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Expressivism and the Practicality of Moral Convictions

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If Mary comes to think that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong, we would expect her to avoid purchasing cosmetics that have been tested on animals and to become agitated at others who refuse to do the same. Conversely, if Brian attends rallies supporting bans on cosmetics testing on animals, refuses to buy products that have been tested on animals and encourages others to do likewise, we would expect him to be of the opinion that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong. At least, in both cases, should our expectations be confounded, there is usually some explanation of why things have not turned out as we thought they would. In both these ways the moral judgments of agents are intimately connected to their actions and affections.

Many expressivists have used a view about the nature of this connection in arguments for their position. They have argued that moral judgments exhibit a connection to actions and affections that no expression of a descriptive state could share. Hence, they conclude, moral judgments cannot be understood descriptively. Expressivists to have employed such arguments from practicality include A. J. Ayer, J. O. Urmson, Charles Stevenson, R. M. Hare, P. H. Nowell-Smith, Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard.[1] In what follows, it will be argued that the most popular arguments from practicality fail to establish expressivism, first because the specific claims concerning the practicality of morality made by the proponents of the arguments are unsupported and second because even if we were to accept such claims, their truth does not entail expressivism. Nevertheless the failure of such arguments is instructive in so far as it suggests other, potentially more fruitful, ways to motivate expressivism.

1. Descriptivism and Expressivism

Descriptivists in ethics hold that moral judgments express beliefs that represent the world in moral ways, the upshot of such expression being a

putative description of the world as containing or realizing moral states of affairs.[2] Expressivists, by contrast, deny that moral judgments express such beliefs. Instead, they claim, moral judgments express affective mental states such as approval and disapproval, the purpose of this expression being the mutual co-ordination of attitudes and actions.[3] These characterizations can be made more precise by introducing some terminology.

The crux of the debate is over the state of mind that moral judgments express, where moral judgments are sincere utterances of declarative moral sentences. Let us call the states thus expressed moral convictions. The declarative sentences used to express such states provide their content. For example, let us suppose an agent sincerely utters the sentence: "Testing cosmetics on animals is wrong." Her moral conviction is a state of mind with content capturable by that sentence. When, as in this case, the content can be captured using a moral sentence, let us say it is moral content.

The question is then whether the moral convictions are beliefs of a certain sort, where a belief is mental state that represents the world, or some part of it, as being thus-and-so. Let us call such states descriptively representational and the way they represent the world as being their descriptive content. Thus, if Brian believes that it is raining outside, then Brian's meteorological conviction is a descriptively representational state of mind with the descriptive content that it is raining outside. Descriptively representational states can be contrasted with other states that represent the world, not as being thus-and-so, but so as to be made thus-and-so. Let us call these states directively representational and the way they represent the world so as to be made their directive content.[4] Desires are the paradigm examples of directively representational states. Thus, if Brian desires an end to poverty, his desire is a directively representational state of mind with the following directive content: there is no poverty. The distinction between descriptively and directively representational mental states is sometimes cashed out in terms of their respective directions of fit. Whereas descriptively representational states have as their function that their contents fit the state of the world, directively representational states have as their function to impose themselves on the world in such a way that the world come to fit their content.[5]

Given these definitions, the core claim of descriptivists is that the moral content of moral convictions is descriptive content. Moral judgments express moral beliefs. Expressivists, in contrast, hold both that the moral content of moral convictions is not descriptive content and that such convictions have distinctive non-moral directive content. The first part of the expressivist thesis is equivalent to the claim that moral judgments do not express moral beliefs. The second is a beginning of a positive

characterization of the states such judgments express. According to a simple version of expressivism, for example, moral judgments express states of approval and disapproval. On such a view, Mary's judgment that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong expresses disapproval of testing cosmetics on animals. Her disapproval is a directively representational state that represents that world so as to be made that no one tests cosmetics on animals. This gives the directive content of the state, which, since it involves no moral terms, is not moral content. According to a more complex version of expressivism, moral judgments express emotionally ascended states of approval and disapproval. A state is emotionally ascended in so far as it is directed not merely at some worldly object or feature, but also at attitudes toward the object or feature.[6] On such a view, Mary's judgment that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong expresses the directively representational state that represents that world so as to be made both that no one tests cosmetics on animals and that everyone disapproves of testing cosmetics on animals. The phenomenon of emotional ascent is one way in which expressivists can meet the challenge of distinguishing the attitudes expressed by moral judgments from those expressed by other evaluative judgments such as judgments of taste.

