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How to be an Ethical Non-Cognitivist

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HOW TO BE AN ETHICAL NON-COGNITIVIST

Eric Hubble

**A DISSERTATION
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OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

This dissertation defends non-cognitivism in ethics by arguing that its distinctive claim costs it no explanatory power. Chapter One defines non-cognitivism in ethics as, roughly, the thesis that there are no conditions under which normative concepts would achieve robust representation of normative properties. It is the thesis that in thinking normative thoughts we do not achieve, nor do we even “try” to achieve, a robust representational connection with normative properties. I define the sort of robust representation at issue.

The second chapter develops a new argument for non-cognitivism, the Regulation Argument. It claims that normative properties are unhelpful in explaining any of the features of normative thought. Normative beliefs need not be responsive to normative properties in a way that ordinary non-normative beliefs *do* need to be responsive to the properties they represent. This leaves normative thoughts interestingly disconnected from normative properties. Thus, appealing to normative properties offers no help in explaining features of our normative thoughts.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five develop a non-cognitivist view of normative thought. Focusing on states of normative uncertainty, I argue that the non-cognitivist can actually accept accounts of these states that are almost identical to that of the cognitivist. This fact allows the non-cognitivist to explain the normative properties of normative thoughts. I illustrate by arguing that the non-cognitivist can accept the leading potential explanations of why it is irrational to have probabilistically incoherent normative credences.

Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight focus on normative language. Once again, I claim that non-cognitivism need not be revisionary. In Chapter Six I argue that the non-cognitivist can accept standard semantic and meta-semantic views of normative language words and sentences. In Chapter Seven I make a case that the non-cognitivist can accept the orthodox definition of logical inconsistency, as well as the standard explanation of why it is problematic to accept logically inconsistent sentences. These two chapters together show why the non-cognitivist does not actually face the Frege-Geach problem. Finally, in Chapter Eight I argue that the non-cognitivist is not barred from giving an adequate account of what we do with normative language.

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Chapter One: What is Non-Cognitivism?

1. The Question

The standard taxonomy of meta-normative views distinguishes between cognitivism and non-cognitivism. My first question is: What is the best account of this distinction?

Any decent account of the distinction must do two things. First, it must categorize views largely as they are normally categorized. The views of A. J. Ayer, C. L. Stevenson, R. M. Hare, Simon Blackburn, Allan Gibbard, Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, and that explored in Mark Schroeder's *Being For* should be classified as non-cognitivist.¹ The views of G. E. Moore, J. L. Mackie, Richard Boyd, Michael Smith, Frank Jackson, and David Enoch should be classified as cognitivist.² If an account of the distinction does not do this, it risks simply changing the subject.

Second, a good account of the distinction must mark a philosophically deep joint. It is no mere sociological accident that we have grouped theorists in the above way. There is an important difference between the two camps. We want definitions of cognitivism and non-cognitivism that do justice to the importance of the distinction.

Our central question can thus be reframed: what is the philosophically deep line that separates these two groups of theorists? This is the line we should regard as defining cognitivism on the one side and non-cognitivism on the other.

There is one main reason to care about finding this line: precisely defining the views will greatly assist further theorizing, especially for non-cognitivists. Non-

¹ See Ayer (1952), Stevenson (1937), Hare (1952), Blackburn (1984) and (1993), Gibbard (1990) and (2003), Horgan and Timmons (2006), and Schroeder (2008). Some of these theorists eschew the label “non-cognitivist.” I would be happy with “non-descriptivist” or “non-representationalist,” but I will use the classic label for theorists in this group.

² See Moore (1903), Mackie (1977), Boyd (1988), Smith (1994), Jackson (1998), Enoch (2007).

cognitivists face many challenges. But perhaps some of those challenges stem not from their accepting non-cognitivism itself, but from taking on optional further commitments, or failing to utilize available resources. In later chapters I argue that this is so. In particular, I argue that non-cognitivists have failed to realize just how many well-developed aspects of a view of normative thought and talk are compatible with their position. For example, as we will see in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, a non-cognitivist can accept almost any account of what it is to be uncertain regarding a normative claim that a cognitivist can. And, as we will see in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, non-cognitivism is compatible with standard views regarding the meanings of normative terms and sentences, in virtue of what they have those meanings, and the logical relations between normative sentences. But these conclusions, and the arguments for them, do not suggest themselves until we see the precise definition of non-cognitivism. Only once we exactly identify the deep thesis that has united theorists from Ayer to Gibbard, will we know how to best defend it.

