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Expressivist Abolitionism

Eric Campbell

University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Moral abolitionists argue that ordinary moral discourse has downsides substantial enough to warrant abandoning the discourse in favor of some replacement(s). Their most common critique is that the 'realist' character of moral discourse inhibits important forms of self-awareness. Until recently, metaethicists had operated on the assumption that abolitionism depends on error theory. To this day, there has been no discernible recognition that well-established metaethical views might strongly support abolitionism, despite rejecting error theory. Here I argue that expressivism supports abolitionism and fits very poorly with quasi-realism. That is because (1) the quasi-realist strategy for defeating error theory helps abolitionists by entailing that they have no need of error theory, (2) expressivist interpretations of belief in realism strongly support abolitionist critiques from self-awareness, and (3) there is an inherent instability between expressivism and quasi-realism, while abolitionism and expressivism fit very nicely together.

1.   Introduction

The most prominent and influential moral error theory is based on the idea that moral discourse presupposes some kind of attitude-independent practical authority, together with the claim that either no such authority exists or we have no good reason for thinking it does. If moral claims are thus all false or unjustified, the question arises what to do about it. Though some error theorists have argued for fictionalization or conservation of moral discourse [Joyce 2001; Olson 2014], several others have argued that moral discourse exacerbates self-deception, bad faith, or otherwise inhibits important forms of human flourishing [Hinckfuss 1987; Garner 1994 and 2007; Greene 2002; Marks 2012; Campbell 2014]. Their most central and common complaint is

that the 'realist' character of moral discourse undermines important forms of self-awareness.[1] Call any systematic critique of moral discourse aiming to justify abandoning participation in it (while developing alternatives) a version of **moral abolitionism**.[2]

Abolitionism has standardly been predicated on error theory, in the sense that the possibility of abolitionism seems to arise only if moral discourse has some false metaphysical presupposition (e.g., realist normative facts). Though it has been recently noted that abolitionism does not rely on error theory, the metaethical community has yet to appreciate the significance of this fact. In particular, the literature contains very little exploration of whether various non-error-theoretic views might fit comfortably with, or even support abolitionism.[3] Here I make the case that expressivism is not only consistent with, but supports abolitionism over quasi-realism.

In section 2, I argue that there are two very different versions of the quasi-realist project; one is the attempt to 'save expressivism from error theory' [Blackburn 2006: 154], while the other aims to legitimise, protect, or earn the right to (realist) moral discourse. However, the quasi-realist strategy for defeating error theory entails that doing so is of no value in defending moral discourse. Instead, by quasi-realists' own lights, the normative version of the quasi-realist project requires engaging with abolitionists' normative critiques of moral discourse. Since quasi-realists have not done this, the more ambitious version of quasi-realism—the only version that makes sense of its name—has not yet been defended.

In section 3, I argue that Allan Gibbard's and Simon Blackburn's explanations of the realist character of moral judgment support the two central theses of a recent, non-error-theoretic abolitionist argument according to which the realist character of moral discourse tends to obscure the nature of our own motivations and values, often leading us to unwittingly violate our own deepest values [Campbell 2014]. I also try to show that by expressivists' own lights, the realist

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[1] For continuity with the quasi-realist literature, I refer to a commitment to attitude-independent normativity as a commitment to realism.

[2] Since the value of moral discourse is likely to vary across persons, groups, and times, the force of abolitionist arguments is likely to vary accordingly. Thus abolitionism need not aim to 'abolish' moral discourse universally, making the term's association with ending slavery (even more) potentially misleading and distracting. I nevertheless retain it, partly to maintain continuity with the literature, and partly for the same reason that Williams [1985] called morality 'the peculiar insitution', i.e., to highlight the fact that moral judgments issue commands, backed by threat of punishment, that do not even pretend to require justification in terms of the interests or values of those commanded.

[3] To my knowledge, there are only two exceptions to this rule. I have argued that any form of normative subjectivism supports abolitionism [2014], while Ingram 2015 maintains that abolitionism and robust moral realism make a surprisingly attractive combination.

character of moral discourse inhibits acceptance of expressivism itself. Thus the more valuable the expressivist insight, the more expressivism militates against quasi-realism.

I conclude that expressivism and quasi-realism fit together very poorly. By contrast, expressivism and abolitionism pair nicely together, since expressivist abolitionism can be packaged as the project to develop ways of thinking and talking that aim to promote the expressivist insight itself, and self-awareness in the socio-ethical domain generally.