Expressivists and descriptivists alike must also admit that regardless of the status of their moral content, moral convictions are always formed in response to states with descriptive content, and that such content is often implicated in the expression of the moral conviction. For example, expressing the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong often implies that testing cosmetics on animals actually occurs, or at least that there is a real possibility of it occurring. Furthermore, moral convictions are formed in response to particular perceived features of the object being evaluated, and such perceptions are also states with descriptive content. For example, Mary's moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong may be formed on the basis of her belief that testing cosmetics on animals causes them unnecessary pain. As Hume noted, most discussions in moral philosophy quickly move from an "is" to an "ought," from descriptive representation to moral content, and this is true whether or not that moral content signals a further type of descriptive representation.[7] Both expressivists and descriptivists, therefore, owe an account of the nature of this relation. But whatever such an account may be, it is theoretically possible and dialectically useful to distinguish the moral content of a moral conviction from the descriptive content of the states it is formed in response to. The debate between expressivists and descriptivists concerns the nature of the moral content.

2. Hume and the General Form of Arguments from Practicality

Perhaps the most famous argument from practicality comes from Book III of Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*: "Since morals … have an influence of the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone … can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not the conclusions of reason."[8] Here, moral convictions or morals are claimed to have a practical role that beliefs, the states controlled by reason, cannot fulfill. Hence, moral convictions cannot be beliefs or descriptively representational mental states.

This passage illustrates the general form of arguments from practicality for expressivism, which is as follows. Moral convictions are practical in some specific sense. No purely descriptively representational state is practical in the same specific sense. Therefore, moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states. In this argument, to say that a state is practical is to say that it is connected to actions and affections in some way.

It is worth noting here Francis Snare's point that for arguments of this type to be successful, at least one of the premises must be an *a priori* truth.[9] If both of the premises were only known *a posteriori*, then, granting the first premise, there would only be evidence for the second on the assumption that moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states or that the conclusion is true. There can therefore only be *a posteriori* support for both premises, if we assume the conclusion to be true. For the arguments from practicality that follow, it will be assumed that at least one of the premises is known *a priori* and hence that Snare's snare can be avoided.

We may ask how arguments from practicality might fail. Besides equivocation on the term "practical," there are two main sources of error. In the first case, arguments of this type will fail, if the type of practicality assigned to moral convictions is too weak, because this is liable to make the second premise false or unsupported. If the connection between moral convictions and actions and affections is weak, it is likely that purely descriptively representational states can also have such a connection, calling the second premise into doubt. In the second case, arguments of this type will fail, if the type of practicality assigned to moral convictions is too strong, because this is liable to make the first premise false or unsupported. If the conditions for practicality are too strict, it is likely that although purely descriptively representational states cannot be practical, neither can moral convictions.[10] In what follows it will be

argued that the most common arguments from practicality fail for the second reason. They fail to support the claim that moral convictions are practical in the relevant senses. Subsequently it will be shown that even if these flaws were to be overcome, the expressivist conclusion would still not follow.

3. Uncontroversial Senses of Practicality

To assess arguments from practicality we must first be clear what sense of practicality is being employed. There are many senses in which moral convictions are practical that have not been thought to support expressivism. To help clarify the controversial senses of practicality employed in arguments for expressivism, it is helpful to contrast them with the uncontroversial senses.

Let us begin by noting that moral convictions are practical in so far as they are a species of normative convictions. Moral convictions concern how we should live and how we ought to act. Moral convictions are characterized by normative terms that serve to indicate a standard or norm by which to judge conduct. For example, when Mary holds that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong, she is recommending a certain path of action. She is directing us not to test cosmetics on animals or to endorse such testing. This directedness is captured in the claim that moral convictions have normative content. One consequence of this sense of practicality is that there are determinate ways in which agents can act in accordance with and contrary to moral convictions. To act in accordance with a moral conviction is to act in ways that a person expressing the conviction recommends and to refrain from acting in ways that a person expressing the conviction discourages. Conversely, to act contrary to a moral conviction is to act in ways that a person expressing the conviction discourages and to refrain from acting in ways that a person expressing the conviction recommends. If Brian purchases cosmetics that have been tested on animals, he is acting contrary to Mary's moral conviction; if he does not purchase such goods, he is acting in accordance with Mary's moral conviction.

Moral convictions are also practical in a second uncontroversial sense that their normative contents can feature in our deliberations about what to do. If Mary is a committed moral person and if she holds that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong, then this consideration will be deliberatively salient for her. When choosing cosmetics, for example, it will be relevant to Mary which products have been tested on animals, and the perceived fact that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong will be a

deliberative consideration against purchasing products that have been so tested.

A third sense of practicality that can be attributed to moral convictions is that they can affect the behavioral tendencies of agents. In the case of Mary, for example, other things being equal, she will not purchase cosmetics that have been tested on animals, nor act in ways that she believes would support any such testing regime. Other things are rarely equal and competing considerations may outweigh moral considerations. In such cases, however, moral considerations remain to be outweighed. This example also shows that moral convictions affect the behavioral tendencies of agents in directed ways. Other things being equal, moral convictions direct agents to behave in ways that are in accordance with the normative content of the convictions.

