

## A Deflationary Metaphysics of Morality

Arguments in metaethics over the metaphysics of morality have been plagued with confusion for quite some time, at least since G.E. Moore wrote *Principia Ethica*. Moore claimed that good is a simple, indefinable, non-natural property, but later confessed that he did not give a clear explanation of what a non-natural property is. Moore wrote in his reply to criticism by C.D. Broad that “in *Principia* I did not give any tenable explanation of what I meant by saying that ‘good’ was not a natural property” (Moore 1968, 382)<sup>i</sup>. Given that debates, dating back to Moore, continue between non-naturalistic realists, naturalistic realists, and antirealists, one hopes that there is now a clearer characterization of the differences among them.

These debates are often characterized in terms of the issue of whether there are any moral facts, or moral properties. One would hope, given that these central metaethical theories are cast in terms of facts and properties, that the notion of a fact or of a property would be sufficiently clear. Unfortunately, there are still significant disputes over what a fact is, or what a property is, or whether there are even any facts or properties at all. This has the danger of making these ontological disputes either trivial or confused. If there are no facts or properties generally, then it is just trivially true that there are no moral facts or properties. If facts and properties are obscure, then so is the matter of the existence of moral facts and properties.

Of particular interest here are the remarks made regarding facts and properties by expressivist moral antirealists such as Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard.

Blackburn, in “How to be an Ethical Anti-realist,” characterizes his view as “antirealist” due to lack of commitment to explanations that make appeal to moral

facts and properties. “This theory is visibly anti-realist, for the explanations offered make no irreducible or essential appeal to the existence of moral “properties” or “facts”; they demand no “ontology of morals”” (1988, p. 174). In his book *Thinking How to Live*, Gibbard characterizes expressivism as denying that there are normative states of affairs or substantive normative facts. “There is no such thing as a specifically normative state of affairs; all states of affairs are natural...Then, clearly if my quasi-realism is correct, there aren’t distinctively normative facts, only naturalistic facts” (2003, p. 181). Gibbard also characterizes his view in terms of the denial of the existence of any nonnatural properties. According to Gibbard, there are distinctively normative and non-normative concepts, but there are no distinctively normative, nonnatural properties. “All *properties* are *natural* but some *concepts* are *non-naturalistic*” (p. 32).

This discussion of moral ontology by Blackburn and Gibbard takes place regardless of the fact that facts and properties are *prima facie* strange, not terribly well understood sorts of entities. In fact, Gibbard himself, in *Thinking How to Live*, expresses some doubts regarding the notion of a “real” fact:

“Are these just pseudo-facts, incapable of real truth and falsehood?...I took no stand on this at the outset, but what do I now conclude? I still weasel: I say that I need to understand the questions. Explain to me “real facts,” “substantial truth,” and “genuine belief,” and I can think how to answer” (2003, p. 182).

There might seem to be little hope of explaining these matters to Gibbard, and helping him to understand the questions, given the theories on offer.

Interestingly, we find a similar hesitation to accept one or another view of ontology in the work of a realist critic of Gibbard and Blackburn. Russ Shafer-Landau defines his moral nonnaturalist view, in contrast to the expressivist position, as a view that claims that “[t]here are instantiated moral properties” (2006, p. 210).

What is a property? Shafer-Landau is noncommittal:

“Nonnaturalism *per se*, is...neutral with respect to the nature of moral properties...nonnaturalism is compatible with any number of specific views about what a property is. Nonnaturalists can await a verdict from the metaphysicians on this question, and incorporate their best answer into a comprehensive metaethic” (2006, p. 211).

It is not clear that any given verdict on the nature of properties will be one that favors the nonnaturalist point. For instance, if the verdict happens to be a nominalistic one, then there are no properties at all. If the metaphysical judge rules in this way, Shafer-Landau’s kind of nonnaturalism is precluded.

Is there a way to answer the queries of Gibbard and Shafer-Landau? What are facts, and what are properties? Philosophers have presented accounts of the nature of facts and properties that have failed to resolve worries about their natures. How could the notion of fact or the notion of property serve the purpose of accounting for such an important matter given the lack of a widely accepted account of either notion?