2.   Moral Quasi-realism as Moral Conservationism

Standard error theoretic arguments directed at the realist character of moral discourse go something like this:

1.   Moral concepts presuppose some kind of attitude-independent practical requirements. (Realist conceptual claim)
2.   No such requirements exist, or we are not justified in thinking they do. (Ontological or epistemological rejection of realism)
3.   No moral judgments are true, or we are not justified in believing any of them. (Different versions of standard error-theoretic conclusion).[4]

Moderate error theories modify the first premise so as to locate the false belief not in the very concept of a moral truth or requirement, but in the background [Olson 2014]. Once upon a time, motion judgments might have always been accompanied by the false background belief that motion is absolute. Those of us who accept Einsteinian relativity no longer think there is such a thing as absolute motion, but we do not regard all pre-relativistic motion judgments as false. Neither do we think all claims about water must be false merely because the speaker believes water is an element. Instead, we regard this as a false belief about water that does not infect the meaning of all claims involving water. Analogously, ordinary speakers might have realist beliefs about morality without their moral claims thereby turning out false. Thus we might accept that 'Slavery is morally wrong' is true, even if we think that the relevant speaker, or even the entire relevant

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[4] I use 'false' to stand for the more precise 'untrue or unjustified', as nothing in my discussion hinges on such distinctions.

linguistic community, falsely believes that moral facts must be realist, or that they depend on divine commandments.

I distinguish between standard and moderate error theories partly because standard theories can seem especially implausible due to the staggering implication that nobody can ever make a true moral claim. Moderate error theories are not quite so counterintuitive as this. Nevertheless, they maintain that ordinary speakers have systematically false beliefs whenever they make moral judgments. Thus both kinds of theories naturally lead to the question whether and how to participate in moral discourse.[5] I follow Matt Lutz in calling this the "'Now What?' Question" (NWQ).

Expressivism is an explanatory account of normative judgment. Its central claim is that normative judgments in general, and moral judgments in particular, are expressions of practical attitudes, i.e., attitudes with a 'desire-like', or world-to-mind direction of fit. Expressivism can appear to entail error theory for two reasons. First, according to the Eleatic Principle, if the best explanation for one's belief in X does not require that X is true, then one's belief in X is unjustified. For example, if the best explanation of one's belief that there is water in the valley does not entail that there is water in the valley, then the belief is unjustified.[6] Crucially, expressivist explanations of normative judgments do not include any mention of normative truths, facts, or properties. Thus expressivism seems to imply that even if there happen to be any such things, belief in them is unjustified.[7] Richard Joyce [2006] employs the Eleatic Principle to support the error-theoretic conclusion that even if there are moral truths, we are unjustified in believing in them.

Second, expressivists join Joyce and other error theorists in relying on the projection metaphor to explain the phenomenology associated with moral judgments. Both theories draw inspiration from Hume's insistence that we project our sentiments onto their objects. For example, if we have an attitude of repugnance toward racism or sexism, then according to

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[5] Since both quasi-realists and abolitionists understand realism as central to ordinary moral thought and practice, I will often drop 'realist' as a qualifier for 'moral discourse'.
[6] This epistemogical principle is closely connected to a popular theory of existence, according to which to exist is to possess causal powers.
[7] Thus expressivism can seem to entail not only a moral error theory, but one for all normativity. However, here I discuss only moral versions of error theory, quasi-realism, and abolitionism, as opposed to more generally normative versions thereof. The difference is that non-moral normativity (e.g., prudential advice) need have no suggestion of realism, as most error theorists acknowledge.

projectivism, we 'project' this sentiment onto the relevant people or behaviors themselves, such that they appear to be intrinsically repugnant. If we are offended, then that which offends us tends to be perceived as inherently offensive. In short, according to projectivism, our sentimental apparatus makes the objects of our appraisals seem to have value that is robustly independent of the sentimental or affective attitudes that 'gild and stain' them. Thus expressivists and error theorists alike explain our experience of (and to that extent, belief in) realist normativity in terms of the projection of sentiments onto the world.

Until recently, abolitionist critiques of moral discourse had been almost entirely predicated on an error theory according to which all moral judgments presuppose a false belief in realist normativity [Hinckfuss 1987; Garner 1994 and 2007; Greene 2002; Marks 2012]. Though error-theoretic abolitionists believe that realism is conceptually essential to all moral discourse, I find this view implausible. More important, it is unnecessary to defend a very robust and interesting version of abolitionism. Instead of insisting that all moral discourse is necessarily realist, abolitionist arguments can be directed at the realist character of moral discourse. So long as this is a sufficiently deep and pervasive aspect of ordinary moral discourse, the abolitionist will have a robust target. Moreover, since quasi-realism is explicitly aimed at legitimizing (or 'earning the right' to) the realist character of moral discourse, we can have a productive disagreement between expressivist abolitionism and expressivist quasi-realism, understood respectively as attempts to critique and legitimise the realist character of moral discourse.[8]

Though quasi-realists and error theorists agree about the centrality of realist belief to moral discourse, they disagree about how to understand this belief—and it is through this different understanding that quasi-realists aim to defeat error theory. According to error theorists, belief in realist normativity is not itself a practically normative belief. Thus when error theorists reject realism, they aim to defend their arguments entirely on non-normative (conceptual and ontological) grounds. Likewise, they regard their error-theoretic conclusions as non-normative, with no direct implications for action. Thus all error theorists accept that their theories leave the NWQ entirely open.