A final uncontroversial sense of practicality for moral convictions concerns their ability to form part of the explanation for agents acting as they do. Let us suppose that Mary is considering whether or not to buy a particular lipstick that has been tested on animals. Many factors may affect whether or not Mary buys the lipstick, such as how much it costs, what color it is, and whether or not it was tested on animals. In some cases, the moral consideration may be trumped by competing considerations and Mary will buy the lipstick anyway. In others, the moral consideration may hold sway and Mary will not buy the lipstick, because, among other things, it was tested on animals. In such cases, Mary has acted not merely in accordance with her moral conviction but on the basis of the conviction. This is not to say that the moral conviction will be the sole basis for Mary's action, since she may be moved by other considerations that suggests the same act. In all cases where the moral consideration holds sway, however, Mary's moral conviction will be at least part of the explanation of her acting as she did.

4. Two Stronger Senses of Practicality

That moral convictions are practical in the senses we have considered is relatively uncontroversial. Expressivists who embrace arguments from practicality, however, typically make stronger claims. They claim not only that moral convictions can affect the behavioral tendencies of agents and feature in explanations of their actions, but that moral convictions have a distinct kind of effect on behavior and a distinct role in the explanation of action that serves to distinguish them from purely descriptively representational states.

A common suggestion is that moral convictions have a distinct effect on behavior and a distinct role in action explanation that is the result of them having some special connection to our motives. To have a motive is to have a goal or purpose. In terms of the earlier discussion, motives are directively representational states of mind. They are mental states that represent the world so as to be made that some state of affairs obtains. The state of affairs is a person's goal. According to the standard Humean model, our purposive behaviors are affected in different ways by our motives and by our beliefs.[11] Roughly, our motives set us our goals and our beliefs determine the means we take in pursuit of those goals. Thus a desire or motive for some chocolate will affect a person's behavior by causing the person to act in ways which he believes will lead to his acquisition of some chocolate. Conversely, a person's belief that there is some chocolate in the refrigerator will affect the person's behavior by determining the means he takes to pursue his motives concerning chocolate. In the case where both elements are present, they will cause the person to go to the refrigerator in the hope of acquiring some chocolate. Accordingly, on this picture, action explanation always involves reference to two distinct elements, a motive that indicates what the agent was hoping to achieve in so acting and a belief that indicates why the agent took the particular way to pursuing that goal that he did. The suggestion under consideration is that moral convictions affect the behavior of agents and the actions of agents through connection with their motives instead of beliefs. There are two ways in which this connection might be spelled out, which provide two strong senses of practicality.

In the first case, we might claim that moral convictions are intrinsically connected to the motives of agents. When moral convictions influence the motives of an agent, they do so without reference to any further state of the agent. This serves to distinguish moral convictions from more mundane beliefs that may be connected to the motives of agents only by channeling a pre-existing motive into a new, more specific form. For example, the belief that there is chocolate in the refrigerator may give rise to a motive to go to the refrigerator. But it will only do so by channeling a pre-existing motive, such as the motive to acquire some chocolate. The claim is that when moral convictions influence motives, they do so intrinsically, without reference to any antecedent motive. The claim would be, for example, that the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong can give rise to the motive not to purchase cosmetics that have been tested on animals without having to channel any pre-existing motive. Hence, the fully displayed explanation of any actions that result from this motive need refer only to the moral conviction and the beliefs it is coupled with.

It is important to note that the suggestion is not that moral convictions can give rise to just any motive, but that they can give rise to appropriate motives, where a motive is appropriate relative to a moral conviction just in case it is a motive to act in ways that are in accordance with that conviction. In the case of a conviction that a type of action is wrong, for example, the appropriate motive will be a motive not to partake in actions of that kind and to encourage others to do likewise. Furthermore, even if we were to grant this sense of practicality, it does not follow that when moral convictions give rise to appropriate motives that the moral conviction will always play a role in the explanation of the agent acting as she does or that the agent will even act in accordance with that conviction. The agent may act in accordance with her moral conviction for some reason other than that provided by the moral conviction or she may have competing motives that outweigh that engendered by the moral conviction, causing her to act in ways that are not in accordance with the moral conviction at all.

The second suggestion for a strong sense of practicality is that moral convictions are, in an interesting way, necessarily connected to the motives of agents. Having a moral conviction is itself sufficient for an agent to have appropriate motives. More precisely, the claim is that: necessarily, if an agent has a moral conviction, then she will have some corresponding set of appropriate motives. As before, a motive is appropriate just in case it is a motive to act in ways that are in accordance with the moral conviction. This view is often labeled internalism.[12] In the case of Mary, the mere fact that she considers testing cosmetics on animals to be wrong will be sufficient for her to have the set of appropriate motives, for example, the motive not to purchase cosmetics tested on animals and the motive to prevent others from doing so.

