

THE SUBJECTIVIST CONSEQUENCES OF EXPRESSIVISM

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1. Introduction

According to Russ Shafer-Landau's definition, 'Ethical [S]ubjectivism ... is the theory that (i) an action is right just in case the one who judges the action approves of it, and (ii) a moral judgement is true just in case it accurately reports the sentiments of the one who holds such a judgement.'¹ This means that Ethical Subjectivism is in fact a combination of two distinct claims. I will call the claim (i) 'Normative Subjectivism' and the claim (ii) 'Metaethical Subjectivism'.²

Almost everyone agrees that Metaethical Subjectivism is untenable.³ It claims that our moral utterances report our approvals or disapprovals. So, if I utter the sentence 'φing is wrong', I make an assertion about my own attitudes. I claim that I disapprove of φing. If I really do disapprove of φing, then it follows from this that it is true that φing is wrong.

Metaethical Subjectivism thus entails a view in normative ethics which I call Normative Subjectivism. According to it, all and only the acts that I approve of are right, all and only the acts that I disapprove of are wrong, and so on.⁴ Normative Subjectivism, in contrast, does not entail Metaethical Subjectivism. It could be true

¹ See R. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18.

² Horgan and Timmons call this version of subjectivism a form of conceptual relativism (see T. Horgan and M. Timmons, "Expressivism, Yes! Relativism, No!" *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 1 (2006), 78–9). Note that this form of normative relativism can still issue categorical normative implications. On this view, φing is wrong *for everyone* if and only if I disapprove of φing. There is an alternative version of subjectivism according to which φing is wrong *only for the agent* if and only if she disapproves of φing (see P. Bloomfield, "Is There Moral High Ground?" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41 (2003), 514).

³ But, see, e.g., T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ch. 6, and J. Prinz, "The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments," *Philosophical Explorations* 9 (2006): 29–43.

⁴ One could also call this view ethical internalism or wrongness-internalism restricted to the first-person perspective. In the theory of practical reasons, there is an analogical view often called reasons-internalism according to which there is a reason for an agent to do some act if and only if the agent would be motivated to do the action if she deliberated rationally from her pre-existing motivations. See B. Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101–21. I want to avoid the internalism label as there are already too many views under it.

even if Moorean non-naturalist realism were the true metaethical theory. This would be the case if being disapproved of were the quality of actions in virtue of which they have the independently existing, *sui generis* moral property of wrongness.

The problems of both these views are familiar. For one, if Metaethical Subjectivism is true, it is questionable whether there could be any real moral disagreements. When talking about the wrongness of an act, I would be talking about my attitudes whereas you would be talking about yours. As a result, we would not be talking about the same issue but rather past one another.

Furthermore, if Metaethical Subjectivism were true, our moral claims would be almost infallibly true. If we consider our own attitudes, we are rarely mistaken about whether we happen to disapprove of something or not. If our moral claims were about whether we have these attitudes (and we were aware of this), our chance of making a false judgment about whether some action is wrong would be equally small.

Finally, because Normative Subjectivism is so implausible, it seems to provide a good reason to reject Metaethical Subjectivism from which it follows. It is difficult to accept that there could be any sort of dependency-relation between my sentiments and the wrongness of actions (or even a perfect match between the two). Such a relation would seem to obtain if it were the case that acts were wrong only if I disapproved of them. Yet, coming to disapprove of an action does not seem to be able to bring it about that the action is wrong in the way that is implied by Normative Subjectivism.

Expressivism seems to be a more plausible view.⁵ According to it, we are not reporting our pro and con attitudes when we make moral claims. Rather, we express them in a way that we could also do by uttering ‘Hooray that!’ or ‘Boo that!’⁶ As a result, moral claims are not truth-apt just as the previous exclamations cannot be true or

⁵ The key expressivist texts include S. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), and *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and A. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), and *Thinking How to Live* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁶ See A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1946, 2nd ed.), 104, and C. Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms,” *Mind* 46 (1937): 14–31. Modern expressivists think that the expressed attitudes are more complex than mere approval and disapproval. In Gibbard’s *Wise Choices*, the relevant attitudes are acceptances of norms determining the rationality of reactive attitudes like guilt. In his *Thinking How to Live*, the relevant attitudes are sets of contingency plans. For Blackburn, the expressed attitudes are sets of attitudes that include approving of and disapproving of moral sensitivities (see *Spreading the Word*, 192–3).

false. The meaning of moral utterances thus consists of their use for projecting our positive and negative attitudes to the world.

This view is supposed to avoid the problems of the two forms of subjectivism. Conflicting moral claims manifest conflicts in attitude rather than those of opinion.⁷ In moral disagreements, we do not hold conflicting beliefs but instead we are for and against different actions. This is similar to the disagreements we can have when we plan which film to see tonight.

The expressivist can also make sense of our fallibility. Our claims about possible errors express the thought that our attitudes may not be the ones a person with the moral attitudes which we approve of would have.⁸ Finally, saying that some action is wrong only if I disapprove of it communicates to others that I do not disapprove of that action if it is done in the counterfactual circumstances in which I have different moral attitudes. But, the expressivist can insist that I can (now) disapprove of the action even when it is done in those circumstances. To express this disapproval, I will deny that the action is wrong only if I disapprove of it and say that its wrongness does not depend on my attitudes.⁹

For expressivism to be able to avoid the pitfalls of subjectivism, it is crucial that the view differs from subjectivism in the relevant respects. Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit have argued that expressivism collapses into subjectivism.¹⁰ According to Michael Smith, Daniel Stoljar, James Dreier, and Michael Ridge, that

⁷ See Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning," 26–7. Jackson and Pettit argue that this way of accounting for the disagreements is available for subjectivists. See F. Jackson & P. Pettit, "A Problem for Expressivism," *Analysis* 58 (1998), 239–51, esp. sec. 6, and F. Jackson, "The Argument from the Persistence of Moral Disagreement," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3 (2008), 75–86. Schroeder argues that this does not solve the hard disagreement problem according to which we are able to disagree with someone's moral claim by saying 'that is false'. However, in the subjectivist framework this isn't possible, because what others say is literally true even if we disagree in attitude. See Mark Schroeder, "Expression for Expressivists," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76 (2008), 86–116.

⁸ See Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 197–202, and N. Sinclair, "Free Thinking for Expressivists," *Philosophical Papers* 37 (2008), 263–287, esp. sec. 3.

⁹ See Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 217–20.

