to solve this problem, the expressivist must shift from a psychological theory of meaning to a use theory of the kind that the pragmatist subscribes to.³¹ Though this shift will not enable the expressivist to rely on the notion of representation, it does enable them to state their view in an alternative way that avoids the aforementioned problems. Proposals for how to do this vary, but consider one such proposal offered by Michael Williams. To explain how a use theory of meaning helps the expressivist, some more details are needed regarding what goes into explaining the meaning of an expression in terms of its function and use. Williams calls these explanations EMUs (explanations of meaning in terms of use).³² Williams proposes breaking down EMUs into three main components: a material-inferential component (an I-clause), an epistemological component (an E-clause), and a functional component (an F-clause). The material-inferential component specifies the intra-linguistic relations between the expression being analyzed and other expressions. This component provides the conceptual content of that expression. The epistemological component specifies when the inferences specified in the material-inferential component are acceptable. Together these two components, the E- and I-clauses, specify how the

³⁰ Chrisman, “Expressivism, Inferentialism, and Saving the Debate,” pp. 342-343.

³¹ To my knowledge, Michael Williams was the first to make this suggestion in “How Pragmatists can be Local Expressivists.” Matthew Chrisman makes a similar proposal in “Expressivism, Inferentialism, and Saving the Debate.” Simon Blackburn has also expressed sympathies to this proposal in a personal correspondence.

³² Williams, “How Pragmatists can be Local Expressivists,” p. 133.

expression of interest is used. The functional component specifies the function of the expression being analyzed, which explains why the former two components are as they are.³³ To put Horwich's account of 'truth' into this model, the I-clause consists of the various instances of equivalence schema. The E-clause tells us that for any proposition P the inference between '<P> is true' to 'P' (and vice versa) is always good *a priori*. The F-clause specifies that the truth predicate functions as a useful device for generalization.³⁴

The model is helpful for the expressivist because it allows them to say that what is distinctive about moral expressions as opposed to expressions like 'red' without reliance on word-world semantic notions like representation that the endorsement of minimalism precludes. The E- and F-clauses of the EMUs of these different kinds of expressions are particularly important. To see how the expressivist can do this, contrast the EMU for 'red' with what a EMU for a typical moral expression looks like

When it comes to an expression like 'red', the I-clause of the EMU will specify the inferential relations between 'red' and other expressions. For instance, the I-clause will specify that 'x is not green', 'x is not yellow', etc., can be inferred from 'x is red'. Similarly, from 'red' we can move to 'colored', from 'crimson' to 'red', etc. Part of the E-clause of the EMU for red will say that the inferences specified in the material-inferential component are always good *a priori*. Importantly, in the case of expressions like 'red', the E-clause of the analysis will also, however, include a clause that says that only report 'x is red' of red things. That is to say that the E-clause of the EMU of 'red' will need to invoke the property of redness and thereby use 'red' in the E-clause (as opposed to merely mentioning it). It will thus rely on world-word relations in

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135, 138-142.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

providing the analysis of ‘red’, but crucially this will not be a semantic relation but a causal one.³⁵

This might seem circular, but there is no circularity here. The reason is that the conceptual content of an expression is fully specified by the I-clause of that expression’s EMU. That is, it is fully specified by the inferential relations that the expression stands in to other expressions. As it happens though, when it comes to observational terms, they acquire observational use and this is what is specified in the E-clause of the EMU and why the EMU for ‘red’ requires invoking the property of redness.³⁶ The F-clause then explains why the I- and E-clauses are as they are by specifying that the function of ‘x is red’ is to express reliable discriminative reactions to environmental changes.³⁷

In contrast, with moral expressions, the expressivist can maintain that the language entry conditions that specify the stimulatory conditions in which it is appropriate to apply a moral expression do not require using that moral expression. That is, the E-clause does not require any appeal to moral properties.³⁸ For instance, in the case of ‘bad’, the E-clause will provide stimulatory conditions in which it is appropriate to apply ‘bad’, but those conditions will importantly not say that ‘x is bad’ should be reported when you encounter the property of badness. Rather the conditions will include things like ‘x is bad’ can be reported, for instance, in the presence of needless suffering. It is this difference in the E-clause of the EMU that allows the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-142.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

expressivist to draw the needed contrast that they were previously drawing by appeal to the representation/non-representational distinction.³⁹

What is distinctive of expressivism though comes in the F-clause of the EMU for moral expressions. In particular, it says that their function is to express certain intrinsically motivating mental states, such as attitudes, plans, or commitments. Let's call an expressivist of this sort who goes in for this kind of use theory an expressivist pragmatist. Clearly, then, there is room for non-expressivist pragmatism. The non-expressivist pragmatist endorses this kind of use theory of meaning but denies that the function of moral expressions is to express intrinsically motivating mental states. If this is correct, then the essential disagreement between the expressivist pragmatist and the non-expressivist pragmatist regards the F-clause of EMUs for moral expressions. That is to say that though the expressivist pragmatist and the non-expressivist pragmatist are both pragmatists, what they disagree about is the function of moral expressions. In the next section, I offer one particular kind of non-expressivist pragmatism to contrast with expressivism. I then motivate why non-expressivist pragmatism is a viable alternative to expressivist pragmatism.