It is again important to note that even if we were to grant this sense of practicality to moral convictions, it does not follow that an agent's moral conviction, when present, will always play a role in the agent acting as she does or that she will always act in ways that are in accordance with it. The presence of other, stronger, motives will undermine both possibilities. Any motivation arising from the moral conviction will be defeasible. Furthermore, internalism fails to allow us to determine the precise nature of the necessary connection between moral convictions and appropriate motives. There are at least two options concerning the nature of this connection. In the first case, it may be the result of the fact that the moral conviction is simply identical with the set of appropriate motives. In the second case, it may be a connection between two distinct states, the moral conviction and the set of appropriate motives. In the first case, this sense of practicality entails the previous sense: if a moral conviction simply is

the set of appropriate motives then nothing other than the moral conviction will be required to generate those motives. In the second case, it does not, since the necessary connection between moral convictions and appropriate motives may be the result of some generic antecedent motive.

5. Two Unsuccessful Arguments

We have considered two ways in which moral convictions have been claimed to be practical. They are intrinsically connected to the motives of agents, and they are necessarily connected to the motives of agents in the way posited by internalists. The argument from practicality that employs the first of these claims is as follows. Moral convictions can be intrinsically connected to the motives of agents. No purely descriptively representational state can be intrinsically connected to the motives of agents. Therefore, moral convictions are not purely descriptive representational states.

Unfortunately for expressivists, this argument suffers from the second general failure of arguments from practicality that the sense of practicality it would have us assign to moral convictions is too strong. This makes the second premise plausible only at the expense of rendering the first premise unsupported.

The second premise appears well supported by examples. Brian's belief that it is raining outside will only affect his motives, if it is accompanied by an appropriate desire, preference, or similar directively representational state. If Brian prefers not to get rained upon, this belief will provide him with a motive to stay indoors. If he likes getting rained upon, then this belief will provide him with a motive to go outside. In the absence of any such attitude, however, Brian's beliefs will not give rise to any motives at all.

Once the second premise is granted, the weight of the argument falls on the first premise. But there is no reason to think the mere practicality of moral convictions supports this premise, since we have already seen that there are other, less controversial, senses of practicality that can be attributed to moral convictions without going so far as to claim that they are intrinsically connected to motives. It is hard to see, therefore, what this further posited connection adds to the practical import of moral convictions.

In response, it may be argued that an intrinsic connection to motives removes an element of contingency from the motivational effects of moral convictions, since whether or not moral convictions motivate is not dependent on some external moral motive, which may be absent.

However, the sense of practicality currently under consideration is only that moral convictions can be intrinsically motivational. When they give rise to motives, they do so by themselves. This still leaves it a contingent and as yet unexplained matter as to whether or not a particular moral conviction will provide a motive. To remove the contingency requires the claim that moral convictions are necessarily connected to motives and practical in second strong sense considered here. By itself the present claim of practicality fails to remove the contingency.

In the absence of further argument, there is no reason to hold that moral convictions are practical in the sense that they can be intrinsically connected to the motives of agents. The fact that moral judgments are practical simply underdetermines whether or not they are so connected. Thus the first premise remains unsupported and the conclusion does not follow.

The second, more popular, argument from practicality results from substituting the second strong sense of practicality into the general schema. The resulting argument is as follows. Moral convictions are necessarily connected to the motives of agents in the way posited by internalists. No purely descriptively representational state can be necessarily connected to motives in the same way. Therefore, moral convictions are not purely descriptive representational states.

In this second argument, the necessary connection posited by internalists is that necessarily, if an agent has a moral conviction, then she will have the corresponding set of appropriate motives. If moral convictions have this connection, but purely descriptively representational states must lack it, then it follows that moral convictions cannot be purely descriptively representational states.[13]

As before, let us grant the second premise for the sake of argument. Once again, however, this puts an unbearable weight on the first premise. There is little reason to suppose that moral judgments are necessarily connected to motives in this way. As we have seen, moral judgments can have normative content, can play a role in the deliberations of agents, can affect the behaviors of agents in directed ways, and can be used to explain their actions, all without being necessarily connected to motives in the way internalists demands. John Boatright puts the point succinctly: "the practicality of moral [convictions] surely requires that there must be some element or feature in virtue of which moral [convictions] have the power to affect human behavior, but there is no reason as yet why it must be a…necessary one."[14] In the absence of further argument, therefore, there is no reason to hold that moral convictions are practical in the sense posited by internalists. Hence, the first premise remains unmotivated, and the conclusion of the argument does not follow.

