# PROSPECTS FOR A
# QUIETIST MORAL REALISM

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To some, moral realism has seemed obvious: *Of course* there are moral facts (that torturing babies is wrong), moral obligations (to keep one's promises), and so on. To others, it has seemed mystifying. For what *could* these special 'moral entities' be, how could they relate to ordinary physical properties such as weighing 200 pounds or being made of steel, how could we come to know them, and how could such things motivate us to act?

The Quietist Moral Realist aims to address both of these reactions: agreeing with the realist that of course there are moral facts, obligations, etc. (that is the realism), while finding a way to shed the metaphysical worries that have traditionally been thrown at moral realists (that is the quietism).

But what is quietism?

Taken in its original sense, quietism reaches back to the Pyrrhonian skeptics, who sought "imperturbability, quietude or tranquility of mind (*ataraxia*) through suspension of judgment (*epoché*) and refused assent (*synkatathesis*) to any philosophical thesis" (Virvidakis and Kindi, 2013). This characterization, however, leaves a great deal open: which philosophical theses are we refusing assent to? And why should we withhold judgment about them?[1]

A common answer to the first question is to say: we are withholding judgment on any *metaphysical* question. So, for example, having aptly noted that quietism may be held *about certain topics,* David Macarthur goes on to say "Arguably, the most interesting and important form of quietism is quietism about metaphysics" (2008, 198). This, however, (as Macarthur mentions) just pushes back the question to: what do, or should, we mean by 'metaphysics' here?[2]

In one standard sense of the word, 'metaphysics' refers to attempts to answer questions about the existence and natures of things of various sorts. But we can't mean that quietists in

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[1] Philip Pettit treats quietism as the view that "much philosophizing leaves no impact on ordinary experience or behavior. Philosophy has no place in practice" (2004, 304). We will leave this meaning of 'quietism' to the side here, and we certainly do not mean here to endorse the view that any of these metaethical issues have no impact on practice. As Eric Campbell has argued forcefully (2014), even if there are no *metaphysical* problems that require us to revise our ethical practices, there may be other philosophical grounds for revision.

[2] Macarthur understands metaphysics as, "An attempt to explain phenomena or the appearances of things in terms of some conception of what is *really* basic, fundamental or real", which often involves asking 'what is X?', looking for an essence. But, he goes on to say, metaphysics often involves claims beyond these, that are neither confirmed nor disconfirmed empirically, that are supposed to hold once and for all. (2008, 198-9).

metaethics are silent on the question of whether moral properties, facts, norms, or reasons exist.[3] For all of those theorists commonly labelled 'quietists' insist that there *are* such things. As a result, it has become common in the metaethics literature to refer to the relevant position not simply as 'quietism', but rather as 'Quietist Moral Realism'[4].

There is, however, another sense of 'metaphysics' in which metaphysics is taken to be an *explanatory* enterprise: one on which certain entities are not just said to exist, but rather are *posited* in an effort to *explain* certain observations. The form of metaphysics the quietist realist rejects seems to be along these lines. Tristram McPherson, for example, describes the 'quietist realist' view as characterized by two claims: "On the one hand it is a form of realism, accepting that there are normative facts and properties. On the other, it suggests that accepting the existence of such facts and properties does not lead to [certain] explanatory burdens" (2011, 224) such as explaining how moral facts could fit in with our broader metaphysical commitments, how we could come to know them, and how they could have a distinctive authority in our deliberations.

So, better understood, Quietist Moral Realists aim to accept that there *are* moral facts and properties, while avoiding many of the *explanatory burdens* thought to fall on traditional moral realists. The trick is to do the latter without appearing to simply dogmatically refuse to engage with metaphysical questions, and without giving responses that simply introduce further metaphysical difficulties.

In this paper we begin by examining the forms that Quietist Moral Realism has taken and the challenges they have faced, with a view to better assessing the prospects for a view along these lines. We begin in Section 1 with a brief overview of the history of Quietist Moral Realism, showing how quietists use an 'internalizing maneuver' to treat the troubling explanatory demands of metaethics as answerable from *within* the domain of moral discourse, which has its own standards for justification. Quietist Moral Realism has taken two main forms: a 'relaxed realist' version, and a 'pragmatist' version. In Section 2, we examine the relaxed realist version of the approach and how it aims to avoid the traditional metaphysical and epistemological problems of metaethics by treating these questions as to be settled via the 'internal' standards of a distinct 'moral domain'. As we will see, however, even if we allow that the traditional explanatory burdens are thereby avoided, difficult new questions pop up in their place. Namely, how can we distinguish different domains? How can we justify adopting different justificatory standards in different domains, or justify claims that beliefs about some, but not other, domains may be motivating? We then turn in Section 3 to elucidate the pragmatist version of the approach, which aims to address these new questions by appealing to the different *functions* of diverse areas of discourse.

But how can we identify the functions of moral discourse? We turn in Section 4 to work in Systemic Functional Linguistics as the basis for a clearer view of the functions moral

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[3] There is, we should note, a slight exegetical awkwardness here. Shall we frame the debate in terms of views about moral facts, of reasons, or of normativity in general? Some quietists, like Parfit and Scanlon, speak primarily of reasons, and offer substantive accounts of morality in terms of reasons to act--and then go on to give a quietist treatment of reasons themselves. Others, like Kramer, Dworkin, and Blackburn, offer straightforwardly quietist treatments of morality itself. In our view, little hinges on whether we express the particular problems at issue here in terms of the traditional problems regarding moral talk, truths, etc., or broader problems regarding normative talk, reasons, etc. So, we shall shift back and forth as context (and works cited) require.
[4] Tristram McPherson, for example, refers to it simply as 'quietist realism' (2011, 224).

discourse serves, the rules it follows, and ways in which these differ from the functions and rules governing everyday empirical discourse. Once this is in place, as we will argue in Section 5, we can see our way to a stronger form of Quietism that (while still affirming realism) does not simply remain *quiet* about the explanatory demands of metaethics, but rather is able to *diagnose* where they go wrong, and to *justify* the characteristic internalizing maneuver. The pragmatist roots of this approach might lead some to doubt that this form of *quietism* still counts as a form of moral *realism*. But as we will argue, that would be a mistake. For a functional discourse analysis also gives us reason to accept an 'easy' approach to ontology (see Thomasson 2015). And given that 'easy' approach we are clearly entitled to say that there *are* moral facts and properties, in the only sense that has sense--clearly affirming realism.[5]

The moral of the story will be that by combining a neo-pragmatic analysis of the discourse with an easy approach to ontology, we can get a form of Quietist Moral Realism that is far stronger than critics of quietism have appreciated. With that on the table, we argue, the prospects for a form of Quietist Moral Realism are good, and the quietist approach should get a serious hearing in debates in metaethics.

# 1. Two forms of Quietist Moral Realism

Philosophers as diverse as Simon Blackburn, Tim Scanlon, Ronald Dworkin, and Derek Parfit have all been labelled 'quietists'.[6] If you were a metaethicist who just stepped out of a time machine from the 20th century, you might be rather surprised to see a quasi-realist like Blackburn, on one hand, and non-naturalists like Dworkin, Scanlon, and Parfit, on the other, put in the same bucket. The ancestry of the two approaches could hardly be more different. Blackburn's expressivism can be traced back to A.J. Ayer's emotivism: a view that has no sympathies with traditional moral realism, that is deeply concerned with presenting a naturalistically plausible conception of ethical discourse, and mobilized by skepticism about the cognitive nature of morality. The relaxed realist's approach, by contrast, traces to the non-naturalist ethics of G.E. Moore: a resolutely realist and cognitivist view about ethics, rejecting the demands of a naturalistic metaphysics.