Unfortunately, defining non-cognitivism has proven extremely difficult. Decades of attempts have failed.³ But it can be done. The place to start is with a metaphor often used in introductory meta-ethics classes, that non-cognitivism is the view that normative thought (and talk) are “not even in the business” of representing normative properties or facts. This metaphor points to something important. The non-cognitivist does not simply say that normative thought does not represent normative properties. She goes further, claiming that, in some sense, it does not even *try*. Paul Boghossian makes something like

³ Works that address the task include: Wright (1988), Gibbard (1990) and (2003), Blackburn (1993), Jackson, Oppy, and Smith (1994), Dworkin (1996), O’Leary-Hawthorne and Price (1996), Rosen (1998), Fine (2001), Dreier (2004) and (m.s.), Chrisman (2008), Asay (2013), Dunaway (2016), and Golub (2017).

this distinction, writing: “[O]n the one hand, a predicate may fail to refer to a property even though it *aspires* so to refer; and, on the other, it may fail to refer to a property because it is no part of its semantic function so to refer.”⁴ But this “aspiring” or “trying” is metaphorical, and “semantic function” could be interpreted in many ways. The idea here needs explication. And matters are further complicated by the fact that non-cognitivists often claim that, in some “deflated” or “minimal” sense, normative beliefs actually *do* represent normative facts.⁵ To define non-cognitivism, then, we must understand *both* a robust, non-minimal kind of representation and what it is for a belief to be “in the business” of representing in this way. This will require some careful work.

Briefly, my view will go as follows. Non-minimal representation should be understood as what I will call *property-dependent* representation. It is so-called because the explanation of what it is for there to be such representation depends on the represented property, as well as whatever is doing the representing. Because both *representer* and *represented* play a role, it is a full-blooded connection, a genuine relation. It is thus sharply distinguished from the sorts of “deflated” or “minimal” representation non-cognitivists sometimes appeal to. This sort of representation is explained *without* appeal to the represented property. It is a “relation” explained by only one relata, so it is *not* a genuine connection.

For normative thoughts to be “in the business” of representing normative properties is for these thoughts to determine conditions under which the thoughts would represent normative properties.⁶ It is for our normative thoughts to set things up so that, if

⁴ Boghossian (1990), p. 160, emphasis in original.

⁵ See especially Dreier (2004) for discussion.

⁶ Going forward, I will talk of beliefs representing properties. It may be that, strictly speaking, these states represent *the instantiation of* normative properties, rather than the properties themselves. If so, we can

there are normative properties, the thoughts will represent them. It is for our normative thoughts to “hold up their end of the representational bargain”; if they fail to represent, it is the fault of the world, not the beliefs. Accordingly, for normative thoughts to be in the business of achieving *property-dependent* representation of normative properties is for the thoughts to determine conditions under which the thoughts would achieve *property-dependent* representation of normative properties.

Given these two pieces, we can define cognitivism and non-cognitivism. The cognitivist thinks that our normative thoughts determine conditions under which they would achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. The cognitivist thinks that normative beliefs do their part in setting things up so that, if there are normative properties, then the beliefs represent them in the property-dependent way. The non-cognitivist denies this. In this sense, she thinks normative beliefs are “not in the business” of achieving this sort of representation of the normative.⁷ As stated above, however, I argue elsewhere that this costs the non-cognitivist very little explanatory power.

Before fleshing out and defending this conception of cognitivism and non-cognitivism, I will address rival views of what non-cognitivism is. I will argue that they all fail.

insert “the instantiation of” where necessary.

⁷ She may think either that we do not represent the normative in any sense, or that we do represent it in some deflated or inclusive sense.

