EXPRESSIVISM, SUPERVENIENCE AND LOGIC

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Abstract
Expressivist analyses of evaluative discourse characterize unembedded moral claims as functioning primarily to express non-cognitive attitudes. The most thorny problem for this project has been explaining the logical relations between such evaluative judgements and other judgements expressed using evaluative terms in unasserted contexts, such as when moral judgements are embedded in conditionals. One strategy for solving the problem derives logical relations among moral judgements from relations of 'consistency' and 'inconsistency' which hold between the attitudes they express. This approach has been accused of conflating inconsistency with mere pragmatic incoherence. In reaction to such criticisms several recent theorists have attempted to use alternative resources. The most sophisticated noncognitivists have postulated secondary descriptive meanings dependent on moral judgement's primary expressive meanings. Recent independent suggestions by Frank Jackson and Stephen Barker attempt to solve the embedding problem by utilizing such descriptive components of moral utterances. Unfortunately, this strategy fails to handle a certain sort of example using just the descriptive resources available to noncognitivists. It must rule valid arguments invalid in virtue of equivocation in the secondary descriptive meanings. The present paper explains the problem and suggests a moral for expressivist theories.

Introduction

Expressivist analyses of evaluative discourse characterize unembedded moral claims as functioning primarily to express non-cognitive attitudes. But, since metaethical theories must explain our practices of making such judgements, expressivists owe us an explanation of the logical relations between these judgements and other judgements. The most thorny problem for this project has been explaining the logical relations between evaluative judgements and other judgements best expressed using evaluative terms in unasserted contexts, such as embedded in condi-

tionals. Since we make judgements embedding moral claims even when we don't hold the attitudes that such claims allegedly express, and since such judgements stand in the standard logical relations to unembedded moral judgements, the expressivist must supplement her account to cover these judgements and explain these phenomena. This is known variously as Geach's problem, the Geach/Frege problem and the Frege/Geach/Searle problem for expressivism.[1]

One strategy for solving the problem, most prominently pursued by Simon Blackburn and Alan Gibbard, tries to derive logical relations between moral judgements from relations of 'consistency' and 'inconsistency' among the attitudes they express. The root idea is that certain sets of attitudes are more coherent than other sets of attitudes, so that a person can be incoherent in virtue of accepting the premises of an argument while denying the conclusion. The incoherence here is explained, not by a prior logical relation between the contents of those attitudes, but rather by relations of mutual unsatisfiability or some similar property among the desires the expressivist takes the attitudes to express. The logical incoherence of the expressions themselves are supposed to be a consequence of the relations of coherence and incoherence between the attitudes.

This strategy has been subjected to a line of objection which suggests that it is a mistake to conflate pragmatic incoherence among attitudes with logical relations among their contents (Schueler 1988). Relations of logical implication between the contents of ordinary judgements do not neatly mirror the facts about when it is rational or pragmatically coherent to hold a set of attitudes (Hale 1993 & Hale 2002). We ordinarily count some sets of claims as consistent (they could all be true at once) but Moore paradoxical (the attitudes they express are incoherent). Our inclination to make this distinction extends to moral judgements, and the cost of the suggested expressivist strategy is that we have to give up the distinction for the moral domain (van Roojen 1996). These are not knock down objections, but they

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[1] Different authors give the point different names depending on who gets credit for making it. Geach first raises the point in a footnote in Geach 1958, p. 54 and more fully in Geach 1960. It is raised again by John Searle 1962. Geach develops the point in greater detail in Geach 1965. And Searle elaborates further in Searle 1969. So far as I know Frege never discussed noncognitivism in ethics, though he does make some of the claims that Geach employs in his discussion.

suggest that expressivists should explore alternative strategies which allow them to make the intuitive distinctions between pragmatic incoherence and inconsistency of content.

