

## EXPRESSIVISM AND THE PRACTICALITY OF MORAL CONVICTIONS

Neil Sinclair ([neil.sinclair@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:neil.sinclair@nottingham.ac.uk))

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*Abstract.* Many expressivists have employed a claim about the practicality of morality in support of their view that moral convictions are not purely descriptive mental states. In this paper I argue that all extant arguments of this form fail. I distinguish six versions of such arguments and argue that in each case *either* the sense of practicality the argument employs is too weak, in which case there is no reason to think that descriptive states cannot be practical *or* the sense of practicality the argument employs is too strong, in which case there is no reason to think moral convictions are practical. I also discuss and dismiss an attempted patch of such arguments provided by Humean Psychology. The conclusion is that expressivists need to look to sources other than the alleged practicality of morality to support their position. In concluding remarks I suggest one such alternative.

If Mary comes to think that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong, we would expect her to avoid purchasing cosmetics that have been tested on animals and to become agitated at others who refuse to do the same. Conversely, if Brian attends rallies supporting bans on cosmetics testing on animals, refuses to buy products that have been tested on animals and encourages others to do likewise we would expect him to be of the opinion that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong. At least, in both cases, should our expectations be confounded there is usually some explanation of why things haven't turned out as we thought they would. In both these ways agents' moral judgements are intimately connected to their actions and affections.

Many expressivists have used a view about the nature of this connection in arguments for their position. They have argued that moral judgements exhibit a connection to actions and affections that no expression of a purely descriptive state could share. Hence, they conclude, moral judgements cannot be understood descriptively. Expressivists to have used this approach include Ayer, Urmson,

Stevenson, Hare, Nowell-Smith, Blackburn and Gibbard.<sup>1</sup> I shall call such approaches *arguments from practicality*. In this paper I aim to show that no such argument is successful.

In the next section I set out the core commitments of expressivism and its rival descriptivism. In §2 I set out the general form of arguments from practicality using Hume as exemplar. Such arguments rely on the claim that moral convictions are practical in a way that purely descriptive states of mind are not. In §3 I distinguish four plausible senses in which moral convictions are practical. I then argue in §4 that there is no reason to think that purely descriptive states of mind cannot be practical in precisely these senses. In §5 I suggest two further senses in which moral convictions might be practical. Unfortunately for expressivists, these senses also fail to provide successful arguments for their position, both because there is little reason to suppose moral convictions are practical in these senses (§6) and because even if we suppose they were, this admission is compatible with descriptivism if moral convictions are what I call ‘hybrid’ states (§7). Finally, in §8 I argue that a distinctively Humean reason to doubt the existence of such states fails. The conclusion is that no argument for expressivism based on the alleged practicality of moral convictions succeeds. In my concluding remarks I suggest an alternative line of argument for the expressivist.

### *1. Descriptivism and Expressivism*

Descriptivists in ethics hold that moral judgements express beliefs that represent the world in moral ways, the upshot of such expression being a putative description of the

world as containing (or realising) moral states of affairs.<sup>2</sup> Expressivists, by contrast, deny that moral judgements express such beliefs. Instead, they claim, moral judgements express affective mental states such as approval and disapproval, the purpose of this expression being the mutual co-ordination of attitudes.<sup>3</sup> These characterisations can be made more precise by introducing some terminology.

First, the crux of the debate is over the state of mind that moral judgements express, where moral judgements are sincere utterances of declarative moral sentences. Call the states thus expressed *moral convictions*. The declarative sentences used to express such states provide their content. For example, if an agent sincerely utters the sentence ‘Testing cosmetics on animals is wrong’ then her moral conviction is a state of mind with content capturable by that very sentence. When, as in this case, the content can be captured using a moral sentence, I shall call this *moral content*.

Second, the debate concerns whether moral convictions are beliefs of a certain sort. Here a belief is mental state that represents the world, or some part of it, as being thus-and-so. I shall call such states *descriptively representational* and the way they represent the world as being their *descriptive content*. Thus if I believe that it is raining outside my meteorological conviction is a descriptively representational state of mind with the following descriptive content: *It is raining outside*. Descriptively representational states are to be contrasted with other states that represent the world, not as being thus-and-so, but so as to be made thus-and-so. I shall call these states *directively representational* and the way they represent the world so as to be made their *directive content*.<sup>4</sup> Desires are the paradigm examples of directly representational states. Thus if I desire an end to poverty, my desire is a directly representational state of mind with the following directive content: *There is no*

*poverty*.<sup>5</sup> The distinction between descriptively and directly representational mental states is sometimes cashed out in terms of their respective *directions of fit*. So whereas descriptively representational states have as their constitutive aim or function that their contents match the state of the world (mind-to-world direction of fit), directly representational states have as their constitutive aim or function to impose themselves on the world in such a way that the world come to match their content (world-to-mind direction of fit).<sup>6</sup> I here endorse this way of elaborating the distinction.

Given these definitions the core claim of descriptivism is:

**D.** The moral content of moral convictions is descriptive content.

In other words, moral judgements express moral beliefs. Expressivists, in contrast, hold both:

**E1.** The moral content of moral convictions is not descriptive content.

And:

**E2.** Moral convictions have distinctive non-moral directive content.

**E1** is equivalent to the claim that moral judgements do not express moral beliefs. **E2** is the beginning of a positive characterization of the states such judgements express. According to a simple version of expressivism, for example, moral judgements

express states of approval and disapproval. On such a view Mary’s judgement that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong expresses disapproval of testing cosmetics on animals. This disapproval is a directly representational state that represents that world so as to be made that: *No one tests cosmetics on animals*. The italicised sentence gives the directive content of the state, which since it involves no moral terms, is not moral content. So one part of expressivists’ positive claim is that moral judgements express states of mind with non-moral directive contents. Expressivists must also claim, of course, that the attitude thus expressed is distinct from more mundane attitudes of approval and disapproval, lest moral judgements are equated with simple judgements of taste. For the sake of argument I shall here grant expressivists this claim.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. *Hume and the General Form of Arguments from Practicality*

Now to arguments from practicality. Perhaps the most famous example comes from Hume:

Since morals...have an influence of the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv’d from reason; and that because reason alone...can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not the conclusions of reason.<sup>8</sup>

Here moral convictions (‘morals’) are claimed to have a practical role that beliefs (the states controlled by ‘reason’) cannot fulfil. Hence moral convictions cannot be beliefs, that is, descriptively representational mental states.

This passage nicely illustrates the general form of arguments from practicality:

- (1) Moral convictions are practical in some specific sense.
- (2) No purely descriptively representational state can be practical in the same specific sense.

Therefore:

- (3) Moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states.

In this schema (and throughout) ‘practical’ is a gloss on ‘connected to actions and affections’. There are three points worth noting about arguments of this form.