2. Failed Attempts to Define Non-Cognitivism

Early non-cognitivists held a number of theses that clearly set them apart from cognitivists. Theorists like Ayer and Stevenson held, against Moore, that there are no normative properties, facts, truths, or beliefs.⁸ Ayer (1952), writes:

If now I... say, "Stealing money is wrong," I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning—that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false.⁹

This makes it plain that Ayer took there to be no normative facts, propositions, or truths. It follows directly that there are no normative properties; if there were, there would be propositions regarding their instantiation. And he writes that in uttering the sentence one is "merely expressing certain moral sentiments."¹⁰ He did not think that such utterances expressed beliefs, and so thought that there are no normative beliefs.

Obviously, that a particular non-cognitivist like Ayer held these negative views does not settle exactly what non-cognitivism is. But at the time the question was not pressing, since these strong positions made non-cognitivists easily distinguishable from cognitivists. Today, however, the question is much more urgent, as contemporary non-cognitivists generally agree that there *are* normative properties, facts, truths, and

⁸ Actually they wrote about the moral or ethical, but I will pretend their focus was the normative more broadly.

⁹ Ayer (1952), p. 107.

¹⁰ Ibid.

beliefs.¹¹ This agreement has come largely via two routes. One is a deflated conception of properties, facts, and truths. The other is an inclusive notion of belief.

According to a deflated conception of x , thought and talk of x adds nothing substantial to thought and talk without it. This thought and talk may, however, still serve some useful function. For example, a deflated view of truth says that thinking or saying that *it is true that* grass is green amounts to nothing more than thinking or saying that grass is green.¹² The word “true” and the concept TRUE may allow us to formulate and express thoughts in an expedient way. But they do not allow us to formulate and express thoughts that we could not, in principle, have formulated and expressed without them. Similarly, on a deflated view of properties, thinking or saying that grass *has the property of greenness* amounts to nothing more than thinking or saying that grass is green. And on a deflated view of facts, thinking or saying that *it is a fact that* grass is green amounts to nothing more than thinking or saying that grass is green.

With deflated notions in hand, non-cognitivists began to affirm many of the theses that earlier non-cognitivists had denied. Non-cognitivists were always happy to moralize, e.g., to say that lying is wrong. Given her various deflated notions, a non-cognitivist who says “Lying is wrong” can happily go on to affirm that it is true that lying is wrong, that lying has the property of wrongness, and that it is a fact that lying is wrong. According to her, she can say these things, since they express nothing more than the first-order normative view that lying is wrong.

¹¹ See especially Blackburn (1993), Gibbard (2003), Horgan and Timmons (2006) and Schroeder (2010).

¹² The literature on deflationism about truth and other notions is now voluminous, but see Ramsey (1927) for a *locus classicus*.

Non-cognitivists also began to accept an inclusive notion of belief.¹³ The non-cognitivist may claim that to believe that lying is wrong just is to have the mental state expressed by an assertoric utterance of “lying is wrong.” Non-cognitivists have always thought that assertoric utterances of “lying is wrong” express some mental state or other. Armed with this inclusive view of belief, the non-cognitivist will happily agree that this state qualifies as a normative belief.

Given these developments, it has become more difficult to tell a non-cognitivist apart from a cognitivist. Many of the telling marks of cognitivism have been embraced, at least according to deflated or inclusive conceptions, by the non-cognitivist. Some have even concluded that the difference has disappeared entirely.¹⁴ Luckily, however, these (now repudiated) negative theses of the non-cognitivist were never the heart of her theory. So the deep difference is *not* lost.

The place to look for the real distinction is the nature of normative talk and thought. For much of the history of non-cognitivism, its proponents have cast it as a view first and foremost about what is going on when someone makes a normative utterance. The idea has been that speech acts involving normative sentences are not best understood as a speaker’s attempt to convey information about the normative features of things. The guiding image is not of a normative reality that one is attempting to inform others about by using normative language. Rather, the person is doing something else: giving voice to an emotion, issuing something like a command, expressing a motivational attitude, etc.¹⁵

¹³ See especially Horgan and Timmons (2006) for a defense of this idea, and Schroeder (2010) for discussion.