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[8] I consider moral discourse 'realist' in so far as its users are disposed to resist the idea that the justification of all moral judgments must bottom out in rationally contingent practical attitudes. Thus it will often not be obvious whether or to what extent a speaker's moral discourse is realist in a given context; even committed relativists can employ substantially realist discourse in certain contexts.

By contrast, expressivist quasi-realists interpret belief in normative realism as itself a normative belief. This is the key to the quasi-realist strategy for defeating error theory (and solving other problems for expressivism). This strategy aims to interpret even the most apparently non-normative metaphysical beliefs, including and especially belief in realist metaphysics, as 'internal to normative thinking', i.e., as practically normative beliefs [Gibbard 2003: 186]. Call this the quasi-realist 'internalizing strategy'.

Blackburn explicitly identifies the internalizing strategy as the 'central quasi-realist tactic: what seems like a thought that embodies a particular second-order metaphysic of morals is [to be] seen instead as a kind of thought that expresses a first-order attitude or need' [Blackburn 1993: 153]. The key attraction of this strategy is that it avoids interpreting ordinary users of (realist) moral discourse as committed to any mysterious metaphysics or epistemology. Instead, quasi-realists interpret realist talk as expressing practical commitments to ways of living, including ways of thinking about how to live.

Deflationism is a central element in the internalizing strategy. According to deflationism about truth, to assert '*p* is true' is just to assert *p*. For example, to claim that the sentence 'Snow is white' is true is just to claim that snow is white. According to deflationism, truth has no substantial nature. Instead, we call sentences with which we agree 'true'. Those with which we disagree, we call 'false'.[9] Therefore, if we can defend the normative claim that stealing is morally wrong, we will thereby have defended the claim that it is true that stealing is morally wrong.

Combined with expressivist explanations of moral judgment, deflationism makes the question whether there are any moral truths either trivially answerable, or else a practically normative question. That is, from within the 'moral framework', it trivially follows that there are moral truths. To ask whether there are any moral truths in a way that does not invite this trivial response amounts to the question whether to operate within that framework, i.e., whether to be a sincere participant in moral discourse.[10]

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[9] This is only meant to be a rough presentation of deflationism, but good enough for our purposes.
[10] See Thomasson 2015 for a defense of this Carnapian approach to existence questions, grounded in semantic deflationism.

In relatively early work, Blackburn deploys the internalizing strategy to interpret an ordinary instance of moral discourse. Blackburn tells us that Fred and Mabel are in love and dearly want to marry. However, Fred feels it his moral duty not to marry Mabel. According to Blackburn, Fred's belief that he has a moral duty not to marry Mabel should not be understood as his believing in 'an external or objective moral fact, also standing outside the natural world of sentiments and desires'. He thinks there is a better explanation of what Fred, and people like him, are doing when they express belief in objectively binding moral duties:

> Fred has been brought up in a certain way, and a consequence of this upbringing is that he looks on certain courses of action with horror. He will keep his self-respect, be able to live with himself, only if he conducts his life in a particular way, and *this prompts a range of feeling that is sufficiently strong to oppose immediate desire* and that gains expression when he describes the conduct as "wrong". (Blackburn 1993: 154; my emphasis).

According to Blackburn, such moralised language and cognition are 'cultural ways of reinforcing such feelings in elements of the population that may be in particular need of them…traditionally soldiers and girls get strong injections of honour and duty' [ibid.: 155]. Thus Blackburn's explanation of the realist character of moral discourse is that it serves to stabilise moral sentiments and their corresponding action-tendencies.

Though in this passage Blackburn claims that Fred should not be interpreted as believing in 'an external or objective moral fact…outside the natural world of sentiments', many realists insist that they should be interpreted in just that way [Dworkin 1996; Cuneo 2018]. This problem with the internalizing strategy has led quasi-realists to widen its scope of application. That is, rather than *denying* that realists believe in 'an external or objective moral fact', quasi-realists began to accept that people do have such beliefs, by *reinterpreting* even explicitly metaphysical beliefs in realism as practically normative commitments, i.e., as internal to normative discourse. In this way, they aim to 'internalize' even the most extravagent and apparently 'external' commitments to the kind of realist metaphysics that expressivism had originally opposed.

Allan Gibbard provides a clear instance of this wide-scope internalizing strategy. Suppose someone attempts to express a robust form of realism by insisting that 'It's a

normative fact, out there independent of us, that it is wrong to kick dogs for fun!'
[Gibbard 2003: 186]. Gibbard suggests that we can save such a person (and to that extent,
quasi-realism) from error by suggesting that such an exclamation 'might amount to
planning to avoid kicking dogs for fun, planning this even for the contingency of being
someone who approves of doing so, and who is surrounded by people who approve. The
claim of independence, then, turns out to be internal to normative thinking—though
arrayed in sumptuous rhetoric' (ibid.: 186). Thus even even the most apparently external
metaphysical claim is interpreted internally, as perhaps nothing more than 'a fancy way
of putting an aspect of a plan for living' (ibid.: 186).