First, there is an obvious and fatal flaw in taking (1)-(3) to establish expressivism: namely that the conclusion of the argument is actually compatible with a version of descriptivism.<sup>9</sup> Descriptivists hold that the moral content of moral convictions is descriptive content. This leaves open two possible versions of descriptivism: according to the first moral convictions are purely descriptive representational states, their moral content being part or whole of their descriptive content; according to the second moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states because although their moral content is descriptive content they also possess some distinct non-descriptive content. The conclusion of arguments from practicality is only that moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational

states, but this is only incompatible with the first form of descriptivism. So arguments from practicality are *at best* arguments against one of two forms of descriptivism. In light of this, in §§3-5 I argue that most arguments from practicality fail even in the narrow aim of refuting the first kind of descriptivism. In §§6-8 I argue that, even if some arguments from practicality force us to abandon the first version of descriptivism, the second version remains a viable possibility. Either way, arguments from practicality fail to establish expressivism.

Second, as Snare has pointed out, for arguments of this type to be successful, at least one of the premises must be an *a priori* truth.<sup>10</sup> For all the arguments from practicality that follow I shall assume that for at least one of the premises is known *a priori* and hence that Snare’s snare can be avoided.

Finally, it is informative to note ways in which arguments of this type may fail. Besides equivocation on the term ‘practical’ there are two main sources of error. In the first case, arguments of this type will fail if the type of practicality assigned to moral convictions is too weak, for this is liable to make the second premise false or unsupported. If the connection between moral convictions and actions and affections is weak, it is likely that purely descriptively representational states can also have such a connection, calling premise (2) into doubt. In the second case, arguments of this type will fail if the type of practicality assigned to moral convictions is too strong, for this is liable to make the first premise false or unsupported. If the conditions for practicality are too strict, it is likely that although purely descriptively representational states cannot be practical, nor can moral convictions.<sup>11</sup> In what follows I shall argue that arguments employing the first four senses of practicality fail for the first reason

while those employing the fifth and sixth senses of practicality fail for the second (among others).

### 3. *Four Plausible Senses of Practicality*

#### 3.1. *Moral convictions have normative content*

The first sense in which moral convictions are practical is that they are a species of normative convictions. Moral convictions concern how we *should* live, how we *ought* to act and so on. The terms that characterise moral convictions – *should*, *good*, *right*, *cruel* and so on – are *normative*, that is, they serve to indicate a standard or ‘norm’ by which to judge and direct conduct. For example, when Mary holds that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong, she is recommending a certain path of action: she is directing us not to test cosmetics on animals (or to endorse such testing). It is this ‘directedness’ that I take to be captured by the claim that moral convictions have normative content.<sup>12</sup>

It is helpful here to introduce a distinction between *recognising* and *embracing* norms.<sup>13</sup> When I claim ‘One ought not to slurp one’s food’ my claim reflects the *recognition* of a certain norm of behaviour is recommended from a particular point of view, in this case, the point of view of (western) etiquette. In other examples, such as the claim that ‘It is illegal to trespass on private property’ the particular point of view is more perspicuous. In order to be moved by either claim, however, I must not only recognise the norm but also *embrace it*, that is, roughly, I have to want to obey it. Without this additional state of mind, the claim will not affect my actions.

The question arises whether moral convictions are constituted by *recognition* of a norm of behaviour or by recognition plus an *embracing* of that norm. There is certainly a sense in which one’s moral views can be ‘read off’ the norms of behaviour one embraces. This is the sense in which Brian (in the opening paragraph) has a moral conviction merely by dint of the fact that he acts as he does. In this sense of ‘moral conviction’ one’s moral convictions are indeed constituted by the norms of behaviour one endorses. Unfortunately, this is not obviously the sense of ‘moral conviction’ with which we are concerned. The focus of this enquiry is the nature of that state of mind expressed by moral judgements and it is an open question whether these two senses of ‘moral conviction’ are co-extensive. Furthermore, in the case of all other norms – such as those of etiquette or the law – we are capable as reflective beings of a reasoned assessment of their basis and thus of reflecting on them without embracing them. Absent any reason to think that moral norms provide an exception to this rule, there is no reason to think that we cannot make the distinction between recognising and embracing in the case of moral norms too.

All we can say for now, therefore, is that moral convictions are practical in that, like other normative convictions, they consist in recognition that a particular way of behaving is recommended (or discouraged) from a particular point of view. In their case, the point of view is that of morality.<sup>14</sup> I shall summarise this sense of practicality by saying that moral convictions are about how we *should* act and feel, where ‘should’ is a gloss on ‘should, according to a particular point of view’.

That moral convictions are practical in this way has two important consequences.

First, that there are determinate ways in which agents can act *in accordance with* and *contrary to* moral convictions. To act in accordance with a particular piece of normative content is to act in ways that a person expressing that content recommends and to refrain from acting in ways that a person expressing that content discourages. Thus if Mary holds that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong she recognises that testing cosmetics on animals is not recommended from the moral point of view. If Brian purchases cosmetics that have been tested on animals he is acting contrary to Mary’s conviction; if he doesn’t purchase such goods, he is acting in accordance with Mary’s conviction. Note that, as these examples demonstrate, one can act in accordance with and contrary to a moral conviction without actually possessing that conviction. There is thus a distinction between acting in accordance with a normative conviction and acting on the basis of that conviction (see §3.2).

Second, this in turn provides a basis on which to distinguish the moral content of moral convictions from the content of common descriptively representational states, such as beliefs about the weather. For while there are more-or-less determinate ways in which one can act in accordance with and contrary to the former, there is no way in which one can act in accordance with or contrary to the latter. That Brian believes it is raining outside fails to recommend any course of action that one can successfully or unsuccessfully follow. Whether this distinction is enough to mark out the moral content of moral convictions as something other than descriptive content remains to be seen.

### 3.2. *Moral convictions, deliberation and action*

Moral convictions concern how we should act, what sort of character we ought to foster and so on. The moral considerations that moral convictions present can also feature in our deliberation about what we ought to do, what sort of character we ought to foster and so on. Moral considerations can be factors in our decision-making and can be used to influence the decisions of others. It is also possible, in favourable cases, for moral considerations to ‘hold sway’ over competing considerations and hence for agents to act *on the basis of* those moral considerations. In such cases, the moral conviction that presents those considerations will feature in the explanation of that action. In short, moral convictions do not merely concern how we *should* act, but can effect our decisions about how we *will* act.

Consider again the example of Mary. If Mary is a committed moral person – that is, if she not only recognises but also embraces moral norms – and if she holds that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong, then this consideration will affect the decisions she makes. Suppose Mary is considering whether or not to buy a particular lipstick that has been tested on animals. Many factors may affect whether or not Mary buys the lipstick, for example: how much it costs, what colour it is, whether or not it was tested on animals and so on. In some cases, the moral consideration may be ‘trumped’ by competing considerations and Mary will buy the lipstick anyway. In others, the moral consideration may ‘hold sway’ and Mary will not buy the lipstick, because (maybe among other things) it was tested on animals. In both types of case, Mary’s moral conviction (or the moral consideration it presents) exerts a force on her motivations; in the latter case, it is part of the explanation for why she acted as she did.

This example illustrates three further senses in which moral convictions are practical.

First, if an agent embraces moral norms then the considerations presented by those norms will feature in her practical deliberations, that is, her deliberations about what to do. Mere recognition that some action is recommended or discouraged from a particular point of view will not be an element in practical deliberation. I may recognise, for example, that (western) etiquette demands that one not slurp one’s food, but this will not enter my deliberations unless I want to follow the rules of (western) etiquette.