¹⁰ See Jackson & Pettit, "A Problem for Expressivism," and F. Jackson and P. Pettit, "Locke, Expressivism, Conditionals," *Analysis* 63 (2003), 86–92. A resembling argument based on modal logic can be found from C. Peacocke, *The Realm of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), ch. 7. For a reply to this argument, see S. Blackburn, "Must We Weep for Sentimentalism?" in J. Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 144–59.

argument fails.¹¹ I will begin from the Jackson-Pettit argument and the objections to it. I will then argue that there is a resembling argument to which the same replies cannot be given.¹² The subjectivism which will result will be more modest than the result of the Jackson-Pettit argument but still problematic for the expressivist.

2. The Jackson-Pettit Argument

The argument by Jackson and Pettit begins from the premise that we have agreed to use the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ only when we disapprove of ϕ ing.¹³ Agreements of this kind give meaning for statements made by using ethical sentences. Thus, when we acquire ethical language, we enter an agreement to act in this way. All of this seems acceptable even for the expressivist.

In doing our part of the described agreement, we must believe that we disapprove of ϕ ing when we sincerely use the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’. Jackson and Pettit then assume that this fact is sufficient for generating truth-conditions for the claim ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’. That claim is true when the necessary belief about our own disapproval of ϕ ing is true and false otherwise, or so they argue. If this is right, then the distinction between expressivism and subjectivism collapses. The moral utterances cannot help but to report the expressed attitudes.

The critics claim that, as it stands, this argument is too quick to succeed. Ridge points out that the argument must contain a hidden premise according to which ‘if a belief that p is necessary for the sincerity of an utterance, then the utterance is true if and only if p .’¹⁴ However, this premise is simply false. That I *sincerely* assert that ‘grass is green’ may require that I believe that I believe that grass is green but the truth-conditions of that higher-order belief do not provide the truth-conditions of my original assertion. They are given by the greenness of grass. If the hidden premise is false, the Jackson-Pettit argument cannot be sound if it is made valid.

¹¹ See M. Smith & D. Stoljar, “Is There a Lockean Argument against Expressivism?” *Analysis* 63 (2003), 76–86; J. Dreier, “Lockean and Logical Truth Conditions,” *Analysis* 64 (2004), 84–91; and M. Ridge, “Sincerity and Expressivism,” *Philosophical Studies* 131 (2006), 487–510.

¹² Arguments of the same type are proposed in both Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 31–33, and in Bloomfield, “Moral High Ground”. Their arguments, however, are centred on the expressivist’s understanding of the talk about moral truth. My argument does not rely on any notion of truth.

¹³ This argument was first formulated in Jackson & Pettit, “A Problem for Expressivism,” 241–2, and then clarified in Jackson & Pettit, “Locke, Expressivism Conditionals” sections 1 and 2.

¹⁴ See Ridge, “Sincerity,” sec. 4.

Smith and Stoljar similarly claim that even if we have agreed to use moral sentences *when* we believe we are in the right states of approval or disapproval, it does not follow that the agreement is to use moral sentences *for* reporting that we are in those states.¹⁵ This means that the conventional requirement for having those beliefs about our attitudes when making moral assertions does not entail that our attitudes of approval and disapproval function as the truth-makers of the moral claims.¹⁶ And, if this is the case, then the expressivist can deny that the requirement for having the beliefs about the expressed attitudes lead to subjectivist truth-conditions of moral claims.

Finally, Dreier argues that Jackson and Pettit fail to show that moral claims, as understood by the expressivists, would have real, robust truth-conditions based on the attitudes of the speaker.¹⁷ He admits that the argument is right in arguing that moral claims have assertibility-conditions (based on the beliefs about the attitudes), which we can call ‘esoteric truth-conditions’. Such assertibility-conditions also exist for demands like ‘Open the Door!’. One can correctly assert such a demand only if one is in a position to command someone and willing to do so.

However, these conditions do not serve the same logical and inferential role as ordinary truth-conditions to which the argument above tries to tie the expressivist. From the utterance of the imperative ‘Open the door!’, we cannot in ordinary logic validly infer that ‘Therefore, I have commanded something.’ This inference would be formally valid if the assertibility-condition for the imperative – that I am commanding something – is understood as its real truth-condition. The utterance of the premise would strictly imply the conclusion which as a result should be trivially true. Dreier points out that, because the inference is not valid (it’s hardly even an inference), the assertibility-condition cannot be the real truth-condition of the imperative.

This means that the expressivist can accept that moral claims have assertibility-conditions based on the attitudes of the speakers. However, she can resist the idea that these conditions provide the real truth-conditions for the moral utterances. This is shown by the fact that, if the assertibility-conditions were real truth-conditions, inferences like ‘Abortion is wrong; Therefore, I have at least one moral attitude’ would again be formally valid. Given that this is not

¹⁵ See Smith & Stoljar, “A Lockean Argument,” sec. 2.

¹⁶ In response, Jackson and Pettit claim that an agreement to use a term when one has a certain belief has to be an agreement to use the term for whatever is the content of that belief (Jackson & Pettit, “Locke, Expressivism,” 88–9).

¹⁷ See Dreier, “Lockean and Logical”.

the case, the assertibility-conditions do not commit the expressivist to accepting that moral utterances thereby have robust attitude-based truth-conditions. The distinction between subjectivism and expressivism can then be put in term of what kind of truth-conditions they claim moral utterances have – mere assertibility-conditions or more robust truth-conditions.

These replies to the Jackson-Pettit argument all seem plausible. However, I still believe that a subjectivist conclusion can be reached from the expressivist framework. My own argument to this conclusion will not rely on the hidden premise revealed by Ridge. It is also neutral about what moral sentences are *used for*, and it does not try to commit the expressivist to any kind of truth-conditions. This means that replies above will not help the expressivist to avoid the subjectivist consequences of her view.

3. The New Argument

There are many standards which guide our practice of making statements by uttering declarative sentences. This is revealed by the fact that our statements can be criticised on different grounds. On occasion, for instance, we can say that a statement made by someone was impolite or uninformative. Yet, on these grounds, we can also criticise other communicative actions like commands and gestures.

However, there are additional standards for specifically assessing statements that apply to statements merely *because* they are statements. These standards do not apply to other communicative actions. Thus, some statements are incorrect *qua* being statements irrespective of what other assessments we could make about the way in which the statement was used in communication.¹⁸

If there are such fundamental standards for assessing statements *qua* statements, then some statements must be correct and others incorrect as statements. It is widely accepted that these standards of correctness play a constitutive role in determining the meaning of the statements they govern. Thus, I will begin my argument from the premise: a necessary and sufficient requirement for a statement (of some sentence) to have meaning is the existence of norms which determine when the sentence can be correctly used to make statements.¹⁹

¹⁸ The previous paragraphs draw heavily from R. Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 47–9.