With all this on the table, I can present my reconstruction of the Central Quasi-
Realist Argument:

1. If error theory is true, ordinary moral discourse commits speakers to external
   realist metaphysical claims.
2. Neither ordinary nor extraordinary moral discourse commits speakers to any
   external metaphysical claims because all such claims, whether explicit or implicit,
   are internal.
3. From (1) and (2), error theory is false.

The version of quasi-realism that consists in the attempt to save expressivism
from error theory via the internalizing strategy can stop here. For the sake of argument, I
am granting that this version is successful. But I also think that 'quasi-realism' is a
misleading name for this project, since it in no way suggests that we should preserve
realist discourse in any form. Instead, it entails that any decision to preserve, reform, or
abandon such discourse can get no support from accepting *or rejecting* an external error
theory.

By contrast, 'quasi-realism' is a fitting name for the project to mimic, earn the
right to, protect, or otherwise legitimise realist discourse, without relying on questionable
(especially non-naturalistic) metaphysics. Only this version of quasi-realism is opposed
to moral abolitionism, and I will use 'quasi-realism' to refer to this version from now on,

unless otherwise indicated. The core argument for this more ambitious version of quasi-realism continues:

4. Ordinary moral discourse is illegitimate if and only if ordinary speakers commit themselves to illegitimate external metaphysical claims.
5. From (2) and (4), 'there is nothing illegitimate in our ordinary [moral] practice and thought.' [Blackburn 1993: 216]

Though I believe this is a faithful reconstruction of the central quasi-realist argument, I emphasize that no quasi-realist has defended it explicitly. There is a good reason for this, since (4) is highly suspicious; indeed, I strongly doubt that Blackburn or Gibbard would accept it, once stated explicitly. But that is just my point. This suppressed premise has been ubiquitous in the metaethical literature, and has resulted in abolitionism (of realist discourse) seeming to be a much less plausible position than it is. Until recently, nobody had pointed out that abolitionism could even be on the table unless error theory were true [Campbell 2014]. That can help explain why quasi-realists might not have seen that the internalizing strategy entails that to defeat all *external* error theories would be of no value in legitimising, protecting, or earning the right to realist discourse.

In fact, I strongly doubt that Blackburn wants to be committed to (5), as stated. It seems to me that his real concern, in that quotation and elsewhere, has been to head off the kind of total normative skepticism that can seem to follow from accepting projectivist explanations as such—a concern I share. Thus I do not see anything in his work that suggests that he would reject the idea that moral discourse might be 'diseased' or 'fraudulent' [Blackburn 1993: 216] in other ways, once we put this concern to the side.

Indeed, Blackburn seems to strongly associate ordinary belief in realism with a 'defective sensibility'. This defective sensibility consists in 'suppos[ing] that only commitments that describe the constitution of the real world have any importance' [Ibid.: 156]. We might think that only arch-realists have such a sensibility, but Blackburn tells us that it is 'actually quite common' [ibid.: 156]. Since he also thinks that (even implicit) commitment to divine command theory reflects the same broad sort of defective sensibility [ibid.: 156], and such a commitment is presumably at least as common as

realism, Blackburn seems committed to the view that a certain kind of defective sensibility pervades ordinary ethical discourse. The basic nature of this 'sensibility' is an inability to maintain one's resolve upon coming to believe that one's ethical judgments reflect one's (rationally contingent) sensibilities or other attitudes. If this is correct, then if Blackburn were to accept the plausible idea that realist discourse tends to promote or reinforce this kind of sensibility, then he might be well on the road to abolitionism, or at least some fairly radical reform of ordinary moral discourse.

Nevertheless, Blackburn has characterised quasi-realism as the project to 'earn the right' to realist discourse, and to 'protect' the 'way of life' embodied in 'normal' thinking [ibid.: 216]. Similarly, Gibbard describes quasi-realism as the attempt to '[start] as expressivists, [then] mimic normative realism' [2003: 184]. These characterizations seem to assume that if expressivists can avoid interpreting realist talk as committed to an implausible metaphysics, then it is a virtue to mimic realist discourse as robustly as possible. Expressivist abolitionism must confront this characterisation of quasi-realism head-on. In particular, it must confront the fact that this assumption overlooks the fact that the *value* of realist discourse has been subjected to sustained criticism by multiple abolitionists.

Quasi-realists have not engaged with these arguments. This cannot be explained on the supposition that they have merely wished to defeat error theory by means of the internalizing strategy, while recognizing that abolitionism is unaffected by this achievement. By contrast, it is easily explained by recognizing that neither expressivists, error-theorists, nor almost anyone else has seen that the NWQ arises just as much from 'internal' interpretations of realist commitments as it does from within the standard external interpretations.

