Moral Non-Cognitivism and the Grammar of Morality[*]

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This paper investigates the linguistic basis for moral non-cognitivism, the view that sentences containing moral predicates do not have truth-conditions. It offers a new argument against this view by pointing out that the view is incompatible with our best empirical theories about the grammatical encoding of illocutionary force potentials. Given that my arguments are based on very general assumptions about the relations between the grammar of natural languages and a sentence's illocutionary function, my arguments are broader in scope than the familiar semantic objections to non-cognitivism relating to the so-called Frege-Geach problem: even if a solution to the Frege-Geach problem has been found, my arguments still stand.

1. What is Moral Non-cognitivism?

Moral non-cognitivism is often depicted as the claim that, for any particular conversational context C, sentences containing moral vocabulary (henceforth 'moral sentences') do not have truth-conditions in C. Moral sentences are, to adopt the language of many contemporary non-cognitivists, not _truth-apt_. The main motivation for this _prima facie_ surprising and unorthodox view about the semantics of moral sentences stems from familiar meta-ethical concerns that are largely unrelated to the linguistic analysis of the sentences at issue. Scepticism with respect to moral properties, for instance, is widely taken to provide good reasons for moral non-cognitivism: many theorists regard moral properties as metaphysically too queer to be admitted in our ontology and as forcing upon us a wildly implausible intuitionist account of moral knowledge (See Mackie 1977). To soothe these metaphysical and epistemological qualms moral non-cognitivists deny that moral sentences have truth-conditions: if moral sentences do not have truth-conditions, the reasoning goes, then we neither need to postulate dubious entities that function as their truth-makers, nor problematic cognitive faculties that explain our apparent moral knowledge of those properties.[1]

To see in more detail what the non-cognitivist means by the view that moral sentences do not have truth-conditions it is worthwhile distinguishing two different notions of truth-conditions. On a first approach to truth-conditions a sentence S has truth-conditions just in case it can be grammatically embedded in the following schema:

[1] Further considerations in meta-ethics are also taken to motivate a moral non-cognitivist approach to the semantics of moral statements, such as issues relating to the debate between motivational internalism and externalism. See Ridge 2006, p. 302.

(T)   '*S*' is true iff *S*.

On this purely syntactic definition of truth-conditions, however, moral sentences clearly have truth-conditions, as the grammaticality of (1) demonstrates:

(1)   'Murder is wrong' is true iff murder is wrong.

As a consequence, the syntactic notion of a truth-condition is surely not the notion the moral non-cognitivist has in mind when claiming that moral sentences do not have truth-conditions.

   Leaving behind this purely syntactic notion, it is fairly obvious that the conception of a truth-condition we are looking for is what we may call the *semantic* conception, according to which a sentence *S* has a truth-condition just in case its substitution instance for (T) is not only grammatical but also true. To illustrate this notion further, note that on the semantic conception truth-conditions are recursively generated by a Davidsonian T-theory for the relevant language: on the Davidsonian approach, a sentence *S* of a language *L* has a truth-condition in *L* just in case *L*'s T-theory comprises a T-theorem for *S*. For illustration, consider the toy language L_{toy}, whose T-theory comprises the following axioms (Cp. Davidson 1967, pp. 47-8 and 1973, p. 74):

Denotation Axiom for L_{toy}:
(2)   'Nick' in L_{toy} denotes Nick.

Satisfaction Axioms for L_{toy}:
(3)   For all objects x, x satisfies 'is rich' in L_{toy} iff x is rich.
(4)   For all objects x, x satisfies 'is bright' in L_{toy} iff x is bright.

Truth Axiom for L_{toy}:
(5)   For all names γ and predicates F, F^γ is true in L_{toy} iff the object denoted by γ satisfies F.

From L_{toy}'s T-theory we can derive in first order predicate logic the following T-theorems for L_{toy}:

T-Theorems for L_{toy}:
(6)   'Nick is rich' is true in L_{toy} iff Nick is rich.
(7)   'Nick is bright' is true in L_{toy} iff Nick is bright.

We are now in a position to define the notion of a truth-condition for L_{toy} as follows: a sentence $\underline{S}$ has a truth-condition in L_{toy} iff L_{toy}'s T-theory comprises a T-theorem for $\underline{S}$. Thus, the sentences 'Nick is rich' and 'Nick is bright' and no other sentence of L_{toy} have truth-conditions in L_{toy}.

Surely, a Davidsonian T-theory for English is considerably more complex than the one for L_{toy}. However, L_{toy} and its T-theory can help illustrate the view that moral sentences in English do not have truth-conditions as the view that the Davidsonian T-theory for English does not comprise T-theorems for moral sentences *because* it does not comprise denotation and satisfaction axioms for moral expressions. Thus, according to moral non-cognitivism, our T-theory for English will not comprise axioms such as (8) or (9):

(8)   For all objects $\underline{x}$, $\underline{x}$ satisfies 'is wrong' in English iff $\underline{x}$ is wrong.[2]

(9)   'wrongness' in English denotes wrongness.

Summing up, we can formulate the view that moral sentences do not have truth-conditions as the claim that English's T-theory does not comprise denotation or satisfaction axioms for moral vocabulary.

If moral sentences do not have semantic truth-conditions, however, questions arise concerning the linguistic role of moral predicates in moral sentences.[3] If our T-theory for English does not comprise satisfaction axioms for 'is wrong', what is the semantic role of 'is wrong' in sentences such as 'Murder is wrong'? What is the linguistic purpose of moral predicates, given that they do not make contributions to the truth-conditions of the sentences they are embedded in?[4] In response to these questions the moral non-cognitivist claims that even though moral vocabulary is truth-conditionally vacuous, it is certainly not linguistically redundant, the explanation being that moral predicates serve a clear and precise pragmatic purpose. More specifically, the non-cognitivist has it that moral expressions are what I shall call *lexical illocutionary force markers* (henceforth 'lexical IFMs')—that is, lexical items that indicate, mark or somehow determine the illocutionary force with which the sentences they are embedded in are conventionally uttered. Given that moral expressions are in fact lexical IFMs, their linguistic purpose is to grammatically encode the illocutionary function of moral sentences—and to serve this pragmatic purpose moral expressions are not required to have semantic values. Thus, the moral non-cognitivist has at her disposal a *prima facie* compelling explanation of how

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[2]If we conceive of predicate satisfaction in terms of property exemplification it becomes immediately obvious why the moral non-cognitivist will deny (8). Assuming moral anti-realism, nothing has the property of being wrong and thus nothing satisfies the predicate 'is wrong': all positive predications of 'is wrong' must, assuming (8), turn out false in English. To avoid this rather uncharitable and counterintuitive result the non-cognitivist claims that the Davidsonian T-theory for English does not comprise (8).

[3]Of course, questions also arise concerning nominalised moral vocabulary such as 'wrongness', 'virtue', etc. I briefly discuss nominalisations in §3.

[4]See Ogden and Richard (1923, p. 125) Ayer (1936, p. 107) for classical formulations of the view that moral predicates are denotationally vacuous.

moral vocabulary can be both linguistically purposeful and at the same time referentially vacuous.