In the spirit of deflationary theories of truth, we can turn to a deflationary theory of facts and properties in order to clarify this issue. As Paul Horwich has noted in his paper “Gibbard’s Theory of Norms,” “[P]arallel accounts [to the

deflationary truth schema] will hold of notions such as ‘fact’ and ‘property’ that are intimately related to ‘truth’” (1993, p. 73). One might reasonably worry that such an account of facts and properties would not be capable of properly characterizing the sort of disputes mentioned above, disputes regarding the existence or nonexistence of genuine moral facts and genuine moral properties. In this paper, I will show that, within this framework, the traditional disputes over the existence of moral facts and properties can be characterized in a far clearer fashion than is usually the case in discussion of these matters.

### **Facts**

A way to properly characterize the way the notion of fact is employed in ordinary contexts without making appeal to any strange, theoretically unnecessary entities is provided by a schema similar to the minimalist truth schema proposed by Horwich (1998). Truth is characterized in terms of acceptance of instances of the following schema:

$\langle p \rangle$  is true if and only if  $p$ .

Whenever we accept that  $p$ , we also accept that it is true that  $p$ . It is also the case that whenever we recognize that a certain proposition  $\langle p \rangle$  is true, we are inclined to claim that it is a fact that  $p$ . Given that it is true that electrons have negative charge, it is a fact that electrons have negative charge.

Given that this is the case, we can characterize our notion of fact in terms of acceptance of the following schema:

*That  $p$  is a fact if and only if  $p$  (Horwich, 1993, p. 74).*

We can appeal to this minimalist fact schema in order to see that the notion of fact plays a generalizing role similar to the generalizing role played by the notion of truth. Talk of the facts in particular domain is a shorthand allowing us to refer to a number of true propositions without stating them one at a time. For instance, take the sentence “Voters will decide in this election based on the facts on the ground in Iraq.” What this means is that, for all propositions  $\langle p \rangle$ , if  $\langle p \rangle$  is a proposition regarding the current situation in Iraq, and it is a fact that  $p$ , then the voters will make decisions in the election based on the belief that  $p$ . By the equivalence schema, this amounts to the following: for all propositions  $\langle p \rangle$ , if  $\langle p \rangle$  is a proposition regarding the current situation in Iraq, and  $p$ , then the voters will make decisions in the election based on the belief that  $p$ .

If we accept such an account of facts, is it possible for us to follow Blackburn in denying the existence of moral facts? Given that there are good reasons for expressivists to attribute truth to moral utterances, there seems to be no comfortable room for such a position. Anyone attempting to capture the ordinary notions of truth and morality would have to admit that the commonsense view is that utterances such as “Rape is wrong” and “Great inequalities in the distribution of wealth are unjust” are straightforwardly true. Furthermore, the expressivist project of attempting to explain how moral claims can be embedded within deductive argument seems to lose its point if we do not grant that moral utterances are true and arguments consisting of such arguments are capable of being valid or invalid.

Given the attribution of truth to moral utterances, and given that saying that a certain proposition that  $p$  is true is trivially equivalent to saying that it is a fact that  $p$ ,

we have good reason to claim that there are moral facts. Blackburn, when denying the existence of moral facts, must have some more robust notion of fact in mind when denying the existence of such facts. That this is so is clear from Blackburn's own claims that his "projectivist" theory is fully consistent with attributions of truth to moral utterances (1999). In order to provide an account of robust facts that will show how different positions on moral ontology can correctly be characterized, I will turn to Blackburn's other formulation of his view, as a denial of the existence of moral properties.

### **Properties**

If we were to attempt to characterize the use of the term 'property' in ordinary, nonphilosophical contexts, we would find that there is little difference between attributing a property *F* to an object *x* and saying that *x* is *F*. Is there a circumstance in which we would say that water has the property of being wet, but deny that water is wet? Is there a circumstance in which we would say that George W. Bush has the property of being a Republican, but deny that George W. Bush is a Republican? These entailments work in the opposite direction as well: There is little room for saying that Susan is a redhead but denying that Susan has the property of being a redhead.