¹⁴ For a recent example, see Golub (2017). The worry is raised in Wright (1988), Dworkin (1996), Rosen (1998), and Dreier (2004).

¹⁵ This focus is clearly present in Ayer (1952), Stevenson (1937), Hare (1952), Blackburn (1984) and (1993), and Gibbard (1990).

However, looking at the function of normative *talk* is not the best place to start. Given the modern non-cognitivist's view that we do in fact have normative beliefs, the non-cognitivist can agree with the cognitivist that assertoric utterances of normative sentences function to express normative beliefs.¹⁶ The most promising route for differentiating the views, then, is to look at what the different theorists think is expressed. Both sides may *call* the mental states expressed "normative beliefs." But they do not agree on what those states *are*. The difference between non-cognitivism and cognitivism lies in their differing views of normative thought.

Here is an initially promising way to distinguish the theories' positions on normative beliefs. One might think that non-cognitivism is the view that normative beliefs are *desire-like* states, perhaps in addition to counting as beliefs. The cognitivist, on the other hand, denies that normative beliefs are desire-like states. In fact, non-cognitivists like Blackburn, Gibbard, and Horgan and Timmons have all embraced the thesis that normative beliefs are desire-like states.¹⁷ This proposal claims that this thesis is definitive of non-cognitivism. But of course, to understand the proposal, we need to understand what it is to be a desire-like state.

The clearest feature distinctive of desire-like states is their role in leading to action. The desire to ϕ pushes one towards ϕ -ing. Setting other desires aside, the desire will tend to lead one to ϕ . Similarly, the desire-like state of planning to ϕ facilitates in various ways one's ϕ -ing. Having the plan to ϕ tends to lead one to ϕ . By contrast, ordinary beliefs do not have this motivational role. While they do of course have an

¹⁶ Employing either a deflated or an inclusive conception of propositions, she can also agree that normative utterances express normative propositions. See especially Gibbard (2003) and Schroeder (2013) for discussion.

¹⁷ See e.g. Blackburn (1993), Gibbard (1990) and (2003), and Horgan and Timmons (2006).

important role to play in the production of action, there is no *particular* action that an ordinary, non-normative belief itself pushes one towards taking.

Thus we have the *Motivation Explanation* of the difference between cognitivism and non-cognitivism:

Motivation Explanation: Non-cognitivism is the thesis that normative beliefs are states with a desire-like motivational role. Cognitivism is the negation of non-cognitivism.

Motivation Explanation, however, is false. Cognitivists *can* and very often do hold that normative beliefs play a desire-like motivational role.¹⁸ Cognitivists often accept *Judgment Internalism*, the thesis that there is a tight connection between normative belief and motivation.¹⁹ For example, many cognitivists think that, setting other motivations aside, a person's belief that she ought to give to charity tends to lead her to give to charity. But this is exactly the sort of motivational role played by a desire to give to charity. Thus, many paradigmatic cognitivists will be classified as non-cognitivists by this proposal. It draws the line in the wrong place; it changes the subject.

Motivation Explanation could potentially be rescued along the following lines.²⁰ Perhaps only the non-cognitivist thinks that playing a desire-like motivational role is part of *what it is* to be a normative belief. While the cognitivist may agree about the

¹⁸ Rosati (2016) provides a list of such cognitivists: Thomas Nagel (1970), John McDowell (1979), Mark Platts (1980), David McNaughton (1988), Jonathan Dancy (1993), Thomas Scanlon (1998), and Russ Shafer-Landau (2003). And there are others. The problem in this context is identified by Price (1989), pp. 76-77, and Dreier (2004). Nagel (1961), pp. 137-138 makes a parallel point regarding scientific instrumentalism.

¹⁹ For a helpful recent overview, see Björklund et al. (2012).

²⁰ Thanks here to conversation with Tristram McPherson.

motivational upshot of a normative belief, perhaps she does not agree that having such a motivational effect is part of what it is to be, for example, the belief that lying is wrong. Perhaps the cognitivist instead envisions a multi-step process that leads to the normative belief's motivational role. This process goes as follows. The belief represents some normative property or relation.²¹ It is a substantive fact of rationality that, when one has a belief that represents that normative property, one is rationally required to have a certain motivational state. Since we are rational beings, the possessor of the belief will generally have the required motivational state. So while the state ends up having a special connection to motivation, playing a desire-like role is not built into the state. According to the cognitivist, all that is built into the belief itself is its representational nature; the motivation comes after.