Several recent theorists have attempted to use alternative resources to do just that. Although expressivism is the position which denies that moral judgements can be fully cashed out in descriptive terms, the most sophisticated proponents have often propounded theories with secondary descriptive components in addition to their primary expressive meanings. Recent independent suggestions by Frank Jackson (Jackson 1999) and Stephen Barker (Barker 2000)[2] attempt to solve the Frege/Geach/Searle problem by utilizing this descriptive component of moral utterances. Unfortunately, both attempts fail to handle a certain sort of example using just the descriptive resources available to noncognitivists. The present paper explains the problem and suggests a moral for expressivist theories.

1. Jackson's proposal

Jackson's proposal is quite simple. While expressivism is the correct account of the *content* of unembedded moral judgements, the moral terms in such judgements 'quasi-' or 'q-stand for' a property – the (possibly highly disjunctive) descriptive property which the relevant pro or con attitude is toward (Jackson 1999, p. 29). Further the moral terms in *embedded* judgements stand for these same properties in the full blown sense that 'square' stands for square in ordinary descriptive judgements. Jackson thinks that the noncognitivist is entitled to employ the property that moral terms q-stand for because moral judgements are universalizable and because expressivist commitments to the supervenience of the ethical on the descriptive will insure that there is such a property available for them to stand for (Jackson 1999, p. 30). A moral judgement such as 'X is right' is q-true just in case X has the property that 'right' q-stands for. A sentence is true* iff it is true or q-true. And validity* is necessary preservation of q-truth* (Jackson 1999, p. 30). In effect Jackson's proposal harkens back to the old idea, familiar from Hare and Stevenson, that moral terms have a

secondary descriptive content and uses this secondary content to explain validity*, an expressivist proxy for validity intended to perfectly mimic its application.

From here the explanation of logical implication is pretty straightforward. Take an ordinary instance of modus ponens of the form: If X is right, Y is right; X is right; therefore Y is right. Since the term 'right' unembedded q-stands for just the same property that the term 'right' straightforwardly stands for in the first premise, the logical relations between the q-contents are such that the q-content of the conclusion is entailed by the premises. Since this property is the same one toward which the speaker expressed approval in the premises, the conclusion inherits the noncognitive component of its meaning from the premises.

2. Barker's proposal

Barker's proposal is more complicated but it too employs descriptive content to unpack the meanings of moral terms and uses this content to explain relations of inconsistency and implication.[3] A speaker uses moral predicates to denote, 'the property F whose instantiation she approves of' (Barker 2000, pp. 271 & 277).[4] The moral judgement that 'T is good':

   (i) conventionally *expresses-as-explicature* the content that T is F, and
   (ii) conventionally *expresses-as-implicature* the content that the speaker is committed to approval of F-things.

The sentence also conveys as conversational implicature that the speaker believes (i) and (ii) and that she approves of T but, as I understand Barker's proposal, this implicature can be cancelled and doesn't carry over into embedded contexts. Hence it doesn't play a role in the logical commitments involved in the judgement.

Even though (i) makes the judgement fully descriptive, Barker intends the proposal to capture what is essential to noncogni-

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[3]   Barker is explicit in acknowledging the precursors in Hare and Stevenson 2000, p. 271.
[4]   In the end the proposal for determining the relevant property F becomes a bit more complicated than this, because it is presupposed that speaker and audience approve of the same property and thus there can be ambiguities in the determination of the relevant F (See Barker 2000, pp. 277–278).

tivism. His idea seems to be that since (ii) is needed to capture what is distinctively evaluative about the relevant judgements and yet it makes no contribution to the truth conditions of the judgement evaluative content makes no contribution to truth conditions (Barker 2000, p. 272). Furthermore since the attitude expressed as implicature determines the content of the property expressed as explicature in (i) the value component is primary and the descriptive component secondary.