I shall discuss the notion of a lexical IFM in more detail in §2, where I will examine the grammatical encoding of speech act potentials in natural languages. Meanwhile, let me illustrate the intuitive appeal of the idea that moral expressions are lexical IFMs by quoting from A.J. Ayer:

> The presence of an ethical symbol in a [sentence] adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money', I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'You stole that money'. In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, 'You stole that money!' in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation mark. The tone, or the exclamation mark, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker. […] For in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. (Ayer 1936, p. 107)

According to Ayer, moral sentences are thus not used to perform _constative_ speech acts, that is they are not used to state, claim or assert a given distinctively moral proposition and to thereby present oneself as believing that proposition to be true. To the contrary, Ayer claims that moral sentences are typically used to express one's feelings of approval or disapproval regarding a certain action or a certain type of action, rather than to describe the world in the way in which assertions of ordinary declarative sentences usually do. In short, according to Ayer, moral sentences are used to perform _expressive_ or _emotive_ illocutionary acts and the fact (if it is one) that moral sentences are used in this way is to be traced back to the occurrence of moral vocabulary in moral sentences. Moral predicates are, in other words, lexical IFMs: expressive devices that, similarly to exclamation marks and intonation patterns, signal the expressive or emotive illocutionary function of moral sentences.

It is worthwhile illustrating the emotivist account of moral sentences by means of a few example sentences. On Ayer's emotivist view, the moral sentences (10a) and (11a) have the same illocutionary force potentials as the non-moral sentences (10b) and (11b). In other words, the a-sentences and the b-sentences in (10) and (11) are conventionally and typically used to perform the same speech act:

(10) a. Murder is wrong.
      b. Boo for murder!

(11) a. His action was good.
      b. Hurray for his action!

On the emotivist view, utterances of moral sentences do not describe the world but rather express the speaker's feelings of approval or disapproval with respect to certain actions or types of actions.[5]

It is important to note at this point, however, that not all moral non-cognitivists are Ayerian emotivists. Carnap (1937), for instance, defends a view that has become familiar under the label 'prescriptivism'. According to prescriptivism, utterances of moral sentences are not expressions of moral emotions but are rather of an imperatival nature. Moral sentences are, on Carnap's view, exclusively used in _directive_ speech acts—that is, their conventional and typical pragmatic function is to issue commands or requests. Here is a quote from Carnap:

> [A] value statement is nothing else than a command in a misleading grammatical form. [I]t is neither true nor false. It does not assert anything and can neither be proved nor disproved. (Carnap 1937, p. 24)

Thus, on Carnap's view, the moral sentences (12a) and (13a) have the same illocutionary force potential as the imperative sentences (12b) and (13b):

(12) a. Murder is wrong.
     b. Don't murder!

(13) a. His action was good.
     b. Perform his action! (_or:_ Do what he did!)

Given that moral sentences have the same logical deep structure as imperative sentences and that imperative sentences do not have truth-conditions it follows that moral sentences do not have truth-conditions.[6] And this view is again to be traced back to the special linguistic role of moral vocabulary: according to the prescriptivist, moral expressions indicate the imperative or directive illocutionary force and thus have a linguistic purpose without having a referential role.

Yet another variety of non-cognitivism is what I shall call 'optativism', the view that utterances of moral sentences are primarily expressions of the speaker's wishes. On this view, the moral sentences (14a) and (15a) are to be paraphrased along the lines of the optative sentences (14b) and (15b):

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[5]See Blackburn 1984 and 1998 for a more recent version of this view.

[6] Lewis 1970, p. 54ff famously assigns performative truth-conditions to imperatives and other non-declaratives. Obviously, if Lewis's account is correct, then the moral non-cognitivists' analogy to non-declaratives is of no use in establishing that moral declaratives do not have truth-conditions. In this paper I shall grant the non-cognitivist her assumption that Lewis's semantics of non-declaratives is mistaken (for criticism of Lewis's account see Harnish 1994 and McGinn 1977).

(14) a. Murder is wrong.
    b. Would that nobody murdered!

(15) a. His action was good.
    b. Would that everybody performed his action/did as he did!

On the optativist approach to moral non-cognitivism, moral sentences primarily express wishes and thus have the same logical deep structure as sentences in the optative mood. And since optative sentences such as (14b) and (15b) do not have truth-conditions, it follows that (14a) and (15a), their moral correlates, do not have truth-conditions either.

   Obviously, there are further possible and certainly more sophisticated versions of moral non-cognitivism than the ones just mentioned. However, at this point I shall leave aside the intricacies of contemporary positions. For the moment it is worthwhile working with the classical and considerably simpler versions of non-cognitivism just discussed and to later generalise to further possible versions of the view. In what follows I shall thus consider it a defining feature of moral non-cognitivism that the linguistic role of moral vocabulary is not to contribute to the truth-conditions of the sentences they are embedded in but rather (at least partly) to indicate or encode the illocutionary force with which moral sentences are conventionally uttered. Moral non-cognitivism is the view that moral expressions are lexical IFMs.[7]

2. Speech Act Distinctions in Grammar[8]

Before coming back to the topic of moral non-cognitivism let me introduce some terminology and examine in detail how speech act distinctions are encoded in the actual grammar of natural languages. Firstly, let me introduce the notion of a _sentence type_. The notion of a sentence type as used in this paper is a purely grammatical notion: whether a given sentence $\underline{S}$ is of a given sentential type $\underline{T}$ is determined purely in terms of $\underline{S}$'s syntactic, phonological and morphological properties. Thus, the sentences of a given natural language $\underline{L}$ can be divided into $\underline{L}$'s different sentential types solely on the basis of distinctions at the level of $\underline{L}$'s grammar. In English, for instance, as in most other natural languages, we can distinguish between three basic grammatical sentence types that are commonly referred to as the _declarative_, the _imperative_ and the _interrogative_ type (Cp. König and Siemund 2007, p. 277). Consider the sentences in (16) for illustration:

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   [7]It will become obvious in §6 that this definition of non-cognitivism is semantically neutral and is thus compatible with each of the major theories of meaning on the market. It is also worth noting that from the above views about the linguistic purpose of moral predicates another view follows that is typically considered a defining characteristic of moral non-cognitivism: the view that the relevant psychological states speakers are in when sincerely uttering moral sentences are not beliefs. How could they be beliefs, the reasoning goes, given that moral sentences do not have truth-conditions? I shall not be concerned with the implausibility of the psychological component of moral non-cognitivism but rather focus my attention on the view's linguistic implications.
   [8]I have named this section after König and Siemund 2007. The contents of this section are almost entirely based on König's and Siemund's fascinating paper.

(16) a. John is selling the books.   *declarative*
      b. Does John sell the books?   *interrogative*
      c. John, sell the books!   *imperative*

While (16a-c) semantically express the same proposition and are constituted by the same sentence radical they nevertheless belong to different sentential types. But precisely which grammatical features constitute sentential typehood in English?