Meta-ethicists in the 21st century have gotten used to it. Blackburn's quasi-realism has become more and more distanced from its anti-realist ancestors. Indeed, his quasi-realism is motivated by the goal of making sense of some of the standard tenets of realism: cognitivism, objectivity, and so on. As quasi-realism makes these concessions to the philosophical 'right', non-naturalism has moved closer to the 'left', attenuating the denial of naturalism, and insisting that positing non-natural facts doesn't commit them to strange Platonic entities to which moral

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[5] This is a position one of us has elsewhere called 'simple' (as contrasted with 'explanatory') realism (Thomasson 2015, Chapter 3).

[6] Applications of the label are often disputed, however. Matthew Kramer (this volume) rejects the label altogether. Price considers Blackburn's quasi-realism  as motivating a local metaphysical quietism about the relevant domains (2011, 12); McPherson, however, distinguishes quasi-realists from those he considers quietist realists (2011, 224-5)--including Scanlon, Parfit and Dworkin. Enoch and McPherson label Dworkin, Kramer, and Parfit quietists (2017, 821).  Cowie classifies Parfit, Skorupski, Dworkin and Scanlon together as holding that normative entities exist in a 'non-metaphysical sense' (2014, 661).

truths correspond, because such a correspondence isn't required. Parfit, for his part, is happy to accept quasi-realism as a species of his Non-Realist Cognitivism.[7]

The optimist might even suppose that the fact that two such different starting places have been tunnelling towards the same territory gives hope that there is an attractive and workable metaethical position to be found there. Our project here is to dig it out.

As mentioned above, the Quietist Moral Realist accepts that there *are* moral facts or properties, and yet aims to reject the 'explanatory burdens' that have beset traditional moral realists. These 'explanatory burdens' are generally placed in three categories:[8]

1. **Metaphysical questions:** Are there *really* normative facts, moral properties, obligations, etc.?[9] If so, how can such things "fit with our broader metaphysical commitments?" (McPherson 2011, 224). How are they related to 'natural' facts, properties, etc.?[10] If they are, as some relaxed realists claim, in some sense not 'ontologically robust' (Parfit 2017, 60), what does that mean, and what is the difference between ontologically 'robust' facts and properties, and those that are not?[11]

2. **Epistemological questions:** If there are moral or (more broadly) normative truths, how could we possibly come to *know* them? (This is a problem thought to be exacerbated if we deny (in each case) that they are truths about *natural* facts. For how can we come into the relevant kind of causal or perceptual contact with non-natural facts?)

3. **Motivational questions:** How could mere beliefs or judgments about moral or normative facts or properties motivate us to act? (Scanlon 2014, 57)

One thing quietists have in common is a desire to avoid, or perhaps reconceptualize, the above 'explanatory burdens' in a way that does not require serious metaphysical investigations. Quietists also share a strategy for avoiding these traditional explanatory burdens. That strategy is to deny the common metaethical assumption "that the most fundamental questions about morality are not themselves moral, but rather metaphysical, questions" (Dworkin 2011, 25). That is, they refuse to think of metaphysical questions as *external to* the moral enterprise, insisting

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[7] As Jamie Dreier has emphasized (2004 and 2015b), we have arrived at a landscape where it has become difficult to properly differentiate between (at least some parts of) the two camps.

[8] Ridge (2019, 149-50) and McPherson (2011, 224) both raise versions of these three explanatory demands. Copp (2018) raises an additional challenge: how the relaxed realist can give a semantics for moral statements that explains the meanings of moral terms and the truth-conditions of moral claims. For, inasmuch as relaxed realists understand moral facts, properties, and the like to have no robust ontological implications--and opt instead for a minimalist treatment of these entities--then these cannot be marshalled in any *explanatory* account of the meanings of moral terms, nor can such things be explanatory truth-makers of our moral claims (compare Thomasson 2015, Chapter 3). We think this is exactly right. While we do not have space to address the semantic challenge directly here, it is worth noting that the pragmatist view we aim to develop would give an entirely different sort of account of the meanings of moral terms (pursuing a version of what Copp calls the 'Wide Non-Realist Strategy" (2018, 587)). One promising approach (following Williams 2011) is to give an account of meanings in terms of the rules of use for the relevant terms (rules that enable these terms to serve their characteristic function). For a development of this approach, see Warren (2015).

[9] Jamie Dreier presses the metaphysical question this way: "The idea that [normative truths] do constitute a distinct realm, another world, but need no metaphysical reality, is somewhat puzzling" (2015b, 158).

[10] The last way of presenting the metaphysical explanatory demand is a version of what Huw Price (2011, 186) has called the 'placement problem', building on what Frank Jackson originally called 'the location problem' (1998, 3).

[11] For discussion of this last point, see Copp 2018, 571.

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that seemingly metaphysical questions can only be addressed by appealing to standards that are in some sense *internal* to ethical discourse. As McPherson puts it, the quietist strategy is "to suggest that the relevant explanatory burdens are best understood as falling on, and being met by, substantive normative theories rather than metanormative theories", so that in interpreting our first-order normative claims, there is "much less to explain" than others have thought. (2011, 227).

This internalizing maneuver is at the heart of Blackburn's frequent appeals to minimalism about truth[12]. If the claim that 'It is true that X is wrong' means no more than 'X is wrong', our understanding of the former should not attempt to outstrip our basis for the latter. How do we know that lying is wrong? Not by appealing to a moral property of wrongness (natural or otherwise) that is instantiated in all and only wrong acts, but instead by looking at how we know lying is wrong—its harmful effects on the party lied to, the way it undermines trust, and so on. If we want to understand the truth (or the error) of a moral assertion, we must recognize that it "is imputed from within the practice, from an immersion in the business of making, criticizing, accepting or withdrawing the verdicts whose impact is essentially practical." (Blackburn 2009, 210)

Ronald Dworkin echoes Blackburn's sentiment, arguing that there is no way to sensibly ask about the truth of moral propositions without presupposing some moral values:

> Morality and other departments of value are philosophically independent. Answers to large questions about moral truth and knowledge must be sought within those departments, not outside them. (2011, 24)

Dworkin sees moral concepts as one among many types of *interpretive* concepts, each with their own respective *genres*: history, poetry, religion, and law are all genres that we must interpret. Crucially, questions about the nature of moral, historical, and legal truth are fundamentally interpretive questions which cannot be answered from the outside; the answers to metaethical questions--even very abstract moral questions about, e.g., whether moral facts are objective, or whether they apply universally--are best understood as fundamentally moral questions:

> The claim that abortion is objectively wrong seems equivalent in ordinary discourse to [the further claim]: that abortion would still be wrong even if no one thought it was. That further claim, read most naturally, is just another way of emphasizing the content of the original moral claim, of emphasizing, once again, that I mean that abortion is just plain wrong, not wrong only if or because people think it is. (2011, 54)

Likewise, the claim that abortion is universally wrong makes it plain "that in my view abortion is wrong for everyone, no matter in what circumstance or culture or of what disposition or from what ethical or religious background" (ibid.).

There is a surprising affinity between Blackburn and Dworkin here. Both encourage us to understand these further claims as moral, rather than metaphysical, assertions--indeed, they both insist there is no other way to understand them. This has implications for potential skeptics. Dworkin argues that they cannot "stand outside a whole body of belief, and… judge it whole from premises or attitudes that owe nothing to it" (1996, 88)--and so they have no place from which to apply an Archimedean lever. Blackburn uses the metaphor of Neurath's boat (1993, 79; 2009, 201), which on an open sea can only be rebuilt plank by plank. Even the committed skeptic must "stand on one part of the (Neurath) boat and inspect the other parts" (2001, 318). Both

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[12] See also Kramer (2009, 271–3) for an account of the relationship between minimalism and this strategy.

thereby suggest that metaethical issues can only be dealt with *internally*, using the same well-worn tools we use when engaged in ethical discourse.

Internalizing moral questions in this way gives the quietist an initial response to the three explanatory burdens described above. But how can we justify this maneuver? What is it that entitles us to address these explanatory burdens from *within* moral discourse--rather than treating them as 'deep' questions for traditional metaphysics or epistemology? It is in addressing that question that the two forms of quietism come apart.