Each of the components of a moral sentence's content (explicative and implicative) generates a correctness-condition which is met if that condition obtains. Barker uses these conditions to define a notion of validity. An argument is valid iff the correctness-conditions for the premises are not compossible with the non-obtaining of the correctness-conditions for the conclusion. Barker's paper is a bit unclear on exactly how to interpret conditionals with embedded moral claims. As a general matter he thinks the implicative content of embedded sentences plays a role in generating their logical relations. So it seems that moral conditionals should be interpreted as having a conjunctive antecedent including both explicative and implicative content and that the correctness conditions for both must be met to entail the conclusion.[5] If I read him correctly, conditionals rule out situations in which the correctness-conditions for the antecedent are satisfied while those of the conclusion are not. Arguments of the form 'If X is good, Y is good, X is good, therefore Y is good' are valid because the first premise rules out a situation in which the correctness-conditions for the second premise are met without those for the conclusion also being met. Or putting it another way, the contents could be captured thusly:

(1) If X is F and I am committed to approving of F things, then Y is F and I am committed to approving of F things.
(2) X is F and I am committed to approving of F things.

Therefore,

(3) Y is F and I am committed to approving of F things.

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[5]   At least his discussion of 'even' (Barker 2000, p. 273) suggests that both sorts of content play a role determining when the condition set by the antecedent is met, and his discussion of a moral example on the following page makes reference to the 'dual content' of both the antecedent and the consequent. What is a bit baffling about the example there is that he relies on a 'contextually given' but unstated premise to explain how the conclusion follows.

3. An objection

It should be clear that this proposal has an important feature in common with Jackson's – the identification of a property which is the property that the speaker morally approves of. The descriptive component captured for Jackson in the q-truth conditions of moral judgements and for Barker the correctness conditions for such judgements depends on the identification of this property. The arguments remain valid only if the property predicated in the antecedent of the first premise is the same as that predicated (or q-predicated) in the second.

But this constraint will not always be plausibly satisfied in actual arguments. Take for example the following argument which is uncontroversially valid:

(a) If cruelty to animals is wrong, eating veal is wrong.
(b) Cruelty to animals is wrong, therefore
(c) Eating veal is wrong.[6]

On either Jackson's or Barker's proposal, the first premise says that if cruelty to animals has a property then eating veal has the same property. On both proposals that property is determined by the moral attitudes of the speaker at the time the sentence is uttered. According to Jackson and Barker the second premise either q-says that cruelty has this same property or expresses-as-explicature that it has this same property. Presumably just as the property is determined for the first premise by the speaker's moral attitudes at the time of utterance, the property in this premise is determined by the speaker's attitudes.

But what licenses the assumption that the speaker's attitudes stay constant? Some moves open to a cognitivist are not available here to the noncognitivist. A cognitivist could say that one remains committed to approving of whatever property it is that underlies correct moral judgements or on which rightness or goodness in fact supervenes. But according to noncognitivism there is no such property independently ascertainable without reference to one's (possibly shifting) attitudes. If there is some standard for correct moral judgements such that it can be employed for securing a constant base property as a descriptive correlate for proper moral evaluation, we have lost one of the main motiva-

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[6]   Since Jackson's paper appears in a volume in honor of Peter Singer, this argument seems like an appropriate example.

tions for accepting noncognitivism. The idea was that the use of moral terms to express attitudes made them unfit to refer to genuine properties in the way that ordinary naturalistic predicates do. Or, more moderately, such reference is parasitic on their expressing such attitudes in such a way that any reference to descriptive properties was secondary to the expression of attitude. A descriptive component which did not vary in any way dependent on the attitudes the term is used to express does not seem merely to merit secondary status.[7]

Jackson offers the noncognitivist the following defense of consistency in attitude: 'It is constitutive of the various conative attitudes being moral ones that the same attitude be taken to the same descriptive properties' (Jackson 1999, p. 31). Two things are worth noting about this response. First, it involves falling back on the sort of account we were trying to get away from – one which attempts to explain the logic of moral claims as falling out of norms for coherent attitude adoption. I will return to this point later. Second, Jackson's suggestion works, if indeed it does, only at a time and not across time. Ethical consistency should not rule out changes of mind.