6. A Further Objection to the Arguments

If the preceding arguments are correct, then the mere practicality of moral convictions fails to establish them as either intrinsically or necessarily connected to motives. But the possibility of other arguments for the claims remains. Until all such arguments have been dismissed, the claim that the first premises of the arguments for practicality are unsupported must remain provisional. Fortunately, the case against arguments from practicality has another component. Even if we grant that moral convictions are practical in either or both of the two strong senses, and therefore grant the conclusions of the above two arguments from practicality, we are no closer to establishing expressivism.

Let us suppose that we accept the conclusion of the second argument that moral convictions are not purely descriptively representational states. This is compatible with moral convictions being what may be called hybrid states with both descriptively representational and directively representational content. Furthermore, it is also compatible with the moral content of such states being at least a part of their descriptively representational content and hence compatible with descriptivism.

Let us consider the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong. If internalism is true, then this conviction will be necessarily connected to the set of appropriate motives with the appropriate directively representational content. Thus, we might say, the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong is sufficient for the set of appropriate motives that includes the directively representational state that represents the world so as to be made such that: nobody purchases cosmetics that have been tested on animals. One way in which this connection will be maintained is if the moral conviction simply includes as a part this motive. Let us suppose that this is so. Then the truth of internalism entails that the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong is partly constituted by the set of appropriate motives that include this motive.

However, this is still compatible with the same conviction having the descriptively representational content that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong. As several authors have noted, there is no objection to a single state having both the mind-to-world direction of fit associated with descriptive contents and the world-to-mind direction of fit associated with directive contents as long as the two contents are distinct.[15] This can happen here. Insofar as the moral conviction is descriptively representational, it can represent the world as being such that: testing cosmetics on animals is wrong. Insofar as the same conviction is directively representational, it represents the world so as to be made such that nobody purchases

cosmetics tested on animals. Since these two contents are distinct, it is possible that they combine in the same conviction while attaching to different directions of fit. On this view, moral convictions are hybrid states with a special connection between the two contentful components. The directively representational content is determined by the descriptively representational content. In this example, the moral conviction that testing cosmetics on animals is wrong is the conviction that represents the world as being such that certain paths of action are morally inappropriate and that represents the world as to be made such that nobody partakes in such paths of action. This special connection notwithstanding, since the descriptive content and directive content are distinct, the conviction that possesses them both is a possibility.

The claim that moral convictions are such hybrid states is compatible with both premises of the second argument from practicality. Insofar as such states involve as an essential component certain motives, then the first, internalist, premise is satisfied. Insofar as such states are not, by that very fact, purely descriptively representational, the second premise is also satisfied. Since the argument is valid, it follows that the conclusion of the argument fails to rule out the possibility that moral convictions are such hybrid states. Since, if moral convictions are such hybrids, their moral content is descriptive content, it follows that the argument fails to rule out the truth of descriptivism.

The same point can be made for the first argument from practicality. Moral convictions may sometimes include appropriate motives while still having moral content that is descriptive. Again, because the contents of these two elements are distinct, and because there is no reason in general to doubt that states can possess both directions of fit as long as they attach to distinct contents, there is no reason to deny this possibility. The fact that the conclusion of the argument fails to rule out this possibility shows that the conclusion cannot help to establish the truth of expressivism.

The upshot is that even accepting that moral convictions have some privileged tie to our motives, it does not follow that their moral content is not descriptive content. A connection with appropriate motives only shows that moral convictions have a distinct, non-moral, directive content. This is perfectly compatible with them continuing to possess moral descriptive content. Thus even granting their first and second premises, the final two arguments from practicality fail rule out the truth of descriptivism. They thus represent no progress in establishing the truth of expressivism.

7. A Humean Reply

The above rejection of the final two arguments from practicality relies on the claim that states that represent the world as being some way may also represent the world so as to be made another way. Since such states are, by that token, not purely descriptively representational, admitting their existence is compatible the second premise of each argument. But this line of reasoning might be considered disingenuous. What the defender of the these arguments had meant to assert is not that no purely descriptively representational state can be connected to motives but that no descriptively representational state at all can be connected to motives and that no state that involves any descriptive content can also involve directive content. With this as the second premise, we can generate a third argument from practicality as follows. Moral convictions are necessarily connected to the motives of agents in the way posited by internalism. No descriptively representational state can be necessarily connected to motives in the same way. Therefore, moral convictions are not descriptive representational states.