I said that internalizing interpretations of realist commitments do not affect abolitionism. That is actually not true, for there are multiple ways in which they *help* abolitionists. The first is that such interpretations relieve abolitionists of the illusory burden of defending an error theory prior to making normative critiques of moral discourse. Given that contemporary abolitionist critiques have been predicated on widely rejected error theories, abolitionism has the potential to attract far more interest once it is generally recognised that it has no need of a controversial external error theory.

The second reason that the internalizing strategy backfires against the quasi-realist is that it implies that quasi-realism has not yet received a proper defense. That is because the internalizing strategy entails that quasi-realism must be understood as the project to defend (realist) moral discourse on fundamentally normative grounds, but no quasi-realist has yet undertaken this task. The third, and perhaps most powerful reason that internalizing interpretations of realist belief support abolitionism is that these interpretations all but force quasi-realists to accept that realist discourse inhibits important forms of awareness, including awareness of the central expressivist insight itself. I will discuss this in the next section.

We are now in a position to frame the 'Now What?' Question, as it arises from within the expressivist internalizing strategy, as admitting of quasi-realist and abolitionist responses. Focusing on the realist character of moral discourse, we can see that the task facing quasi-realists is to *explain* realist belief in terms of the expression of certain practical attitudes, then to *justify* expressing these attitudes in terms of the expression of realist beliefs. If they can do this, they will have vindicated a commitment to realist moral discourse in the only way the internalizing strategy allows it to be vindicated—in fundamentally normative terms. It follows that the task facing expressivist abolitionists is likewise to explain realist beliefs in terms of the expression of certain practical attitudes, then to justify *not* expressing these attitudes in the form of realist moral beliefs. That can involve criticizing the relevant attitudes as such, or else criticizing expressing them in such misleading ways. As we will see, quasi-realists' explanations of realist judgments imply that they are quite misleading, and that such judgments play an important role in promoting what expressivists are all but forced to consider a 'defective sensibility'.

With all this on the table, expressivist quasi-realists and abolitionists can proceed with a productive disagreement, having secured some very important common ground. Both accept that realist beliefs and related attitudes play a central role in moral discourse. Both agree that to accept realism is to express some kind of practical attitude(s), plan(s), or some other mental state(s) with a world-to-mind direction of fit. Both adopt the internalizing interpretation of realist belief, which requires them to reject external error theories, and to accept that the NWQ is a fundamentally normative question.

In order to continue this productive disagreement, we will want some conception of how

expressivists should understand improvement in normative judgments. For the sake of discussion, let the expressivist quasi-realist and abolitionist both adopt Blackburn's conception of normative progress [1998: 318]. On this view, progress can be judged to take place when we judge our own or someone else's overall normative sensibility to have been improved by means of adding, dropping, or otherwise modifying some practical attitude(s). For example, suppose we value sensitivity, informedness, impartiality, and other such features in our normative judgments. If we come to see that some normative judgment of ours is insensitive, uninformed, biased, or lacks some other property we value, then we will judge a new—say, more sensitive or more aware judgment—to be an improvement.

3.   Expressivist Abolitionism vs. Expressivist Quasi-Realism

The most common justification for abolitionism is that the realist character of moral discourse promotes self-deception, a lack of self-awareness, or some other form of bad faith regarding one's motives in the socio-moral domain. Abolitionists argue that the resulting self-ignorance undermines human flourishing in various ways. Ian Hinckfuss [1987] contends that the realist meaning of moral judgments promotes elitism and authoritarianism, while Richard Garner argues that the realist nature of moral concepts leads to 'self-deception, superstition, [and] duplicity' [1994: 3]. Joel Marks [2012] believes that realist moral discourse contributes to self-deceptive, counter-productive, and otherwise unwholesome forms of moralised anger and guilt. Bernard Williams complained of a lack of transparency in moral discourse, primarily owing to the realist character of the concept of moral obligation, along with the 'characteristic reaction[s] of the morality system', blame and guilt [1985: 177]. His conclusion that 'we would be better off without [the morality system]' is founded on the view that these core features of moral discourse form an obstacle to normatively important forms of self-knowledge [ibid.: 174]. Friedrich Nietzsche claimed that the realist character of moral discourse (which he called 'Thou Shalt') is a kind of 'medicine', the function of which is to combat a '*sickening of the will*'. However, this medicine operates by facilitating 'the excessive nourishment (hypertrophy) of a single point of view and feeling which is [thereby made] dominant', imprisoning people within a limited normative perspective [1887/1974: 206; his emphasis].

Expressivist explanations of realist moral belief support the core abolitionist complaint that moral discourse inhibits awareness of the relationship between one's motives and one's

moral judgments. They moreover support the idea that realist belief functions to strengthen or otherwise stabilise the will. Indeed, expressivists join a wide variety of theorists in supporting the thesis that the realist character of moral discourse is a biologically and/or culturally evolved adaptation, a core function of which is to stabilise practical attitudes conducive to norm-adherence.[11] So call this thesis **Stability**. Expressivist explanations of the realist character of moral judgment also support the view that moral judgments perform their stabilizing function largely by means of deflecting attention, and thus awareness, from the nature of our own values and motivations, as well as from the stabilising function itself. Call this thesis **Deflection**. Stability and Deflection form the basis of a recent non-error-theoretic abolitionist critique, according to which paradigmatically moral judgment facilitates important forms of practical commitment and social coordination, but often promotes deep normative pathologies. Central among these pathologies is the tendency of moral discourse to promote the unwitting violation of our deepest values.[12] Deflection also supports the view that realist discourse promotes what Blackburn calls a 'defective sensibility'.