Second, if an agent embraces moral norms, then her moral convictions will affect the way she behaves. This is to say that an agent who embraces moral norms will have a certain tendency to act in ways consistent with those norms and that, other things being equal, she will act in those ways. For Mary this means that, other things being equal, she will not purchase cosmetics that have been tested on animals. Of course, other things rarely are equal and competing considerations may outweigh moral ones. In such cases, however, moral considerations remain to be outweighed.

Finally, the example demonstrates that in some cases moral considerations may ‘hold sway’, that is, outweigh competing considerations. When this happens, the agent will not merely act *in accordance* with her moral conviction, but will act *on the basis of* that conviction. This is not to say that the moral conviction will be the *sole* basis for the agents’ action, for she may be moved by other considerations that recommend the same course of action. In all cases where moral considerations ‘hold sway’, however, the agents’ moral conviction will be at least part of the explanation for the agent acting as she did.

#### 4. *Four Unsuccessful Arguments*

We have, then, four senses in which moral convictions are practical:

- P1.** They have normative content.
- P2.** Their contents can feature in agents’ practical deliberations.
- P3.** They can affect agents’ behavioural dispositions.
- P4.** They can feature in the explanation of agents’ actions.

(In the last three cases, the ‘can’ is important, for we have seen no reason to think that moral convictions always feature in deliberation, affect behavioural dispositions or explain action. I shall assess these stronger claims in §§5-6.) The question is whether these four senses provide plausible arguments from practicality.

##### *4.1. First Argument from Practicality*

Plugging **P1** into the general schema for arguments from practicality set out in §2 generates the following:

- 1<sub>P1</sub>.** Moral convictions have normative content.
- 2<sub>P2</sub>.** No purely descriptively representational state can have normative content.

Therefore

- 3.** Moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states.<sup>15</sup>

This argument fails for the first reason given in §2; namely, the sense of practicality it employs is too weak. While it seems undeniable to say that moral judgements have normative content, it seems unreasonable to hold that descriptively representational states cannot have the descriptive content expressed by sentences such as: *Testing cosmetics on animals is wrong* (premise **2<sub>P2</sub>**). At least absent an account what can and cannot be represented to be the case there is no reason to suppose that a mental state cannot represent the world as being, precisely, a world in which testing cosmetics on animals is wrong. More generally, absent such an account there is no reason to suppose that there cannot be purely descriptively representational states with normative contents. Thus premise **2<sub>P2</sub>** remains unsupported and the conclusion doesn't follow.

#### 4.2. *Second Argument from Practicality*

Substituting **P2** into the general schema generates the following argument:

**1<sub>P2</sub>**. The content of moral convictions can feature in agents' practical deliberations.

**2<sub>P2</sub>**. It is not the case that the content of purely descriptively representational states can feature in agents' practical deliberations.

Therefore

**3.** Moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states.

This argument fails for the same reason as the first; namely, that the sense of practicality it employs is too weak. For while it is plausible that the content of moral convictions can feature in agents’ practical deliberations (premise **1<sub>P2</sub>**), it is implausible to claim (premise **2<sub>P2</sub>**) that the content of a purely descriptive state cannot so feature. For example, suppose Brian believes that it is raining outside and is averse to getting rained upon. Then the purely descriptive content: *It is raining outside* will feature in Brian’s deliberations as a consideration in favour of any measures that avoid him getting rained upon (staying indoors, taking an umbrella and so on). So this purely descriptive content has featured in Brian’s practical deliberation. Thus premise **2<sub>P2</sub>** is false.

Expressivists have an obvious reply to this objection. The *way* in which moral contents feature in agents’ practical deliberations, they will claim, is distinct from the *way* in which descriptive contents features in such deliberations. Several expressivists have developed this suggestion, notably Hare and Blackburn.<sup>16</sup> Their common thought is that the moral contents of an agent’s mental states are of *necessary relevance* to that agent’s practical deliberations. More precisely the thought is that, necessarily, if an agent’s mental states have moral content that applies to some course of action under consideration in practical deliberation then that moral content will provide that agent with some deliberative reason for or against that action. For example, suppose Rachel is deciding whether to A or B and considers A right. According to these expressivists the moral content *A is right* will necessarily be taken by Rachel to be a reason in favour of A-ing. When, as here, the reason is conclusive, the moral content will provide an answer to Rachel’s deliberative question ‘What shall I do?’ When the reason is less than conclusive (as for example, when Rachel’s

judgement is that A is generous) it will not by itself determine the practical issue but will still retain commendatory force. In both cases the moral content remains relevant to the deliberative question. Descriptive contents, in contrast, can sometimes be relevant to practical deliberation, but are never necessarily so. Thus, in the example above, the descriptive content *It is raining outside* is only of relevance to Brian’s practical deliberation given his aversion to getting rained upon. Should Brian be indifferent to climactic conditions the same content would not provide a deliberative reason. So moral contents are of necessary relevance to practical deliberation whereas the relevance of descriptive contents is at best only contingent. It follows that moral contents cannot be descriptive contents and descriptivism is false. (Note that, unlike the other arguments so far discussed, this form of the argument from practicality *does* suffice to establish expressivism and not merely refute the first version of descriptivism.)

There are two problems with this argument. First, it is not clear that moral contents have a necessary, as opposed to merely ubiquitous relevance to practical deliberation. Suppose for example, that most members of a community have an aversion to getting rained upon. Suppose this aversion is so common and deep-seated that the members of the community take it for granted in all their interactions and deliberations. In such a scenario the statement ‘It is raining’ may seem to take on a necessary relevance to the practical deliberations of members of this community. But of course this practical relevance is still contingent on agents’ aversions to getting rained upon – it only appears necessary because of the ubiquity of that aversion. The same might well apply for moral contents. The apparent necessary relevance of moral contents to practical deliberation may be the result of some ubiquitous concern that

those contents engage with, for example an aversion to morally objectionable actions. Alternatively, moral contents themselves may be analysable into non-moral contents that, contingently, have a ubiquitous practical relevance. For example, on Railton’s version of descriptivism the conviction that an action is right represents that action as one that would be approved of by instrumentally rational agents when counting equally the interests of all potentially affected individuals and when fully and vividly informed. Railton then notes: ‘Since in public discourse and private reflection we are often concerned with whether our conduct is justifiable from a general rather than merely personal standpoint, it therefore is far from arbitrary that we attach so much importance to morality as a standard of criticism and self-criticism’.<sup>17</sup> This extensive practical relevance could again be mistaken for necessary relevance. Furthermore, the existence of an understandable attitude of indifference to moral concerns when practically deliberating supports this view: for such cases can be taken as evidence of situations under which the otherwise ubiquitous concern with which moral considerations engage is absent. Until these alternative hypotheses are ruled out the expressivist has provided no reason to think that the practical relevance of moral contents is necessary rather than merely ubiquitous.