Noting this uncontroversial fact regarding the notion of property, the use of the term 'property' is best described by the following minimalist property schema, suggested by Horwich:

For any object *x*, *x* has the property of *being F* if and only if *x* is *F*. (1993, p. 74)

There is little room, if properties are understood in this sense, for disagreement over whether a certain property is being attributed to an object by a speaker. Whenever a speaker predicates F of an object, it just trivially follows that this speaker is attributing the property of being F to that object<sup>ii</sup>.

As was the case with facts, as noted above, while the deflationary account of properties presented here resolves problems that have plagued previous accounts, it seems at first sight ill-suited to characterize Blackburn's position and the positions of philosophers with similar views. Blackburn is willing to endorse unqualified moral claims. For example, in his "How to be an Ethical Anti-realist," the essay quoted earlier in this paper, he defends the claim that his projectivist view is capable of explaining how one can make the true assertion that cruelty is wrong. This assertion, along with the property schema, would seem to issue in the result that a projectivist ought to endorse the claim that cruelty has the property of being wrong as well. There seems to be no room on this view for positions such as Blackburn's and Gibbard's, positions that endorse moral claims but deny the existence of moral facts and properties.

### **Robust and Nonrobust Properties**

In light of these considerations, the best approach for an expressivist to take is not to deny the existence of moral facts and properties. Such denials, insofar as they were to be taken at face value<sup>iii</sup>, are not well motivated in light of the deflationary accounts of facts and properties mentioned above. If such denials are not an essential element of expressivism, then the statements of Gibbard and Blackburn regarding facts and properties were ill-motivated. In either case, it is clear that the expressivist

ought not to deny the existence of moral facts and properties. The root of such denials was, perhaps, that expressivists have held one or another of the theories of properties discussed above, and the problems with such accounts should be clear by now. The lack of explicitness on the nature of facts and properties in these discussions has had a tendency to muddy the waters.

There is, however, a difference on the issue of ontology between the expressivist and her metaethical antagonists. Such a distinct position on commitment to moral ontology is central to the case that is made in favor of expressivism—Expressivism is supposed to be an appealing view due to its lack of commitment to a strange moral ontology. If this central aspect of expressivism is no longer of interest in light of a deflationary ontology, then what reason is there to be an expressivist?

In order to properly characterize the differences between various metaethical positions on ontology, it is necessary to add to the deflationary account of properties presented above a way to distinguish robust properties from nonrobust properties. It is best to say, not that the expressivist rejects moral properties, but rather that the expressivist, unlike certain “moral realists,” does not think that there are robust moral properties. This distinction between robust and nonrobust properties is a distinction that is also, as I will note below, required in order for deflationist theorists to answer an objection that has been raised against such accounts. Thus having a way to clearly distinguish the robust properties is necessary to properly characterize moral properties as well as the property of truth.

In order to distinguish between truth and other more inflationary properties, Horwich has made an appeal to the notion of a ‘substantive property.’ A substantive



property is explained, on Horwich's account, as follows: "truth is not a *complex* or *naturalistic* property, but a property of some other kind... According to minimalism, we should beware of assimilating *being true* to such [complex or naturalistic] properties as *being turquoise*, *being a tree*, or *being made of tin*" (1998, p. 38). Thus, while it is the case that truth is a property, on Horwich's view, given the minimalist property schema and that 'true' is a genuine predicate, minimalists regarding truth can appeal to this distinction between substantive and nonsubstantive properties in order to distinguish their views from their inflationary opponents.