¹⁹ See, e.g., P. Strawson, “On Referring,” *Mind* 59 (1950), 327–8; S. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982); and D. Whiting, “The Normativity of Meaning Defended,” *Analysis* 67 (2007), 133–40.

It is worth noting that this premise has been explicitly accepted by the most prominent expressivists Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard.²⁰ Furthermore, if the expressivist rejects this premise, this would mean that she would have to defend some other global theory of meaning which is both independently plausible and compatible with the expressivist semantics of moral statements.

Let us then stipulate that, whenever a sentence is correctly used to make a statement according to the norms introduced above (whatever they happen to be), the statement receives a ‘positive semantic evaluation’.²¹ This phrase should be understood as a mere placeholder for being such as to satisfy the relevant norms of correct assertion. In all other situations, the statements made using the same sentence receive a ‘negative semantic evaluation’.

It is worth noting that the statements which receive negative semantic evaluations are just as *meaningful* as the ones that receive positive semantic evaluations. Their meaningfulness is guaranteed by the same norms that determine when the sentence could have been used correctly (even if in fact it was not so used). The difference is that when a statement receives a negative semantic evaluation the relevant sentence is used incorrectly.

We can then give necessary and sufficient conditions for the correct use of a sentence in terms of when the statements of the sentence receive a positive semantic evaluation. This is possible with *empty and trivial* material biconditionals such as:

- (i) Grass is green if and only if the statements made by using the sentence ‘grass is green’ would receive a positive semantic evaluation.

Here, on the left side, I *use* the sentence ‘grass is green’ (even if I don’t use it to assert that grass is green). In asserting the whole biconditional, I am claiming that I can use this sentence (as I have just done) only and always when the sentence, as *mentioned* on the right side, could be used to make statements which would receive positive semantic evaluations. Given that ‘positive semantic evaluation’ is a mere placeholder for being such as to satisfy the relevant norms of correct use for making statements, all that (i) claims is that one can correctly use the given sentence (as I just did) when one is able to correctly use it to make statements.²² No substantive proposal is yet

²⁰ See S. Blackburn, “The Individual Strikes Back,” *Synthese* 58 (1984), 281–301, and A. Gibbard, “Meaning and Normativity,” in E. Villanueva (ed.), *Truth and Rationality* (Ascadero, Ca.: Ridgeview, 1994), 95–115.

²¹ I borrow this term from Dan Boisvert’s work in progress.

²² To deny (i) [i.e., to say either (a) that grass is green if and only if the sentence ‘grass is green’ does not receive a positive semantic evaluation, or (b) that grass is

made about when one could use this sentence correctly. This is why (i) is empty and trivially true.

Many accept that ordinary declarative sentences can be correctly used to make statements only and always when the relevant statements would be *true*, i.e., when they would correspond to the facts.²³ Thus, the following holds:

- (ii) The statements made by using the sentence ‘grass is green’ would receive a positive semantic evaluation if and only if the sentence ‘grass is green’ is true.
- (i) and (ii) together entail, by the transitivity of biconditionals, that
- (iii) Grass is green if and only if the sentence ‘grass is green’ is true.

This result is reassuring because all such non-paradoxical and non-indexical instances of the T-Schema should be trivially true.

In order for moral statements to have some meaning (which they have), there must also be some norms that determine when moral sentences can be used correctly. Otherwise moral statements would be mere ‘sounding off’.²⁴ We must therefore be able to formulate the corresponding necessary and sufficient conditions for the correct use of moral sentences in terms of when the statements made by using these sentences would receive positive semantic evaluations. We can do this by beginning, again, from the following empty and trivial biconditional which resembles the biconditional (i) above:

- (iv) ϕ ing is wrong if and only if I can now use the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ to make a statement that receives a positive semantic evaluation.²⁵

not green if and only if the sentence receives a positive semantic evaluation] would therefore be to propose that one could correctly use this sentence to make a statement when it is not correct to do so (see endnote 26 below). This seems inconsistent rather than merely being the sort of Moorean inconsistency involved in thinking either (c) that P and thinking that one does not think that P, or (d) that not-P and thinking that one thinks that P.

²³ This norm is defended in M. Weiner, “Must We Know What We Say?” *Philosophical Review* 114 (2005), 227–51.

²⁴ This quote is from J. McDowell, *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 201.

²⁵ When the moral sentence is used on the left in the embedded context, it no longer makes the statement ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’. Similarly, when I say that ‘if moon is cheese, then pigs fly’, I do not claim that moon is cheese. In addition, the modern quasi-realists cannot in principle object to moral sentences being embedded in contexts that appear truth-functional. A part of the quasi-realist project is to provide an account of these contexts that is compatible with expressivism. See Blackburn, *Quasi-Realism*, essay 10.

As before, here I begin by using the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’. In asserting the whole biconditional, I claim that I can correctly use this sentence (as I have just done) if and only if I am now in a situation in which the statement which I could make by using this sentence would receive a positive semantic evaluation. Given that a sentence receives a positive semantic evaluation just when it is correctly used to make an assertion, all that (iv) claims is that I can now use this moral sentence correctly if and only if I could now use it correctly. Denying this would again be inconsistent.²⁶ It is important to note that nothing has been said so far about when the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ receives a positive semantic evaluation – whether this is when the sentence is true or when the sentence satisfies some weaker epistemic condition.

There is one significant difference between (i) and (iv). Whilst (i) concerns the statements using the sentence ‘grass is green’ in general, (iv) only concerns the statements *I* could make *now* by using the sentence. This avoids the problems caused by the possibility that moral sentences might include hidden indexicals.²⁷ Thus, it is not true that I am here (that is, the author of this article is where he really was writing the article) if and only if the sentence ‘I am here’ can be used to make statements that receive positive semantic evaluations. You can use the sentence correctly even when I am no longer here. Yet, it is true that I am here if and only if I could now use the sentence ‘I am here’ to make a statement that receives a positive semantic evaluation.

²⁶ To deny (iv) would be to think that it could be correct to claim either that (a) [ϕ ing is wrong and I could not now use the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ to make a statement that would receive a positive semantic evaluation], or that (b) [ϕ ing is not wrong and I could use now the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ to make a statement that would receive a positive semantic evaluation]. However, one could claim that (a) only when it could be correct to assert that ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ in these circumstances in which that statement would not receive a positive semantic evaluation (i.e., when it could not be correctly asserted). Likewise, one could claim that (b) only when it would be correct to assert the negation of ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ in the circumstances in which the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ would be correct to assert. This too would lead to a contradiction. For this reason, it does not seem to be coherent to accept either (a) or (b), so the denial of (iv) seems to be inconsistent.