³⁹ It is an interesting question whether this way of drawing the contrast between expressions like 'red' and moral expressions is a stable way of maintaining the bifurcation in language that the expressivist wants to draw. The fact that expressivists also endorse minimalism about properties makes this strategy questionable.

3. Expressivism, Pragmatism, and Moral Motivation

If the non-expressivist pragmatist denies that the function of moral expressions is to express intrinsically motivating mental states, what is their function? The first thing to notice in response to this question is that pragmatists can disagree about the function of moral expressions. Pragmatism itself does not recommend any particular view on the matter. The denial of expressivism does rule out that their function is as the expressivist maintains, but this leaves a good deal of room for disagreement even among non-expressivist pragmatists. One particular kind of non-expressivist pragmatism that I find attractive denies that there is anything that can be said in general about the function of moral expressions because different moral expressions serve very different functions. In order to determine the function of a particular moral expression, we must look to the function of moral discourse and our practice of morality as a whole and see what role that expression plays in enabling the larger system which it is a part of to fulfill its function. Just as the function of the different parts of a bicycle must be stated in reference to the function of the bike as a whole and the rest of its parts, this is similarly the case with respect to the function of particular moral expressions.

This shifts the immediate problem from the question regarding the function of moral expressions to the question of the function of moral discourse. In response to that question, the kind of pragmatism that I am interested in says that the function of moral discourse is to maintain social cohesion by promoting cooperation and coordination, and reducing social tension and strife. Essentially, moral discourse is a useful technology that we have developed so that we can

live together smoothly. There is an immediate and pressing worry with this proposal though. Namely, the expressivist can agree that the function of moral discourse is to maintain social cohesion, but urge that in order for it to fulfill that function moral expressions must function to express intrinsically motivating mental states. After all, the expressivist might say, in order for moral discourse to fulfill its function, people must often and reliably be motivated to comply with their moral judgments given that the function of moral discourse is bound up with getting people to act in certain ways. By maintaining that moral expressions serve to express intrinsically motivating states of mind, we get clear explanation of why people are so often and reliably motivated to comply with their moral judgments. If this line of thought is on track, the kind of pragmatism that I am suggesting collapses into expressivist pragmatism and would not in fact be a non-expressivist alternative. My first task in this section is to deny that this kind of pragmatism does in fact collapse into expressivism.

Of course, in order for moral discourse to fulfill its social function, people must at least often be motivated to comply with their moral judgments. But the function of moral expressions need not be as the expressivist maintains in order to explain why people are so motivated. Here an analogy to law is useful. Plausibly, our legal system serves a function very much like the function that I am suggesting that morality and moral discourse serves. It is also crucial to its functioning that people be regularly, predictably, and consistently be motivated to comply with the law. However, it is quite implausible that the explanation as to why people are so motivated is because legal expressions function to express intrinsically motivating states. Rather, we typically think that the reason that people are motivated to obey the law has to do with the fact that they will be punished if they do not and they have an aversion to punishment. There is also the fact that we train people from a young age to be disposed to obey the law. A bit of evidence

for this latter claim comes from the fact that those who are raised in certain communities or social groups are often not habituated in the relevant ways and as a result frequently lack any motivation to comply with the law. They might even be disposed to break the law and do so even when there is no cost to compliance. If that is correct, then it seems that we have little reason to think that legal expressions and legal judgments serve an expressive function. But yet since our legal system seems to generate sufficient compliance so that it can fulfill its function, it seems that we could likewise explain the successful functioning of moral discourse without assigning moral expressions an expressive function.