  The most obvious grammatical difference between the three sentences under (16) is presumably orthographic: (16a-c) differ with respect to their punctuation marks '.', '!' and '?'. Besides this orthographic difference the sentences under (16) also differ syntactically, namely with respect to their word order. Table 1 shows the different patterns of word order constituting the basic grammatical sentence types in English:[9]

Table 1: Word Order of Basic Sentence Types in English

	WORD ORDER	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
IMPERATIVE	(S+)V+O	*(John,) sell the books!*
DECLARATIVE	S+V+O	*John is selling the books.*
INTERROGATIVE	[Y/N]V+S+O [Wh]V(+S)+O	*Does John sell the books?* *What does John sell?* *Who sold the books?*

Besides word order and punctuation further grammatical features determine sentential typehood in English. An important phonological determiner is intonation: while declarative and imperative sentences in English are marked by a flat or falling intonation, interrogative sentences are encoded by distinctly rising intonation. Further expressive devices that determine sentential typehood in natural languages are of a lexical nature: in many languages the addition or omission of special lexical material helps determine a given sentence's grammatical type. In French, for instance, the particle 'est-ce que' is used to mark the interrogative type:

(17) *English:*
    (a) John owns a car.
    (b) Does John own a car?

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[9]Explanation of abbreviations: 'S'–subject, 'V'–verb, 'O'–object, '[Y/N]'–yes/no question, '[Wh]'–wh-question'. Round brackets signify optionality.

(18) *French:*
     (a) Jean possède une voiture.
     (b) Est-ce que Jean possède une voiture?

As (17) and (18) demonstrate, the interrogative type is grammatically marked by means of punctuation marks, intonation and word order in English, but is marked slightly differently in French, namely by means of punctuation marks, intonation, word order and the addition of the interrogative particle 'est-ce que'.[10] Thus, one and the same sentence type can be grammatically marked in different ways in different languages.

To illustrate this phenomenon further it is worthwhile noting that the interrogative type in Spanish is grammatically marked yet differently than in English and French. Consider (19):

(19) *Spanish:*
     (a) Juan posee un coche.
     (b) ¿Juan posee un coche?

Firstly, note that in Spanish questions are orthographically marked by a combination of the punctuation marks '¿' and '?'. Secondly, note that (19a) is syntactically indistinguishable from (19b): both sentences have the same constituents and exhibit exactly the same word order. Thus, the key grammatical feature determining the interrogative type of certain Spanish sentences is the distinctively rising intonation with which interrogatives are conventionally uttered in Spanish. Summing up, one and the same sentential type—in this case the interrogative type—is usually marked in different ways in different languages.

Thus far we have seen that, in some natural languages, sentential typehood is determined by varying combinations of the grammatical features of word order, punctuation, intonation and lexical constitution. There is, however, another important expressive device that determines sentential typehood in many natural languages: verbal inflection. Consider, for instance, (20), which is conventionally used to perform the speech act of wishing in Finnish:

(20) *Finnish:*
     Kävelkööt!
     walk-3PL.OPT.PRES.ACT.[11]
     Would that they walked!

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[10]Of course, not all questions in French are marked by the particle 'est-ce que'.

[11]Explanation of abbreviations: '3PL'–third person plural, 'OPT'–optative, 'PRES'–present, 'ACT'–active. Thus, the verb 'kävellä' (to walk) in (20) occurs in its third person plural, optative, present, active

In (20), the *optative type* is marked morphologically, namely by addition of the inflectional affix '-kööt' to the verb stem 'kävel'. Another language in which the optative sentence type is marked morphologically is Ancient Greek:

(21) *Ancient Greek:*
      Εἴθε τις   ἀείδοι.
      OPT someone-NOM sing-3SG.OPT.PRES.ACT.[12]
      Would that someone sang!

Note with respect to (21), however, that the optative type in Ancient Greek is marked by the interaction of the particle 'εἴθε' (alternatively 'εἴ γαρ') and addition of the optative inflectional affix '-οι' to the verb stem 'ἀείδ'. Further languages in which the optative is encoded by a distinct morphological category of the verb are Turkish and Sanskrit.

Finally, it is worthwhile considering Latin, in which the optative sentence type is not marked by a distinct morphological category of the verb but rather by the optative particle 'utinam' that occurs in combination with the verb in the subjunctive mood:

(22) *Latin:*
      Utinam aliquis   cantet!
      OPT   someone-NOM   sing-3SG.SJNCT.PRES.ACT.[13]
      Would that someone sang!

Let me sum up the discussion thus far. As we have seen from the above data, sentence types are grammatically marked in a variety of ways in the languages of the world. In fact, the set of expressive devices used to distinguish between sentential types is rather heterogeneous, comprising combinations of grammatical features as varied as word order, punctuation, the addition of constituents (particles), verbal inflection and intonation. However, even though sentential types are marked differently in different natural languages, they nevertheless can be identified in purely formal terms. As König and Siemund put it,

> [d]espite a certain heterogeneity in the formal inventory used to identify different sentence types, sentences can usually be assigned to one and only one basic sentence type within a language without fulfilling additional conditions. (König and Siemund 2007, p. 282)

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form. Note also that the affix '-kööt' in Finnish can signal the third person plural, imperative, present, active form. (20) is thus ambiguous between an imperative and an optative reading.

[12]Explanation of abbreviations: 'NOM'–nominative, '3SG'–third person singular. The first occurrence of 'OPT' in (21) designates the optative particle 'εἴθε', the second the mood of the inflected verb 'ἀείδοι'.

[13]Explanation of abbreviations: 'SJNCT'–subjunctive.

Once we have classified a particular language's sentences according to their grammatical forms we can correlate the different grammatical types to their typical use functions. Sentences of the declarative type are, for instance, primarily used to perform *constative* speech acts—that is, speech acts by means of which the speaker presents herself as believing the relevant sentence's truth-condition to be satisfied. Examples of constative speech acts are asserting, stating, declaring, reporting and claiming but also predicting, promising, criticising and accusing (König and Siemund 2007, p. 284). The primary use of sentences of the imperative type, in contrast, is to order, command or request: imperative sentences are typically used to perform *directive* speech acts. Finally, the primary use of the interrogative type is to perform speech acts such as asking, querying, examining or questioning, the associated class of speech acts being a subclass of the class of directive speech acts. Thus, in natural languages sentences belonging to a particular grammatical type have different illocutionary force potentials, this being an empirical discovery that is reflected by the common practice of referring to the grammatical types by means of force-indicating labels such as 'declarative', 'interrogative', 'imperative' or 'optative' (cp. Harnish 1994, p. 407). In what follows I shall refer to the empirical discovery that grammatical type correlates to illocutionary function as the principle of *Form-Function Correlation*:

(FFC)   In natural languages, a sentence's grammatical type correlates with its illocutionary function.

Now, it might be objected to the claim that a sentence's grammatical form correlates with its illocutionary function by quoting indirect speech acts as counterexamples. Consider, for instance, (23), a familiar example from Searle (1975: 265):

(23) Can you reach the salt?

Even though (23) has the grammatical form of an interrogative sentence, its customary use is imperatival: (23) is primarily used to express a request, not a question. If there are cases in which interrogative sentences are primarily used to express imperatives, however, then the strict correlation between a sentence's illocutionary function and its grammatical form as postulated by FFC is violated (cp. also Davidson (1979, p. 113)).