However, it could be that, even if the expressivist cannot deny an instance of (iv), she can deny a conjunction of two instances. Expressivists accept the law of the excluded middle (that either ϕ ing is wrong or not wrong). Take then an undecided expressivist who neither disapproves nor does not definitively not disapprove of ϕ ing. She won’t deny any instance of (iv), but she will still think that either ϕ ing is wrong (but she does not disapprove of ϕ ing) or ϕ ing is not wrong (but she does not not disapprove of ϕ ing). This response is available for the expressivist if there are moral issues about which she hasn’t made up her mind..

²⁷ See, e.g., G. Harman, “Moral Relativism Defended,” *Philosophical Review* 84 (1975), 3–22.

Thus, even if moral sentences contained hidden indexicals, (iv) would still hold.

According to the expressivist, there is a fundamental difference between the norms that govern the use of moral sentences and the norms that govern the use of other declarative sentences. Unlike the other norms, the norms for the correct use of moral sentences cannot be based on the truth of these sentences as correspondence to some moral facts. Moral sentences do not aim at truth and so their semantic success cannot consist of this. Rather, according to the expressivist, moral sentences are correctly used when they successfully express approval or disapproval.²⁸ This is their fundamental purpose and what their meaning allegedly wholly consists of. The expressed attitudes of approval and disapproval essentially differ from beliefs in their direction of fit. They aim at changing the world instead of describing it.

Now, it seems obvious that, even on this view, *only sincere* uses of moral sentences can be semantically successful. If the correct use of moral sentences is a matter of the speaker expressing what she approves and disapproves of, then insincere uses which fail to express the speaker's attitudes cannot satisfy the norms of correct use.²⁹ Sincere uses of moral sentences, and only those, must then receive a positive semantic evaluation. As a result, the following biconditional must hold:

- (v) I can now use the sentence 'ϕing is wrong' to make a statement that receives a positive semantic evaluation if and only if I can now sincerely assert the sentence 'ϕing is wrong'.³⁰

²⁸ In effect, this is the same premise as Jackson's and Pettit's. See Jackson & Pettit, "A Problem for Expressivism". That it is correct to make a moral utterance to express approval or disapproval would be based on our agreement to use moral terms when we approve or disapprove of something and want to express these attitudes to others. It also corresponds to premise (3) in Horgan and Timmons's argument (see Horgan and Timmons, "Expressivism, Yes!", 85).

²⁹ Schroeder agrees that according to our pre-theoretical intuitions about expression, one can only express attitudes one has. See Schroeder, "Expression," 99. He also argues that understanding expressivism to be an account of the assertability conditions of moral terms (i.e., of the norms of correct use) in terms of the attitudes of speakers which each use of the term conventionally expresses is the best version of expressivism. See *ibid*, especially pp. 108–109, and M. Schroeder, *Being For – Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), sec. 2.5.

³⁰ (v) is in itself a statement of the basic idea of moral relativism as understood by Horgan and Timmons. They claim that this idea is that particular judgments have relativized correctness conditions. According to (v), the correctness conditions of my moral statements are relative to my sincerity. See Horgan and Timmons,

At this point, an expressivist is likely to make an important objection (see also section 5). She will point out that insincerity is not the only reason why my moral statements could be incorrect. Here is an example. Let us imagine that we are discussing whether ethnic minorities should be granted equal rights. Let us also imagine that I am a racist who disapproves of giving these rights for the minorities. In this context, I could sincerely assert the sentence ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’.

This statement is certainly *meaningful*. But, as noted above, meaningfulness does not entail that the sentence is used correctly to make a statement. My statement of the sentence ‘snow is red’ would certainly be meaningful. But, according to the norms that govern the use of this sentence (‘State only if true!’), it would still be incorrect to use this sentence to make a statement given what snow is like.

Similarly, the expressivist could claim that, even if I could sincerely use the sentence ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’ to make a statement, this statement would still be incorrect because it would be both immoral and false. At this point, it is useful to distinguish between two different ways in which statements can be correct. One could think that sincerity of the statement makes the sentence merely *correctly assertible* but not *accurately assertible*. This distinction is clear in the case of non-moral statements.

Sincerity is also a norm for correctly stating the sentence ‘grass is green’. There is something incorrect in stating that sentence if one believes that grass is not green. But even if I believed that grass is green, I could not state this sentence correctly merely in virtue of having that belief. My assertion must also be correct in the sense of being accurate – it must also be true that ‘grass is green’. It is this latter norm of accuracy that is often taken to constitute the meaning of the non-moral statements. Because normal descriptive statements have such a further norm of correctness, the argument I am pursuing here does not apply to them as the premise (v) would be false (but, again, see section 5 below).

The expressivist can then claim that there is a similar meaning-constituting norm of accuracy also for moral statements. They too can be correctly stated only if they are true or if stating them is morally

“Expressivism, Yes!”, 80–3. However, Horgan and Timmons frame their discussion in terms of truth-conditions about which I am neutral in my argument. Nick Zangwill has argued more directly that expressivism fails because it cannot offer any further conditions for the concept-application whereas such conditions are an intrinsic part of all concepts (see N. Zangwill, “Moral Mind-Independence,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1994), 205–219).

permissible. For these reasons, my use of the sentence ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights to minorities’ to make a statement cannot satisfy the *relevant* norms for the correct use in the right sense of accurate use. And, therefore, my statement, even if sincere, cannot receive a positive semantic evaluation which would make (v) false.

I doubt whether an expressivist can reject (v) on these grounds. Let us begin from the idea that my statement ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’ must receive a negative semantic evaluation because this statement would be immoral. The problem with this is that being immoral would be a wrong kind of a fault in a statement when we assess the correctness of statements qua statements. Notice first that other communicative actions like commands and gestures can also be immoral. As noted earlier, in determining whether a statement receives a positive or a negative semantic evaluation, we should only consider the specific norms that govern merely the statement itself and not the evaluative status of making the statement in a wider context of communicative actions.

To see this, consider the sentence ‘my friend is in her room upstairs’. When a murderer asks me where my friend is, using this sentence to make a statement would be immoral. It would lead to my friend getting killed. But, the fact that my statement would be criticisable as immoral does not mean that the sentence itself would be incorrectly used to make a statement. After all, I can even know that my friend is in her room. In this case, my statement is immoral even when it satisfies all the semantic norms that govern the correct use of the relevant sentence.