Before saying more about how Stability and Deflection support central abolitionist complaints about moral discourse, I want to show that Blackburn and Gibbard must accept both Stability and Deflection. Recall that Blackburn thinks Fred describes actions as morally wrong in the service of 'oppos[ing] immediate desire', as a way of supporting modes of life that allow him to be able to live with himself. In other words, the 'need' we express in the form of realist metaphysical claims is a 'need' to stabilise certain ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Gibbard's interpretation of belief in realist normative facts also straightforwardly supports, or is just a version of, Stability. As we saw, Gibbard interprets even the most explicit, strident claims that normative facts are 'out there in the world, independent of our attitudes' as 'a fancy way of putting an aspect of a plan for living'. Gibbard hypothesises that this aspect of a plan for living is a matter of 'planning to avoid kicking dogs for fun, planning this even for the contingency of being someone who approves of doing so, and who is surrounded by people who approve.' Thus according to Gibbard, this aspect of an overall plan for living involves a determination to follow through on one's current socio-moral commitments in the face of future

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[11] For variations on this theme, see Axelrod 1986, Alexander 1987, Dawkins 1976, Ruse 1986 and 1995, Blackburn 1985, Frank 1988, Scheffler 1992, Wright 1994, Gibbard 1990 and 2003, Joyce 2001 and 2006, Richerson and Boyd 2005.
[12] I develop this critique at length in Campbell 2014.

disincentives, including acting against one's own considered judgment at the time of action [Gibbard 2003: 186]. This is as supportive of Stability as an explanation of realist discourse can be, and also hints at its potential for extreme pathology.

Blackburn's and Gibbard's interpretations of realist discourse also require something much like Deflection in order to be plausible. To see why this is so, note that most metaethicists disagree with expressivist interpretations of realist commitments, including and especially realists themselves. Presumably, the vast majority of sincere employers of moral discourse would disagree with them as well. Such internalizing interpretations must therefore reject the vast majority of speakers' own interpretations of what they are doing when appealing to realist normativity. For example, Terence Cuneo [2018: 639] has argued that expressivist interpretations of his and other realists' beliefs are deeply uncharitable, since they are so at odds with realists' interpretations of their own beliefs. Thus the expressivist position must be that although the vast majority of sincere users of moral discourse will deny that they are expressing their own attitudes or needs by using realist language, they are doing so nonetheless.

I do not think that expressivists having to postulate such recalcitrant self-ignorance on the part of realists makes expressivists' interpretations less plausible. Instead, I think that the plausibility of these interpretations relies on something much like the Deflection thesis. For if Gibbard's interpretation is right, we should focus on questions that have, to my mind, received nowhere near enough attention. For instance, why such 'sumptuous' rhetoric? Why would someone express an aspect of a plan for living involving not kicking dogs for fun in terms of a strident belief in normative facts existing out there in the world, independent of us? Why not express the plan in less misleading terms? What role does *this particular way* of expressing one's plans play in such a moraliser's plan for living? And most pressingly, why do ordinary realists continue to resist internalizing explanations of their own rhetoric, even after having been exposed to these arguments for many years?

It seems to me that without recourse to something like the Deflection thesis, expressivists will have a very hard time avoiding charges of uncharitableness. However, if and since the Deflection thesis is independently plausible, expressivists can defend their interpretations by appealing to a non-ad-hoc explanatory framework capable of answering all the above questions. According to Deflection, the stabilising function of moral judgment is threatened by an awareness of that very function. For precisely that reason, Deflection neatly explains why such

otherwise mystifying and misleading rhetoric would evolve or otherwise develop, i.e., in order to deflect attention away from the attitudes generating the moral judgments, often onto some notionally stable normative order to which attitudes and actions must conform. Thus not only do Blackburn's and Gibbard's explanations of realist rhetoric support Deflection, but without some such thesis, their interpretations of realist moral belief are almost certainly mistaken. In short, if expressivists are correct that belief in realist normativity expresses higher-order practical attitudes aimed at stabilizing lower-order practical attitudes, then moral discourse and cognition appear very well-suited to preventing speakers from recognizing this fact.

At this point, it seems clear that quasi-realists should accept Stability and Deflection, on pain of undermining their own internalizing interpretations of realist discourse. But if they do, they should also accept that realist discourse inhibits awareness of expressivism itself. That is because expressivism claims that realist moral judgments serve to stabilise practical attitudes, while Deflection holds that this stabilising function is threatened by an awareness of that very function. Thus, by expressivists' own lights, accepting expressivist explanations of realist belief will tend to threaten the core function of realist moral judgment.