However, even if expressivists could make a case for the necessary practical relevance of moral contents, it doesn’t follow that moral contents are not descriptive. For though a necessary practical relevance would suffice to distinguish moral contents from mundane descriptive contents such as those concerning the weather, further argument is required to show that this relevance would distinguish moral contents from the class of descriptive contents as a whole. For descriptivists can insist that moral contents are just that special species of descriptive content that have a

necessary relevance to practical deliberation. More precisely, descriptivists can claim that moral convictions are states that represent the world as being, precisely, a world in which certain choices and paths are morally commended or obligatory. Such states have descriptive content in so far as they offer a representation of the world but also have necessary practical relevance in so far as the representations they offer are of a world in which certain choices are morally preferable or obligatory. So such states have descriptive content characterisable by moral sentences and that content is of necessary practical relevance. To take the example of rightness, the descriptivist can claim that moral convictions concerning rightness describe the world as one in which certain intentions are morally correct.<sup>18</sup> So Rachel’s conviction that A is right descriptively represents the world as being such that an intention on behalf of Rachel to A is the morally correct intention. Absent a general theory of descriptive representation there is no reason to doubt that a mental state can represent the world thus. Since the contents of such states are of necessary practical relevance the rejuvenated expressivist argument fails.

#### *4.3. Third Argument from Practicality*

Substituting **P3** into the general schema for arguments from practicality generates the following argument:

- 1<sub>P3</sub>**. Moral convictions can affect agents’ behavioural dispositions.
- 2<sub>P3</sub>**. No purely descriptively representational state can affect agents’ behavioural dispositions.

Therefore

3. Moral convictions are not purely descriptive representational states.

This argument fails for the same reason as the previous two: the sense of practicality is too weak to make the second premise plausible.

The example of Mary in the opening paragraph gives us reason to accept that moral convictions can affect agents’ behavioural tendencies (premise **1<sub>P3</sub>**). It seems implausible, however, to claim (premise **2<sub>P3</sub>**) that no purely descriptively representational state can have a similar influence. Consider Brian. If Brian believes that it is raining outside and if he hates getting rained upon then his behaviour will be accordingly affected. Other things being equal he will not go outside for the time being or will make sure that if he does then he takes an umbrella. If Brian didn’t believe that it was raining outside then he wouldn’t be reluctant to go outside (at least not on this count). Therefore Brian’s belief about the weather – a purely descriptive representational state – can affect his behavioural dispositions.

Again, there is an expressivist riposte. The *way* in which moral convictions affect agents’ behavioural tendencies, they will claim, is distinct from the *way* in which purely descriptive representational states do the same. I shall discuss, and dismiss, two suggestions along this line in §§5-6. A third suggestion can be dismissed here. Expressivists may argue that moral convictions affect agents’ behavioural dispositions in certain determinate ways, whereas purely descriptively representational states can affect agents’ behaviours in multifarious ways, depending on the content of desire, concern or preference (that is, *directively* representational state) they are coupled with. So while, for example, the moral judgement that testing

cosmetics on animals is wrong affects all agents who accept it in similar ways (not to purchase cosmetics tested on animals, for instance), the belief that it is raining outside can affect agents’ behaviours in many ways, depending, in the simplest case, on the agent’s attitude to getting rained upon. However, although this marks a genuine difference between moral convictions and states such as the belief that it is raining outside, it is an insufficient basis on which to distinguish moral convictions from purely descriptively representational states. For the fact that moral convictions affect agents’ behaviours in certain determinate ways is a mere consequence of their normative content, and again, we have seen no reason to doubt that normative content can be descriptive content. Normative contents serve to recommend or discourage certain paths of action whereas mundane descriptive contents do not. It is no surprise, therefore, that states that possess such normative contents affect behaviour in ways commensurate with that recommendation or discouragement. But, at least absent a theory of descriptive representation, this is compatible with the content of such states being descriptively representational.

#### *4.4. Fourth Argument from Practicality*

Substituting **P4** into the general schema generates the following argument:

- 1<sub>P4</sub>**. Moral convictions can feature in explanations of agents’ actions.
- 2<sub>P4</sub>**. No purely descriptively representational state can feature in an explanation of agents’ actions.

Therefore

3. Moral convictions are not purely descriptive representational states.

This argument fails for the same reason as the previous three. By assigning a weak sense of practicality to moral convictions (premise **1<sub>P4</sub>**) it fails to rule out purely descriptively representational states being practical in the same sense (premise **2<sub>P4</sub>**). We have seen how moral convictions can feature in explanations of agents' actions. Unfortunately, it is equally easy to see that purely descriptively representational states can play a similar role. If Brian believes that it is raining outside, if he prefers not to get rained upon and if the consideration this belief presents holds sway in his deliberations then Brian will act on the basis of this belief and the belief will play a part in explaining his actions. Thus premise **2<sub>P4</sub>** is false and, once again, the argument has failed.

As before, there is a quick expressivist reply. The *way* in which moral convictions feature in explanations of agents' actions, they will claim, is distinct from the way in which purely descriptively representational states can feature in such explanations. In the next two sections I shall discuss, and dismiss, two suggestions along this line.

*5. Two Further Senses of Practicality*

Are there any further senses in which moral convictions are practical? We have seen that moral convictions, like purely descriptively representational states, can affect agents' behavioural tendencies as well as feature in explanations of their actions. It has also been suggested that moral convictions may have a distinct kind of effect on

behaviour and a distinct kind of role in the explanation of action that serves to distinguish them from purely descriptively representational states. What might these be?

A common suggestion is that moral convictions have a distinct effect on behaviour and a distinct role in action explanation that is the result of moral convictions having some special connection to our *motives*. To have a *motive* is to have a goal or purpose. In terms of the earlier discussion, motives are directly representational state of mind, that is, mental states that represent the world so as to be made that some state of affairs is realised. That state of affairs is one's goal. According to the standard Humean model our purposive behaviours are affected in different ways by our motives and by our beliefs.<sup>19</sup> Roughly, our motives set us our goals and our beliefs determine the means we take in pursuit of those goals. Thus my desire (motive) for some chocolate will affect my behaviour by causing me to act in ways in which I believe will lead to my acquisition of some chocolate. Conversely, my belief that there is some chocolate in the fridge will affect my behaviour by determining the means I take to pursue my motives concerning chocolate. In the case where both elements are present, they will cause me to go to the fridge in the hope of acquiring some chocolate. Accordingly, on this picture, action explanation always involves reference to two distinct elements: a motive that tells one what the agent was hoping to achieve in so acting and a belief that tells one why the agent took the particular way to pursuing that goal that he did. The suggestion under consideration is that moral convictions affect agents' behaviour and explain agents' actions through connection with their motives rather than beliefs. There are two ways in which this

connection might be spelled out, which provide two further senses of practicality (which I shall label **P5** and **P6**).

**P5.** In the first case, one might claim that moral convictions are *intrinsically* connected to agents’ motives, that is to say, when moral convictions influence agents’ motives, they do so without reference to any further state of the agent. This serves to distinguish moral convictions from more mundane beliefs that may be connected to agents’ motives, but only by channelling a pre-existing motive into a new, more specific form. For example, the belief that there is chocolate in the fridge may give rise to a motive to go to the fridge. But it will only do so by channelling a pre-existing motive, such as the motive to acquire some chocolate. The claim here is that when moral convictions influence motives, they do so intrinsically, that is, without reference to any antecedent motive. The claim would be, for example, that the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong can give rise to the motive not to purchase cosmetics that have been tested on animals without having to channel any pre-existing motive. Hence the fully displayed explanation of any actions that result from this motive need refer only to the moral conviction and the beliefs it is coupled with.

There are two important points to note about this suggestion.