As noted above, despite all they have in common, those labelled as metaethical 'quietists' derive from two very different ancestries. Broadly speaking, growing out of these distinct ancestries are two importantly different camps of contemporary quietists, which we will call the 'relaxed realist' camp and the 'pragmatist' camp. The 'relaxed realist' camp is generally thought to be represented by Scanlon, Parfit, Dworkin, and Kramer[13] (cf. McGrath 2014, 186-87), and generally defends the internalizing maneuver by[14] insisting that the interesting and important metaphysical questions are "domain-specific--questions about the metaphysics *of* some particular domain or domains" (Scanlon 2014, 25).[15] Questions about the existence of moral facts, our knowledge of them or motivation by them are, on this view, to be addressed from within a moral standpoint, because these questions concern a distinctive 'moral domain'. The pragmatist camp, on the other hand, is generally thought to be occupied by such figures as Price, Blackburn, Gibbard, Brandom and Rorty.[16] Rather than appealing to different domains, pragmatists typically aim to *diagnose* the metaphysical problems as arising from mistakes about the category or function of a relevant area of *discourse.*

We will next, in Section 2, discuss the relaxed realist approach, the problems that have been raised for it, and remaining questions it leaves us with. Thereafter, in Section 3 we will return to examine the pragmatist approach, showing the ways pragmatist quietists appeal to differences in the *functions* of the relevant areas of discourse to justify the internalizing maneuver and to undermine the thought that any legitimate explanatory demands remain.

# 2. Relaxed Realism and Its Challenges

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[13] Matthew Kramer is grouped with the other relaxed realists by Ingram (2017), Enoch & McPherson (2017), and Tiefensee (2019)--though Tiefensee's characterization of relaxed realism is broad enough to include pragmatists like Blackburn--but we disagree with this categorization. Kramer is happy to make use of the internalizing maneuver; his (2009) is an extended exploration of this technique. But he also emphasizes the compatibility of this maneuver with a pragmatic account of moral discourse (2017).

[14] Copp (2018, 570) refers to these 'relaxed realist' views as forms of 'avant-garde nonnaturalism' or (following Parfit) "nonrealist cognitivism".

[15] Relaxed Realists typically aim to distance themselves from the pragmatist quasi-realism of Blackburn and Gibbard, since they take it to be tied to non-cognitivism. Scanlon insists on a cognitivist interpretation of judgments about reasons for action, taking these as *beliefs about reasons* (not as decisions, imperatives, or attitudes), which he argues is "more in accord with the common-sense understanding of normative judgments than expressivist interpretations are" (2014, 61). Parfit complains that because they are non-cognitivists, quasi-realists have an unconvincing model of moral disagreement (2011 387-9) and so cannot account for the concept of moral mistakes or moral improvement (2011, 394-7). Finally, Dworkin is skeptical that the pragmatic approach has the resources available to sufficiently distinguish itself from more traditional non-quietist accounts. (1996,110-112). See also Dworkin (2011, 35-7).

[16] Though interestingly, Macarthur also places Scanlon in this camp. (2008, 196).

Relaxed realism is a species of metaethical non-naturalism. Non-naturalists hold that moral properties are not reducible or otherwise identical to natural properties, but that nevertheless our moral assertions straightforwardly express beliefs which can be true or false. The three explanatory burdens we saw in Section 1 seem especially burdensome here. It's hard enough for a naturalistic metaethics to account for the metaphysics and epistemology of moral properties—or to explain how they come to motivate us. If moral properties aren't even natural properties, though, how are we going to have any hope of making sense of these features?

The relaxed realist offers a two-part answer: First, they distinguish the moral domain or 'genre' from the domain of the natural sciences. They note that these domains operate according to their own particular rules or standards. Second, they argue that the standards suitable for some domains, like the natural sciences, are not those suitable for moral inquiry--and we can rely on the internal standards for moral inquiry to address the explanatory burdens.

This two-step process helps us make sense of why, within the moral domain, relaxed realists like Scanlon and Parfit argue that moral truths "need no natural or special metaphysical reality in order to have the significance that we commonly grant them" (Scanlon 2014, 52), because they are, "in the strongest sense, true, but these truths have no positive ontological implications." (Parfit, Vol II, 479). In the scientific domain, it's plausible to hold that facts require some kind of metaphysical grounding. The fact that water expands when it freezes is explained by 'deeper' natural facts about the molecular structure of water, and how those molecules interact when they have lower average kinetic energy. But it would be a mistake to look for the same kind of explanation in the moral domain, to make what Blackburn (this volume) calls the "constitutive demand"--a demand for an account of what something being right or wrong *consists in*.

The appeal to different domains is supposed to relieve us of the metaphysical challenge about whether there 'really' are such things as moral facts or properties. For we can, from an internal standpoint, make sense of moral facts (e.g., that it's wrong to torture kittens), and there is no external standpoint from which we can persist in asking if there *really* are such moral facts. Similarly, we can avoid metaphysical questions about whether 'positing' such things could really *explain* anything. For the demand for this kind of *explanation* only makes sense within certain domains--such as that of empirical science (Cf. Scanlon 2014, 26-27, and Kramer 2009, 199-207).

The same two steps alleviate the epistemological explanatory burdens. We can make sense of moral knowledge as arising from a kind of competence with the rules and norms internal to moral discourse. The demand that moral knowledge requires some kind of plausible causal connection between belief and fact arises from a conflation of the standards of the moral and scientific domains:

> We cannot be, in any causal way, "in touch" with moral truth. But we can nevertheless think well or badly about moral issues. What is good and bad thinking is itself a moral question, of course: a moral epistemology is part of substantive moral theory. (Dworkin 12)

The internalizing maneuver, then, gives relaxed realists a way to sidestep concerns about how we could come to have epistemic access to strange moral entities, just as it gives them a way to dispel concerns about moral ontology. "The reality and knowability of moral properties are not starkly ontological or epistemological matters; they are fundamentally moral matters" (Kramer

2009, 200). Questions of moral epistemology only make sense when posed within the moral domain. Their answers do not require us to do any metaphysics.

Finally, the question of how an irreducible non-natural fact could have any kind of motivational import for a natural creature like a human doesn't seem so mysterious, when seen from *within* that discourse. A child asks why it's wrong to lie. You explain that it's wrong because lying hurts people's feelings; it's not the sort of thing you'd like others to do to you; it undermines trust in a community; it treats people as mere means to an end. And you don't want to do that, do you? Inasmuch as the child has become a competent moral agent--that is, inasmuch as she understands these points from within the discourse--these reasons should weigh on her decisions about lying. If she responds instead with a blank, uncomprehending stare, this is evidence that she has not yet fully developed as a moral agent (cf. Ridge 2019, 149). The relaxed realist appeals to the fact that moral judgments have a certain content that marks them out as belonging to the moral domain--a content that connects them to motivational significance (Cf. Dworkin 1996, 116). Judgements in other domains (those of "ordinary matters of fact") lack this connection.The third explanatory burden, then, is also addressed by appealing to differences of domains (Cf. Scanlon 2014, Chapter 3).

The idea that there are different domains, then, does crucial work for relaxed realist versions of quietist moral realism. Questions about the existence of moral facts and about how we can know them, or whether they may be action-guiding, are to be settled by the standards *internal* to the moral domain--not by invoking 'external' standards of deep metaphysical or epistemological inquiry.

But the appeal to different domains raises new questions. First, what distinguishes the different domains? How can we determine where we have different domains? Tristram McPherson and David Enoch (2017) press this question, asking what domains are and how they are individuated. As they put it, we "need at least the sketch of a non-ad hoc way of explaining which (and how many) domains there are. Absent such an explanation, it is unclear whether the notion can do any work" (2017, 824). Without a clear response, they suggest, just about *anything* could be counted as a domain.