You might think that insufficient time will have passed in considering an argument such as the one above for a speaker's attitudes to have shifted sufficiently to matter to the identity of the relevant property. But this is not so. One reason we make arguments such as the one exemplified above is that we think we can get our interlocutor to accept premises like the first without having any special attitude towards either the act-type in the antecedent or the act-type in the conclusion. At the same time we hope that we can get her to form a judgement about the act-type in the antecedent by sufficient means of persuasion. A speaker who does not care at all about non-human suffering might be brought to care about it intrinsically on the basis of various ways of presenting it. We might display the similarity of animal suffering to human suffering of a relevant sort. Or we

might remind the speaker of animals for which she has cared. Whether this counts as rational persuasion or as mere emotive appeal is irrelevant. The important point is that if we are successful we change the speaker's attitudes such that the property that her judgements supervene on will have shifted. Thus the descriptive component of the argument above in such cases will have the form:

(a′) If X is F, Y is F.
(b′) X is G, therefore
(c′) Y is G.[8]

This is not a valid form of argument.

The obvious response for the expressivist is to allow the contents of all the premises to shift as the person considering the argument changes her mind. While the first premise involved one property before the thinker changed her mind and accepted the second premise, its content shifted as she changed her view of the act-type in the second premise. That response may not be so bad for the case at hand, where the occasion on which she was persuaded of the first premise is still luminous in memory. But not every judgement we now accept is one whose justification we are in a position to recall. At least that is how it is with respect to most of my beliefs. I may recall that I once had a good justification for them, without recalling specifically what it was. If the conditional premise in a moral argument is one of those, allowing its content to shift whenever I change my moral attitudes will tend to loosen it from its justificatory moorings. When I formed the judgement it had one content and, if I was responsible, my reasons justified me in accepting that content. But there is no guarantee that the justification I once had is such as to support this judgement when we shift the contents as the proposal would require.[9] I'm assuming that other people are like me in that they don't remember their justifications for much of what they believe. If so, the shift-

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[8] I have abstracted from the additional component in Barker's analysis, the implicative content, but adding it would just reemphasize my point.

[9] This way of responding could be used to underwrite a new form of the 'wishful thinking' charge against noncognitivism (Dorr 2002) brought for licensing the deduction of descriptive conclusions from noncognitive premises. Someone could form a justification for accepting a conditional with a moral antecedent grounded in the descriptive properties on which one's moral judgements at a time supervene. This person could then change her attitudes to make the antecedent true and on that basis conclude that the conclusion was true as well.

ing contents proposal is not attractive as an account of the contents or q-contents of our moral judgements.

If I'm right about this, the use of ethical supervenience on the non-ethical to generate a descriptive content for moral terms, together with the deployment of theses contents to explain logical relations between judgements, presents the noncognitivist with a dilemma. Either she allows the contents of moral judgements to shift as a person's basic moral commitments shift thereby endangering their justification, or she holds their contents constant but is then unable to explain implications between judgements formed at different times. Neither is particularly attractive.

4. How bad is this really?

Someone sympathetic to noncognitivism might suspect that the problem is not all that troubling. On any account, don't people sometimes change their minds about the premises of arguments? So won't rival metaethical theories have similar problems?[10] To this I have three responses. One notes that this way of thinking mischaracterizes the complaint. The second places my objection within the debate between cognitivists and noncognitivists. And the third shows that rival theories are not all subject to a similar objection.

Firstly, it is important to see that my objection is not that a person might change his or her mind about the status of the premises and hence will no longer be committed to the conclusion. The point is rather that given the account of validity on offer, a moral argument will not be valid whenever a thinker changes her attitudes between considering the first premise and a subsequent step. I have admitted that the expressivist can save the claim that the argument is valid by holding that all the premises shift their contents when such a change of attitude occurs, but at the cost of often prying the judgements so expressed loose from the contexts in which they were considered and adopted.