First, the suggestion is not that moral convictions can give rise to *any* motive, but that they can give rise to *appropriate motives*, where a motive is appropriate relative to a moral conviction just in case it is a motive to act in ways that are in accordance with the normative content of that conviction. In the case of a conviction

that a type of action is wrong, the appropriate motive will be a motive not to partake in actions of that kind and to encourage others to do likewise.

Second, it doesn't follow that when moral convictions give rise to appropriate motives the moral conviction will always play a role in the explanation of the agent acting as she does or that the agent will even act in accordance with that conviction. This is because the agent may act in accordance with her moral conviction for some reason other than that provided by the moral conviction or she may have competing motives that outweigh that engendered by the moral conviction, causing her to act in ways that are not in accordance with the moral judgement at all.

**P6.** In the second case, one might claim that moral convictions are, in an interesting way, *necessarily* connected to agents' motives, which is to say that having a moral conviction is itself *sufficient* for an agent to have appropriate motives. More precisely, the claim is that: necessarily, if an agent has a moral conviction, then she will have some corresponding set of appropriate motives. As before, a motive is appropriate just in case it is a motive to act in ways that are in accordance with the normative content of the moral conviction. This view is often labelled 'internalism'.<sup>20</sup> For example, in the case of Mary, the mere fact that she considers testing cosmetics on animals to be wrong will be sufficient for her to have the set of appropriate motives – for example, the motive not to purchase cosmetics on animals and the motive to prevent others from doing so. There are two points to note about this suggestion.

First, as before, it doesn't follow that an agents' moral conviction will always play a role in her acting as she does or that she will always act in ways that are in

accordance with it. The presence of other, stronger, motives will undermine both possibilities. So any motivation arising from the moral conviction will be defeasible.

Second, internalism fails to determine the precise nature of the necessary connection between moral convictions and appropriate motivations. In the first case, the necessary connection may be the result of the fact that the moral conviction is simply *identical* with the set of appropriate motivations. In the second case, the necessary connection may be a connection between two distinct states: the moral conviction and the set of appropriate motives.<sup>21</sup> In the former case, this sense of practicality (**P6**) entails the previous sense (**P5**). In the latter case, it does not, since the necessary connection between moral convictions and appropriate motives may be the result of some generic antecedent motive.

#### *6. Two more unsuccessful arguments*

The forgoing discussion has produced two further ways in which moral convictions may be claimed to be practical:

- P5.** They can be intrinsically connected to agents' motives
- P6.** They are necessarily connected to agents' motives

##### *6.1. Fifth argument from practicality*

Substituting **P5** into the general schema of arguments from practicality provides the following argument:

- 1<sub>P5</sub>**. Moral convictions can be intrinsically connected to agents’ motives.
- 2<sub>P5</sub>**. No purely descriptively representational state can be intrinsically connected to agents’ motives.

Therefore

- 3.** Moral convictions are not purely descriptive representational states.

Unfortunately for the expressivist, this argument fails for the second reason listed in §2, namely that the sense of practicality it assigns to moral convictions is too strong. This makes premise **2<sub>P5</sub>** plausible only at the expense of rendering premise **1<sub>P5</sub>** unsupported.

The second premise appears well supported by examples. Brian’s belief that it is raining outside will only affect his motives if it is accompanied by an appropriate desire, preference or similar directly representational state. If Brian prefers not to get rained upon this belief will provide him with a motive to stay indoors; if he likes getting rained upon then this belief will provide him with a motive to go outside. In the absence of any such attitude, however, Brian’s beliefs will not give rise to any motives at all.

Once the second premise is granted the weight of the argument falls on the first. But this premise is unsupported. There is little reason to suppose that moral convictions are practical in the sense given in **P5**. As we have seen, moral convictions can have normative content, can feature distinctively in agents’ practical deliberations, can affect their behaviours in directed ways and can explain their actions, all without being intrinsically motivational. It is hard to see, therefore, in what sense being intrinsically connected to motives adds to their practical import.

It may be argued that an intrinsic connection to motives removes an element of contingency from the motivational effects of moral convictions, for whether or not they motivate is not dependent on some external moral motive, which may be absent. However, **P5** only states that moral convictions *can* be intrinsically motivational, which is to say that *when* they give rise to motives, they do so by themselves. This still leaves it a contingent (and as yet unexplained) matter as to whether or not a particular moral conviction will provide a motive. To remove the contingency requires the claim that moral convictions are *necessarily* connected to motives, that is, that moral convictions are practical in sense **P6**. By itself **P5** fails to remove the contingency.

In the absence of further argument there is no reason to hold that moral convictions are practical in the sense that they can be intrinsically connected to agents’ motives. The fact that moral judgements are practical simply underdetermines whether or not they are so connected. Thus premise **1P5** remains unsupported and the conclusion doesn’t follow.

### *6.2. Sixth argument from practicality*

The sixth argument from practicality results from substituting **P6** into the general schema:

- 1P6.** Moral convictions are necessarily connected to agents’ motives in the way posited by internalism.

- 2p6. No purely descriptively representational state can be necessarily connected to motives in the same way.

Therefore

3. Moral convictions are not purely descriptive representational states.

In this argument, the necessary connection posited by internalism is as follows: that necessarily, if an agent has a moral conviction then she will have the corresponding set of appropriate motives. If moral convictions have this connection, but purely descriptively representational states must lack it, then it follows that moral convictions cannot be purely descriptively representational states.<sup>22</sup>

As before, I shall grant the second premise for the sake of argument. Once again, however, this puts an unbearable weight on the first. For there is little reason to suppose that moral judgements are necessarily connected to motives in this way. As we have seen, moral judgements can have normative content, can play a distinctive ubiquitous (or near-ubiquitous) role in agents’ deliberations, can affect agents’ behaviours in directed ways and can explain their actions, all without being necessarily connected to motives in the way internalism demands. Boatright puts the point succinctly:

[T]he practicality of moral [convictions] surely requires that there must be some element or feature in virtue of which moral [convictions] have the power to affect human behaviour, but there is no reason as yet why it must be a...necessary one.<sup>23</sup>

In the absence of further argument, therefore, there is no reason to hold that moral convictions are practical in the sense posited by internalism. Hence premise **1P<sub>6</sub>** remains unmotivated and the conclusion of the argument doesn't follow.

### *7. A further objection to the fifth and sixth arguments*

If my arguments of §6 are correct it follows that the mere practicality of moral convictions fails to establish them as either intrinsically or necessarily connected to motivation. But the possibility of other arguments for these claims remains. Until all such arguments have been dismissed, my claim that the first premises of the final two arguments for practicality are unsupported must remain provisional. Fortunately, my case against arguments from practicality has another component. In this section I will argue that even if we grant that moral convictions are practical in senses **P5** and **P6**, and therefore grant the conclusions of the final two arguments from practicality, we are no closer to establishing expressivism.

Suppose we accept the conclusion of the sixth argument, namely that moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states. This is compatible with moral convictions being what I shall call *hybrid* states, that is, states with both descriptively representational and directly representational (that is, motivational) content. Furthermore, it is also compatible with the moral content of such states being (a part of) their descriptively representational content and hence compatible with descriptivism. This can be demonstrated with an example.