Second, what justifies the standards appropriate to acquiring knowledge within each domain? As Michael Ridge puts it, "One might worry that without some general *ex ante* constraint on what makes a domain legitimate the theory will make it too easy to have justified beliefs about esoteric domains" (2019, 152). Surely not just any standards will do. Scanlon considers and responds to this worry, writing:

> There are mathematical standards for answering mathematical questions, scientific standards for answering empirical questions about the physical world, and forms of practical reasoning for answering questions about what we have reason to do. These standards typically consist, in part, of substantive principles about the domain, such as mathematical axioms, moral principles, and scientific generalizations. (2014, 20)

This seems apt, but so far no more than trivial: to say that there are mathematical standards for answering mathematical questions does not yet tell us what these standards are, or why (other than sharing a name) they are appropriate.

Third, why should beliefs *about a domain of morality*--unlike beliefs about other sorts of things--motivate us to act? The relaxed realist can make sense of why these sorts of beliefs (unlike others) have motivational import, given what they're *about*. Explaining motivation in terms of features of the entities represented, however, would undermine the quietist's denial that

metaphysical questions should take priority. It also seems to fall short as an 'explanation': for if moral facts are just a special kind of non-natural thing in the world, how can we explain why we are *required to respond to these things?* (See Dreier 2015a, 177-80; 2015b, 166-8)[17].

In sum, relaxed realists aim to avoid the classic metaphysical, epistemological, and motivational explanatory puzzles by appealing to the differences that arise in different *domains* or *genres*--where the standards across domains may vary for claiming that certain things (peacocks, reasons, numbers) exist; for claiming to have knowledge of the relevant sorts of facts; and regarding whether or not beliefs with those contents motivate action. But as we have seen, this response raises new questions: How can we understand the relevant 'domains', and what distinguishes them? *Why* is it appropriate to have the relevant standards in each domain? And why should these domain differences make a difference to whether or not the relevant beliefs are motivational?

As we see it, there are three options available in response to these questions:[18]

1. **Representationalism:** We can explain the differences in domains and the appropriateness of standards in terms of the facts or properties which they help us accurately represent or come to know.
2. **Extreme quietism:** We can remain quiet in the face of the question--or simply make these distinctions in trivial terms.
3. **Pragmatism:** We can address these questions in pragmatic, functional terms.

We need a way to justify the claim that there may be perfectly legitimate variations in the *standards for claiming that there are* things of certain kinds (peacocks, reasons, numbers, possibilities...), and also in the *methods for acquiring knowledge* of different kinds (everyday empirical, moral, mathematical, modal...). The thought that these concern different 'domains' is okay as a starting place. But this way of putting things may encourage a metaphysics-first approach if it suggests that it is the different *natures of the objects concerned* that explain or justify the different standards. While this strategy may be tempting to heavyweight metaphysicians, it should not be on the table for quietists, who hoped to evade traditional (domain-external) metaphysical questions about the existence or natures of the entities in question. The second approach--an extreme quietism that simply refuses to engage with these questions--however, leaves something important and interesting unexplained.

In sum, relaxed realists aptly identify different areas (domains, or genres) of discourse--the empirical, the mathematical, the modal, the moral--and urge that each is to be recognized as having its own standards. That seems right.

But *why* should we have such different areas of discourse (or, if you prefer, sorts of concepts)? Why *should* they follow different rules? What purposes in human life does it serve to

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[17] Here we again see the awkward wrinkle we noted in fn. 3 above. Dreier's critiques of Parfit and Scanlon here are specifically levelled at the motivational implications of their "Reasons Fundamentalism"--which combines "non-naturalist realism about fundamental normative properties... with the claim that the property of being a reason is the fundamental normative property"--it is, in short, a kind of relaxed realism about reasons (2015b,155). But the points Dreier raises apply just as aptly here for morality as it does for reasons.

[18] Huw Price (2019, 8) similarly observes that relaxed realists face a trilemma: to go metaphysical, to be extreme quietists and simply fail to engage with the questions, or to turn to a version of expressivism (broadly construed). See also Annika Böddeling (2020), who argues that relaxed realists face a dilemma: they must either account for their cognitivism in minimalist terms, in which case they fail to adequately distinguish their view from quasi-realism, or they must give a substantive account of moral truth and belief, in which case they seem to abandon the attractively quietist features of the view.

have these different forms of discourse? Without addressing questions like these, this form of quietism seems rather too quiet.

# 3. The Pragmatist Approach

The most promising way of developing quietism seems to us to be option 3: a pragmatist approach. For such an approach offers an appealing alternative to both the representationalist's ways of dealing with the questions, and to an unsatisfying refusal to engage. As David Macarthur puts it, "One of the common misconceptions about quietism is that the quietist simply turns his back on metaphysical problems, an attitude that strikes many metaphysicians as dogmatic and dismissive" (2008, 199). Instead, as Macarthur makes clear, at its best, the pragmatist quietist aims to "earn the right not to have to answer the metaphysical problem in question" (2008, 199)--by both *diagnosing* the mistake(s) behind the original metaphysical problem, and showing how we should *reconceptualize* the relevant problem.

So how can a pragmatist approach give us a more satisfying response to questions about *how* we can distinguish different domains, *why* the relevant standards are appropriate, and why some (but not other) beliefs or judgments should be motivating? The key is to begin by addressing questions about the functions of different areas of language. This is an approach that:

> begins with linguistic explananda rather than material explananda; with phenomena concerning the use of certain terms and concepts, rather than with things or properties of a non-linguistic nature. It begins with linguistic behavior, and asks broadly anthropological questions: How are we to understand the roles and functions of the behavior in question, in the lives of the creatures concerned? What is its practical significance? Whence its genealogy? (Price 2011, 231)

Approaching questions about domains in terms of differences in 'linguistic frameworks' may bring to mind Carnap, who insisted that we may introduce new linguistic frameworks, without first answering ontological questions "concerning the existence or reality of the total system of new entities" (1950/1956, 214). In introducing a new linguistic framework, we introduce "new ways of speaking, subject to new rules" (1950/1956, 206)--that may then *entitle* us to introduce new singular terms and variables quantifying over them--in what we may *then,* if we like, call a 'domain'.[19]

A related approach can be seen in Gilbert Ryle's (1949) idea that certain explanatory demands in philosophy ("how is the mind related to the body?" "how can we come to have knowledge of other minds?") arose from *category mistakes.* For as Ryle insisted, category differences must be understood first and foremost not in terms of the *category of object referred to* (in terms of the differences between minds and bodies), but in terms of *linguistic categories,* or better still, in terms of *what we are doing* when we say someone has a false belief versus when we say they have a new coffee table. Huw Price suggests understanding Ryle's category distinctions in explicitly functional terms, writing, "Ryle's functional orientation… will … lead us to focus on the difference between the *functions* of talk of beliefs and talk of tables; on the issue of what the two kinds of talk are *for,* rather than that of what they are *about"* (2009, 331).

In metaethics, the pragmatist approach has been most closely associated with the work of Blackburn and Gibbard. Both begin from an alternative functional view of moral

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[19] Scanlon distances himself from Carnap's talk of 'linguistic rules' (2014, 19n.3), though it is not clear to us exactly why.

discourse--seeing it as fundamentally *not* in the business of tracking and reporting on worldly facts, but rather as providing ways to express our attitudes (Blackburn) or planning states (Gibbard). But despite the alternative functional story, Blackburn and Gibbard take pains to show how, from that beginning, we could come to make moral statements which are capable of being true or false. Moreover, we could assert that there are moral facts and properties, not in some 'pretending' or 'as if' way, but in the ordinary English sense. While this point may be obscured by the term '*quasi*-realism' (introduced to form a contrast with traditional forms of realism, but which might suggest that something is 'held back'), it is clear in Blackburn's work that that would be a misreading. As he puts it straightforwardly, "...if the words retain an uncorrupted, English, sense, then… the quasi-realist, holds not just that we talk and think as if there are…[moral or modal properties etc.], but that there are" (Blackburn 1993, 57). Thus we get not just pragmatism, but a form of pragmatist *moral realism.* Yet it is clearly a *quietist* form of moral realism. For the pragmatist appeals to claims about the different *functions* of the relevant areas of discourse to both diagnose the mistakes behind the alleged metaphysical problems, and to reconceptualize the relevant problems in the area: as problems not about what moral properties (say) *are* (or how they could be *known*, or how they could be *motivating*), but rather as problems about how the relevant areas of discourse function and what rules they follow (cf. Macarthur 2008, 200-204).