It might be objected that there is an important relevant difference between our legal system and our system of morality. Namely, in the case of our legal system, there is a system of punishment in place that punishes those who transgress the law but this is not the case when it comes to our moral system. This might be thought to explain why it is that though our legal system can generate sufficient compliance without legal expressions serving an expressive function the parallel does not hold in the case of our moral system. But, of course, there is a kind of punishment within our moral system. For instance, we tend to esteem and give approval to those who do what we judge to be the morally right thing. In certain cases, we even esteem and give approval to those who do what they judge to be the morally right thing to do even if it is not what we judge to be the morally right thing to do. Similarly, we tend to disesteem and shame those who do not comply with what we judge to be the morally right thing to do as well as those who do not comply with what they judge to be the morally right thing to do. Similar considerations apply to those whom we tend to associate ourselves with, and those we avoid and steer clear of. It would be unwise for the expressivist to underestimate the desires that people have for esteem and approval, to spend time with others, to avoid disesteem and shame, to not be

shunned, etc. Pair this with the training process that we put children through, and it is not at all clear that moral expressions must be assumed to express intrinsically motivating mental states in order for a sufficient number of people to comply with their moral judgment in a sufficient number of cases so that our system of morality can function well.

More plausibly, expressivists should admit that moral expressions and moral judgments do not *need* to serve an expressive function in order for morality to fulfill the hypothesized function. Instead, they should maintain that, despite this, we nonetheless have strong independent reason for thinking that *they do in fact* serve that function. This would be to acknowledge that there is room for non-expressivist pragmatism, but to maintain that we have reason to believe that as a matter of fact it is false because expressivism is true. One powerful consideration that the expressivist can point to in favor of this suggestion is the following. Suppose that a person purports to have some moral commitment, and yet they fail to be motivated whatsoever to comply with that commitment. If we assume that there are no costs to complying with the commitment in question, then, barring special circumstances like cases of depression, the lack of motivation leads us to doubt the sincerity of that person's commitment. For instance, if I judge that we ought to be helping the poor and yet I never am motivated at all to do so even when I could at no cost, there is good reason to be skeptical that I sincerely think that I ought to help the poor. If expressivism is true, we have a good explanation for this fact. For according to the expressivist, sincere moral judgments necessarily motivate at least so long as certain conditions are met. If these conditions are met, and I purport to have some commitment that I am not in fact motivated by, then that commitment must not be sincere.

Parallel considerations are not at all plausible when it comes to legal judgments. We have no problem imagining an individual who sincerely judges that doing some action would be

illegal and yet is not at all motivated to avoid doing that action despite that there are no costs of compliance. Hence, expressivists can argue that even if the function of moral discourse might be to reduce social tension, and even if moral expressions need not serve an expressive function in order for moral discourse to succeed in fulfilling that function, this further consideration provides us with good reason for thinking that moral judgments, but not legal judgments, function to express intrinsically motivating mental states.

Expressivists are correct that we do indeed doubt the sincerity of a person who says that they have some moral commitment but are not motivated by that commitment when there are no costs to comply and barring special circumstances. However, though a lack of motivation in such circumstances may provide us with good evidence that the purported moral commitment is disingenuous, it does not follow that it must necessarily be disingenuous. It is this stronger claim that the expressivist needs in order to support their view. That is, expressivists are committed to there being a necessary constitutive connection between moral judgments and expressions on the one hand and motivation on the other. For the expressivist's thesis is that the constitutive function of moral judgments is to express intrinsically motivating mental states.

Consider another kind of case where a lack of corresponding motivation to a particular kind of judgment suggests insincerity. For instance, consider judgments of pain. Typically, if someone says that they are in pain but they are not at all motivated to do anything to stop what is causing the purported pain despite that doing so would involve no cost, we tend to be skeptical that they are in fact in pain. For example, suppose that Kyle sticks his hand in a fire. If there is nothing stopping him from removing his hand nor any reason why he might want to keep it in the first, such as in order to win a bet, and yet he is not at all motivated to remove his hand, then we are likely to be skeptical that Kyle is in fact experiencing pain. We might wonder, for instance, if

we are being deceived and perhaps there is some protective material around Kyle's hand preventing him from being burned, or perhaps the fire is not real fire. In this respect, then, judgments of pain are similar to moral judgments. In cases of judgments of pain though, we have good reason to think that the connection between judgments of pain and motivation is merely evidential as opposed to constitutive. This becomes clear when we consider cases of third-personal ascriptions of pain to strangers. For instance, suppose that Kyle has his hand in a fire and is exhibiting all the classic signs that he is in pain. Suppose that Kyle is trying to get his hand out of the first but for whatever reason he is unable to. Matthew does not know Kyle, but he is witnessing the scene and concludes that Kyle is in pain. Nevertheless, Matthew is not at all moved to help Kyle even though doing so would involve no cost. Though this would presumably lead us to think that Matthew is an asshole, it does not at all seem plausible to maintain that Matthew's judgment that Kyle is in pain must be disingenuous. What this suggests is that despite that a lack of motivation to end pain provides good evidence that one is sincerely experiencing pain, the stronger constitutive connection between judgments of pain and motivation does not hold. The question when it comes to moral judgments is whether they are like judgments of pain in this respect or whether a stronger constitutive connection holds as the expressivist maintains?