Even thought this argument may seem devastating initially, there is a familiar account of speech acts that we can use to resolve the problem. According to Searle (1975), we need to distinguish between two different types of speech act: *direct* and *indirect*. A speech act is direct, according to Searle, iff by performing it one performs one and only one illocutionary act. A speech act is indirect, on the other hand, iff by performing it 'one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another' (Searle 1975, p. 266). Utterances of (23) are, on this approach, indirect speech acts: when uttering (23)

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one performs the illocutionary act of requesting the salt from one's hearer by way of performing the illocutionary act of asking whether one's hearer can reach it.

Once the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts is in place, it is fairly obvious that (23)'s customary but nevertheless _indirect_ imperatival illocutionary function is not grammatically encoded in (23). Thus, its indirect illocutionary function of requesting cannot be read off (23)'s grammatical sleeves (ibid.). However, on the approach at issue, a sentence's grammatical form nevertheless encodes its _direct_ illocutionary function.

To further illustrate the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts it is worthwhile comparing this pragmatic phenomenon to the semantic phenomenon of _standardised non-literality_.[14] Even thought (24), for instance, is conventionally and typically used non-literally, it nevertheless has a literal meaning that diverges from what (24) is conventionally used to convey:

(24) John Prescott has a chip on his shoulder.

The literal meaning of (24)—a proposition that is false on any ordinary occasion of usage—is a function of its syntax and the lexical meanings of its ultimate constituents. What utterances of (24) standardly convey, however, is not a function of (24)'s syntactic and lexical features but rather is determined by the speaker's communicative intentions and other contextual features. With regard to (23) the situation is similar: the direct or literal illocutionary function of (23) is determined by (23)'s grammar—its word order, lexical constituents, intonation, and the other natural language IFMs mentioned above. Its indirect or non-literal illocutionary function, however, is determined contextually, namely by the speaker's communicative intentions and other contextual features that are typically in place when (23) is uttered in a conversation.[15]

We can now revise FFC in the light of the phenomenon of indirect speech acts. The literal or direct illocutionary function of (23) is to ask the question whether the hearer can reach the salt—just as (24) literally expresses the proposition that John Prescott has a small and thin piece of something on his shoulder. The fact that (23) and (24) are standardly used non-literally does not change these facts about their literal meanings and literal illocutionary functions respectively. To the contrary, the intuition that (23) and (24) are standardly used non-literally can fruitfully be accounted for by the view that both literal meaning and literal illocutionary function are determined by the respective sentences' grammatical and lexical features. We can thus revise FFC as follows:

(FFC′)   In natural languages, a sentence's grammatical type correlates with its direct illocutionary function.

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[14]See Bach 1987, p. 79ff for this notion.
[15]This becomes obvious when we consider cases in which (23) is used with its direct illocutionary force.

FFC′ records an important empirical discovery about natural languages that is rather hard to deny: the empirical data show beyond reasonable doubt that there is a strong correlation between grammatical form and direct illocutionary function.[16] Moreover, FFC′ serves an important explanatory purpose: the conventionalised grammatical encoding of direct illocutionary functions helps us communicate efficiently and seamlessly.

Finally, remember that sentential typehood is constituted by particular combinations of grammatical features. Given FFC′, we can consider the relevant combinations of grammatical features as indicating the direct illocutionary functions of sentences of the relevant type. In short, the grammatical features constituting sentential typehood are *Illocutionary Force Markers* or IFMs:

> *IFMs in Natural Languages*:
> - word order
> - punctuation
> - added or omitted constituents (particles)
> - verbal inflection
> - intonation

The above grammatical devices and the relevant combinations thereof constitute different means of expressing particular illocutions in natural languages. As a consequence, we usually perform a particular speech act in virtue of having uttered a sentence with grammatical features that are, in our language, conventionally used to perform the relevant speech act. Moreover, lexical IFMs form a special subclass of the natural language IFMs: lexical IFMs are lexical items whose linguistic function is of a pragmatic rather than a semantic nature, namely to indicate or mark illocutionary force.

3. The Grammar of Moral Sentences: Data

Let us now return to the topic of moral non-cognitivism. Remember that, according to moral non-cognitivism, the grammatical form of moral sentences is expressive, imperative or optative, to the effect that moral sentences' direct illocutionary function is to express emotions, imperatives or wishes—depending on what version of the view one favours. Remember also that the moral non-cognitivist adopted this view to avoid moral vocabulary denoting moral properties, the explanation being that moral expressions are lexical IFMs and are as such referentially—but not linguistically—vacuous. Let us consider this view in the light of the above considerations about sentential types and their grammatical encoding in natural languages.

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[16]The idea that natural languages comprise specific grammatical devices for asking questions, issuing commands, etc. goes back to classical times. The *locus classicus* for analytic philosophers is, however, (Frege 1918, esp. p. 65).

Of what sentential type are moral sentences in English? Firstly, note that, given the standard grammar of English, moral expressions are not lexical IFMs but ordinary predicates and nouns—that is, expressions whose linguistic purpose it is to contribute to the truth-conditions of sentences they are embedded in: according to the standard grammar of English, moral predicates, for instance, are satisfied by actions or particular types of actions and thus make contributions to the truth-conditions of sentences they are embedded in. Moreover, on the standard grammar of English, moral sentences such as 'Murder is wrong' are of the declarative type: as regards lexical constituents, word order, intonation, morphology and punctuation the sentences at issue are what grammarians standardly consider declarative sentences. If sentences such as 'Murder is wrong', however, are grammatically to be classified as declaratives, then it follows from FFC′ and the datum that the literal illocutionary function of declaratives in English is constative that the literal illocutionary function of the relevant moral sentences is constative too—and not expressive, optative or directive as the non-cognitivist claims: according to the standard grammar of English, moral declaratives have truth-conditions and in uttering a moral declarative literally speakers present themselves as believing those truth-conditions to be satisfied.[17] Thus, the standard grammatical accounts of English together with FFC′ entail the negation of moral non-cognitivism.[18]

The only way in which the moral non-cognitivist can escape this argument is by either giving up FFC′ or by rejecting our standard grammar of English, thus claiming that the linguists' list of IFMs that I have presented in the previous section is incomplete: moral vocabulary has to be added. I shall not investigate the option of abandoning FFC′ in this paper, for FFC′ is simply too well supported by empirical data.[19] Rather, I shall here consider the second option open to the non-cognitivist, namely the option that moral expressions are lexical IFMs, which was, as we have seen in §1 the central linguistic claim of moral non-cognitivism: moral predicates are not satisfied or 'true of' objects but their linguistic role is to indicate a sentence's literal illocutionary function. But could moral predicates really be lexical IFMs? Could moral expressions be expressive, imperative or optative devices—that is, lexical constituents marking illocutionary force similar to the interrogative particle 'est-ce que' in French or the optative particles 'εἴθε' and 'εἴ γαρ' in Ancient Greek? In what follows I shall argue that this view comes at a considerable cost for the moral non-cognitivist.

Force Markers, Particles and Moral Vocabulary

Here is a syntactic datum shedding doubt on the view that moral predicates are lexical IFMs: in the languages of the world recognised lexical IFMs are never predicates at the level of surface syntax. Rather, in natural languages lexical IFMs are consistently _particles_, that is lexical items that cannot be inflected, graded, nominalised or tensed, that

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[17]Surely, we can utter moral sentences with the intention of expressing our feelings or wishes or with the intention of issuing a command. But that datum can be accounted for in a cognitivist framework by the notion of an indirect speech act. See §5 below.