Consider the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong. If internalism is true then this conviction will be necessarily connected to the set of appropriate motives, that is, to the set of motives with the appropriate directly representational content. Thus, we might say, the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong is sufficient for the set of appropriate motives that include:

- (a) The directly representational state that represents the world so as to be made such that: *One doesn't purchase cosmetics that have been tested in animals*
- (b) The directly representational state that represents the world so as to be made such that: *No one else purchases cosmetics that have been tested on animals.*<sup>24</sup>

One way in which this connection will be maintained is if the moral conviction simply includes as a part this set of motives. Let us suppose that this is so. Then the truth of internalism entails that the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong is partly constituted by the set of appropriate motives that include (a) and (b).

However, this is still compatible with the same conviction having descriptively representational content: *Testing cosmetics on animals is wrong*. As several authors have noted, there is no objection to a single state having both the mind-to-world direction of fit associated with descriptive contents and the world-to-mind direction of fit associated with directive contents so long as these two contents are distinct.<sup>25</sup> This can happen here. In so far as the moral conviction is descriptively representational it can represent that world as being such that: *Testing cosmetics on*

*animals is wrong*. In so far as the same conviction is directly representational it represents the world so as to be made such that: *One doesn't purchase cosmetics tested on animals* (and so on). Since these two contents are distinct, it is possible that they combine in the same conviction whilst attaching to different directions of fit. On this view, moral convictions are hybrid states with a special connection between the two contentful components: for the directly representational content is determined by the descriptively representational content. In this example, the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong is the conviction that both represents the world as being such that certain paths of action (purchasing cosmetics tested on animals) are morally inappropriate and that represents the world as to be made such that no one partakes in those paths of action. This special connection notwithstanding, the descriptive content and directive content are distinct, so the conviction that possesses them both is a possibility.

The claim that moral convictions are such hybrid states is compatible with both premises of the final argument from practicality. In so far as such states involve as an essential component certain motives (directly representational contents) then internalism is satisfied (premise **1<sub>P6</sub>**). In so far as such states are not, by that very fact, purely descriptively representational, premise **2<sub>P6</sub>** is also satisfied. Since the argument is valid, it follows that the conclusion of the argument – that moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states – fails to rule out the possibility that moral convictions are such hybrid states. And since, if moral convictions are such hybrids, their moral content is descriptive content, it follows that the argument fails to rule out the truth of (this version of) descriptivism.

The same point can be made for the fifth argument from practicality. For moral convictions may sometimes include appropriate motives while still having moral content that is descriptive. Again, because the contents of these two elements are distinct, and because there is no reason in general to doubt that states can possess both directions of fit (so long as they attach to distinct contents), there is no reason to deny this possibility. And the fact that the conclusion of the argument fails to rule out this possibility shows that the conclusion cannot help to establish the truth of expressivism.

The moral is this: even accepting that moral convictions have some privileged tie to our motives, it doesn't follow that their moral content is not descriptive content. For a connection with appropriate motives only shows that moral convictions have a distinct, non-moral, directive content. And this is perfectly compatible with them continuing to possess moral descriptive content. Thus even granting their first and second premises, the final two arguments from practicality fail rule out the truth of descriptivism. They thus represent no progress in establishing the truth of expressivism.

#### *8. A Humean Reply*

The above rejection of the final two arguments from practicality relies on the claim that states that represent the world as being some way (descriptive representation) may also represent the world so as to be made another way (directive representation). Since such states are, by that token, not purely descriptively representational, admitting their existence is compatible the second premise of each argument. But this

argumentative move might be considered disingenuous. What the defender of the these arguments had meant to assert, surely, is not that no *purely* descriptively representational state can be connected to motives but that no descriptively representational state *at all* can be connected to motives, that is, no state that involves any descriptive content can also involve directive content. With this as the second premise the final argument becomes:

- 1<sub>P6</sub>.** Moral convictions are necessarily connected to agents’ motives in the way posited by internalism.
- 2\*.** No descriptively representational state can be necessarily connected to motives in the same way.

Therefore

- 3\*.** Moral convictions are not descriptive representational states.

Unlike the previous arguments, the conclusion of this argument is not compatible with the view that the moral content of moral convictions is descriptively content. So it provides a potentially stronger case for expressivism.<sup>26</sup>

Potentially, perhaps. Actually, no. The problem is that no reason has been offered in support of premise 2\*. Why suppose that no descriptively representational state can be necessarily connected to motivation in the way posited by internalism? Hume certainly thought that no belief could be motivationally engaged in this way, a claim that has since been enshrined as one part of the view known as Humean Psychology.

Here is Hume himself:

[R]eason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will...[and] can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately the argument here cannot rely on authority. Furthermore, there are plausible counterexamples to this Humean premise. Milikan has discussed the case of the state of a mother hen responsible for the call to it's chicks: here the mother hen is in a state that both represents the world as being one in which there is food around (descriptive representation) and represents the world as being so as to be made that her chicks come and eat it (directive representation) – the latter providing a connection to motives. Thus premise 2\* is false and the conclusion doesn't follow.<sup>28</sup>

Before this line of argument is given up too quickly, however, it is worth considering another possible expressivist defence. For the expressivist might accept that although being distinct from any motivational (directively representational) element is not definitive of *all* descriptively representational states, it is nevertheless definitive of the distinct type of representational states that exist in mature

deliberating humans. After all, Humean Psychology, of which Premise **2\*** is a part, arises from an examination of the nature of agency, the paradigm cases of which are mature deliberating humans. It is natural to think, therefore, that the condition on descriptively representational states on which Humean Psychology insists (namely their disconnectedness from motivation) applies first and foremost (and perhaps only) to the states of mature deliberating agents. If this is the case then the expressivist might be able to bypass the example of the hen’s call to its chicks through utilising the following argument:

- 1<sub>P6</sub>**. Moral convictions are necessarily connected to agents’ motives in the way posited by internalism.
- 2\*\***. No descriptively representational state possessed by a mature deliberating agent is necessarily connected to motives in the same way.
- S**. Moral convictions are states of mature deliberating agents.

Therefore

- 3\***. Moral convictions are not descriptively representational states.

The problem with this argument is with the second premise (Premise **2\*\***). There are indeed two generally recognised ways in which the descriptively representational states of organisms can determine their actions: according to former (the one at work in the example of the hen’s call to her chicks) descriptively representational states are necessarily connected to motivations; according to the latter (the one at work in most human cases) they are not. It is also the case that in mature deliberating humans, the

latter mechanism is generally at work. But it doesn't follow that that this is always the case, that is, it doesn't follow that  $2^{**}$  is true. I will argue these points in turn.

(i) The first point is best made with a bit of evolutionary background. Individuals who hope to thrive in an environment will need to have some way of acquiring information about that environment. Through evolutionary selection, all species have been equipped with systems that allow them to this, for example, visual systems such as the human eye and photosensitive cells. These systems fulfil their evolutionary function when they produce descriptively representational states, that is, states that represent the world as being thus and so, thus enabling individuals of that species to guide themselves through their environment.

The ultimate evolutionary aim of these systems is to aid reproductive success, but there is more than one way in which the products of these systems can be used to further this aim.

