

Fallibility for Expressivists

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EXPRESSIVISM The primary function of moral language is not to describe the world, but rather to express conative states (e.g., desires, preferences, intentions).

QUASI-REALIST PROJECT Reconcile expressivism with the “realist” trappings of moral language.

Blackburn (1993, 1998); Gibbard (2003)

Our Question: How should quasi-realists make sense of acknowledgments of moral fallibility?

- (1) a. I believe eating meat is wrong.
- b. But I might be mistaken.

The Idealization Analysis

How can I make sense of my own fears of fallibility? Well, there are a number of things that I admire: for instance, information, sensitivity, maturity, imagination, coherence. I know that other people show defects in these respects, and that these defects lead to bad opinions. But can I exempt myself from the same possibility? Of course not... So I can think that perhaps some of my opinions are due to defects of information, sensitivity, maturity, and imagination, and coherence.

—Blackburn (1998): 318.

Horgan & Timmons (2015); Ridge (2015)

Worries for the Idealization Analysis:

- Has trouble accounting for the coherence of worries that idealized sensibilities could err: Egan (2007)
- (2) Even if my belief that eating meat is wrong survives idealization, this belief might be mistaken.
- Is semantically *ad hoc* and implausible. Schroeder (2013)
 - *ad hoc* because the analysis isn’t derived compositionally
 - Implausible because it predicts that (3) & (4), though not equivalent, become equivalent when embedded under *might*:

- (3) It is not wrong to eat meat.
- (4) I would not disapprove of eating meat if I were an idealized agent.
- (5) It might not be wrong to eat meat.
- (6) I might not disapprove of eating meat if I were an idealized agent.

The Credal Analysis

CREDAL EXPRESSIVISM The primary function of epistemic modals (*might*, *must*, *probably*) is not to describe the world, but rather to express credences.

Yalcin (2007, 2011); Rothschild (2012); Moss (2013, 2018)

Combining moral expressivism with credal expressivism gives us:

CREDAL ANALYSIS Acknowledgments of moral fallibility are expressions of moral uncertainty.

Advantages:

- Accounts for the coherence of worries that idealized sensibilities could err.
 - e.g., (2) expresses a non-zero credence that eating meat is wrong, conditional on the belief that eating meat is wrong surviving idealization.
- Is semantically well-motivated (since it follows from a view about the compositional semantics of epistemic modals)
- Avoids predicting that (3) & (4) become equivalent when embedded under *might*.

Credences for Expressivists

A worry: How should we understand moral credences in the first place?

Smith (2002)

One option: moral credences = degrees of a conative attitude towards various reactive attitudes.

Gibbard (1990); Sepielli (2012)

A residual worry: But if moral credences are degrees of a conative attitude, why should we expect to be subject to the same coherence constraints (e.g., Probabilism) as descriptive credence?

Two-Part Answer:

1. Follow Gibbard (2003) in taking the conative attitude that constitutes moral judgment to be a type of intention.
2. Follow Goldstein (2016) in arguing that intentions come in degrees, and that they are subject to probabilistic coherence constraints.

On the resulting picture, acknowledgments of moral fallibility are expressions of moral credences, which in turn are degrees of intentions towards various reactive attitudes.

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