Unlike the previous arguments, the conclusion of this argument is not compatible with the view that the moral content of moral convictions is descriptively content. It provides a potentially stronger case for expressivism. The problem is that no reason has been offered in support of the second premise. Why should we suppose that no descriptively representational state can be necessarily connected to motivation in the way posited by internalists? Hume certainly thought that no belief could be motivationally engaged in this way, a claim that has since been enshrined as one part of the view known as Humean psychology. As he writes: "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will…[and] can never oppose passion in the direction of the will."[16]

Unfortunately the argument here cannot rely on authority. Furthermore, there are plausible counterexamples to this Humean condition on the nature of descriptively representational states. Milikan has discussed the case of the state of a mother hen responsible for the call to its chicks where the mother hen is in a state that both represents the world as being a state in which there is food around and represents the world as being so as to be made that her chicks come and eat it. The content about food being around is descriptive content. The content about being so as to be made that the chicks eat it is directive content which provides a connection to motives. Thus the second premise is false, and the conclusion does not follow.

Before this line of argument is given up too quickly, however, it is worth considering another possible expressivist defense. An expressivist

might accept that although being distinct from any motivational, directively representational, element is not definitive of all descriptively representational states, it is nevertheless definitive of the distinct type of representational states that exist in mature deliberating human beings. After all, Humean psychology, of which the second premise is a part, arises from an examination of the nature of agency, the paradigm cases of which are mature deliberating human beings. It is natural to think, therefore, that the condition on descriptively representational states on which Humean psychology depends, their disconnectedness from motivation, applies only to the states of mature deliberating agents. If this is the case, then an expressivist might be able to bypass the example of the hen's call to her chicks through utilizing the following argument from practicality. Moral convictions are necessarily connected to the motives of agents in the way posited by internalists. No descriptively representational state possessed by a mature deliberating agent is necessarily connected to motives in the same way. Moral convictions are states of mature deliberating agents. Therefore, moral convictions are not descriptively representational states.

The problem with this argument is with the second premise. There are indeed two generally recognized ways in which the descriptively representational states of organisms can determine their actions. On one of them, the one at work in the example of the hen's call to her chicks, descriptively representational states are necessarily connected to motives. On the other, the one at work in most human cases, they are not. It is also the case that in mature deliberating human beings, that mechanism is generally at work. But it does not follow that that this is always the case or that the second premise is true. These points will be argued for in turn.

The first point is best made with some evolutionary background. Individuals who hope to thrive in an environment will need to have some way of acquiring information about the environment. Through evolutionary selection, all species have been equipped with systems that allow them to do this, for example, visual systems such as the human eye and photosensitive cells. The systems fulfill their evolutionary function when they produce descriptively representational states that represent the world as being thus and so, thus enabling individuals of that species to guide themselves through their environment.

The ultimate evolutionary aim of such systems is to aid reproductive success, but there is more than one way in which the products of such systems can be used to further this aim. In the simplest case, the descriptively representational states produce actions that directly address the biological needs of the individual. The content of the descriptively representational states is connected to action, in such a way as to produce

actions that will aid the individual's reproductive success, given that the descriptive representation is accurate. The antennae of honeybees, for instance, are sensitive to, among other things, the presence of oleic acid, a chemical they come across most commonly when it is given off by decaying honeybee corpses. The state of the antenna when it detects this acid causes the bees to remove the source of the acid from the hive.[17] The connection between the descriptively representational state of the antenna and the action it prompts, however, is hard-wired in the sense that there is no possibility, given the actual constitution of the honeybee, of the information provided by the descriptively representational state being used to produce other actions: where the bees sense oleic acid, they will remove its source. This can provide for tragic circumstances. For example, honeybees will remove a bee tainted with oleic acid even if it is still patently alive. The removal behavior, and no other, is hard-wired, because it is the action that will most aid the reproductive success of the honeybees. The bees use their descriptively representational states produced by their antennae in a direct way. They are translated directly into specific actions what will aid reproductive success, given that the descriptively representational state describes accurately. Biologists label such behavior sphexish, after a genus of digger wasp that provides another common example.

There is, however, a more complicated way in which individuals can use their descriptively representational states in ways that will further their reproductive success. On this model, the behaviors which descriptively representational states prompt are determined, not by a hard-wiring of responses aimed at fulfilling the individual's biological needs, but by the particular motives or directively representational states present in the individual, where an individual's particular motivations can be correlated reasonably well with the individual's biological needs. On this system of action production, there is no reproduction-aiding hard-wired behavior associated with each type of descriptively representational state. Instead, descriptively representational states produce actions that would, were the descriptions accurate, satisfy the particular motives they are coupled with, under the proviso that the motivations are generally commensurate with the basic biological needs of the individual. The same descriptively representational state can serve the aims of different motivations, a point that is reminiscent of Hume's metaphor of reason being a slave of the passions. An imaginary case of a hyper-intelligent bee illustrates this sort of mechanism. Let us suppose that hyper-intelligent bees, like actual honeybees, have antennae sensitive to the presence of oleic acid, which produce descriptive representations concerning the location of such acid. For hyper-intelligent bees, there is no direct hard-wired connection

between such states and any particular behavior. Instead, the action that the descriptively representational state will prompt is determined by the peculiar motivations of the particular hyper-intelligent bee. If the bee is motivated to remove the source of acid from the hive, then he will do so. If the bee is motivated otherwise, for example to ignore the acid source perhaps because it is a live bee, then no such removal behavior will result. The hyper-intelligent bee translates his descriptively representational states into action only through the medium of his particular motivations, where these motivations generally track his biological needs.[18]