It could be objected that *moral* statements, unlike other statements, can be incorrect in virtue of being immoral. But this does not seem to be the case. Take a moral sentence which no-one has ever yet stated: ‘Killing a baby with a tennis-racket at midnight is wrong’. It could be that stating this sentence to express disapproving attitudes towards certain type of baby-killing happens to seriously damage the brains of others. In that case, stating the sentence to express attitudes would be immoral. But, this would not entail that the statement ‘killing a baby with a tennis-racket at midnight is wrong’ would be incorrect qua a moral statement. That a moral statement is immoral is not sufficient for it to be incorrect. If this is true, then it is not clear how the immorality of my statement ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’ *per se* could undermine its status as a statement that receives a positive semantic evaluation.

The expressivist is likely to reply that at least my statement is *not true*, and therefore it must receive a negative semantic evaluation. However, depending on how we understand the notion of truth in this

expressivist objection, I believe that the expressivist will face a dilemma when she makes this response.³¹ Firstly, when the expressivist says that my statement ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’ is not true, she could mean that there is a set of moral facts to which the stated sentence fails to correspond. This is why the statement is not true and why it receives a negative semantic evaluation.

This response is not available for the expressivist. It would amount to rejecting expressivism – the defended view. After all, the expressivist now admits that there are moral facts and that our moral statements aim at matching to them. This would mean that our moral statements are apt for being robustly true. If our moral statements could be true in this way, then it would seem to follow that we should be able to also believe them to be true. This would vindicate cognitivism.

To avoid this horn of the dilemma, the expressivist could instead claim that, when she says that my statement ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’ is not true, this should be understood as an expression of her attitudes.³² She would be expressing some attitudes which would *disagree in attitude* with the negative attitudes which my statement has expressed towards granting equal rights for the minorities. These attitudes would consist of tolerating granting equal rights for the minorities or of positively approving of granting these rights. They could also include disapproval of my disapproval of granting these rights (even if they would not need to).³³

In this case, the expressivist would be expressing disagreeing attitudes which she could have equally well expressed by saying that it is wrong to claim that minorities should not have equal rights. She could have perhaps even expressed these same attitudes by saying that it is right to grant equal rights for the minorities. Given the deflationary views about truth defended by expressivists, all these statements seem to amount to expressing the same positive attitudes towards the equal rights and perhaps some negative attitudes towards my negative attitudes towards the equal rights.

³¹ Schroeder also voices his worries about this solution. See Schroeder, “Expression,” 113.

³² Blackburn, *Quasi-Realism*, 172–3, and 184–6, Horgan and Timmons, “Expressivism, Yes!”, sec. 5. Horgan and Timmons claim that the deflationary account of truth can help the expressivist to avoid the subjectivist consequences. If my argument is correct, this claim is false.

³³ For these and other proposals for what kind of attitudes our talk about moral truth and falsehood could express, see Schroeder, *Being For*, sec. 11.4.

If we assume that the disagreeing attitudes include the latter, negative attitudes towards my disapproval of the equal rights, then the new expressivist proposal seems to collapse into the earlier, problematic suggestion. On this proposal, the statement of the sentence ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’ cannot use the stated sentence correctly because making this statement would constitute a moral failure. It would be something to be morally disapproved of. The given statement cannot allegedly therefore receive a positive semantic evaluation. The criticism that my statement is false has now been reduced to making this earlier point.

As before, one needs to resist here the idea that the immorality of making some statement could itself undermine the fact that a sentence is correctly used in the given statement. If the audience-harming sentence ‘killing a baby with a tennis-racket at midnight is wrong’ can be immorally but still correctly stated, it is not clear why the sentence ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’ could not also be immorally but correctly stated by the standards that govern the use of this sentence.

In contrast, if we drop this assumption, we would think that your sentence according to which my racist statement is false (and thus incorrect) merely expresses positive or tolerating attitudes towards the equal rights. In this case, there is a threat that the expressivist is now saying something quite implausible or that she has failed to give any standards of correctness for moral claims. It seems as if now the positive attitudes which the expressivist expresses towards equal rights (when she says that my racist statement is false) are setting the standards of incorrectness with which my statement ‘it is wrong to grant equal rights for the minorities’ is to be evaluated.³⁴

But, surely, these attitudes of the expressivist cannot set the standards of correctness for making moral statements. In fact, it would be quite uncharitable to think that this is what the expressivist would propose. That the expressivist has positive attitudes towards equal rights may explain why *she thinks* that my statement is incorrect. These attitudes may also explain, if my argument is correct, why it is correct for her *to say* that my statement is false and thereby incorrect. But it is difficult to see how those attitudes could be an explanation for why my statement *is* incorrect.

If the expressivist’s claim that my racist statement is incorrect because it is false boils down to an expression of her positive attitudes towards equal rights, then it is not clear what real constraints of

³⁴ See Shafer-Landay, *Moral Realism*, 30.

correctness (in the sense of accuracy) has been offered beyond the norm of sincerity.

This leads us to the question, when can a moral sentence be sincerely asserted according to an expressivist? There are two competing views about this. Gibbard has accepted Searle's view according to which '[w]hen one expresses a state of mind...being in that state of mind constitutes... being sincere.'³⁵ This means that on his view the following biconditional holds:

(vi) I can now sincerely assert the sentence 'ϕing is wrong' if and only if I now disapprove of ϕing.

According to Ridge, '[a] speech-act is sincere if and only if the speaker believes she has the state of mind she believes it expresses.'³⁶ The latter view seems more plausible. In the cases where one is mistaken about one's own attitudes, it still looks like one can be sincere when one believes one has the required attitude. For the current purposes, I will remain neutral between these two alternatives. In any case, according to Ridge, the expressivist should accept the following biconditional:

(vii) I can now sincerely assert the sentence 'ϕing is wrong' if and only if I now believe that I disapprove of ϕing.³⁷

We now have all the ingredients for the argument for the subjectivist implications of expressivism. We can begin from the biconditionals (iv) and (v); ϕing is wrong if and only if I can now use the sentence 'ϕing is wrong' to make a statement that receives a positive semantic evaluation; and I can now use the sentence 'ϕing is wrong' to make a statement that receives a positive semantic evaluation if and only if I can now sincerely assert the sentence 'ϕing is wrong'. According to classical logic, together they imply by the transitivity of biconditionals that

(viii) ϕing is wrong if and only if I can now sincerely assert the sentence 'ϕing is wrong'.

By transitivity of biconditionals again, (viii) together with (vi) and (vii) entail the subjectivist theses according to which

³⁵ See Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 94, and J. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 66–7. Ira Schnall defends this view about sincerity in order to try to resist the Jackson-Pettit argument (see I. Schnall, "Philosophy of Language and Meta-ethics," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (2004), 587–594).

³⁶ Ridge, "Sincerity," sec. 2.