There is one main problem with trying to draw the line in this way. The proposal classifies some non-cognitivist views as cognitivist. One such view goes as follows. To believe that lying is wrong is just to feel horror at the thought of lying.²² However, the view continues, horror is simply a certain sensation; nothing motivational lies in the nature of horror, or in the nature of feeling horror at the thought of lying. There is, however, a substantive fact about rationality that connects horror and motivation: when one has feeling of horror regarding lying, one is rationally required to have a certain motivational state. Thus, the belief that lying is wrong does as a matter of fact have a special connection to motivation.

This view is classified as cognitivist by the current proposal. No special

²¹ I will now use "property" in the inclusive sense, to refer both to monadic properties and to relations.

²² C.f. Ayer's (1952), p. 107 claim that saying that it was wrong for someone to have stolen some money is akin to saying "you stole that money" in a "particular tone of horror."

motivational role is built into the nature of the belief that lying is wrong. The motivational role only comes after, via a substantive fact of rationality. However, the view is clearly non-cognitivist, closely akin to the view of Ayer. Thus, the proposal fails.²³ I conclude that we should not attempt to define cognitivism and non-cognitivism in terms of the motivational roles of normative beliefs.

3. The Representation Explanation

It turns out that the right way to define the views starts with the metaphor discussed above, that the cognitivist thinks that normative beliefs are “in the business” of representing normative properties. I take the central, guiding idea behind cognitivism to be the following: in having normative thoughts, people “try” to accurately represent normative reality. In having normative thoughts, we “try” to respond to normative facts. Beyond this there is an enormous amount of disagreement among cognitivists. But, plausibly, this is the big idea. We should define non-cognitivism as the negation of this view. As stated above, we need to understand two things in order to take this route. First, in light of the the non-cognitivist appealing to deflated and inclusive conceptions of things, we must identify a robust kind of representation. Second, we must spell out what it is for a mental state to be “in the business” of this sort of representation.

First: what is robust representation? A minimal conception of representation denies that representation amounts to any substantive, real connection between

²³ Arguably, it fails for another reason as well. It results in classifying as non-cognitivist the view of Ralph Wedgwood (2001) and (2007). On this view, it is part of the nature of normative belief that it plays a special motivational role. But Wedgwood almost always is, and I think should be, classified as a cognitivist. However, his view importantly differs from that of paradigmatic cognitivists, so this may be a “spoils to the victor” case.

representer and represented.²⁴ For example, on one such view, it is just trivial that “wrong” represents the property of being wrong. In saying that a predicate represents the property of wrongness, we do no more than say that it is the predicate “wrong.” What makes “wrong” represent wrongness? Just being the predicate “wrong”; there is no more to be said. Let us simply grant that words, concepts, etc. can represent in such a sense. It is still an open question: can they represent in any further, more robust sense?²⁵ What would it take for a representation relation to count as a *substantive* relation between representer and represented?

The answer is this: when a relation is substantive, both sides must play a part in the account of what it is for the connection to obtain. To take a simple example, the *taller than* relation is a substantive relation between two things. To account for the fact that Sam is taller than Max, we need to appeal to both the height *of Sam* and the height *of Max*. Both of the people that stand in the relation play a role in the account of what it is for the relation to obtain.

In the case of a robust representation relation, both the representer and the represented must play a role. For example, suppose that for a needle on a gas gauge to represent the amount of gas in the tank is for there to be a certain sort of causal covariation relation between the position of the needle and the amount of gas in the tank. In this account, both sides of the representation relation figure; the causal covariation relation holds between *the position of the needle* and *the amount of gas in the tank*. The representation relation is thus a robust, full-blooded one, as both sides play a role in the

²⁴ See Båve (2009) for helpful discussion of such views.