The third-personal analogue in the case of moral judgments provides some reason that we might doubt that the connection is constitutive rather than merely evidential. For instance, suppose that I judge that Eric morally ought to Φ . At first pass, it seems that according to the expressivist, if I could get Eric to Φ (or perhaps do something to increase the likelihood that he Φ) at no cost to myself but I was not at all motivated to do so, my judgment must not be sincere. But suppose that someone objects to my sincerity on the ground of my lack of motivation. It seems that I could truthfully respond, "No! I sincerely think that Eric really ought to Φ but it is

no concern of mine to get him to Φ , and as a result I lack any motivation to do so.” Expressivists have a reply. In particular, they can say that what is going on in this case is that though I might be sincere in judging that Eric morally ought to Φ , my response and my lack of motivation to do anything to get him to Φ can be explained by my lacking another moral commitment, namely, that I morally ought to do anything to get Eric to Φ . This raises an interesting issue for the expressivist. Specifically, if moral judgments function to express intrinsically motivating mental states, what corresponding motivation is a person expressing in the case of third-personal ought ascriptions if not that they are motivated to do something to get them to do what is judged that they ought to do?

The obvious suggestion is a kind of counterfactual motivation. On this suggestion, for a third-personal ought ascription to be sincere the person doing the judging must counterfactually be motivated to comply with their judgment were they in the situation that the person that their judgment is about is in. For instance, in sincerely judging that Eric ought to Φ , I express a mental state such that if I were in Eric’s situation, then I would be motivated to Φ . One reason that we might doubt this suggestion is that suppose the following day that I happen to be in a situation that is like the situation that Eric was in the previous day in all morally relevant respects. Nevertheless, today I lack any motivation to Φ . I submit that, though it may be legitimate to conclude from this lack of motivation that I am hypocrite, it does not seem that my judgment the previous day must have been insincere. Expressivists might agree. They might maintain that what has happened is that my motivations have changed, and so though my judgment might have been sincere yesterday, if I made the same judgment today, given my lack of motivation, it would now be disingenuous. In other words, I must have changed my mind about whether Eric morally ought to Φ . But must I have really? It is difficult to say because it is not clear how to test

this suggestion by appeal to examples. I submit that it may enable the expressivist to salvage their view, but after introducing this epicycle, the motivation that the expressivist originally invoked to motivate their expressivism has significantly lost its force. Since we can accommodate that intuition with the weaker merely evidential connection between motivation and moral judgments, it is not clear what the motivation is for expressivism anymore.

One suspicion is that these kinds of moves are often made because they are taken to be necessary to salvage anti-representationalism and the advantages that it brings with it. But if there is a genuine anti-representationalist alternative to expressivism, this is not a good reason to make these kinds of *ad hoc* moves in order to salvage expressivism. My suggestion is that once this alternative view is on the table, we can see that expressivism may not need saving. We can keep the anti-representationalist baby and throw out the expressivist bath water. The way to do so is by endorsing non-expressivist pragmatism. Of course, expressivists might deny that there is anything *ad hoc* going on in going counterfactual. Nothing that I have said rules this possibility out, but that has not been my aim. I have merely been trying to argue that there is room for anti-representationalists to reject expressivism and it is not obvious that expressivism is the preferable form of anti-representationalism. To settle the issue is going to turn on the further debate about motivational internalism and externalism. Yet given the dialectic, I take it that non-expressivist pragmatism is a live view that merits further consideration.

Conclusion

I have tried to suggest that there is room for a non-expressivist anti-representationalist metaethic. The particular view that I have suggested is a form of (non-expressivist) pragmatism that is in the spirit of the kind of pragmatism offered by Price. In section 2, I gave a rough statement of the view. In section 3, my main aim was to isolate the essential difference between the pragmatist and the expressivist. In light of the difficulties that the contemporary expressivist faces and how they might go about solving those differences, there turns out to be far fewer differences between the views than might have been expected. As a matter of fact, expressivism can and perhaps ought to be characterized as a kind of pragmatism. Yet even so, there is room for non-expressivist pragmatism. In section 4, I suggested a particular form of non-expressivist pragmatism, arguing that it can indeed remain non-expressivist. I then turned to try and show more generally why someone might opt for non-expressivist pragmatism. In light of this discussion, I conclude that such a view is at least a contender in the debate and it is a mistake to think that anti-representationalism and expressivism are merely two different labels for the same view.

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