³⁷ For the sake of the argument, I assume here that I, as a competent speaker, would know which attitudes moral utterances express and that expressivism is right about which attitudes they are.

- (ix) ϕ ing is wrong if and only if I now disapprove of ϕ ing[, and]
- (x) ϕ ing is wrong if and only if I now believe that I disapprove of ϕ ing.

It is worth pointing out that only either (ix) or (x) – but not both – can be the conclusion of this argument. This is because the argument needs to make use of a view about what is required for sincerity. However, given that not both (vi) and (vii) can be correct views about sincerity, one cannot use the argument to derive both (ix) and (x). This is fortunate because (ix) and (x) would together entail the obviously false claim that ‘I now disapprove of ϕ ing if and only if I now believe that I disapprove of ϕ ing’.

4. The Conclusion

Thus, I have argued that expressivism leads to either (ix) or (x). In what sense is expressivism subjectivist as a result? Firstly, it must be recognised that (ix) and (x) are not statements of Metaethical Subjectivism. They do not claim that judgments about wrongness are *about* the disapproval of actions and thus robustly truth-apt. About the issues of what wrongness-judgments are about, what wrongness-claims express, and whether they are capable of being true (objectively or subjectively), these theses are neutral.

Instead, (ix) and (x) should be understood as argument schemas. The schematic letter ‘ ϕ ’ in them stands for a verb or a description which specifies either an action-token or an action-type. This means that my argument schema can be used to show that ‘torture is wrong if and only if I now disapprove of torturing’, that ‘lying is wrong if and only if I now disapprove of lying’, that ‘singing is wrong if and only if I now disapprove of singing’, and so on. In effect, whatever action-specification we put in the place of ‘ ϕ ’, we can always use the argument schema to derive a local subjectivist conclusion.

If we keep using this schema to derive each one of its possible instantiation one at a time, eventually we could infer from these instantiations in classical logic an infinitely long conjunction according to which ‘torture is wrong if and only if I now disapprove of torturing, and lying is wrong if and only if I now disapprove of lying, and singing is wrong if and only if I now disapprove of singing, ...’. This conjunction would contain all the possible instances of the thesis (ix) (or (x)). In classical logic, this conjunction would also be logically equivalent with the universally quantified generalisation according to which for any act, x, x is wrong if and only if I now disapproved of x. This would mean that all and only the acts that I

now disapproved of are wrong just as the general statement of Normative Subjectivism claims.

Now, it could be suggested that the expressivist might be required to accept the instances of (ix) or (x) on the basis of the previous argument, and yet be able to rationally reject the infinitely long disjunction of them and the universally quantified generalisation. This could be rational despite the fact that, in classical logic, this would seem to commit one to a contradiction. This phenomenon can be illustrated with familiar cases of the preface-paradox in which a historian accepts each assertion in his book about some historical event but yet believes rationally that the conjunction of all these assertions is false.³⁸

There are two main ways in which philosophers tend to explain why the author's beliefs are rational even if seemingly contradictory. The first is to think that the historian recognises the fallibility of her evidence gathering methods (others have failed by using them too), and this fact enables her to rationally reject the conjunction of her assertions even if this commits her to inconsistent beliefs. The second is to think that the historian is less than fully certain about the correctness of each of her assertion even if she believes them to be true. This would make it rational for her to believe that the probability of all her less than certain beliefs being true at the same time is so low that she should not believe that the conjunction of them is true.

It is not clear whether the expressivist could use these same means to explain how it could be rational to accept the instances of (ix) or (x) but not the infinite conjunction of them or the universally quantified, subjectivist generalisation. The reason why the expressivist should accept the instances of (ix) or (x) is the argument which I have just given. If that arguments works as I have argued, then we have not used fallible evidence gathering methods, and the expressivist should thus also be fully certain about each of the instances of (ix) or (x). This would mean that the expressivist would need some other explanation for how she could rationally reject the global subjectivist conclusion even when she accepts the instances of the previous argument schema. It is not immediately obvious what such an explanation could be.

Because my argument does not claim that Metaethical Subjectivism follows from expressivism, it is not clear whether expressivism inherits all the problems of Metaethical Subjectivism. Given that (ix)

³⁸ See D. C. Makinson, 'The Paradox of the Preface,' *Analysis* 25 (1965), 205–207.

and (x) are neutral about what it is to say or think of something that it is wrong, it does not follow that if one is committed to them one could not perhaps account for moral disagreements or fallibility. But, as explained above, they do commit the expressivist to Normative Subjectivism about particular act- tokens and act-types and perhaps even to the general thesis expressing this form of subjectivism. If expressivism has even this awkward consequence, this should count seriously against the view.

Expressivists themselves have claimed that their view and their other commitments do not have this implausible implication.³⁹ If my argument is correct, then that claim is false. At least normatively speaking, the commitments of their view have subjectivist implications. Of course, I cannot prevent Simon Blackburn from repeating over and over again, as he does, that it is not the case that ϕ ing is wrong if and only if I (or anyone else) disapprove of ϕ ing (or believe that I disapprove of). If the argument given above follows from materials he is committed to, then all this implies is that he is committed to an inconsistent set of claims or attitudes.

It is worthwhile to make two further comments about the conclusion of the previous argument. The conclusion of that argument is not merely that only expressivists themselves are committed to Normative Subjectivism as the correct moral theory. Expressivism, after all, is supposed to be a general account of what all of us mean when we use moral language. This means that, if we assumed that expressivism were true, anyone could use the argument above to show that Normative Subjectivism is the correct moral theory in her case. Therefore, the truth of expressivism would entail that we would all have to think that Normative Subjectivism is true.

The second point worth noting is that the conclusions (ix) and (x), which I call statements of a version of Normative Subjectivism, are only formulated in terms of *material biconditionals*. As such, they only make claims about the wrongness of some actions (which I happen to disapprove of). This means that they do not need to be understood as asserting that the wrongness of actions *depends* on the fact that I disapprove of them. The expressivist could claim that my argument does not have that further, more implausible subjectivist implication of counterfactual correlation.

However, setting the question of dependency-relation aside, I believe that already the subjectivist conclusion about the extension of wrongness should be worrisome for the expressivist. First, it provides

³⁹ See, e.g., Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 217–20, esp. fn. 21, and his “Sentimentalism”.

some pressure for the expressivist to explain how the actions which she disapproves of happen to be wrong if she is right that their wrongness does not depend on her attitudes. Without the dependency-relation (which the expressivist denies) this seems like quite a coincidence.

The second and more serious problem with even the weaker subjectivist conclusion has to do with what would in this situation count as good evidence for the truth of moral utterances. If either (ix) or (x) were true, the best evidence for the wrongness of any given action would be whether I disapproved of it or not. In fact, no other evidence would even be very relevant. This seems implausible even if the wrongness of the relevant actions did not counter-factually depend on whether I disapproved of them or not.