²⁵ It is safest to leave open the possibility that multiple relations might have some claim to the label “representation.” This may turn out to be false, but I do not want to rule this out.

account of the representational connection between them.²⁶

Similarly, when a person believes that Fido is happy, thereby representing Fido as being happy, we very plausibly have substantive representation of the property of being happy. There is some representation relation R such that the person stands in R to the property of happiness. And in the account of what it is for a person to stand in R to the property of happiness, the property of being happy will appear.²⁷ It is not obvious exactly how; different theories of mental representation will give different answers. Perhaps standing in R to the property involves possessing a concept that stands in some causal relation to instances of happiness, or that carries information about happiness, or that is associated with a description that picks out happiness.²⁸ On any of these views, happiness appears in the account of what it is for a thought to represent (the instantiation of) happiness. Thus, insofar as the relations they describe count as kinds of representation, they are *robust, property-dependent* kinds of representation. To take David Lewis somewhat out of context, “[i]t takes two to make a reference.”²⁹

Contrast this with the minimal account above. According to it, it is trivial that “wrong” represents the property of wrongness. It does so simply because it is the predicate “wrong.” In this account, the property of wrongness plays no role. Thus the representation is not a substantive, genuine connection.

²⁶ Of course, one might prefer a more complex story of the needle’s representation of the amount of gas. I submit that, if the story is at all plausible, both sides will play a role.

²⁷ I take for granted that something about the person’s mind will also appear.

²⁸ I have in mind theories along the lines of Dretske (1981), Millikan (1984), Fodor (1987), or Lewis (1970).

²⁹ Lewis (1983), p. 371.

The difference between robust and minimal representation, then, is whether the represented property plays a part in the account of the representation.³⁰ To find out whether a given representation relation is of the robust or minimal variety, we look at whether the account of that sort of representation appeals to the represented property. If it does, it is robust, or *property-dependent*. If it does not, it is minimal. A more precise definition, which will be slightly revised below, says:

Property-Dependent Representation (First Pass): Given that x stands in some representation relation R to a property F , for R to be property-dependent is for F to figure in the account of what it is for x to stand in R to F .³¹

Another example will help clarify the idea. The concept `HAPPY` stands in some representation relation R to the property of happiness. The account of what it is for `HAPPY` to stand in R to happiness includes the fact, let us suppose, that there is a causal relationship between tokenings of the concept `HAPPY` and instances of the property of happiness. Thus, the property of happiness figures in the account of what it is for `HAPPY` to stand in R to happiness. And so the representation counts as property-dependent. The presence of a causal relation in particular was unnecessary; happiness just had to figure in the account is *some* way for the representation to be property-dependent. And it may still

³⁰ Something like this idea has been at least hinted at in a number of places in the past few decades. See, for example, Brandom (1988) and (2008), Price (1989), (2011), and (2013), Blackburn (1993) and (1998), Fine (2001), and Dreier (2004).

³¹ A notion of property-dependent representation that requires that the account of what it is for a concept to represent to a property to appeal to *either the property or materials sufficient to define the property* may turn out to be more useful. But the stated version is good enough for present purposes.

be that there is some other, minimal representation relation that HAPPY stands in to happiness.

To reiterate the contrast with minimal representation, suppose that the concept WRONG stands in some representation relation R' to the property of wrongness. The account of what it is for WRONG to stand in R' to wrongness is just for WRONG to figure in thoughts that motivate one, in a certain way, to avoid some action. The property of wrongness does *not* show up in the account of what it is for WRONG to stand in R' to wrongness. Thus, R' does *not* count as property-dependent representation.³²

I have been relying on there being an “account” of a concept representing a property. I am not taking a stand on exactly what such an account is.³³ But the notion is familiar from many areas of philosophy. We ask for accounts of causation, justice, free will, love, knowledge, etc. When we ask this, we ask *what it is* to be the item in question, or ask for a *real definition* of the item. Similarly, we can ask for an account of what it is for a concept to represent a property. It is this familiar idea of an account that I appeal to here.