[18]In fact, there is currently no evidence of natural languages with respect to which this claim does not hold.

[19]See König and Siemund 2007 for an extensive study.

have a rather inflexible syntactic distribution and an extremely limited lexical representation. Moral predicates, however, are unlike particles in all of these respects. To see this in detail note firstly that moral expressions are inflectable. Moral predicates can, as (25) demonstrates, be conjugated:

(25) Murder is wrong.
      Murder and rape are wrong.

Secondly, note that moral vocabulary is tensed:

(26) Murder is/was/will be wrong.
      Murder and rape are/were/will be wrong.
      It is/was/will be wrong of you to take that money.

Thirdly, note that recognised lexical IFMs are not syntactically gradable, that is they cannot enter comparative and superlative constructions and do not accept degree modifiers such as 'very' or 'completely'. As (27) demonstrates, however, moral predicates are unlike recognised lexical IFMs in being syntactically gradable:

(27) Murder is very/entirely/completely wrong.
      It was very/entirely/completely wrong of you to take that money.

Fourthly, particles—and thus the recognised lexical IFMs in the languages of the world—cannot be nominalised. Moral predicates, however, can be nominalised, which is evidenced by the fact that we can use moral predicates to form expressions such as 'wrongness' or 'rightness'.
   A fifth and final datum providing evidence against the view that moral expressions are lexical IFMs is that our moral vocabulary is lexically rather rich and varied. Particles in general and lexical IFMs in particular, however, are not nearly as richly lexically represented. Consider the phrases under (28):

(28) x ought/ought not to φ, x should/should not φ.
      φ-ing is wrong/unethical/immoral required/good/moral/compulsory.
      It is wrong/unethical/immoral required/good/moral/compulsory to φ.

Summing up, from a syntactic and a lexical point of view recognised lexical IFMs and moral vocabulary have very little in common. In fact, we do not find a single recognised lexical IFM in the languages of the world that has a lexical representation or syntactic

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distribution that is nearly as rich, nuanced and versatile as the lexical representation and syntactic distribution of moral vocabulary. Given that an expression's syntactic and lexical properties are usually taken to correlate with its linguistic role, this is surely bad news for moral non-cognitivism: moral expressions simply do not seem to be lexical IFMs.

Cross-Linguistic Variation

There are further data that turn out problematic for moral non-cognitivism. As we have seen in the previous section, it is a key feature of natural languages that literal illocutionary functions are encoded differently from language to language: there is no uniformity with respect to how the interrogative, for instance, is grammatically encoded in the languages of the world. In fact, there is not a single type of illocutionary function that is encoded consistently by means of the same combinations of IFMs across all known natural languages (see König and Siemund 2007). Given that there is no uniformity with respect to the grammatical marking of illocutionary force potentials in natural languages, however, we should expect the moral expressive, imperative or optative illocutionary force postulated by moral non-cognitivists to be encoded differently in different natural languages. We should, for instance, expect to find natural languages that do not comprise moral predicates but that encode the moral illocutionary force more standardly—by means of combinations of word order and added particles, for instance, by means of word order and intonation or even by means of combinations of word order, intonation and a distinctive form of verbal inflection. However, there is currently no evidence of natural languages in which no moral sentences are of the regular declarative form. The fact that we do not see any cross-linguistic variations in the grammatical encoding of the postulated moral illocutionary forces should make us rather suspicious of the claim that moral expressions are lexical IFMs.[20]

Pragmatic Embeddings

Here is another disanalogy between recognised lexical IFMs and moral vocabulary. Unlike recognised lexical IFMs, moral expressions can occur within sentences that are of a different grammatical type and that thus have a different direct illocutionary function

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[20]It might be objected at this point that we can observe some grammatical uniformity in the languages of the world with respect to the encoding of direct illocutionary functions. The great majority of languages, for instance, phonologically encode the interrogative by a rising intonation. Moreover, the interrogative type is almost never marked morphologically, that is a special interrogative mood of the verb is extremely rare in natural languages. And even though the morphological marking of interrogativity is extremely rare, interrogative particles are, as König and Siemund (2007, p. 292) put it, 'quite frequent among the languages of the world.' Thus, some illocutionary forces are fairly systematically encoded across the languages of the world. It is imperative to emphasise at this point, however, that there are exceptions to even these most general rules: as König and Siemund (ibid.) point out, 'cases of rising intonation in declaratives and a falling contour in interrogatives do occur [in the languages of the world] and are, for example, reported from Fanti (Niger-Congo, Kwa) and Grebo (Niger-Congo, Kru).'

than the type or function they are supposed to encode. Consider, for instance, interrogative sentences containing moral predicates:

(29) a. Is murder wrong?
     b. Was it wrong that I took that money?

What is the interpretation of (29a-b) given that 'is wrong' is an illocutionary force marker signalling expressive, optative or imperative force? Surely, we want to say that (29a-b) are questions and that their direct illocutionary function is to ask whether actions of a particular type—murder and stealing—are wrong. But this explanation is not open to the moral non-cognitivist, who is forced to accept that the sentences under (29) are either ungrammatical or of the expressive, imperative or optative type. Given the absurdity of each of these options the moral non-cognitivist is in trouble.

   To see this point more clearly consider the ungrammatical French construction (30b), which mixes illocutionary force markers signalling incompatible illocutionary forces:

(30) a. Jean possède une voiture.
     b. *Jean possède une voiture est-ce que.

Analogously, the moral non-cognitivist must accept the view that (29a-b) are grammatically just as infelicitous as (30b). Such a view, however, is surely surprising given that (29a) and (29b) are grammatically immaculate. Thus, the above data provide another *reductio ad absurdum* of moral non-cognitivism: given that there is no evidence of lexical IFMs interacting with other IFMs in the way in which moral expressions do, we ought to conclude that moral predicates are not lexical IFMs.[21]

Declarative Embeddings

Obviously, further cases concerning other grammatical types can be cited. In this section, however, I shall focus on data relating to the presumably most standard type of embedding, namely on data relating to the embedding of moral sentences in composite

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[21]In response to my objection it might be claimed that the moral non-cognitivist can paraphrase (29a-b) as follows:

(i) a. Do I feel approval towards murder?
    b. Do I command you not to murder?
    c. Do I wish that nobody murdered?

But accounts paraphrasing (29a-b) along these lines are subjectivist and thus cognitivist accounts. Thus, the moral non-cognitivist cannot make any clear sense of moral vocabulary that is embedded within sentences of the interrogative types.

declarative sentences. Consider embeddings with sentential operators such as propositional attitude and modal operators:

(31) a. I know that murder is wrong.
     b. I know that it is wrong that I took that money.

(32) a. *I know that Boo for murder!
     b. *I know that don't murder!
     c. *I know that would that nobody would murder!

(33) a. It is true that murder is wrong.
     b. It is a fact that murder is wrong.
     c. Murder is actually wrong.
     d. Murder is necessarily wrong.

(34) a. *It is true that boo for murder!
     b. *It is true that don't murder!
     c. *It is true that would that nobody would murder!
     d. *Necessarily boo for murder!
     e. *Necessarily don't murder!
     f. *Necessarily would that nobody would murder!