Broadly speaking, the pragmatist argues that the apparent metaphysical problems regarding, say, moral language, rely on misconceptions about the *functions* the relevant language serves. If this pragmatic approach requires distinguishing functions, however, this makes it crucial to say how we can identify, and justify claims about, the functions that different areas of discourse serve.[20] Traditional realists are often suspicious of this very enterprise, suspecting expressivists of just 'making it up', and responding that we can simply give a uniform functional view: that the function of all forms of indicative discourse is *to state truths about the world.*

We can do better in responding to such skeptics, and in buttressing a pragmatist version of Quietist Moral Realism, if we can answer functional questions in empirical terms. Price makes this clear: "the verdict on the Carnap-Ryle view must await excavations--first-order scientific inquiries into the underlying functions of language in human life" (2009, 335).

We needn't wait for long. For, to make good on the pragmatist's idea that forms of language serve many different functions, we can turn to the inquiries conducted by Systemic Functional Linguistics. We will turn next with some exposition of results in Systemic Functional Linguistics, before returning in Section 5 to show the ways in which this work can enable the quietist to discharge the explanatory burdens and provide a deeper more resilient form of quietist moral realism.

## 4. Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Functions of Moral Language

Systemic Functional Linguistics begins from the idea that "language has evolved in the service of certain functions" (Halliday 1973, 14) and that the "nature of language is closely related to...

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[20] Blackburn addresses this question in general terms, suggesting that "For a given local area, the answer is plain: we gardner evidence from its surroundings, or in other words from other things we think, for example about description, explanation, and representation of the world" (1993,7).

the functions it has to serve" (1970, 141). It involves taking a "descriptive-ethnographic view" of language, on which "linguistics is part of anthropology, and grammar is part of culture" (Halliday 1977, 36-7).

Michael Halliday's inquiries in Systemic Functional Linguistics begin with language development in children. What is distinctive about the language of early childhood is that uses of language wear their functions on their sleeve--each utterance serving a single function. As Halliday puts it, in early childhood language, the internal form of the utterance "reflects rather directly the function that it is being used to serve" (1973, 19). Halliday identifies six standard functions served, including the instrumental (to request goods or services: 'milk!'); the regulatory (to control the behavior of others: 'Mama, come!'); the interactional (greetings, callings: 'bye bye'); personal (for self-expression of feelings); heuristic (questioning, demanding explanation), and imaginative ('let's pretend'). There is also, as a relatively late development, the informative or representational function, on which language is used as a means of communicating information to someone the speaker assumes doesn't know it (1973, 27). Although this is a late development for the child, the representational function comes to dominate the adult's 'conception of the use of language' (1973, 27). It has come to dominate philosophical thinking about language as well, as can be seen in the dominance of what Price calls the Representationalist proto-theory of language (2011, 4-5).

These functions, Halliday suggests, persist in mature language. But their expression becomes more complex. For we learn to use grammatical structures that give us options for serving these functions in various ways, and that enable us to simultaneously serve different functions (1973, 26-7; 1975, 42).[21]

Moral discourse seems to develop out of a need to serve the regulatory function--of regulating the behavior of others, and perhaps also (ultimately) of ourselves. But there are (grammatically) many ways to do this. The child aims to regulate the behavior of others through imperatives. But this would not suffice to serve all the functions of a mature moral language. In mature speech, moral requirements are characteristically expressed not (just) through imperatives ("Don't kill") but through modal terms ("You must not kill"). Ryle (1950) already noted one useful function of shifting to modals: while imperatives enable us only to impose *requirements*, modal terms also enable us to express *permissions* ("You *may* lie if needed to save a life"). Modal terms in general, as systemic functional linguistics has it, provide ways in which "a language user can intrude on her message, expressing attitudes and judgments of various kinds" (Eggins 2004, 172). Modal terms such as 'should' and 'must' enable us to express meanings of obligation, in *degrees ranging* from the strict (you *must*…) to less strict (you *should*…) (Eggins 2004, 179-181).

Of course simple modal statements are not our only form of regulatory language in adult speech. Even in non-moral language, we can shift from a modal expression ("You must all read Kant") to the use of 'objective' modality ("It is required that all students read Kant"). The shift to the impersonal modal has the effect of covering the speaker; "it is a covert attempt to get people to do things without having to take responsibility for issuing the command" (Eggins 2004, 186). In the case of morality, this grammatical shift enables us to present moral language as not merely issuing commands or requirements from some individual or authority ("Give to charity"), but rather to present it as *what must be done* ("It is a moral requirement that one give to charity"),

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[21] More precisely, grammar enables speakers to serve three metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) in a single utterance.

without appealing to any commands. As a result, such expressions are able to serve a regulatory function without being properly subject to challenges such as "but I don't want to", "who says I should?", and the like.[22]

From impersonal modals (like "It is required that students read Kant"), we can go on to nominalize and speak of requirements, e.g. "A requirement of the course is reading Kant". This then enables us to refer back to, enumerate and quantify, requirements, e.g. "the five requirements for this course are...". We can then also qualify requirements and compare them: "The requirements of this course are very onerous", "The requirements of this course are more onerous than those for the course I took last term". Such nominalizations again play a central role in properly *moral* discourse, enabling us to say things such as: "the moral requirements incumbent on any rational being are…", "our moral obligations are independent of our desires", and so on.

We began from the relaxed realist's idea that a moral 'domain' should be distinguished from other domains (such as that of everyday empirical knowledge or science), and should be acknowledged as following its own standards for knowledge. We then suggested that talk of 'domains' should *not* be understood in terms of differences in *objects* of the domain, but rather traced to differences in the *functions* of the discourse in question. While the crucial differences we have uncovered underlie the ways in which different 'domains' have been distinguished, these are at bottom differences in the *functions* of the discourse, not in the *'natures'* of the *'objects'*.

We turned to systemic functional linguistics for help in addressing questions about what the functions of moral discourse are. We have raised the hypothesis that the ur-function, out of which moral language develops, is regulatory--a function of guiding and controlling behavior. But this is certainly not all that a fully developed moral language--complete with reference to moral obligations, reasons for action, and the like--enables us to do. As we have seen, mature moral language introduces new forms of speech, including not just commands and prohibitions (such as could perform the original regulatory functions), but also modal formulations, depersonalized expressions, nominalized appeals to moral requirements or obligations, and so on. These new forms of speech, which form part of any fully developed system of moral language, are essential for a full moral system to do its work. What do they do for us? Let us summarize:

- **Imperatives** serve a function of regulating behavior.
- Adding **modal expressions** enables us to not merely *command* but also to *permit* various forms of behavior, and to do so with varying *degrees* of stringency.
- **Impersonal modals** enable the commands (and permissions) to be made in a way that does not avert to the authority of the speaker to impose commands.
- **Nominalizations from modals** enable us to speak of requirements as 'things', in ways that enable us to demand and give *justifications* for thinking that there are such requirements, to *compare* requirements, and so on.

These more highly developed forms of moral language augment the ur-function of regulation along several dimensions. They enable a discourse wherein shared requirements and permissions

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[22] Does this characteristic impersonal form of moral language also enable it to 'cover its tracks' in ways that may be systematically deceptive, as Nietzsche would have suggested? We will leave that open here. For interesting discussion, see Campbell (2014).

can be given, presented in an *authority-independent* way, *publicly justified* and made *open to reason, comparative evaluation, and debate*.