This notion of a substantive property is in need of a bit of clarification. It is not entirely clear what would count as a naturalistic or a complex property. Is *being a chair* a naturalistic property, or not? Should we only count as naturalistic properties those properties that figure into scientific laws? To use one of Horwich's own examples, given concerns over whether colors are genuine properties, it might not be plausible to think *being turquoise* is a candidate for being a natural property<sup>iv</sup>. One wonders as well where and how to divide the complex from the noncomplex properties. Perhaps a philosopher who is confused over the deflationary theory of truth and its claims might find the deflationary account of the property of truth complex. Would this render such a property substantive? Is there a clear way to distinguish the substantive from the nonsubstantive?

To give the right kind of characterization of substantive properties, we would be well served to get clearer on the role of properties in claims regarding explanation. It is best to start with a basic fact about explanation. Explanation is asymmetric: if x explains y, then it cannot be the case that y explains x. If the explanation of the trail

in the cloud chamber is provided by the electron, then the trail in the cloud chamber cannot explain the presence of the electron. To use a familiar terminology, in such an example, the trail in the cloud chamber is the matter being explained, the explanandum. The presence of the electron is the explanans, what explains the explanandum.

We can use the basic difference between an explanandum and an explanans to define a kind of hierarchy. At a lower level of the hierarchy are kinds of properties, “explanans properties,” that explain other kinds of properties at the next level higher, the “explanandum properties” (with respect to the relevant explanans). When a property P1 is invoked in an explanans for another property P2, then P2 is at one level higher in this explanatory hierarchy.

To illustrate this point, I will use a very rough and highly reductionistic framework. Say, for example, that physical properties provide a full explanation of all chemical properties. Then the physical properties, whatever they happen to be<sup>v</sup>, are at level 0 of the explanatory hierarchy. The chemical properties, explained on the basis of level 0 properties, are at level 1. Detailing the hierarchy further, if a full explanation can be given in chemical terms of the operation of neurons, then neuroscientific properties are at a level 2 with respect to the level 1 chemical properties. Assume for the sake of argument that there can be a complete, comprehensive psychology based entirely on the neural facts, a full reduction of psychology to neuroscience. If this is so, then psychological properties are at level 3 in the hierarchy, explained fully by the level 2 neuroscientific properties. All of these reductive claims are controversial, of course, and it is not my purpose here to defend

any of them. It may be that psychological properties cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of neuroscientific, chemical, or physical properties. In this case, there would be no clear explanatory link between the psychological properties and any of the others, and no way of clearly fitting psychological properties into an explanatory hierarchy. Whether this is the case is outside of the scope of this paper—I am simply using this kind of example to illustrate the idea of an explanatory hierarchy.

There is no need for an account of properties beyond the minimalist one to fully characterize the explanatory hierarchy. In fact, the minimalist property schema is of great use in spelling out the explanatory relations among properties. Just as truth is a useful notion, on a minimalist account, as a device of semantic ascent, so is the notion of a property similarly useful. Say, for example, taking another controversial point from the philosophy of mind, that neural firings explain feelings of pain in humans. Thus we can claim, inferring from the minimalist property schema, that the property of being a neural firing explains the property of being in pain (in humans). We can then relate this point to the explanatory hierarchy: pain properties are a single level higher than neural properties on the hierarchy. Such a generalization is one we could not make without the resources of the minimalist property schema. In this way, talk of properties plays a similar role to talk of truth—It allows us to form useful generalizations.

Before returning to the issue of the status of moral properties, it is important to note one application of the explanatory hierarchy. Such a hierarchy helps us to see how the property of truth, on minimalist and more generally deflationary accounts, is

distinct from other kinds of properties. In fact, truth has the interesting distinction, on a minimalist account, of being at the *highest* level of any explanatory hierarchy. Minimalism accounts for the truth of propositions based on what is the case in all domains: given that electrons have negative charge, it is true that electrons have negative charge; given that snow is white, it is true that snow is white; given that abusing children is wrong, it is true that abusing children is wrong. Thus the property of truth would be at a higher level, in the explanatory hierarchy, from any other property invoked in a proposition that states a truth.

### **Varieties of Antirealism and Realism**

Can this account properly characterize the moral antirealist's view?