In the simplest case, the descriptively representational states produce actions that directly address the biological needs of the individual, that is to say, the content of the descriptively representational states is processed (that is, connected to action) in such a way as to produce actions that will aid the individuals reproductive success, given that the descriptive representation is accurate. A case involving bees will illustrate. The antennae of honeybees are (among other things) sensitive to the presence of oleic acid, a chemical they come across most commonly when it is given off by decaying honeybee corpses. The state of the antenna when it detects this acid causes the bees to remove the source of the acid from the hive.<sup>29</sup> The connection between the descriptively representational state of the antenna and the action it

prompts, however, is *hard-wired* in the sense that there is no possibility – given the actual constitution of the bee – of the information provided by the descriptively representational state being used to produce other actions: where the bees sense oleic acid, they will remove its source. (This can provide for tragic circumstances – for example, honeybees will remove a bee tainted with oleic acid even if it is still patently alive.) Furthermore, that this particular action, and no other, is hard-wired is because it is this action that will (most) aid the reproductive success of the honeybees. So the bees use their descriptively representational states produced by their antennae in a very direct way: they are translated directly into those specific actions what will aid reproductive success, given that the descriptively representational state describes accurately. Biologists label such behaviour ‘sphexish’, after a genus of digger wasp that provides another common example.

There is, however, a more complicated way in which individuals can use their descriptively representational states in ways that will further their reproductive success. On this model, the behaviours which descriptively representational states prompt are determined, not by a hard-wiring of responses aimed at fulfilling the individuals’ biological needs, but by the particular motives (directively representational states) present in the individual, where an individual’s particular motivations correlate reasonably well (but not infallibly) with the individual’s biological needs. On this system of action production, there is no reproduction-aiding hard-wired behaviour associated with each type of descriptively representational state; rather, descriptively representational states produce actions that satisfy the particular motives they are coupled with, under the proviso that those motivations are generally (though not always) commensurate with the basic biological needs of the individual.

In short, the same descriptively representational state can serve the aims of different motivations. (Recall Hume’s ‘slave of the passions’ metaphor.) An imaginary case of a hyper-intelligent bee will illustrate this sort of mechanism. Suppose the hyper-intelligent bee has visual mechanisms for producing descriptive representations concerning the location of nectar. For hyper-intelligent bees, there is no direct hard-wired connection between such states and any particular behaviour. Rather, the action that the descriptively representational state will prompt is determined by the peculiar motivations of the particular hyper-intelligent bee. If the bee is motivated to (desires to) help the gathering of nectar, then he will ‘dance’, thus helping other bees locate and harvest the nectar. If the bee is motivated otherwise – for example, to ignore the nectar, perhaps because the hive is full – then no such dancing will result. So the hyper-intelligent bee translates his descriptively representational states into action only through the medium of his particular motivations, where these motivations generally (but not infallibly) track his biological needs.<sup>30</sup>

There are no doubt evolutionary advantages and disadvantages to each of these action-producing mechanisms, but importantly for our purposes these two different ways in which descriptively representational states may be processed into action have different consequences for the motivational engagement of such states. In the first case – the honeybee case – the descriptively representational states are necessarily connected to a corresponding motivation, the connection between them having been determined by selective pressures. In the second case – the hyper-intelligent bee case – there is no necessary connection between any descriptively representational state and any particular motive. In the first case, therefore,

descriptively representational states are motivationally engaged. In the second case, they are motivationally detached.

(ii) The second point is that the latter, more sophisticated mechanism is generally at work in the case of mature deliberating humans. When it comes to their action-guiding mechanisms, mature humans are hyper-intelligent bees. That is, mature humans typically use their descriptively representational states to guide their actions only through combining them with distinct, contingently present, motivations: in their case, desires. This claim can be empirically supported: if mature human actions were not generated in this way, then we would behave differently from the ways we know we do behave. For example, if human behaviours were hard-wired then the same descriptively representational state would always lead to the same behaviour, which we know not to be the case.

But from these two points it doesn't follow that *all* the descriptively representational states of mature deliberating humans are necessarily detached from motivations in the way asserted in premise 2\*\*. For the possibility remains that some of our descriptively representational states are, like the descriptively representational states of the honeybee, necessarily connected to motivations (directive representations). Moral convictions are good candidates for such states. To put the point another way, though it might be the case that our 'mature' deliberative systems fit the second, sophisticated model – and hence that the descriptively representational states that partake in such a system are necessarily detached from motivations – it doesn't follow that all our descriptively representational states partake in such a

system. It remains a possibility that our mature deliberative system works alongside a sphexish motivational system that employs a different workforce of (motivationally engaged) descriptively representational states. It follows that premise 2\*\* is false and the expressivist conclusion doesn't follow.

In this context it is interesting to consider Lewis' argument against the possibility of states that are descriptively representational and yet necessarily connected to motivation – so-called 'besires'.<sup>31</sup> Lewis argues that the existence of such states is incompatible with decision theory, which is a '...well worked-out formal theory of belief, desire, and what it means to serve our desires according to our beliefs' and is 'surely...fundamentally right'.<sup>32</sup> The problem with this argument is that it may well be that besires cannot be part of any deliberative process that is modelled by decision theory, but this simply goes to show that besires, if they exist, are not part of the deliberative processes of mature agents that are modelled by such a theory. Such a conclusion fails to rule out the possibility of besires – it merely restricts the roles they *could* play. The preceding argument has the same form: it may well be that moral convictions (considered as descriptive states necessarily connected to appropriate motivations) cannot be part of any deliberative process that fits the sophisticated model exemplified by hyper-intelligent bees. But this simply goes to show that moral convictions, if they exist, are not part of the human deliberative process that is modelled in this way. It is for this reason that restricting the condition of motivational detachment to just those descriptively representational states involved in the mature deliberative systems of humans provides no support for expressivism. The problem is that it remains an open question whether or not moral convictions are

part of such a system. Lewis’ argument fails in a similar way: it remains an open question whether desires are part of the system modelled by decision theory.

To summarise this section. The Humean condition on the nature of descriptively representational states (premise 2\*) fails – in conjunction with the thesis of internalism – to provide a convincing argument for expressivism because it is false. Furthermore although the Humean theory is more plausibly true of some subset of the descriptively representational states that are part of the deliberative processes of mature humans, there can be no guarantee that moral convictions are part of this class. It follows that there can be no argument for expressivism that employs both the thesis of internalism and a plausible version of the Humean view of descriptively representational states. Once again, considerations of the practicality of moral convictions have failed to advance the case for expressivism.

### *9. Conclusion*

There is a long history of arguments for expressivism, from Hume onwards, based on the alleged practicality of moral judgements and the states of mind they express. I have argued that there is no sense of ‘practicality’ that can do the job. Where claims of practicality are innocuous they fail to support expressivism. Where they seem to provide the prospect of supporting expressivism they are no longer innocuous. Furthermore on closer examination the final two senses of practicality do not even provide the prospect of supporting expressivism, since accepting that moral convictions are practical in these ways is compatible with descriptivism properly understood. In addition, Humean Psychology provides no reason to think otherwise.

What then, of the prospects for expressivist accounts of moral judgements? Although I have endeavoured to consider as many senses of practicality as possible it remains a possibility that there is sense that will make the expressivist argument work. Perhaps the expressivist could demarcate such a sense, but the history of unsuccessful attempts to do so makes the prospects look bleak.