Further examples arise from embeddings of moral sentences in constructions containing logical connectives:

(35) a. If rape is wrong, then so is murder.
     b. *If boo for rape, then boo for murder!
     c. *If would that nobody would rape, then would that nobody would murder!
     d. *If don't rape, then don't murder!

As these data demonstrate rather clearly, moral sentences are capable of conditionalisation, negation, and embedding in constructions comprising modal and propositional attitude operators. Imperative, optative and expressive sentences, however, cannot be embedded in the relevant declarative constructions. Now, what is important at this point is that the purely syntactic fact that moral sentences can be so embedded provides evidence against the view that moral sentences are of the imperative, optative or expressive grammatical type. Thus, independently of whether we can give a semantically and pragmatically adequate non-cognitivist account of the above constructions and thus solve the Frege-Geach problem, the grammatical facts are, from a linguistic point of view, sufficient to shed considerable doubt on the view that moral expressions are lexical IFMs and thus on the view that moral sentences do not have truth-conditions.

4. The Grammar of Moral Sentences: Theory

Even though linguists will consider the above data as providing clear and unmistakable knockdown objections against non-cognitivism, the philosopher may still be unconvinced. Why is it problematic, the moral non-cognitivist might ask, that moral vocabulary does not have the syntactic and lexical properties—and thus the surface characteristics—of recognised lexical IFMs? It is sometimes claimed, after all, that there are expressions in natural languages that are predicates at the level of surface syntax but whose linguistic function differs from that of ordinary predicates. The obvious example that comes to mind here is, of course, the expression 'exists', which, according to Frege at least, is a predicate at the level of surface syntax but a quantifier at the level of logical form: according to Frege, 'exists' denotes a higher-order property. Could moral vocabulary—similarly to 'exists' on the Fregean view—display a discrepancy between surface form and logical deep structure? What is problematic about the claim that the surface syntactic characteristics and the linguistic function of moral expressions do not match up in the way in which they do with respect to ordinary predicates?

Certainly, views according to which moral predicates are syntactically, semantically and pragmatically exceptional are not in principle methodologically inadmissible. However, it is important to note that such views are methodologically viable only if they have special explanatory virtues: moral non-cognitivism must explain phenomena that the methodologically simpler cognitivist approach to moral discourse cannot explain. In other words, the non-cognitivist theory must have greater explanatory force in order to justify its additional complexity. But are there any linguistic phenomena that only moral non-cognitivism can account for?[22]

The only linguistic datum that non-cognitivists present in support of their theories is the alleged datum that by uttering moral sentences we express _non-cognitive attitudes_—attitudes that differ from belief in not purporting to represent the world. As I have explicated in §1 already, the expressivist, for instance, claims that by (sincerely) uttering moral sentences speakers express their feelings of approval or disapproval towards certain acts, while the prescriptivist and the optativist claim that by using moral language we issue commands or express wishes. Can these data be accounted for within a cognitivist approach to moral discourse?

It presumably does not come as a surprise that they can. As is familiar from Searle (1969) from the fact that an utterance u of a sentences s expresses a non-cognitive attitude in a context c it by no means follows that the speaker has not also claimed or asserted that p, where p is the proposition semantically expressed by s in c. Searle's notion of an indirect speech act helps illustrate the point. There are, for instance, many cases of declarative sentences that are conventionally and typically used to express non-cognitive attitudes. Consider (36):

(36) That airplane is huge.

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[22]One might think that restricting the discussion to linguistic phenomena is mistaken, since philosophical phenomena should be taken into account too. I discuss this issue in §7.

Even though (36) is typically used to express feelings of surprise or astonishment, utterances of it nevertheless also assert the proposition that the conversationally salient airplane is huge: in standard situations the direct speech act performed by uttering (36) is constative, while the indirect speech act performed by assertions of (36) is expressive. In a moral cognitivist framework utterances of moral sentences can be plausibly analysed similarly: the direct speech act performed when asserting moral sentences is constative— a moral predicate is ascribed to an act or a type of act—while the secondary speech act is expressive, directive or optative, depending on the context of utterance and the speaker's communicative intentions. Thus, cognitivism has a straightforward and uncontroversial explanation of the datum that moral sentences are sometimes, or possibly even always, used to express non-cognitive attitudes.[23]

Among explanatorily equally powerful theories we are, all else being equal, to choose the simpler one: _ceteris paribus_, the simplest explanation is the best. As we have just seen, we can explain the relevant data by means of the notion of an indirect speech act—a notion that we need in our standard account of pragmatics anyway: only the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts allows us to systematically account for our use of sentences such as 'Can you reach the salt?' or 'That airplane is huge.' Thus, cognitivism in conjunction with standard speech act theory offers a straightforward, simple and uncluttered account of the semantics, pragmatics and syntax of moral sentences—an account that is compatible with the familiar linguistic data concerning the syntax and semantics of predicates and lexical IFMs. As a consequence, the non-cognitivist's claim that moral predicates exemplify a unique divergence between surface syntax and logical deep structure remains unfounded: no linguistic work is done by moral non-cognitivism that could not also be done by cognitivism.[24]

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[23]Note also that my view can account for the apparently motivating nature of moral judgments that is widely conceived of as an important argument in favour of non-cognitivism. To see how this works let a moral judgment be the mental state expressed by the sincere utterance of a moral sentence. On my cognitivist approach this mental state will be a belief that is, by itself, not motivating. However, when sincerely uttering moral sentences speakers usually also perform the indirect speech act of expressing a non-cognitive, desire-like attitude. It is this desire-like, non-cognitive attitude that motivates subjects to act in particular ways. The view that moral judgements are motivating overlooks the fact that moral judgements typically occur in conjunction with non-cognitive, desire-like attitudes. To be sure, however, my account cannot explain why moral judgments are _necessarily_ motivating. But I take it that versions of internalism according to which it is necessarily the case that one is motivated not to _F_ if one judges that _F_-ing is wrong are simply too strong.

[24]Blackburn (1984) aims to give an explanation of the relevant surface-deep structure incongruence in natural languages by discussing 'Eex', a language that is just like English with the only exception that it does not comprise the mentioned incongruence: in Eex moral sentences are not declarative sentences but rather are assigned their own distinct grammatical type (see (Blackburn 1984, p. 193)). Blackburn makes the following claims about Eex:

  Eex needs to become an instrument of serious, reflective, evaluative practice, able to express concern for improvements, clashes, implications, and coherence of attitudes. Now one way of doing this is to become like ordinary English. That is, it would invent a predicate answering to the [emotivist] attitude, and treat commitments as if they were judgements, and then use all the natural devices for debating truth. If this is right, then our use of indirect contexts does not prove that an expressive theory of morality is wrong; it merely proves us to have adopted a form of expression adequate to our needs. (Blackburn 1984, p. 195; cp. also Blackburn 1988, p. 507.)

Thus far I have argued that there are no linguistic data speaking in favour of non-cognitivism. I shall now launch a more direct attack on the view and argue that there are linguistic data speaking against it. To be precise, I shall argue that moral non-cognitivism is explanatorily inferior with respect to certain data about ordinary speakers' communicative intentions: it cannot account for the obvious datum that we can use moral sentences in straightforwardly constative speech acts—that is, with the intention of ascribing a predicate or a property to certain actions or types of actions (cp. Cuneo 2006).