My second response is that the objection misunderstands the dialectical situation. Contemporary noncognitivists do not intend to be error theorists. They mean to explain the appearance that moral judgements are genuine judgements, that people convince

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[10]   I put the objection in this way because this is the form in which I have encountered it.

one another of moral conclusions through arguments, that they label one another inconsistent, and that they begin their arguments from premises which themselves can be supported by evidence and argument. While it may be that the early noncognitivists such as Ayer (Ayer 1952) and Carnap (Carnap 1937, pp. 23–30) were not so keen on vindicating these features of moral discourse, those who have made it their task to answer Geach's challenge do so precisely because they want to explain why our practices of argument and deliberation make sense. Blackburn, for example, hopes that this quasi-realist theory will show how moral judgements can 'earn the right to truth.'

If that is the goal, the dilemma for noncognitivism is serious. Either moral arguments which appear valid really equivocate, or many of our arguments proceed from premises which have been severed from their evidential and deliberative grounds. And the situation which grounds the dilemma will be quite common. Our example involved one sort of moral argument, one with a conditional first premise, employed precisely because it could be accepted by someone who had no attitude toward either the antecedent of the consequent. The second premise consisted of the antecedent, which in many normal situations would only be accepted by an interlocutor after further argument. Since that argument would (on the expressivist account) have to shift the interlocutor's attitudes, it would introduce just the sort of equivocation that my objection traded on. As I argued above, this sort of argument is not unusual. Thus it is troubling that the change of mind that leads to the shift of content is inherent to the sort of moral argument exemplified.

But it gets worse than this. People can also change their moral attitudes for reasons entirely unrelated to the argument in question. They can be moody, can have epiphanies, can change their minds about some subtle point in the back of their minds. They can go through long trains of reasoning simultaneously and over a long period of time. Each of these will shift the descriptive content of moral predicates as defined by the accounts under consideration. And whether subjects notice it or not, it will shift the relations between their conclusions and premises or the relations between their premises and their grounds.

This is deadly for the project of explaining and vindicating the moral deliberation we in fact engage in, since shifting attitudes will generate shifting contents for moral judgements. Much of our moral thinking today begins with commitments that we have

reached based on past deliberation – deliberation that is now long enough ago that we have since changed our minds about some other moral matters. That means that our current reasoning will rely on judgements which employ the same form of words as the reasoning that led to our accepting the judgements employing those words, while expressing different contents than were employed in reasoning to these conclusions. There is no reason to expect any rational connection between the thoughts we started with long ago, and the conclusions we now reach. What might look like exemplary and clearheaded moral thinking will instead offer no rational justification. We may not yet have an error theory, but most moral thinking will involve error.

This brings me to my last point: rivals to noncognitivist theories need not be saddled with similar difficulties. The problem with the expressivist approach is that according to these accounts moral judgements are for logical purposes analogous to indexicals. They allow the moral attitudes of the speaker in the context of utterance at a time to determine the contents of moral terms. Since a speaker's attitudes can shift subtly and unnoticeably, there is much room for equivocation. You would expect then, that indexical relativism of the sort proposed by Dreier (Dreier 1990), would suffer from the same problem. But, perhaps surprisingly, the indexical relativist has resources to escape the problem – resources that a noncognitivist is not consistently free to employ.

These resources are available to the likes of Dreier because a relativist need not hold that the *actual current* commitments of the speaker *by themselves* determine the contents of the relevant moral judgements. They can hold instead that moral judgements are to be assessed relative to a suitably cleaned up moral system derivable from the actual moral commitments of the speaker. Depending on what further principles of rational commitment the relativist endorses, this cleaned up system could be quite a bit different from the one actually endorsed by the speaker. It could be the system of moral commitments which the speaker would adopt were she to rationally revise her current commitments in light of further evidence, constraints of formal and informal consistency, and so on. The account would remain relativist in so far as these additional principles are not sufficiently strong to generate convergence among all rational moral agents irrespective of their original starting points. Yet they might be strong enough that judgements by the same rational agent, modifying her

commitments over time would be assessed relative to the very same moral system. Thus, if the account entails that the content of a moral judgement is to predicate the property commended by the moral system picked out by the speaker's actual attitudes, that property can remain the same property even as that speaker rationally revises her commitments.