There are evolutionary advantages and disadvantages to each of these action-producing mechanisms, but importantly for our purposes these two different ways in which descriptively representational states may be processed into action have different consequences for the motivational engagement of such states. In the honeybee case, the descriptively representational states are necessarily connected to a corresponding motivation, the connection between them having been determined by selective pressures. In the hyper-intelligent bee case, there is no necessary connection between any descriptively representational state and any particular motive. In the first case, therefore, descriptively representational states are motivationally engaged. In the second case, they are motivationally detached.

The second point is that the more sophisticated mechanism is generally at work in the case of mature deliberating human beings. When it comes to their action-guiding mechanisms, mature human beings are hyper-intelligent bees. Mature human beings typically use their descriptively representational states to guide their actions only through combining them with distinct, contingently present, motivations; in their case, desires. This claim can be empirically supported. If mature human actions were not generated in this way, then we would behave differently from the ways we know we do behave. If human behaviors were hard-wired, then the same descriptively representational state would always lead to the same behavior, which we know not to be the case.

But from these two points it does not follow that all the descriptively representational states of mature deliberating human beings are detached from motivations in the way asserted by the second premise of the argument. The possibility remains that some of our descriptively representational states are, like the descriptively representational states of the honeybee, necessarily connected to directive representations. Moral convictions are good candidates for such states. To put the point another way, though it might be the case that our mature deliberative systems fit the second, sophisticated model and hence that the descriptively representational states that partake in such a system are necessarily detached

from motivations, it does not follow that all our descriptively representational states partake in such a system. It remains a possibility that our mature deliberative system works alongside a sphexish motivational system that employs a different workforce of motivationally engaged descriptively representational states.

According to such a twin-track motivational model, most of our descriptively representational states influence our actions through combining with possibly absent and variable motivations. Such descriptive states produce actions that would satisfy the particular directive states they are coupled with were their descriptive content to prove accurate, but can be coupled with various directive states thus generating a variable effect on action. For example, the belief that there is chocolate in the refrigerator will, other things being equal, prompt a move towards the refrigerator when coupled with the motive for some chocolate, a move away from the refrigerator when coupled with the motive to avoid chocolate and no action at all when coupled with indifference toward chocolate. But alongside these everyday methods of descriptive representation, there would be some rarer ways of representing the way the world is such that there is no possibility of an agent that represents the world as being that way lacking a relevant motive. Moral convictions would be one example. On this picture, an agent with a moral conviction that an action is right has a mental state that represents the world as being such that that action is right but is also a mental state that is automatically coupled with the motive to act in that way, just as the descriptive representation of honeybees of a hive-bound source of oleic acid is automatically coupled with a motive to remove the source from the hive. In this sense, moral motivation would be hard-wired motivation, with no possibility, given the constitution of our motivational system, of moral descriptive representation being coupled with anything other than motives appropriate for their normative content. If human beings model such a twin-track system, the second premise of the argument is false and expressivism as a conclusion does not follow.

In this context, it is interesting to consider the argument by David Lewis against the possibility of states that are descriptively representational and yet necessarily connected to motives, so-called besires.[19] Lewis gives the example of the besire which consists both of the belief that it would be good if Meane got the job and the desire that Meane get the job. This is what was above called a hybrid state, since it represents the world as being a certain way, giving it descriptive content, and represents the world so as to be made a certain way, giving it directive content. It is also a state with a particular connection between these two contents. The descriptive content is normative content and the directive content is

constitutive of a motive the following of which would be in accordance with that normative content.

Lewis argues that the existence of such besires is incompatible with decision theory, which is a "well worked-out formal theory of belief, desire, and what it means to serve our desires according to our beliefs," a theory that is "surely…fundamentally right."[20] The problem with this argument is that it may well be that besires cannot be part of any deliberative process that is modeled by decision theory, but this simply goes to show that besires, if they exist, are not part of the deliberative processes of mature agents that are modeled by such a theory. Such a conclusion fails to rule out the possibility of besires, it merely restricts the roles they could play. The preceding argument has the same form. It may well be that moral convictions, considered as descriptive states necessarily connected to appropriate motivations, cannot be part of any deliberative process that fits the sophisticated model exemplified by hyper-intelligent bees. But this simply goes to show that moral convictions, if they exist, are not part of the human deliberative process that is modeled in this way. It is for this reason that restricting the condition of motivational detachment to just descriptively representational states involved in the mature deliberative systems of human beings provides no support for expressivism. The problem is that it remains an open question whether or not moral convictions are part of such a system. The argument Lewis offers fails in a similar way. It remains an open question whether besires are part of the system modeled by decision theory.