When asserting 'Murder is wrong', for instance, speakers sometimes—possibly usually—intend to present themselves as believing a certain proposition to be true, namely the proposition literally expressed by the uttered sentence on the given occasion of use. Granted, in addition to expressing that belief they may often also intend to express feelings of disapproval, issue commands or recommendations or express wishes and preferences. However, the important datum here is that they sometimes are in fact uttered with the intention of presenting a proposition as true or with the intention of ascribing a property. And it is this datum that suggests that we can utter moral sentences constatively rather than merely expressively, directively or optatively. The moral non-cognitivist, however, cannot account for this datum and thus defends a view that not only has a considerably more complex syntax, semantics and pragmatics than cognitivism but that is also explanatorily inferior to standard cognitivism.[25] Surely, a view with such extreme costs to our linguistic theorising and no explanatory virtues ought to be rejected.[26]

Before moving on and turning to objections that might be made to the above argument let me present my argument from a different angle. Take the perspective of a field linguist who interprets speakers of English from scratch. Could such a radical interpreter assign a non-cognitivist syntax, semantics and pragmatics to speakers of English? Given

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On Blackburn's view there is accordingly a special reason for why moral expressions are syntactically and lexically exceptional lexical IFMs: moral feelings need to become the object of 'serious, reflective, evaluative practice.' Thus, on Blackburn's view there is something other than ascribing moral properties that we can do with English but that we cannot do with Eex. But surely this view is incorrect, for Eex clearly has the expressive resources to express 'concern for improvements, clashes, implications and coherence of attitudes'. Consider the following constructions of Eex:

    a. I disapprove of murder, you don't.
    b. I approve of helping the poor, you don't.
    c. I don't like murder, you do.
    d. I disapprove of murder; therefore I disapprove of that action.
    e. It is incoherent to disapprove of killing animals, but to approve of eating meat.

If moral emotions, commands and wishes need to become the object of 'serious, reflective, evaluative practice', then Eex certainly has the linguistic resources necessary for such practice and therefore does not need to change into English.

[25]One might think that the non-cognitivist can account for the relevant data by means of the notion of an indirect speech act, namely by letting the direct speech act performed by uttering a moral sentence be an expressive, optative or imperative one and the indirect speech act a constative one. On this view, however, the non-cognitivist still owes us an account of the truth-conditions (or proposition) that one presents oneself as believing to be satisfied when asserting moral sentences. Avoiding there being such a truth-condition (or proposition) was exactly what gave rise to the problems the non-cognitivist was intending to avoid by claiming that moral expressions are lexical IFMs.

[26]I have only discussed linguistic data, not philosophical advantages. I shall address these issues in §7.

the empirical data available to the field linguist, she surely could not, for the overall most elegant, simple, coherent and explanatorily fruitful theory is a cognitivist one: cognitivism postulates fewer *ad hoc* exceptions and is accordingly more systematic and coherent than non-cognitivism. Thus, given that linguistic facts are publicly accessible and that languages are systematic and rule-governed, moral non-cognitivism and its unnecessarily convoluted account of natural languages must quite simply be mistaken.

5. Meaning and Truth?

One might think that the objections I have presented thus far are objections to the classical versions of moral non-cognitivism, such as Ayer's emotivism and Carnap's prescriptivism but not to more contemporary versions of the view. In particular, it might be objected that my objections can be defused by pairing moral non-cognitivism with what I shall call a 'deviant semantics'—that is, a semantics on which the meaning of a declarative sentence is not determined by its Davidsonian truth-conditions. Isn't my objection, which is, after all, based on the notion of a Davidsonian T-theory, entirely besides the point once we assume a deviant, non-Davidsonian semantics?

To see why the appeal to a deviant semantics does not help the non-cognitivist we need to note that there is a big difference between the claim that declarative sentences *have* truth-conditions and the claim that the semantic content of a declarative sentence should be *identified with* or is *determined by* its truth-conditions. Thus, one can take the view that meaning is not determined by truth-conditions but nevertheless claim that declarative sentences have truth-conditions. In fact, this is what deviant semanticists usually do nowadays: defenders of conceptual role semantics or of psychological theories of meaning, for instance, do not usually deny that declarative sentences have truth-conditions.[27] Rather, what they deny is merely that truth-conditions determine or constitute linguistic meaning.

Assuming that the deviant semanticist does not want to give up the view that ordinary declarative sentences have truth-conditions, my above argument remains untouched. As I have argued above, the only expressions in English that do not have denotational axioms in the T-theory for English, that is the only expressions that do not have semantic values in the Davidsonian sense, are lexical IFMs, emphasis, contrast or politeness markers—or interjections such as 'ah', 'wow', 'hmm' or 'pst'.[28] But the view that moral predicates are

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[27]See, for instance, Block 1987 or Horwich 1998a.

[28]See Schachter and Shopen 2007, pp. 52-9. The moral non-cognitivist might be tempted to assimilate moral vocabulary to pejoratives such as 'bastard' as in 'That bastard Kresge isn't late for work' (see Potts 2007, p. 170. Even though the occurrence of 'bastard' in the previous sentence may not have a semantic value but serve a purely expressive purpose, pejoratives that occur in predicate position clearly have descriptive and not only expressive contents. Consider the sentence 'Kresge is a bastard': besides expressing the speaker's antipathy towards Kresge and thus having an expressive meaning that sentence also expresses the propositional content that Kresge is a bastard; it expresses, in other words, the content that Kresge was begotten and born out of wedlock. Moreover, pejoratives never change the primary illocutionary function of the sentences they are embedded in but rather only add a secondary expressive illocutionary function (see Boisvert 2008 for a cognitivist expressivism that assimilates moral vocabulary to pejoratives; for more extensive discussion of pejoratives see Potts 2007).

such expressions has been refuted in §§4-5. In order to run my argument against moral non-cognitivism, I therefore do not need to make any claims about linguistic meaning and its nature, but rather only about the correlation between grammar and the purely extensional properties of both composed and lexically basic expressions of English. However, the moral non-cognitivist can, of course, pair her deviant semantics with a rejection of the view that ordinary declarative sentences have truth-conditions in English.

To deny that ordinary declarative sentences have truth-conditions in English, however, is a strategy that is dialectically unavailable to the moral non-cognitivist: it amounts to saving the village by destroying it. To see why this is so note that the claim that moral sentences do not have truth-conditions has become rather uninteresting in a philosophical framework in which no sentence whatsoever has truth-conditions: moral non-cognitivism has collapsed into universal non-cognitivism. But if moral non-cognitivism is true *because* universal non-cognitivism is true, then we would expect the moral non-cognitivist to provide arguments for universal non-cognitivism. Typically, however, moral non-cognitivism is not argued for along such lines. Moral non-cognitivists do not typically argue that no natural language declarative sentence has truth-conditions. Rather, the traditional arguments for non-cognitivism are based on observations about the *pragmatics* of moral sentences, namely on the datum that moral sentences are usually used differently from ordinary declarative sentences—to express emotions, commands or wishes. What explanatory role would these observations play in building a case for moral non-cognitivism if universal non-cognitivism was assumed right from the start? Surely, moral non-cognitivism is standardly claimed to be compatible with a broadly Davidsonian approach to semantics—or, in other words, with a T-Theory for English, excluding axioms for moral expressions: moral declarative sentences are, according to the moral non-cognitivist, exceptional in not having truth-conditions.