Yet there is an alternative path for the expressivist who accepts my arguments. At various points in those arguments, I have appealed to the fact that *absent a general theory of descriptive representation* – that is, a theory of what can and cannot be represented to be the case – there is no reason to think that our moral convictions cannot represent the world in ways that also make those convictions practical. The recurring nature of this fault is indicative of the way expressivists have tended to approach arguments from practicality: namely by assuming some condition on descriptively representational states (for example the Humean condition) and then arguing that moral convictions cannot satisfy it. Perhaps, then, expressivists would do better to approach these issues in a more systematic way by first addressing the issue of the nature of descriptive representation in general before ascertaining whether this issue, once settled, can generate successful arguments for their position. Such work may well precipitate a significant, though welcome, shift in the accepted motivations for expressivism.

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<sup>1</sup> A.J. Ayer, “The Analysis of Moral Judgements,” *Horizon* 20 (1949); J.O. Urmson, *The Emotive Theory of Ethics* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), 19-23; Charles Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms,” *Mind* 46 (1937); Richard Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 28-31, 83-93 and 170-2; P. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1957), 36-43; Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 187-9 and *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 70 and Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) ch.6.

<sup>2</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>3</sup> S. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 167 and *Ruling Passions*, 48-51; A. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 75.

<sup>4</sup> Terminology from Ruth G. Milikan, “Pushmi-Pullyou Representations,” in *Philosophical Perspectives IX*, ed. J. Tomberlin (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Being descriptively and directly representational are not the only ways in which a state can be representational. See David Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) ch.11.

<sup>6</sup> The tradition originates with G.E.M Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 56. See also Lloyd Humberstone, “Direction of Fit,” in *Mind* 101 (1992).

<sup>7</sup> See Stevenson, *Facts and Values*, 59, Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 75, and Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, 8-14.

<sup>8</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), §3.1.1. See also *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1777), §1.

<sup>9</sup> Shafer-Landau and Snare are two authors who miss this point. Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism*, 121) presents the argument as follows: ‘(1) Necessarily, if one sincerely judges an action right, then one is motivated...in accordance with that judgement (2) When taken by themselves, beliefs neither motivate nor generate any motivationally efficacious states (3) Therefore, moral judgements are not beliefs.’ But the only valid conclusion is that moral judgements are not beliefs *taken by themselves*, that is, not only beliefs. This is compatible with descriptivism as I have defined it. Snare (“The Argument from Motivation,” *Mind* 84 (1975)) presents a valid argument but fails to realise that its conclusion (that moral judgements are not ‘simply’ what he calls ‘reason-judgements’) is compatible with descriptivism.

<sup>10</sup> Snare, “The Argument From Motivation”, 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Blackburn, “Moral Realism,” in *Morality and Moral Reasoning*, ed. J. Casey (London: Methuen, 1973), 113.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 153-62. Jackson prefers to cash out this sense of *directedness* in terms of the doctrine of internalism, which I discuss below (§§4-5).

<sup>13</sup> Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,” *Philosophical Review* 81 (1972) and “Are Moral Considerations Overriding?,” in her *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> The notion of a ‘point of view’ is intended in the following sense: to say that a particular action is recommended from a particular point of view, say, the moral point of view, is just to say that in the context there are considerations that can be usefully marked out as moral that recommend that course of action (see R.D. Milo, “Moral Indifference,” *The Monist* 64 (1981), 385-7). Such a view is not committed to any particular account of what marks out the particular type of consideration in question, nor that there is even a context-independent way in which moral considerations can be so distinguished: see Joseph Raz, “The Moral Point of View,” in *Reason, Ethics and Society*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Peru, IL: Open-Court, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> “If the ethical term is understood to be normative, then it does not merely describe...and if it does merely describe...then it is not normative so no longer does the work that ethical terms are supposed to do.” - Ayer, “The Analysis of Moral Judgements”, 240.

<sup>16</sup> Hare, *The Language of Morals*, 28-31 & 83-93 and Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Railton, “Moral Realism”, 202.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Wedgwood, “Conceptual Role Semantics for Moral Terms,” *Philosophical Review* 110 (2001).

<sup>19</sup> Smith, “The Humean Theory of Motivation”.

<sup>20</sup> Internalists include Blackburn (*Spreading the Word, Ruling Passions*), McDowell (“Values and Secondary Properties”, in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) and Nagel (*The Possibility of Altruism*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970). One important part of my formulation of internalism, that distinguishes it from most of the authors mentioned here, is that it draws a connection between *moral convictions* (that is, the states that moral judgements *express*) and appropriate motivation, rather than between moral judgements themselves and appropriate motivation. This is an advantage. Note that it doesn’t follow that an agent who makes a moral judgement has the moral conviction that that judgement is taken to express. This is because meaning is conventionally determined, so that an agent can (perhaps with no intention to deceive) use a form of words without actually possessing that state of mind that that form of words is conventionally determined to convey (this is why people can be told what they mean). Thus even if a necessary connection between *having* moral convictions and appropriate motivation is plausible, it doesn’t follow that the same sort of necessary connection between *expressing* moral convictions (that is, making moral

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judgements) and appropriate motivation is also plausible – if only because the connection between *expressing* and *having* a moral conviction is not straightforward (see Richard Joyce, “Expressivism and Motivational Internalism,” *Analysis* 62 (2002) for a similar conclusion).

<sup>21</sup> Blackburn (*Ruling Passions*) holds the former view, Smith (*The Moral Problem*) the latter.

<sup>22</sup> This argument appears in Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms” and Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 188-9

<sup>23</sup> J. Boatright, “The Practicality of Moral Judgements,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1973), 320.

<sup>24</sup> I shall assume that the complete set of such motives is determined by one’s answer to the ‘moral attitude problem’. See note [??].

<sup>25</sup> Huw Price, “Truth and the Nature of Assertion,” *Mind* 96 (1989), §1 and Lillehammer, “Moral Cognitivism”, 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps too strong, since the conclusion of this argument is incompatible with the claim that moral convictions ever involve a descriptively representational element, even one whose content can be captured in non-moral terms. Yet some expressivists have wanted to assert this (see Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 169-170, “Morality and Thick Concepts,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 66 (1992) and Allan Gibbard, “Morality and Thick Concepts” in the same volume). I shall assume for the sake of argument that expressivists can avoid this problem.

<sup>27</sup> Hume, *Treatise* §2.3.3. A precursor to Hume’s point can be found in writings of Descartes, who pictured reason as a mere ‘fountain keeper’ directing the flowing water of the passions – see J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 101.

<sup>28</sup> Shafer-Landau (*Moral Realism*, 122-7) also rejects the Humean premise, but uses moral convictions as a counter-example. Milikan’s argument (“Pushmi-Pullyou Representations”) has the advantage that it shows the Humean premise to be implausible independently of the very issue at hand.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (London: Phoenix, 1995), 76.

<sup>30</sup> The discussion of the previous two paragraphs owes much to David Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) ch.3 §4.

<sup>31</sup> J.E.J. Altham, “The Legacy of Emotivism,” in *Fact, Science and Morality*, ed. G. MacDonald and C. Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)

<sup>32</sup> David Lewis, “Desire as Belief,” *Mind* 97 (1988), 325.