One might worry that the idea of deflated conceptions of things threatens to collapse the distinction between robust and minimal representation that I have drawn.³⁴ Perhaps there is some deflated sense in which it is trivial that the property F appears in the account of what it is for a concept C to represent a property F. For example, perhaps there is some deflated conception of *account* such that, when one says that the account of what it is for x to stand in R to F appeals to the property F, one is simply saying that it is

³² Perhaps it will turn out that only property-dependent representation should be counted as representation at all. But even granting this, we still need to separate representation from the non-representation relations the non-cognitivist appeals to.

³³ For one attempt to say what such accounts are, see Rosen (2015).

³⁴ Asay (2013) briefly raises this kind of worry.

an account of x standing to R to F , as opposed to some other property G . If so, it looks like *all* representation is property-dependent, and thus I have failed to differentiate the substantive, full-blooded representational connection from the minimal.

Much more would need to be said to fully flesh out this worry. But there is a simple solution. We say that for a representation relation R to be property-dependent is for *all* accounts of what it is for x to stand in R to F to appeal to F . It may be that there are multiple accounts of what it is for x to stand in R to F , some of which appeal to F , and some of which do not. If so, we do not count R as property-dependent. But if *all* the accounts appeal to F , we do count R as property-dependent. Thus we have the needed revision to the above definition:

Property-Dependent Representation: Given that x stands in some representation relation R to a property F , for R to be property-dependent is for F to figure in *all* accounts of what it is for x to stand in R to F .³⁵

For example, suppose the following. There is an account of what it is for *WRONG* to stand in a certain representation relation R to the property of wrongness, and the account appeals to wrongness. What exactly it says does not matter. However, there is another account of what it is for *WRONG* to stand in R to the property of wrongness. It says that for *WRONG* to stand in this representation relation to the property of wrongness is simply

³⁵ Note that, if there is *no* account of the representation, it counts as property-dependent, since all zero accounts appeal to the represented property. This will give the correct results below, when we use property-dependent representation to define cognitivism and non-cognitivism. Theorists who think there is no account of representation will count as cognitivists, as they should. A theorist needs to earn the label “non-cognitivist” by providing a distinctive sort of account of what this representation amounts to.

for WRONG to play a certain motivational role in a person's psychology. This account does *not* appeal to wrongness. Thus, this representation relation R is not property-dependent. For it is not the case that *all* accounts of what it is for it to obtain appeal to the represented property.

As we move on, I will often write as if there is always one unique account of what it is for x to stand in R to F, but this is merely for convenience.

4. Using Property-Dependent Representation to Define Non-Cognitivism

Given our definition of property-dependent representation, a tempting idea is simply that cognitivists think that there is property-dependent representation of normative properties, whereas non-cognitivists think there is not. Call this *Tempting*:

Tempting: Cognitivism is the view that there is property-dependent representation of normative properties. Non-cognitivism is the negation of this.

Tempting has a lot going for it. It would correctly classify many cognitivist and non-cognitivist views. Many cognitivists hold that there is property-dependent representation of normative properties. For example, Boyd (1988) thinks that part of the account of “good” representing goodness is the usage of the term being causally regulated by instances of goodness. Jackson (1998) holds that part of the account of what it is for a normative term to represent a normative property is for the concept to be associated with a description which is best satisfied by that normative property. Thus, both of these cognitivists take normative terms' representation of normative properties to be property-

dependent.³⁶ Many very similar examples (having to do with mental, rather than linguistic, representation) could be produced.

Tempting also correctly classifies all non-cognitivist views; all non-cognitivists agree that there is no property-dependent representation of normative properties. Old school non-cognitivists would deny that normative thoughts represent normative properties at all. Newer non-cognitivists may well think that representation of some sort is achieved. However, no non-cognitivist has proposed that there is property-dependent representation of normative properties. No non-cognitivist has proposed that normative properties figure in the account of what it is for normative thoughts to represent them. Thus, non-cognitivist views are correctly classified by *Tempting*.

However, *Tempting* is not what we want. The problem is that it will misclassify certain error theorists. It is a non-negotiable datum that these error theorists are cognitivists. But *Tempting* classifies them as non-cognitivists.