Finally, it should be noted that, in a sense, it should not be too surprising that expressivism has the previous subjectivist consequence. After all, expressivists are often committed to a thesis called motivational internalism. On this view, roughly, there is a necessary correlation between accepting a moral statement and being motivated to act in accordance with it. At first look, it seems that an expressivist who accepts this view seems to be in no position to reject the biconditional claims (ix) and (x).

If such a person accepts that ϕ ing is wrong, she must be motivated not to ϕ (i.e., disapprove of ϕ ing) or the internalism thesis she is committed to is false. And, if such a person is motivated not to ϕ (i.e., disapproves of ϕ ing), then it looks like she must accept the moral statement that ϕ ing is wrong if she thinks that this statement gives voice to the disapproving attitudes which she too shares. If this diagnosis is right, then the expressivist should be willing to accept the subjectivist views in normative ethics expressed by (ix) and (x) because she is committed to accepting all their instances given her internalism.

5. Replies to Objections

Finally, expressivists could give two different responses to my argument, which I believe merit to be taken seriously. They can develop the objection already discussed in the middle of the third section in two different ways. In this final section, I want to explain why I am sceptical about whether the expressivist can avoid the problems which the previous conclusion poses for her in these ways.

First, it could be argued that the conclusion of my argument is both more general and less harmful than previously implied. Earlier, I claimed that one cannot use the previous argument to derive subjectivist conclusions about non-moral, descriptive sentences. This,

I said, is because the standards for making statements by using these sentences are based on truth rather than on sincerity. This is why it is not the case that grass is green, for instance, if and only if I now believe that grass is green. Rather, grass is green if and only if it is true that 'grass is green'.

It could be claimed that I am thereby equivocating on what 'positive semantic evaluation' is. When it comes to non-moral, descriptive statements, receiving a positive semantic evaluation requires being true whereas, for moral statements, this is only claimed to require sincerity. The expressivist could, however, claim that, on her view, any assertion is correct qua being an assertion if and only if the assertion is sincere, i.e., the speaker has the belief or the attitude which the statement expresses.

The expressivist could also add that the consequences of this are harmless. Let us assume that, in this situation, the argument schema above could be used to derive the subjectivist thesis 'grass is green if and only if I now believe that grass is green'. The expressivist could point out that this conclusion must be harmless because no one could consistently deny this statement anyway.

Denying this statement would commit one to thinking that either grass is green and that one does not believe that it is, or that grass is not green but one believes that it is. However, both these combinations of thoughts are obviously false. If one thinks that grass is green, then the belief that one does not believe that grass is green would be false, whereas if one thinks that grass is not green, then the belief that one believes that it is green would be false. This means that it would be incoherent to deny a statement of the non-moral, descriptive bi-conditional above. If this is true, then being committed to corresponding moral bi-conditionals cannot arguably be any more problematic.

This response requires taking a controversial stand in the debates about norms of assertion.⁴⁰ A defence of that view would need to explain why there seems to be something defective about asserting what one believes when one's belief is false or fails to count as knowledge.⁴¹ For instance, why does it seem improper to assert that 'My ticket did not win' when the winning ticket has been drawn but not announced in a lottery even when one believes truly that it did not win?

⁴⁰ This view, however, is defended in K. Back and R. Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1979).

⁴¹ The truth norm for assertions is defended in Weiner, 'Must We', whilst the even more demanding knowledge norm is forcefully defended in T. Williamson, 'Knowing and Asserting,' *Philosophical Review* 114 (2005), 489–523.

Be that as it may, one could also try to argue that a commitment to (ix) or (x) is more harmful for the expressivist than our general inability to reject corresponding non-moral statements on the pain of having inconsistent beliefs. This could perhaps be done in the following way. In the case of the non-moral, descriptive bi-conditionals resembling (ix) and (x) like the one about grass above, even if I must accept them for the previous Moorean reasons, there is a sense in which I know what it would be for these sentences to be false at this moment. In this situation, the colour of grass would not correspond to my belief about its colour. This is a real, live epistemic possibility for me which I must consider in my deliberation.

However, it is not clear whether the expressivist can provide a similar explanation for what it would be for the instances of (ix) or (x) to be false at this moment when I disapprove of some act. If I disapprove of this act, then it is correct for me to assert that this act is wrong. Yet, given the expressivist picture thus far, I have not been told what it would be for this act to fail to be wrong in this situation and why I would need to reflect the possibility of this act not being wrong (but see section (b) below). This means that even if others will have to accept similar bi-conditionals about non-moral, descriptive sentences, the situation seems more serious for the expressivist.

The expressivists could also claim that I present a false dilemma by claiming that either the correct use of moral terms can be only constrained by the sincerity of the speaker or it will be constrained by truth as correspondence to facts. I have argued that the latter norm is unavailable for the expressivist and the former has subjectivist consequences. The expressivist wants to then argue that she has resources for giving the kind of constraints for the correct use of the moral terms that avoid the unwanted subjectivist flavour. I can think of three further ways in which the expressivist can attempt to do this.

(a) *Emotive ascent*. The expressivist can first argue that the norm of sincerity requires more than is usually assumed. She can claim that, if one merely disapproves of ϕ ing, saying that ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ would not count as a *sincere* use of the moral term. In that case, one could only sincerely say that ‘I don’t like ϕ ing’.

Instead, in order to be able to use a moral term for the expression of attitudes sincerely, one needs to have a whole set of different attitudes.⁴² One needs to have positive attitudes towards one’s own continued disapproval of the action, approval of others’ disapproval of the action, disapproval of others’ lack of disapproval of

⁴² See Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, 9 and 67.

the action, and so on. Furthermore, one also perhaps needs to be planning or intending not to ϕ , and to accept that it is rational to blame someone who ϕ s.⁴³ Call all of these attitudes that are necessary for being able to sincerely say that ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ the set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing.

If we accept all of this with the expressivist, then we have to revise (vi) and (vii) above. We would thus get:

- (vi*) I can now sincerely assert the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ if and only if I now have a set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing [, and]
- (vii*) I can now sincerely assert the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ if and only if I now believe that I have a set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing.⁴⁴

We could use these in the argument above to derive the alternative conclusions:

- (ix*) ϕ ing is wrong if and only if I now have a set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing,
- (x*) ϕ ing is wrong if and only if I now believe that I have a set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing.

It is worth pointing that these conclusions are still subjectivist, but perhaps less objectionably so. It takes more for an act to be wrong than my mere dislike of the action. It takes a whole integrated set of different attitudes.