This suggests the beginnings of a functional account of the domain of moral discourse. Without these shared features, one may be able to have a top-down system of behavioral control (such as Hobbes imagined coming from the commands of the sovereign), but not what we would regard as a fully developed *moral* system. Taken together, we can see how these various forms of speech enable moral discourse to serve as a tool in coordinating our behavior, in public and reasoned ways. This account of the functions of a mature system of moral language fits well with other accounts of the function of a moral system. As Richard Joyce put it:

> By providing a framework within which both one's own actions and others' actions may be evaluated, moral judgments can act as a kind of "common currency" for collective negotiation and decision-making. Moral judgment thus can function as a kind of social glue, bonding individuals together in a shared justificatory structure and providing a tool for solving many group coordination problems. (2006, 117)[23]

A common response from traditional moral realists at this stage is to say: Sure, we can *all* accept views like these about the functions moral discourse serves. But (they will say) "that doesn't undermine the view that there *are* moral facts and properties, obligations and reasons, and that we can speak truths about them". So true. We will come back to these points below in clarifying why the resulting view *is* a form of moral realism.

"So why" (the critic may go on to ask), "does it make a difference--why bother with this long-winded functional story?" That is the key point, and the answer is this: the functional story does not come as a mere add-on linguistic/anthropological curiosity. These differences in function come with differences in the rules such terms follow and the methods by which they enter language. And fully grasping those differences enables us to show why many of the 'explanatory burdens' placed on traditional moral realists are mistakes that grow out of a failure to acknowledge these crucial differences. We will next discuss these differences in introduction rules, and then turn to show how this enables us, first, to affirm realism, and second, to shed the alleged explanatory burdens.


# 5. How to Develop a Quietist Moral Realism

The work in Systemic Functional Linguistics enables us to see functional differences between talk of obligations versus talk of dogs and apples. But it does more than just that. It also enables us to see that the key noun terms used in moral discourse enter into language through entirely different routes, and with entirely different introduction rules, than more basic nouns like 'dog' and 'apple'. Consider nominative terms for moral requirements, duties, or obligations, as contrasted with nouns like 'dog and 'apple'. In early stages of language development, semantics and grammar are 'congruent': processes are represented by verbs, entities by nouns, and so on (Halliday 2009, 117-21; Hopper and Thompson 1985, 155-6). Nouns such as 'dog' and 'apple' are congruent: they name a single, visible, tangible object (Hopper and Thompson 1985, 155-6; Halliday 2009, 116). Children acquire such congruent nouns first, typically ostensively, in

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[23] Cf. Warren (2015, 269-71; 2018, 477) and Timmons (1999, 157).

investigating their environment.[24] Such terms are initially used in serving the heuristic function--enabling the child to label and go on to acquire more information about the objects: "At this very early stage, in its most elementary form the heuristic use of language is the demand for a name, which is the child's way of categorizing the objects of the physical world" (Halliday 1975, 20).

By contrast, the terms for duties, obligations, and requirements are not congruent. They enter language at a relatively late phase, as what Halliday calls "grammatical metaphors" (2009, 116-38). Grammatical metaphors arise when language develops such that "A meaning that was originally construed by one kind of wording comes instead to be construed by another"--including terms from another grammatical category (Halliday 2009, 117). For example, one may move from saying 'wash the car' to speaking of 'a carwash' or 'taking the car in for a wash' (ibid).

The noun terms for duties, obligations, and requirements are derived through nominalizations from modal statements. There are, thus, characteristic differences not only in the *functions* of the relevant discourse (physical object discourse versus discourse about duties, or obligations), but also in the *rules and methods* by means of which the relevant noun terms are introduced into the language. It is these differences that account for the sense that such things as requirements, duties, and obligations belong to a different 'category' or 'domain' from ordinary objects such as dogs and apples. As Halliday emphasizes (2009, 131), when grammatical metaphors (which include such noun terms as 'requirement' and 'duty') are introduced, that brings with it the potential for absurdities and internal contradictions:[25] the hallmarks of what Ryle identified as 'category mistakes' (1949, 16-18).

Some think that taking a pragmatist approach to analyzing moral discourse would take the 'realism' out of quietist moral realism. But the opposite is true. For properly understanding these entry rules gives us justification for accepting so-called 'easy arguments' for the existence of moral properties, duties and obligations (see Thomasson 2015). Easy arguments arise where we can apparently make inferences from uncontested truths (say, 'The barn is red') via a conceptual truth ('If the barn is red, then the barn has the property of redness') to come to an apparently metaphysical conclusion ('There are properties'). Parallel easy arguments can be given for moral properties, requirements, etc. For we can move from 'One shouldn't torture babies' to 'There is a moral requirement to refrain from torturing babies' to 'There are moral requirements'. Such easy arguments are valid because the linking conceptual truth just gives an object-language version of the introduction rule for the relevant terminology.

So understood, a functional analysis of the discourse gives us reason to accept that these easy arguments are perfectly valid, and so that (barring further objections)[26] we should accept that there *are* moral properties, moral facts, requirements, and obligations--and so to accept moral realism. The quietist form of realism that results thus is what one of us has elsewhere

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[24] These congruent nouns then would apparently fulfill the demands of what Price calls an 'e-representational' view of language: one that "gives priority to the idea that the job of a representation is to *co-vary* with something else--typically some external factor or environmental condition" (2011, 20). Price emphasizes that it is a mistake to think that the "prime function" of all representations is to do this job (2011, 20-21).

[25] Halliday's example here is "The fifth day saw them at the summit", which introduces absurdities since, of course, days cannot see (2009, 131).

[26] Of course a number of objections have been raised to such easy arguments. There is not space to address these here, but for responses to the most common objections, see (Thomasson 2015).

called 'simple realism' (Thomasson 2015, Chapter 3), as contrasted with 'explanatory realism'. The 'simple realist' asserts that there *are* moral facts, properties, etc. *in the only sense that has sense* (the sense given by the rules of use governing the terms). Yet in adopting 'simple realism', we do not treat these moral facts, properties, etc. as 'metaphysical posits' that are supposed to do *explanatory work*.[27]

Where does this leave the quietist with respect to the three classic 'explanatory burdens' with which we opened our discussion? We saw at the end of Section 2 that relaxed realists have a plausible initial response to these burdens: They insist that questions about the existence of moral facts, our knowledge of them, or motivation by them should be addressed from *within* a moral standpoint, because these questions concern a distinctive 'moral domain'. But the relaxed realist's reliance on domains raises questions about how to distinguish the different domains and what justifies their differing epistemic standards and relations to motivation.

The current approach takes a different route, insisting that it is the differences in function and introduction rules that play the crucial role here--it is not a matter of detecting differences in the natures of 'objects' of distinct 'domains of things'. Nor are we forced to answer detailed questions about the individuation of domains--questions such as whether aesthetic properties are part of the same domain as moral properties. For we mustn't think of 'domains' as if they are baskets of different sorts of objects (oranges in one, apples in another). Instead, talk of different domains is a harmless but potentially misleading objectualizing way of getting at differences that trace back to differences in the functions and rules governing the various forms of discourse.

The original 'explanatory burdens' can be diagnosed and reconceptualized more clearly if we appeal not to differences in 'domains' or in the 'status of the objects', but instead to an analysis in terms of the functions and rules of the discourse. Let us treat the burdens in turn.

## 5.1 Metaphysical questions: Are there *really* moral properties, moral facts, reasons, obligations, etc.? If so, how can such things "fit with our broader metaphysical commitments?" (McPherson 2011, 224). How are they related to non-moral or 'natural' properties, facts, etc.?