This fact helps us see how Deflection explains, in a non-ad-hoc way, why what Blackburn calls a 'defective sensibility' would be 'quite common', especially among realists. If it is a central function of realist discourse to stabilise practical attitudes, and if this function is served by inhibiting awareness of the relationship between one's moral judgments and one's contingent practical attitudes, then it should not be surprising if the more that realist discourse serves its function, the more one's resolve will be threatened by expressivist/projectivist explanations as such. By that very token, committed users of realist discourse can be expected to resist expressivist explanations of realist belief, while those who accept expressivism while attempting to retain robustly realist discourse will either be undermining a central function of realist discourse, or else will have to keep their expressivist beliefs effectively suppressed in ordinary life.[13]

We are now in a position to sketch how an expressivist abolitionist can address the NWQ, employing the materials Blackburn and Gibbard developed to defend quasi-realism. First, interpret the 'needs' or 'plans' expressed in the form of realist belief as the need or plan to stabilise practical attitudes or commitments. This recapitulates Blackburn's and Gibbard's own

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[13] This problem for quasi-realism parallels problems for moral fictionalism, as I argue in Campbell 2014.

strategy. Second, regard belief in realist moral facts as a common device for deflecting attention away from the practical attitudes which actually generate the moral judgments. While an *error theoretic* abolitionist would say that this deflection of attention is accomplished by means of a false, non-normative belief in a realm of attitude-independent normative facts, an 'internalizing' expressivist abolitionist would admit that things appear this way, but insist that such beliefs are practically normative expressions of an aspect of a plan for living. In particular, this aspect of a plan for living constitutively involves the unconscious intention to remain unaware of the nature of one's own moral judgments. Again, all of this fits very well with what quasi-realists already do or must accept.

An expressivist abolitionist might evaluate the value of such realist beliefs somewhat ambivalently. At their best, these tools tend to keep us from acting in ways that are contrary to our deepest or highest values. This is what Blackburn has in mind when discussing the case of Fred.[14] However, at their worst, they generate seriously pathological behavior and prevent us from gaining self-knowledge, especially knowledge of what it is that we *do* care about and thereby what other, derivative things we *should* care about.[15] The point is that abolitionists already think that the realist character of moral discourse has these sorts of effects, though most mistakenly think that error theory is required to get this sort of critique on the table. But expressivist materials, far from being a hindrance to this sort of critique, implicitly support it.

Of course it is still possible for quasi-realists to accept Stability and Deflection, while nevertheless defending realist discourse on normative grounds. However, this project has not been undertaken. It also appears unmotivated from within expressivist commitments as such, while abolitionist critiques from self-awareness follow quite naturally from these commitments. In fact, if Deflection is correct, then expressivism and quasi-realism are at odds, as I have argued. That is because what Blackburn calls 'the realist surface' of moral discourse is actually—by his own lights—a functionally deep aspect of it, to be understood in terms of its role in stabilising or strengthening certain practical attitudes. And it is part of the enabling conditions for this function that certain forms of awareness be suppressed. One of the forms of awareness the function serves to inhibit is the nature of moral judgments themselves, specifically that they are inherently connected to practical attitudes. Since the central expressivist strength lies in its explanation for

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[14] This is also the basis for Joyce's moral fictionalism.
[15] For a fuller defense of this claim, see Campbell 2014.

this connection, the abolitionist project to oppose a mode of discourse that inhibits awareness of this very connection is directly motivated from within expressivist commitments as such.

Moreover, if expressivists' internalizing explanations of belief in realist normativity are correct, they add to our self-understanding by extending this inherent connection to ostensibly external metaphysical judgments about the nature of normativity. However, since these expressivist insights are plausible only if Deflection is on the right track, it follows from expressivist commitments that expressivism and quasi-realism are in fundamental conflict. That is because expressivists tell us something that—if we believe it—should tend to undermine a central function of realist moral discourse.

Finally, the Deflection thesis can help explain and clarify a common intuition about the relationship between expressivism and quasi-realism. It explains what is both right and wrong about the intuition that quasi-realism takes away with its expressivist hand what it gives with its realist hand. This criticism is mistaken if it is interpreted to mean that expressivism and quasi-realism are logically or conceptually inconsistent. There is no such inconsistency, since expressivism is a naturalistic explanatory strategy, while quasi-realism must be understood as a dissociable normative project. However, interpreted socio-psychologically, the charge sticks. That is because the more we cultivate an awareness that our moral judgments express practical attitudes, the more we undermine a deep practical feature of paradigmatically moral judgments. Again, the claim that moral judgments have this deep practical feature is something that expressivists should be eager to accept in order to save their internalizing interpretations from charges of implausibility and uncharitability. But once they accept this, they are on the road to abolitionism, understood as the project to cultivate the forms of awareness that, by expressivists' own lights, moral discourse tends to inhibit.