The relativist can make this move insofar as she thinks that there are more and less rational ways of modifying one's moral commitments. And there is no reason that even a very Humean relativist need deny that. More Humean theories just think that the relevant principles are largely hypothetical, so that what one should rationally accept is in great part a function of where one starts out. Less Humean theories will posit more robust principles leading to more convergence between those with different starting commitments. The theories will remain relativist so long as they don't entail complete convergence regardless of starting point.

The noncognitivist is barred from using this strategy insofar as she thinks there are no facts which determine a set of principles for the revision of commitments. Or at least she will be so barred as long as she denies there are facts of this sort. And once she thinks there are such facts, there is no principled reason to remain a noncognitivist. If there can be objective normative facts about this sort of thing, there is no reason to banish putative moral facts to the noncognitive realm.

5. The original problem resurrected

Where Jackson has to rely on an additional argument about the incompatibility of shifting attitudes with moral purposes to rule out shifting contents, Barker has additional resources built directly into his theory to help him handle the problems generated by the possibility of such shifts. The dual contents he postulates can be deployed to generate conflicting contents, seemingly without transforming questions about the compatibility of contents into a question about the rationality of holding certain attitudes. He has after all, defined validity in terms of the non-compossibility of the correctness conditions of the premises with those involved in denying the conclusion. With correctness conditions that go beyond what is required by truth conditions we have more ways in which we can generate incoherence and

non-compossibility just in virtue of the contents alone. For example, if the property that a person is committed to approving of under certain conditions by the first premise is distinct from the property invoked by the second premise there might be a conflict between approving of one and also approving of the other. The conventional content *expressed-as-implicature* by one judgement might exclude the conventional content *expressed-as-implicature* by the other. This might make the correctness-conditions of the premises not compossible and thus trivially satisfy the proffered definition of validity.

It is of course not obvious that there is any incoherence in approving of one thing because it is F, and approving of another because it is G, even where G and F are incompatible.[11] But even if it were, the appearance that Barker is better off in virtue of his additional resources is illusory. The ability to generate incoherence between contrasting commitments is a decidedly mixed blessing if it is a blessing at all. Opponents of noncognitivism will be able to use that sort of incoherence to generate logical inconsistencies where the usual interpretation of certain moral sentences will not support them. Here is an example:

(A) Serendipitous pleasure is good.
(B) I am not committed to approving of pleasure of any sort by my current attitudes.

The correctness-condition generated by the implicative content of (A) is incompossible with the correctness-condition generated by the explicative content of (B). Hence Barker must rule these statements inconsistent. Given his definition of validity any further claim you like will follow from these two judgements. Perhaps he can modify his definition of validity to handle the latter consequence.[12] But it will remain true that he must rule these two inconsistent with one another when at worst our every-day judgements might regard them as instances of a pragmatic incoherence such as is involved in Moore-paradoxical utterances. Even if we think there is some tension here, it surely does not rise to the level of logical contradiction. Yet Barker's proposal seems

[11] Recall that the original complaint that caused us to look to the secondary descriptive meaning of moral judgements to explain logic was partly motivated by skepticism about the inconsistency of such attitudes (Schueller 1988 and van Roojen 1996).