The idea that explanatory considerations can be used to distinguish among views of morality is a familiar one in metaethics (Harman 1977, Sturgeon 1985, Dreier 2004, Dreier 2006, Sturgeon 2006), although I think the import of this point has not been sufficiently appreciated. No author has yet presented this point in quite the right way, leaving the view vulnerable to objections.

One prominent appeal to explanation in distinguishing realist and antirealist views is a proposal recently offered by James Dreier. In "Meta-Ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism," Dreier notes that minimalist accounts of truth, facts, and properties have an apparent tendency to collapse distinctions between realist and antirealist views, and suggests a somewhat baroque way to appeal to explanation to adequately distinguishing between such views. Synthesizing points that he attributes to Kit Fine (2001), John O'Leary Hawthorne and Huw Price (1996), and Gibbard (2003), Dreier proposes an "'explanation' explanation" of the

realist/antirealist distinction: the key distinction between different views, particularly between Gibbard's expressivism and Moorean realism, is in how these views explain belief attributions. Dreier provides the following example to illustrate the view:

Suppose that Julia sincerely asserts the sentence, 'Knowledge is intrinsically good.' She believes, then, that knowledge is intrinsically good.

(J) Julia believes that knowledge is intrinsically good...

What the "explanation" explanation tells us is that the division between [Gibbard and Moore] must lie in their differing explanations of (J). According to a Moorean, (J) must consist in Julia's standing in a certain doxastic relation to goodness...By contrast, Gibbard's expressivist account will explain (J) by reference to the sort of planning state Julia is in: perhaps she has decided to include knowledge among her non-instrumental aims (Dreier 2004, 41).

There are a few problems worth noting with this proposal. A variety of factors might enter into the explanation of why someone has a particular belief, and not all of them are relevant to the metaphysical issue at hand. Suppose, in this case, that Julia had never engaged in the kind moral thinking that would result in intuitions regarding the goodness of knowledge. Perhaps she believes that knowledge is intrinsically good because she was told this by an especially charismatic professor. In such a case, it seems like goodness does not enter at all into the proper explanation of her belief on *any* account. Her belief is best explained by appeal to facts regarding Julia's professor. The existence of such individuals and of charisma is common ground among a range of widely different views, so in such a case, her belief would not be a

useful one to consider in distinguishing between the metaphysical commitments of different views of the nature of ethics.

As Matthew Chrisman (2008) has noted, the proposal offered by Dreier has trouble with false beliefs. How would Dreier's account distinguish cosmological realists from cosmological antirealists? The cosmological realist is committed to the existence of those entities postulated by the best current astronomical science, whereas the cosmological antirealist considers such entities only to be the best theory that is acceptable in light of the available evidence. On the 'explanation' explanation view, the way to tell if a view is cosmologically realist would be by considering whether the doxastic relation between entities and believers provides an explanation of the relevant cosmological beliefs. For instance, in the following example (K), the explanation of Kelly's belief, on the cosmological realist view, appeals to Kelly's doxastic relation to Saturn:

(K): Kelly believes that Saturn has rings.

This account, however, cannot work to distinguish cosmological realists and cosmological antirealists in every case of a belief. Imagine that Virginia, an amateur astronomer, has spent time listening to ill-informed individuals and dreaming of space, and she has come to believe in the existence of a planet in the far reaches of the solar system called Crosus. There is no such planet, but Virginia believes that such a planet exists. Take as our example, in telling the difference between the cosmological realist and antirealist, (V):

(V): Virginia believes that Crosus is the most distant planet in the solar system.

Dreier's 'explanation' explanation of V would hold that the cosmological realist would explain Virginia's belief in terms of her doxastic relation to Crosus, unlike the cosmological antirealist, who offers an alternative account. As Chrisman points out, however, this cannot be the case. There is no such planet as Crosus to be the relata of such a belief. In light of this, it seems hard to see how Dreier's account can be generalized. Chrisman's problem suggests that realism and antirealism distinctions are best cast not in terms of beliefs about the entities in question, but rather as an issue over the entities themselves.