Accordingly, the Humean condition on the nature of descriptively representational states cannot be employed in a successful argument from practicality, because it is false. Furthermore, although the Humean theory is more plausibly true of the subset of the descriptively representational states that are part of the deliberative processes of mature human beings, there can be no guarantee that moral convictions are part of this class. If follows that there can be no argument for expressivism that employs both the thesis of internalism and a plausible version of the Humean view of descriptively representational states. Once again, considerations of the practicality of moral convictions have failed to advance the case for expressivism.

8. Conclusion

There is a long history of arguments for expressivism, from Hume onward, based on the alleged practicality of moral judgments and the states of mind they express. Unfortunately for expressivists, there is no

sense of practicality that can do the job. Not only is there no reason to think that moral convictions are practical in the way that arguments of expressivists require, but even if such a reason were presented the arguments would fail to rule out the possibility of moral convictions being hybrid states, a possibility that is consistent with descriptivism. Finally, Human psychology also fails to rule out the possibility of such hybrids.

We may ask what the prospects for expressivist accounts of moral judgments are. Although we have considered here the most common senses in which expressivists claim moral judgments to be practical, it remains a possibility that there is a sense of practicality that can make the expressivist argument work. Perhaps an expressivist could demarcate such a sense, but the history of unsuccessful attempts to do so makes the prospects look bleak.

Yet there is an alternative path for an expressivist who accepts the above arguments. As stated here, the debate between expressivists and descriptivists concerns whether or not the moral content of moral convictions is descriptive content. But it is surprising to note that nowhere have expressivists sought to argue for their position by first defending a theory of what can and cannot be represented to be the case and then arguing that given such a theory there can be no such thing as a descriptive representation of a distinctively moral state of affairs. Instead, expressivists have preferred to argue for their position by assuming some condition on descriptively representational states, for example the Humean condition, and then claiming that moral convictions cannot satisfy it. Perhaps, then, expressivists would do better to approach these issues in a more systematic way by first addressing the nature of descriptive representation in general before ascertaining whether this issue, once settled, can generate successful arguments for their position. Such work may well precipitate a significant, though welcome, shift in the accepted motivations for expressivism.[21]

Notes

1. See A. J. Ayer, "The Analysis of Moral Judgements," *Horizon* 20 (1949), J. O. Urmson, *The Emotive Theory of Ethics* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), pp. 19–23, Charles Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," *Mind* 46 (1937), R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 28–31, 83–93 and 170–172, P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1957), pp. 36–43, Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 187–189, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 70, and Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 105–125.

2. See Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 17.
3. See Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, p. 167, *Ruling Passions*, pp. 48–51 and Gibbard, op. cit., p. 75.
4. See Ruth Garrett Milikan, "Pushmi-Pullyou Representations," in *Philosophical Perspectives* IX, ed. J. Tomberlin (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, 1995).
5. See G. E. M Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), p. 56 and Lloyd Humberstone, "Direction of Fit," *Mind* 101 (1992).
6. See Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, pp. 8–14.
7. See David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1896), p. 457.
8. Hume, op. cit.
9. See Francis Snare, "The Argument from Motivation," *Mind* 84 (1975), pp. 2–3.
10. See Simon Blackburn, "Moral Realism," in *Morality and Moral Reasonin*g, ed. John Casey (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 113.
11. See Michael Smith, "The Humean Theory of Motivation," *Mind* 96 (1987), pp. 36–61.
12. See David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 39.
13. See Stevenson, op. cit.; Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, pp.188–9.
14. John Boatright, "The Practicality of Moral Judgements," P*hilosophical Quarterly* 23 (1973), p. 320.
15. See Huw Price, "Truth and the Nature of Assertion," Mind 96 (1989); Hallvard Lillehammer, "Moral Cognitivism," Philosophical Papers 31 (2002), pp. 12–13.
16. Hume, op. cit., p. 413. See also John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, eds., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume I (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 101.
17. Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden* (London: Phoenix, 1995), p. 76.
18. See David Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) ch. 3 §4.
19. J. E. J. Altham, "The Legacy of Emotivism," in *Fact, Science and Morality*, ed. Graham MacDonald and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
20. David Lewis, "Desire as Belief," *Mind* 97 (1988), p. 325.
21. I would like to thank Thomas Magnell and two anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Value Inquiry* for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.