As we have seen, quietists in both camps have argued that these apparently 'metaphysical' questions are best understood as moral questions, to which moral answers must be given. With a clearer view in place about the functions and rules governing moral language, we can show why this approach is justified. For talk of moral properties, moral facts, and obligations, is not introduced by observing or 'tracking' things in the world (as talk of dogs and apples is). Instead, it is introduced via nominalizations out of more basic forms of moralizing. So, if we can say that lying is wrong, we can trivially infer that lying has the property of being morally wrong; and if we ought to look after children, we can infer that we have an *obligation to* look after our children. It is because the relevant noun terms (for 'entities' in the moral 'domain') are introduced in this way that the 'internalizing move' to answer apparently metaphysical questions via first-order moral claims is legitimate. As we have argued above, this gives us a direct answer

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[27] Not even to 'explain' why we should act in some ways and not others. For if talk of moral requirements arises via hypostatizations out of more basic claims about what we *should* do, then it would give only a dormitive virtue explanation to appeal to the requirements in order to *explain* why we should act in this way. (For general discussion of the relevance of dormitive virtue arguments to such claims of explanation, see Thomasson 2015, 156-7).

to the first of these questions. For we can use easy ontological arguments to conclude that: yes, there are moral facts, moral properties, and obligations (gaining a form of simple realism). But this method of addressing questions about whether moral properties exist (by means of trivial inferences from uncontested moral truths), is very different from the ways we must go about answering questions about whether vampire bats exist.[28]

Enoch and McPherson argue, however, that if we interpret Scanlon as offering an easy ontological approach to internal questions with a pragmatic approach to external questions, his view will be "hard to distinguish from an unattractively global hermeneutic fictionalism" (2017, 829). Christopher Cowie similarly worries that "domain relative truth is not truth: a statement can be true relative to a specified domain without actually being true (e.g. that Sherlock Holmes lives at Baker Street)" (2014, 673). If we think of domains as like stories, we can see how this objection might arise.

But if, instead, we see the fundamental distinctions as lying in the different functions of different areas of discourse, and the rules they follow, then we can see that the fictionalism objection is misguided. For the rules that entitle us to introduce talk of moral properties, obligations, and the like, are the rules that *give these terms the only meaning they have.* As a result, it is simply *true* (in the only sense that has sense--not true in some fictional sense that could be contrasted with full-blown truth) that there are reasons, obligations, and so on.[29] That is why it is perfectly apt to say that quietism, so understood, *is* a form of moral realism.

Similarly, we can see that the quietist need not claim that obligations, moral properties, and the like are 'not ontologically robust' (whatever that would mean) in some sense in which other things (such as dogs and apples) are. Instead, we should simply allow that are such things *in the only sense that has sense* (cf. Thomasson 2015, Chapter 3). Simon Blackburn makes much the same point in his response to David Lewis's claim that quasi-realism is a form of fictionalism. As Blackburn writes:

> What then is the mistake in describing such a philosophy as holding that 'we talk as if there are necessities when really *there are none?'* It is the failure to notice that the quasi-realist need allow no sense to what follows the 'as if' *except* one in which it is true. (1993, 57)

As Matthew Kramer aptly describes Blackburn's view, "There is nothing quasi about quasi-realism" (2017, 20). The apparent differences here are not traced to some obscure claim of a different 'metaphysical status' or 'robustness', but rather to differences in the *functions* of these areas of discourse, and the different *rules* that permit the introduction of these different noun terms.

But it is not enough to just make sense of the existence of moral obligations, properties. To secure a realism as 'robust' as traditional moral realists want, we also need an argument that these obligations, properties, etc. aren't contingent on the opinions or values of any particular individual or group, but that they are in an important sense mind-independent. That is, we need an argument that relativism and subjectivism are false, that moral properties are objective.

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[28] Unless, of course, one already knows (for example) that there are particles arranged vampire-bat-wise. (But of course, that is not the normal sense of the question 'do vampire bats exist'). For, as one of us has argued elsewhere (Thomasson 2015, Chapter 3), one can make a trivial inference from 'there are particles arranged vampire-bat-wise' to 'there are vampire bats', as well as across other "ontologically alternative" forms of expression. For discussion of ontologically alternative forms of expression, see Thomasson (2019, 255-7).

[29] For discussion of this point, and of why, if we can genuinely make easy arguments for existence, we are not subject to charges of fictionalism, see Thomasson (2015, Chapter 5). For a clarifying distinction between quasi-realism and fictionalism, see Blackburn (2005).

Quietists of either camp can make strides toward this goal with the internalizing maneuver. Kramer, for example, has argued that:

> Moral subjectivism and moral relativism are to be repudiated chiefly for moral reasons. That is, they are to be repudiated chiefly because they are moral doctrines that yield morally unacceptable conclusions. (2009, 31)

A commitment to moral relativism would leave us, for example, incapable of condemning the Taliban's policy of barring girls from education, since, after all, this policy is a consequence of the moral convictions of the Taliban (Blackburn 1999). It would likewise commit us to the position that "if one day people in general, or in the stipulated community, ceased to react [opprobriously] to genocide, genocide would cease to be wicked" (Dworkin 1996, 102). The wrongness of such commitments isn't a metaphysical matter; it's a moral matter. Moral objectivity, then, is a moral stance.

This is all well and good, and should be familiar by now. The Quietist Moral Realist can justify moral objectivity by making use of the standards of the moral domain itself. But as we saw in Section 2, this still leaves us with the question: Where do these domain-specific standards come from? The analysis we considered from Systemic Functional Linguistics gives us a plausible way to respond.

If moral discourse functions to regulate our social lives, to guide us into cooperative behavior, it should be no surprise that this function necessitates some kind of moral objectivity:

> The sort of inconsistency involved with ethical beliefs can be understood in terms of possibility of action: inconsistent ethical beliefs cannot coherently guide our behavior. And, in failing to guide our behavior, they frustrate one of our main practical goals: effective action in the world. (Timmons 1999, 173)

We use moral discourse to coordinate our behavior, to decide what *we* should do. But we can't serve this central function of moral discourse if we treat the opinions and values of any particular person or group as the last word on moral truth.[30]

What of further metaphysical questions, such as "how are these moral properties or facts related to non-moral or 'natural' properties, facts, etc.? Such questions arise when we think of talk of 'moral properties', normative facts, and the like *on analogy with* talk using congruent, observationally introduced terms such as 'bats' or 'fungus'. "What is a bracket fungus, and how is it related to the tree on which it grows?", is a perfectly good question--to be addressed by empirical investigation. But that doesn't tell us that the parallel questions for moral properties and facts are legitimate and sensible questions.

The best response here is not to say that such questions are misguided because the objects being represented by moral discourse are *non-natural* objects. (Why should that matter? And what would it even mean?). Instead, they are misguided because they treat nominalized moral terms on the model of congruent nouns observationally introduced--rather than recognizing these nominalizations as crucial parts of moral language that can enable us impose requirements and issue permissions, in a speaker-neutral way, and in a way that enables us to compare and publicly justify these regulations. Once we see how and why these terms are introduced, the sense that

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[30] Cf. Blackburn (1984, 195). See Price (2003) for a generalized pragmatist account of the role that the norms surrounding truth-assessment play in engendering useful convergences in a community. See Warren (manuscript) for an exploration of how these norms could plausibly make sense of objectivity in moral, modal, and mathematical discourse.

there are 'deep' questions about what relations these referents stand in to natural facts and properties, should fade away.


## 5.2 Epistemological questions: If there are moral facts, how could we possibly come to *know* them?

The appeal to functions can similarly help us respond to the epistemological questions: If there are moral or (more broadly) normative truths, how could we possibly come to *know* them?

      The relaxed realist is inclined here to also respond by distinguishing different domains, insisting that, while causal or empirical methods of acquiring knowledge are suitable for acquiring knowledge of the natural world, different methods are appropriate for coming to know about the mathematical domain, or facts in the domain of reasons. But this appeal to domains leads to further questions: what makes the standards we use for acquiring knowledge in each domain appropriate?