The proposal on offers here avoids the trouble with Dreier's account, for it is cast not in terms of second-order attributions of beliefs regarding moral matters, but rather in terms of first-order statements that concern morality. The minimalist account of moral properties provides a framework that thus allows for best accounting of the difference among metaethical views. The key issue is not what accounts for beliefs regarding what is intrinsically good, but what accounts for whether knowledge is in fact intrinsically good, if it indeed does have this property. This can be demonstrated by showing how well the account on offer here, of minimalist properties and the explanatory hierarchy, can capture what has been at issue in recent debates over morality and explanation.

One clear case where philosophers have appealed to explanation in developing moral realist and antirealist positions is the debate between Gilbert Harman (1977) and Nicholas Sturgeon (1985, 2006) over whether moral properties are necessary in explanations of moral observations and acts. I will use two of their famous examples to illustrate how this debate relates to the framework at hand.

Harman describes the terrible treatment of a cat:

“If you round a corner and see a group of young hoodlums pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it, you need not need to *conclude* that what they are going is wrong; you do not need to figure anything out; you can see that it is wrong” (1977, p. 4).

This existence of this kind of moral observation, according to Harman, does not require us to postulate any kind of moral fact to explain it. We can explain the observation based on facts regarding the psychological attitudes of the observer—the observer disapproves of cat torture, hence observes the incineration of the feline as a morally wrong act.

As I have argued above, the notion of a “fact” is not entirely clear, and we may be better served to focus here on properties. We can define first two different views in light of Harman’s example: I will call these views *explanatory realism 1* and *moral antirealism 1*. The views are defined as follows. Explanatory realism 1 is the view that Harman rejects:

Explanatory realism 1: Observations that certain acts are wrong are explained by the wrongness of the relevant acts. The property of *being wrong* is hence more robust than the property of *being an observation that an act is wrong*. In general, moral properties are more robust than observation properties.

What is moral antirealism?

Moral antirealism 1: The property of *being wrong* does not explain the



observation that certain acts are wrong. The property of *being wrong* is not more robust than the property of *being an observation that an act is wrong*. In general, moral properties are not more robust than observation properties.

These accounts provide us with part of the story, but not the entire story. In his critique of Harman, Sturgeon focuses on a different sort of case in which we might be inclined to say that certain kinds of behavior result from moral properties such as moral character. Sturgeon argues that we need to make appeal to facts regarding moral character in order to explain certain actions—In his example, there would be no other way to explain why Hitler did all the awful things he did without making appeal to Hitler's moral depravity. Sturgeon argues that such causal explanations are the best explanations of certain matters, thus moral realism is vindicated on the basis of the causal role of moral properties such as the property of being depraved. Thus the core of Sturgeon's view is:

Explanatory moral realism 2<sup>vi</sup>: Horrid actions are explained by the depravity of an individual's character. The property of *being depraved* is hence more robust than the property of *being a horrid act*. In general, character properties are more robust than act properties.

The moral antirealist who opposes Sturgeon would deny this claim of explanatory moral realism 2 in a similar fashion:

Moral antirealism 2: Horrid actions are not explained by the wrongness of an individual's character. The property of *being depraved* is hence not more robust than the property of *being a horrid act*. In general, character properties are more not robust than act properties.

Harman does not, however, leave either the moral observations invoked by explanatory realism 1 or the kind of act invoked by explanatory realism 2 entirely unexplained. He offers an alternative explanation, an explanatory view I will call explanatory moral antirealism:

Explanatory moral antirealism: Observations that certain acts are wrong are explained by the attitudes of the observer. Horrid acts are explained by the attitudes of the person acting.

Thus we can see Harman's view as a conjunction of several claims: moral antirealisms 1 and 2, and explanatory moral antirealism. To sum up, and generalize: explanatory moral antirealism is the view that moral properties do not explain moral acts and observations, as well as the view that such acts and observations are best explained on the basis of the attitudes of individuals.