What about truth-deflationism, the view that there is nothing more to truth than disquotation? Surely, the only notion of a truth-condition available to the deflationist is the syntactic notion of a truth-condition explicated in §1: a sentence S has a truth-condition just in case it can be grammatically embedded into the T-schema.[29] But we have seen in §1 already that this cannot be the notion the non-cognitivist has in mind when denying that moral sentences have truth-conditions. Rather, the notion of a truth-condition that the moral non-cognitivist has in mind must be the semantic notion of a Davidsonian truth-condition as explicated in §1. Thus, the deflationist about truth who believes that there is nothing more to truth than disquotation will reject Davidsonian T-theories for English. Moral non-cognitivists who help themselves to such an extremely deflated notion of truth thus also commit the dialectical mistake of saving the village by destroying it.[30]

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[29]Note that Horwich's (1998b) minimalism is not deflationist in this sense: on Horwich's minimalism 'is true' expresses a property, just one that cannot be analysed in terms of reference or satisfaction. Horwich accordingly does not reject Davidsonian T-Theories. In fact, he thinks they are true but he does not believe that they illuminate the concept of truth (ibid. 111). For Horwich, what it means for a theory of truth to be deflationist is simply to claim that the concept of truth is insusceptible to analysis or definition (ibid. 121-2). Note also that Horwich would not subscribe to the purely syntactic notion of a truth-condition just mentioned, for he thinks that some grammatical instances of (T) have to be given up to handle the Liar paradox.

[30]An example of such a strategy is Stoljar 1993. Some contemporary expressivists (e.g. Gibbard (2003, p. 7)) accept that moral sentences have truth-conditions and combine this view with a psychologistic theory

Let me sum up the discussion. My arguments have shown that any view on which ordinary declarative sentences have truth-conditions ought to hold that moral declarative sentences have truth-conditions too. This claim was made independently of any claims about the nature of linguistic meaning and natural language semantics and is thus compatible with conceptual role accounts of meaning, ideational or Lockean theories of meaning and even Dummettian verificationist semantics (Dummett 1976). Thus, the only viable remaining positions are to outright reject Davidsonian T-theories for English and thus to accept non-cognitivism *tout court* or to reject moral non-cognitivism: if I am right, arguing for moral non-cognitivism must take the form of arguing for non-cognitivism *tout court*. Surely, there are views running under the label of 'non-cognitivism' or 'expressivism' of which it is unclear whether they assign Davidsonian truth-conditions to moral sentences. Insofar as it is unclear whether these accounts assign such truth-conditions to moral sentences, it is unclear whether they are subject to my objections. However, insofar as it is unclear whether they assign truth-conditions to moral sentences, it is also unclear whether they are versions of moral non-cognitivism. Thus, my argument stands independently of whether more contemporary accounts of 'expressivism', for instance, assign truth-conditions to moral sentences or not.[31]

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of meaning, according to which the meaning of an expression is determined by the mental states it expresses (cp. also Chrisman (2008, p. 339)). There are two problems with such approaches. Firstly, psychologistic theories of meaning are widely considered to be amongst the rather implausible theories of meaning on the market. In fact, one might consider the psychologistic approach a degenerating research programme. Secondly, and perhaps more seriously, note that (FFC')—the principle of *Form Function Correlation*—holds independently of the semantic theories we hold. Thus, the psychologistic semanticist is also committed to the view that the primary or direct illocutionary function of sentences of the form of 'Murder is wrong' is constative: when speaking literally, speakers uttering 'Murder is wrong' present themselves as believing that murder is wrong or, in other words, as believing that the sentence's truth-conditions are satisfied. Consequently, speakers who literally and *sincerely* assert 'Murder is wrong' are in the psychological state of believing that murder is wrong and the words 'Murder is wrong' in their mouths express—in the sense relevant for the psychologistic semanticist—the psychological state of believing that murder is wrong. We are thus forced to conclude that moral declaratives are semantically on a par with non-moral declaratives: speakers who literally and sincerely assert 'Grass is green' are in the psychological state of believing that grass is green, and the words 'Grass is green' in their mouths express—in the sense relevant for the psychologist semanticist—the psychological state of believing that grass is green. Summing up, it follows from (FFC') and the grammatical facts about declaratives in English alone that the psychological states expressed by literal uses of moral declaratives are of the same type as those expressed by non-moral declaratives: they are ordinary beliefs, and not attitudes of approval or disapproval. Thus, moral declaratives and non-moral declaratives must have the same type of meaning. (Note that Gibbard (2003, pp. 185-88) accepts that the relevant states are beliefs, but claims that moral beliefs differ from non-moral beliefs in being 'plan-laden'. As Chrisman points out, however, it is unclear whether this view 'constitutes a rejection of [moral] realism' (Chrisman 2008, p. 346)).

[31]Could the non-cognitivist object to my view by claiming that ascriptions of personal taste are declarative sentences but do not have Davidsonian truth-conditions? They could not. Note that nobody working on the semantics of predicates of personal taste takes the view that these predicates ('is tasty', 'is fun') are lexical illocutionary force markers. Rather, theorists claim that these sentences are context-sensitive or assessment relative, and on both views truth-conditions are assigned to predicates of personal taste, the only difference being that the truth-conditions include reference to an assessor or—on the relativist view—are satisfied relative to an assessor. Neither of these views is non-cognitivist: both claim that ascriptions of personal taste have truth-conditions, the crucial point being that they have special, non-standard truth-conditions. See Lasersohn 2005 for extensive discussion.

6. Conclusion

I have argued for the following conditional: if ordinary declarative sentences have truth-conditions, then moral declarative sentences have truth-conditions too. Once this conditional is in place, moral non-cognitivism has either been disproved or trivialised, depending on one's views on the semantics of ordinary declaratives. The arguments I have used to reach my conclusion assumed uncontroversial principles and distinctions from pragmatics and syntax, and empirically incontestable claims about the relation between grammatical form and illocutionary force potential: if there is anything like empirical refutation in linguistics, then, assuming that ordinary declaratives have truth-conditions, there is no doubt that moral non-cognitivism is empirically refuted. In addition to offering a new argument against moral non-cognitivism the paper has shown that the Frege-Geach problem highlights only one relatively minor aspect of a very problematic linguistic claim: the claim that moral predicates are, at the level of logical deep structure, lexical IFMs and not ordinary predicates.

Surely, a very general but rather important question concerning philosophical methodology must remain unanswered in this paper: how seriously ought we to take results from the empirical sciences in our philosophical theory building? In the particular case at issue I am inclined towards a radical response: we should let the sciences—and in this case empirical linguistics—provide a framework that restricts the options for viable philosophical theories. For what alternative is there, given that we are far from agreeing on meta-ethical issues relating to the open-question argument, moral motivation, moral realism and moral knowledge? Isn't it methodologically irresponsible to argue from one's highly controversial meta-ethical theory to an empirically refuted and absurd linguistic conclusion?

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