      A pragmatist approach can do better by noting the differences in function, and rules governing, talk of moral facts, requirements, obligations, etc, versus those governing talk of bats and fungus. For it can lead us to reevaluate the assumptions behind the alleged epistemological problems. Where terms are introduced ostensively, with a central function of tracking environmental features (which we can then go on to empirically investigate), it makes sense to worry that if we could not be in causal or perceptual contact with these objects or properties, we could not come to know anything about them. But again, the sense that these are legitimate worries for coming to know about the referents of our nominalized *moral* terms should begin to crumble once we attend to the differences in the functions and rules governing these terms.[31]

      Once we give up the assumption that talk of reasons or of moral facts is (because it uses noun terms) parallel to talk of bats, we can also give up the assumption that knowledge of these things should be achievable through some sort of causal commerce with the relevant entities. And we can see the route to a different story about how we *can* acquire moral knowledge. Talk of moral facts, for example, just involves useful hypostatization out of talk of what we may, should, or must do. So to figure out what the 'moral facts' are, we naturally go via first-order moral inquiries into what we ought to do. The internalizing maneuver again turns out to be perfectly reasonable--and now we can see why.

      But how do we come to figure out what we should do? We can at least get a start if we return to our functional account of moral discourse. We have suggested that moral discourse functions to regulate social behavior, in ways that are publicly justifiable, impersonal, and not dependent on the commands of any particular individual or group. When we investigate the epistemic status of moral beliefs, we appropriately check to see if they are robust or just the product of our temperament or enculturation--and so if they are properly *impersonal*. We give

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[31] A full pragmatist account would appeal not only to the function of moral discourse, but also to the function of *epistemic* discourse. It serves our purposes well to be able to distinguish cases in which we, or others, do or do not have moral knowledge. Like moral claims, knowledge claims play a regulative role: helping us to monitor and keep track of who can be trusted on different issues , what sources are reliable, and what puts them in a position to be reliable. Cf. Chrisman (2007),  and Craig (1990) as cited in Blackburn (2019). It also helps us decide when one is "in the kind of position that renders further inquiry otiose: having the status to call the case closed." (Blackburn 2019, 56).

reasons for them in ways that aim to be *publicly justifiable* as ways of regulating social behavior. We scrutinize our reasons for trusting the ethical judgements of others, and aim to ensure we are not just taking them on authority. Once again, we can see that different procedures are appropriate for acquiring knowledge of moral facts than of facts about fungus--though these differences are better accounted for in terms of the different rules and functions governing the different forms of discourse than in terms of differences in the 'natures' of the objects in different 'domains'.

## 5.3 Motivational questions: If there are moral facts, how could they possibly be *authoritative* or *action-guiding* for us?

We see the same pattern when we think about the motivational question. Here again, the kind of internalized explanation offered by the relaxed realist is a decent start. But it doesn't go far enough. If we take the motivational question to be, "Why is it that *I* should act in accordance with my judgement that, e.g., lying is wrong?", then the best answer we can hope for will be a moral answer. But if we instead take the question to be, "How… could our judgments of what we ought to do motivate us to do things, when they do?" (Dreier 2015a, 177) we don't seem to get a very informative answer. "The problem isn't that what the [relaxed realist] has to say [about motivation] is false, or that nobody else would want to say it; the problem is that it offers nothing in the way of explanation." (Dreier 2015a, 178)

And this is precisely where adding a pragmatic analysis to a quietist account helps. For when we look to the functional import of moral discourse, we can find a more informative answer. Moral language, on this analysis, originates from discourse that overtly has the function of regulating behavior--and so of being action-guiding. The nominalizations that enable us to talk of (and compare, and justify claims about) moral facts, obligations, and so on come later. But introducing this language is *not* done by discovering some new kind of thing in the world that we can refer to, and asking how beliefs about a thing *of this kind* could be motivational.

Instead, as we have seen, the language that enables us to speak of moral facts, obligations, and so on is introduced by grammatical metaphor on top of overtly action-guiding language. In sophisticated moral language, the overtly action-guiding language is simply transformed grammatically (so that we can better enumerate, compare, and reason about the topic), without losing the original action-guiding function. A better question than to ask how beliefs about how these queer objects could be motivational, is instead to ask how motivating discourse arises, and gets transformed into nominalized terms--which are supposed to motivate us to act in certain ways regardless of our desires or of the desires or commands of others. It is a function of the discourse to bring us into socially coordinated behavior, and that function can't be fulfilled unless the discourse has this feature—that it motivates, and does so impersonally, without the authority of a commander.

As we saw above, the relaxed realist form of quietism has faced daunting criticism, and risks being too quiet in failing to respond to questions that remain about how we can distinguish different domains, and why they should come with different epistemic standards and motivational import. We have aimed to show that taking a pragmatist approach may provide a promising way around these criticisms by moving us from simple talk of different domains, to

talk of linguistic functions, and the rules that underlie them. By combining a broadly pragmatist approach with this work in Systemic Functional Linguistics, we open up the route to a response that is not simply quiet in the face of the 'explanatory burdens' pressed in metaethics, but instead has something to say about them. For once we have the beginnings of a pragmatic story on the table about the *functions of* and *rules governing* the more puzzling forms of moral language, we can see why some prominent explanatory demands are misguided, and why the questions that remain *can* legitimately be addressed via the 'internalizing maneuver' so typical of quietism.

We offer this as a natural development of the pragmatist approach to such problems--when fleshed out with some of the empirical linguistic work that pragmatists insist is needed, and when combined with an 'easy' approach to ontological questions that is itself supported by the same kind of pragmatic discourse analysis. We also offer this development of a quietist position as an option to relaxed realists, as a development that (we think) is consistent with their central commitments, and yet is no longer open to the criticisms standardly raised against approaches that bottom out in talk of different 'domains'. If relaxed realists hesitate to accept this offering, perhaps it will at least advance discussion to ask them to articulate their sources of resistance, and to clarify what more is wanted.

# 6. Conclusion

We began by observing that there have been two sorts of reactions to moral realism: some find it *obviously* true; others find it metaphysically mystifying. A quietist approach speaks to both sorts of reactions. With the first, Quietist Moral Realism, properly understood, says *yes: of course* there are moral facts, moral obligations, and moral properties. In fact, we can get the claims that there *are* by means of trivial inferences from claims we can all agree on (e.g. 'we shouldn't torture babies'). To those who claim to find the realist position metaphysically mystifying, the quietist can now also offer a more satisfying response: these questions seem pressing and worrying, *if* we tacitly think of these moral terms as working analogously to terms for bats or fungi. But once we get a fuller understanding of crucial differences in the ways these moral terms are introduced and the functions they serve, we can see that these concerns arise from false analogies. In this way, the quietist can keep the realism, and yet dissolve the sense of mystery. This hope, in our view, makes a pragmatist version of Quietist Moral Realism an appealing way to go, well worth further development and investigation.

Further challenges, of course, remain to be met, including investigating concerns that the very functions served by moral discourse involve a kind of deception (presenting there as being commands without a commander),[32] showing how one can build a suitable account of moral knowledge from this basis,[33] and a suitable account of moral objectivity, explaining how (if we see moral claims as expressions of attitudes) we can allow that moral claims may retain their meaning even when embedded in force-stripping contexts,[34] and so on. The work here certainly

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[32] On this score, see Eric Campbell (2014).
[33] See Blackburn (2019).
[34] This is of course the notorious 'Frege-Geach problem'. For a helpful overview, see Schroeder (2008). See Geach (1964) and Searle (1962) for the original formulations of the problem. See Hare (1970), Blackburn (1984, 192-210; 1988), and Gibbard (1990, 83-102) for proposed solutions. There has been a great deal of discussion of this issue, which we do not have space to review here. We will point out only that the crucial part of this view is not one about *meanings*, but about *functions*, and that these two views may be separated. See Thomasson (2020, Chapters 2 and 3)

isn't complete. Nonetheless, we hope to have shown where one might look to unearth a form of Quietist Moral Realism that is deeper and more resilient than its critics have appreciated, and that may provide a plausible and interesting response to some central problems of metaethics.

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for these distinctions drawn for the case of *modal* discourse. See Warren (2015) for a proposed solution in metaethics that rejects expressivists accounts of meaning, but still fits well within the pragmatist tradition. See also Michael Williams (2011) for a metatheoretical account of how the distinction between meaning and function can clarify use-theoretic accounts of meaning.

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