What is the best way to describe the distinctive ontological view of expressivists? Given that expressivists reject any kind of explanation that takes moral properties as basic, we can see the expressivist as being committed to a Harman-style explanatory moral antirealism. This is part of the expressivist story, but not the entire story. The distinctive point made by expressivists is in their view of the specific attitudes that provide an explanation for moral action, moral observation, and, most central to the point at hand here, to moral properties. Hence the core ontological view of expressivism includes what I will call "expressivist explanatory moral antirealism":

Expressivist explanatory moral antirealism: Psychological states of norm-acceptance provide an explanation of moral properties. Hence, moral properties are less robust, by one level, than properties of norm-acceptance.

In light of this, the ontological view of expressivists is best cast as the view that there are moral properties, and the distinctive nature of such properties is detailed by expressivist explanatory moral antirealism.

As a test case for this account, consider again James Dreier's example (J):

(J): Julia believes that knowledge is intrinsically good.

If my criticisms of Dreier's account are sound, the key issue in the debate is not the explanation of (J) but rather the explanation of (I):

(I): Knowledge is intrinsically good.

Does expressivist explanatory moral antirealism accurately account for (I)? One might worry that there would be no difference between the explanations a Moorean or an expressivist would offer of (I). Insofar as (I) is the claim that knowledge is intrinsically good, it would seem that both the Moorean and the expressivist would claim that nothing explains (I). It would be a brute, unexplained fact, on any account, that knowledge is intrinsically good if it is indeed so.

I do not think, however, that an expressivist could hold the view that it is a brute fact that knowledge is intrinsically good without abandoning the explanatory ambitions of expressivism. Expressivism has been intended, throughout its history, as a naturalistic alternative to Moorean realism. Gibbard puts these explanatory ambitions forward in *Thinking How to Live*, claiming that "[n]aturalistic truths are the only ones we must start out recognizing in order to explain, in one way or another,

everything. In that sense, the basic fabric of the world is naturalistic” (Gibbard 2003, 194). Were an expressivist to accept that (I) is a simple brute fact, she would do so at the cost of abandoning this explanatory ambition. She would have to accept that there is a truth that cannot be explained in terms of naturalistic truths. In doing so, she would accept a view that has no clear advantages or significant difference, with regard to explanation, over the realist.

Furthermore, I do not think it is clearly the case that the issues of having an intrinsic property and being a brute fact are the same issue. An analogy is helpful to consider in this case. (I) has a structure parallel to (P):

(P): Pain is intrinsically conscious.

(P) may or may not be the case: it is a matter of great controversy in the philosophy of mind and consciousness whether it is. Assuming for the sake of argument that (P) is true, is it the case that (P) is a brute truth, one that cannot be explained in other terms? It does not seem to be so. (P) is fully consistent with physicalist views on which there is a physical explanation for pain and its nature, as well as with nonreductionist and nonphysicalist views on which there is no such explanation. A physicalist who held the view that all states of pain must be conscious would seek to find a way to explain this feature of pain states in terms of the properties of the brain. In this example, and in general, the issues of having a property intrinsically and having a property without any explanation come apart. This suggests that the expressivist explanatory moral antirealism on offer here would not have any significant problem in offering an explanation of (I), just in virtue of the fact that (I) concerns an intrinsic property.

## Expressivism, Naturalistic Realism, and Nonnaturalism

It has been suggested recently, by Gibbard himself, that if expressivists accept that there are moral properties, such acceptance might collapse the distinctions between expressivism and views that historically have been expressivism's rivals. Gibbard claims that "we may be hard pressed to identify any real differences between naturalistic realism, non-naturalistic realism, and expressivism, once these positions are suitably refined" (2006, p. 75). Gibbard sees this as a "happy convergence" (p. 75). While such a convergence might be happy insofar as it dissolves metaethical disputes, it threatens to make the ontological essence of expressivism (and its rivals) far too unclear.