(b) *Attitudinal truth*. The expressivist can also argue that she can *construct* a notion of truth which will be able to provide a more substantial norm for the correct use of the moral sentences.⁴⁵ This notion of truth will be neither deflationist nor one based on correspondence to facts. The hope is that it will help the expressivist to avoid the subjectivist conclusion above. It would also help the expressivist to explain what it would be for actions to not be wrong when I do not disapprove of them.

Begin from the idea that we understand the notions of improvement and deterioration as they would apply to our moral sensibilities. They consist of all our approving and disapproving attitudes, plans, intensions and sets of m-attitudes. Our moral

⁴³ See Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, and Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*.

⁴⁴ For the sake of the argument, I assume here that I, as a competent speaker, would know which attitudes moral utterances express and that expressivism is right about which attitudes they are.

⁴⁵ Here I draw from Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 197–202, and Alexander Miller, *An Introduction to Metaethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 78–81. See also Horgan and Timmons, “Expressivism, Yes!”, 93–4. Horgan and Timmons acknowledge that construing truth in this way risks making truth relativised to the agent’s coherent set of attitudes as argued by Bloomfield (see Bloomfield “Moral High-Ground?”, 511–26).

sensibilities are better the more coherent, consistent, and informed factually they are. If this is right, then there is a best possible set of attitudes I could have. This would be the set I would have if I made all possible improvements to my current actual attitudes. Thus, there exists the most coherent, consistent, and informed set of attitudes I could end up with. Call this set ‘my M*’.

We can then define a notion of attitudinal truth for my moral statements in terms of my M*. Take the statement ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ which I could make. According to the definition available for us, that statement is (attitudinally) true if and only if a set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing would belong to my M*. The expressivist is then able to accept a similar norm of correct use of the moral terms as for all other declarative sentences. An instance of this norm can be expressed as follows:

- (xi) I can now use the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ to make a statement that receives a positive semantic evaluation if and only if I could now use the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ to make an attitudinally true statement.

Together with (iv), (xi) entails that

- (xii) ϕ ing is wrong if and only if I could now use the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ to make a (attitudinally) true statement.

Given the definition of the attitudinal truth in terms of my M* above, (xii) entails

- (xiii) ϕ ing is wrong if and only if a set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing would belong to my M*.

Has the expressivist managed to avoid subjectivist consequences in this way? This is not clear. (xiii) tells us that wrongness of an action correlates with whether I would have a set of relevant disapprovals, approvals and intentions towards ϕ ing when I have made my current attitudes as coherent, consistent, and informed as possible.⁴⁶ This could imply that the wrongness of actions depends only to some degree on my current actual attitudes.

(xiii) may still be somewhat worryingly subjectivist. Given my current set of attitudes, it could in principle be that in my maximally coherent, consistent, and unified M* I have sets of m-

⁴⁶ Russ Shafer-Landau argues that an expressivist faces a problem at this point. It seems like the constraints on the correct moral statements are phrased in normative terms like being maximally consistent and unified. Either these terms refer to real normative constraints or using them to state the normative constraints is an expression of the expressivist’s attitudes. The former option seems unavailable for the expressivist and the latter raises the question of whether a right has been earned to assess the correctness of the statements which others make. See Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 27.

attitudes towards kindness and helping others (which would entail that they are wrong) and lack such sets towards cruelty and torture (which would entail that they are not wrong).⁴⁷ (xiii) also has the awkward consequence that the best available evidence for the wrongness of actions would be information about my current attitudes and about the ways of making them more coherent.⁴⁸

(c) *Act-types*. The last option for the expressivist (which I can think of) does not describe the norms for the correct use of moral terms in terms of mere attitudes or truth. Instead it relies on substantial act-types. So far I have talked about the wrongness of ϕ ing without specifying which acts are in question. Maybe the expressivist could specify the norms for the correct use in terms of certain act-types. Thus, she could say something like

(xiv) I can now use the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ to make a statement that receives a positive semantic evaluation if and only if to ϕ is to murder, or to steal, ..., or to torture someone.

Together with (iv), (xiv) would entail:

(xv) ϕ ing is wrong if and only if to ϕ is to murder, or to steal, ..., or to torture someone.

This conclusion would certainly *not* be subjectivist as no-one’s attitudes are even mentioned in (xv). However, (xiv) is a problem for the expressivist. If the expressivist accepts it, it would certainly be a big break in the expressivist tradition. It would also be no longer clear what expressivism would be a theory about.

I began my argument from a premise which expressivists seem to accept. According to it, constitutive of the meaning of moral terms is the norms which determine when the terms are correctly used. If (xiv) is expressivist’s account of the norms for the correct use of ‘wrong’, then the expressivist accepts that our attitudes do not play a role in determining the meaning of the term ‘wrong’. This certainly goes against the explicit commitments of the expressivists. Allan Gibbard, for instance, claims that it is constitutive of expressivism that one attempts to explain the meaning of a term in terms of the mental states it expresses.⁴⁹ On his view, anyone who accepts (xiv) would not then count as an expressivist. But, maybe the expressivist could give up the attempt to give an account of our moral language and try to merely account for our moral thought.

⁴⁷ See Miller, *Introduction*, 136.

⁴⁸ See Dreier, “Lockean and Logical,” sec. 4.

⁴⁹ See Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*, 6–7.

The expressivist could also accept a hybrid view. She could argue that the correct use of the sentence ‘ ϕ ing is wrong’ requires both that I have a set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing *and* that to ϕ is to murder, or to steal, ..., or to torture someone.⁵⁰ If we then ran the argument of the section 3, the conclusion would be that ϕ ing is wrong if and only if I have a set of m-attitudes towards ϕ ing *and* to ϕ is to murder, or to steal, ..., or to torture someone.

The consequence of this is that what is definitely not wrong would not depend on my attitudes. An action that didn’t belong to the specified act-types could not be wrong. However, the wrongness of actions would still be relative to my attitudes. This is because the conjunction of the right-hand side is true only if I have the relevant attitudes towards the act-types listed in the other conjunct. Thus, certain amount of subjectivism would still remain.

At this point, I can think of no other ways in which the expressivist could avoid the subjectivist consequences of her view. Given that none of the abovementioned ways in which an expressivist could try to avoid the consequences seems satisfactory, I conclude that, if expressivism is true, it will have some subjectivist consequences.

⁵⁰ Mark Timmons claims in this spirit that a moral statement is correctly assertible when the attitude it expresses would guide the agent to act in ‘ways that promote survival enhancing coordinative behaviour’. See M. Timmons, *Morality without Foundations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 172.