Recalling Blackburn's conception of normative progress, the expressivist abolitionist will argue that to the extent that we value self-awareness in our normative judgments, we will have to regard the practical judgment constitutive of a belief in realism as inferior to the practical judgment constitutive of a belief in relativism, specifically a belief that reasons must ultimately be relative to the various practical attitudes that reason-judgments express. An expressivist abolitionist could even propose such a conception of relativism as an aspect of a plan for living that involves cultivating awareness of the often very elusive and complex practical attitudes that generate normative judgments. After all, many of these attitudes are the results of propaganda

and other insidious forms of indoctrination, while others are rooted in drives that might serve or have served reproductive fitness, while currently generating personal and social misery or debasement.

Though there is not space to defend the abolitionist aspect of expressivist abolitionism more fully, it is worth addressing Blackburn's claim that 'it can hardly be doubted that it is a good thing that people should sometimes feel [a sense of objective moral duty], for otherwise they are more likely to do the most awful things' [1993: 155]. It does seem to be a good thing that some people sometimes feel that way. However, it can very much be doubted whether a sense of being beholden to duties that are totally divorced from one's values and instincts is overall a good thing, or that everybody or even most people are well-advised to cultivate or retain it. Ian Hinckfuss's [1987] abolitionist case against moral discourse was grounded in the observation that the greatest atrocities are often done in the name of one's moral duties.

In this connection, it is worth noting that in Blackburn's own example, we have no reason to think that it is a good thing that Fred feels a sense of objective moral duty not to marry Mabel, and good reason to think otherwise. After all, Blackburn tells us that '[t]he opportunity is there, the desires are aflame, and the consequences are predictably acceptable or even desirable. There is only one thought to oppose it: they have a duty to do otherwise, so it would be wrong' [1993: 154]. Blackburn gives us no reason to think that Fred should not marry Mabel, aside from Fred's felt moral duty. That sounds sad to me. I think we should be suspicious of Fred's motives, and his moralising way of remaining unaware of them. I also think Blackburn's invocation of 'soldiers and girls' as the people paradigmatically in need of moral injunctions suggests that we be should be less complacent about the overall value of moral discourse. For I take it that soldiers and girls are in particular need of this rhetoric largely to the extent that that they are typically commanded—often on pain of extreme punishment—to do things that go profoundly against their natural instincts, and at least often against their deepest values. The same may be true for the rest of us, to a much greater extent than we realise.

4.   Conclusion

On one understanding, quasi-realism is the project to save expressivism from error theory via the internalizing strategy. On another, quasi-realism is the project to legitimise, protect, or earn the right to realist moral discourse from within expressivist commitments.

On the first understanding, quasi-realism's core task is to interpret the ostensibly external metaphysical beliefs targeted by error theorists as unwitting practical commitments. If this strategy succeeds, then quasi-realism will have saved expressivism from error theories, at least in their standard external forms.

However, this strategy is of no help in legitimising moral discourse, or protecting it from abolitionists' normative critiques. That is because the internalizing strategy entails that any project to conserve, revise, or abandon (the realist character of) moral discourse cannot be supported, *to any extent*, by accepting or rejecting an external error theory. The internalizing strategy entails that in order to support the claim that moral discourse is 'legitimate', or 'in order as it is', quasi-realists must defend moral discourse on fundamentally normative grounds. Since no quasi-realist has yet undertaken this task, it follows that this more ambitious and controversial version of quasi-realism has not yet been defended against a heretofore unrecognized opponent; an expressivist abolitionist. Such an opponent might be the most challenging quasi-realists have yet faced. Not only can they agree with the quasi-realist internalizing strategy and expressivist explanations of the realist character of moral discourse, but these explanations strongly support the most common abolitionist complaint against moral discourse, namely that it inhibits normatively significant forms of self-awareness.

Finally, in order to defend their own interpretations of realist belief from charges of uncharitableness and implausibility, expressivists should embrace the view that the realist character of moral discourse inhibits important forms of awareness, including of the truth of expressivism itself. Thus it follows from expressivist commitments that expressivism and quasi-realism are in tension with each other. By contrast, expressivism fits well with abolitionism because it is quite natural to package expressivist abolitionism as a fundamentally normative proposal to think and talk in ways that aim to promote the expressivist insight itself, as well as self-awareness in the socio-moral domain more generally.

Whether or not expressivists should reject (the realist character of) moral discourse, the lack of any sense that quasi-realists have needed to defend moral discourse on normative grounds surely owes much to the widespread complacency about the value of moral discourse within academic metaethics. As Richard Joyce has said, 'it is something of a travesty in moral

philosophy that . . . philosophers have largely contented themselves with the unexamined assumption that morality is a Good Thing without which we'd all be worse off' [2006: 143]. If the arguments of this paper are on the right track, expressivists should no longer be so contented. Given that Stability and Deflection do not depend on error theory or expressivism, neither should anyone else.[16]

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