There are key differences between an expressivist ontology and a naturalistic realist ontology, for reasons I have discussed above. There is a clear distinction between these views, given that the expressivist is committed to rejecting explanatory moral realism 1 and explanatory moral realism 2. Is there a way to distinguish the nonnaturalist view from the expressivist view? Shafer-Landau, in a recent defense of nonnaturalistic moral realism, raises explanatory considerations: "Moral principles and facts aren't meant to explain behavior, or anticipate our actions, but rather to *prescribe* how we are to behave, or *evaluate* states and events" (2006, p. 219). We can adapt this point quite easily to the framework of properties: on Shafer-Landau's nonnaturalism, moral properties play no role in explaining behavior, in contrast to the kind of role that moral properties play on an explanatory realist account such as Sturgeon's. Shafer-Landau is also committed to the view that moral properties are *sui generis*: there is no nonmoral explanation of moral properties. It might seem that the

framework of an explanatory hierarchy, presented here, is ill-suited to explain the status of nonnaturalism. This is not so. In fact, the best way to define such a view is as one that holds that there are moral properties, and such properties are “off the charts”: these properties are neither more robust than, nor less robust than, any nonmoral properties. These kinds of properties are properties that do not fit into any explanatory hierarchy. Thus the contrast between nonnaturalism and expressivism is preserved, insofar as a nonnaturalist would reject what I have called expressivist explanatory moral antirealism. There is a strand in common between the nonnaturalist and expressivist: both reject the idea that moral properties feature in any explanans for phenomena such as moral observation or action. There is also a key difference: the nonnaturalist rejects any explanatory grounding of morality in norm-expression or any other kind of psychological attitude.

It may be thought that this account of the differences between expressivist and nonnaturalist views goes too far, in attributing to the expressivist a view of metaphysics that she need not accept. Expressivism might be considered simply an analysis of moral judgments, a theory that is neutral on the metaphysical issues discussed in this paper. While I think that this approach is at odds with the historical roots of expressivism as an antirealist theory, it may be granted that there is a possibility of such a neutral expressivist view. In light of this, we can see that there is a dilemma for this theory, the theory of neutral expressivism: neutral expressivists owe us an account of metaphysics making it clear whether their view is equivalent, metaphysically, to nonnaturalism, or to the explanatory expressivist antirealism detailed in this paper, or perhaps to some other possible view. In any case, the neutral

expressivist owes us an account of ontology, and it was the purpose of this paper simply to show how expressivists, nonnaturalists, and others might distinguish their view in a deflationary framework.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Drier 2006a attempts to offer an account of what Moore had in mind in his discussion of the nature of good. I have doubts about Dreier's attempts to distinguish between Moore's views and other metaethical theories, doubts that are explained later in this essay.

<sup>ii</sup> A similar account of properties is discussed by Stephen Schiffer in his book *The Things We Mean*. According to Schiffer, "It is a *conceptual truth* that if Lassie is a dog, then Lassie has the property of being a dog" (2003, p. 61). I find Schiffer's characterization of properties as "pleonastic entities" secured by "something-from-nothing" transitions a bit misleading. The point is not that properties are created or brought into existence by appeal to the minimalist property schema. Rather, as with truth, the point is that it is a mistake to say anything about the ontological status properties over and above what is stated by this schema.

<sup>iii</sup> It is important to note here that Blackburn's denial of the existence of moral facts and properties, cited above, places the terms 'fact' and 'property' in scare quotes. Perhaps this reflects Blackburn's own suspicion of the traditional discussion of these two notions.

<sup>iv</sup> The considerations raised by Hardin (1988) should at least raise a concern as to whether color is a naturalistic property.

<sup>v</sup> Given that I am just using this notion of a physical property to explain the idea of an explanatory hierarchy, there is no need here to give a full account of what is and what is not a physical property. There may be no clear definition of what exactly a physical property is.

<sup>vi</sup> I am using the term 'explanatory moral realism 2' here to keep the points regarding the explanatory role of moral properties distinct. A philosopher could, for example, hold explanatory realism 1 without holding explanatory realism 2, if she thinks that moral properties explain observations but not actions.