[12] Though if he does he won't be able to use a shift in the properties mentioned in our previous example to generate an incoherence that will allow us to rule the overall argument valid.

to involve him in finding contradictions here, where intuitively there are none.[13]

Even this much incoherence is not uncontroversial. Perhaps the only way to get serendipitous pleasure is not to want or approve of it ahead of time. If it is genuinely good, then perhaps the most coherent response is to avoid approving of it.[14]

This objection is of course just a version of the objection that previous papers (Schueller 1988, Hale 1993 & van Roojen 1996) had raised for Blackburn and Gibbard and which I suggested might lead us to want an approach which did not rely on relations between psychological states to explain the logical relations between moral judgements allegedly expressing those states. Deploying Barker's apparatus to rule out a shift of contents generated by shifting attitudes is just an attempt to do what Blackburn and Gibbard have already tried. It is an attempt to require 'consistency' of attitude of a sort that rules pragmatic incoherence a form of inconsistency. We can miss this because his apparatus builds the required incoherence into the implicative content of the judgements in question. It thus looks like his proposal is an attempt to explain the inconsistency of various judgements as falling out of the inconsistency of their contents. But once we recall that implicature is (in part) designed to explain why competent speakers regard two judgements with compatible truth conditions as incoherent, we should see that using implicature to explain validity is itself an instance of the strategy we were trying to get away from.[15] Thus, to the extent that expressivists

[13] This criticism is made of Blackburn and Gibbard's noncognitivist analyses in van Roojen 1996 to emphasize a point made about Blackburn 1986 in Schueller 1988. Barker seems to think that he has avoided the charge in as much as he cites the paper in question (See Barker 2000, note 8), but he seems to misconstrue the argument. The point was not that a fully explicit paraphrase of the contents of an emotive utterance should be assertable wherever the emotive utterance is. Rather it is that if the utterance up for emotive analysis is inconsistent with any other judgements, any utterance with the same content should be inconsistent with those other judgements as well, and vice versa. Two judgements which differ in what they are consistent with must not have the same content. Barker's discussion in the text does not address this charge.

[14] If this example doesn't move you, think of a claim that something is wrong coupled with a denial of any commitment to disapprove. Since some moral views will themselves involve the thought that disapproval is wrong, a person might hold such a position. Reasonable or not, the view does not seem to be contradictory.

[15] Presumably Moore paradoxical utterances will have the feature that the two claims flanking the 'but' have incompossible correctness conditions stemming from their conventional implicative content. It was supposed to be a point in favor of using descriptive meaning to handle Geach's problem that we would not be conflating Moore-paradoxicality with contradiction.

have reason to try and employ descriptive content to explain the phenomena, they will have reason not to use it along with implicature in a hybrid strategy.

Conclusions

Both Jackson's and Barker's deployment of a descriptive element to explain the logical relations between moral judgements and judgements which embed moral judgements fail for similar reasons. Given the methods available to noncognitivists for determining the exact content of the descriptive element, that element can vary between different judgements as the speaker's moral judgements develop over time. Some arguments will then involve equivocations that render them invalid. Thus, the descriptive meaning approach will require supplementation to rule out certain sorts of changes in attitude during the process of making up one's mind. But once one brings in the necessary supplementation, certain sorts of merely pragmatic incoherence will be classed as logical inconsistency. That will allow opponents to generate putative inconsistencies where intuitively there seem to be none. Thus, both of these attempts to use an acceptably noncognitivist notion of descriptive meaning for moral utterances to handle the embedding problem fail.

That failure doesn't seem to depend on quirks particular to the two examples I've been discussing. The reason that the two authors need to supplement their theory with an appeal to pragmatic constraints on the coherence of attitudes is that the secondary descriptive meaning available to noncognitivists is not the sort of thing that cannot vary with changes in a speaker's attitudes without a change in the meanings of the judgements involved. That is precisely why these 'meanings' are considered secondary, and why the views still count as versions of noncognitivism.

This suggests a more general moral. James Dreier (Dreier 1999 & 2002) has noted that as noncognitivist theories try to accommodate all of the relevant data, they look more and more like cognitivist theories. Perhaps even these theories, which include significant cognitive content in their analyses of moral expressions, have not gone far enough.[16]

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