The problem is simply stated. Consider a theorist who thinks that there are no normative properties.³⁷ *A fortiori*, there are no normative properties that appear in the account of what it is for normative terms, concepts, etc. to represent normative properties. Thus, there is no property-dependent representation of normative properties.

Tempting classifies such an error theorist as a non-cognitivist. But in some cases, this is the wrong result. The line we want to draw places at least some such error theorists with the cognitivists. This error theorist thinks that normative thought and talk are fundamentally just like ordinary non-normative thought and talk. In having normative

³⁶ It is clear that they do not think there is some *other* account of the representation that does not appeal to the properties.

³⁷ Not all error theorists will accept this. Some will claim that there *are* normative properties, but they are uninstantiated.

beliefs and making normative assertions, we try to do the same thing we do with ordinary non-normative beliefs and assertions: represent how things are, and communicate this to others. Our normative thought and talk are in the same business as our ordinary non-normative thought and talk. The error theorist just thinks that in the normative case we fail to do so, because the world does not contain what we need to succeed. Thus, just as we want to classify our current view of beliefs about phlogiston as cognitivist, so we want to classify this error theorist about the normative as a cognitivist.³⁸

We need to revise *Tempting*. My idea is this. Cognitivists need not think that there is property-dependent representation of normative properties. But a cognitivist needs to think that there *would be* property-dependent representation of normative properties, if the world had normative properties. For example, this error theorist thinks that, if there *were* a property of wrongness, then WRONG would achieve property-dependent representation of it.

This gives us a first pass at the *Representation Explanation* of the difference between cognitivism and non-cognitivism. It will receive a slight tweak below.

³⁸ *Tempting* is very close to the “Explanation Explanation” that James Dreier, in his (2004), uses to divide cognitivism from non-cognitivism. According to Dreier, the cognitivist holds that normative properties appear in the metaphysical explanation of normative beliefs, and the non-cognitivist denies this. However, as pointed out by Chrisman (2008), Dreier’s view suffers from the problem just discussed. If there are no normative properties, they cannot play a role in the metaphysical explanation of normative beliefs. Thus the Explanation Explanation, like *Tempting*, will misclassify certain error theorists. Arguably, it also suffers from an additional problem, that of misclassifying the view of Ralph Wedgwood, defended in Wedgwood (2001) and (2007), as non-cognitivist. *Tempting* at least escapes that potential problem, but I do not have the space to discuss it further here.

Representation Explanation (First Pass): Cognitivism is the thesis that, if there were normative properties, there would be property-dependent representation of them. Non-cognitivism is the negation of cognitivism.³⁹

A few examples will help clarify how it could be that, if a certain actually non-existent property were to exist, there would be property-dependent representation of the property.

Suppose a theorist thinks that a predicate represents the property, if there is one, that best trades off *naturalness*, in the sense of Lewis (1983), and closeness to the way the predicate's users apply it, and does sufficiently well at both.⁴⁰ The *natural* properties are the ones that “carve nature at its joints”; among the most natural of all are those properties that figure in a completed fundamental theory of physics. The details are not important here. Thus, “happy” represents whatever property best trades off being close to a joint in nature and having in its extension the things which the term's users apply it to, as long as the property is both sufficiently joint carving and sufficiently close to the users' applications.

On such a theory, it is easy to see how a predicate might fail to represent any property. There might simply be no property that is sufficiently joint carving and sufficiently close to how the users apply the predicate. An error theorist might think that normative predicates are like this.

However, if a certain property were added to the world, the predicate *would*

³⁹ On standard views of counterfactuals, if there *are* normative properties and there *is* property-dependent representation of them, this makes true the counterfactual “if there were normative properties, there would be property-dependent representation of them.” Thus, we are safe in thinking that a theorist who holds that there actually is property-dependent representation of normative properties will be counted as a cognitivist by *Representation Explanation (First Pass)*.

⁴⁰ This is the toy account of reference that Lewis discusses in his (1983) and (1984). It is not Lewis's actual view; see Weatherson (2013) and Schwarz (2014).

achieve property-dependent representation of the property. If the world gained a property that was both extremely natural and had an extension that closely matched how users applied the predicate, then the predicate would represent that property. And the representation would be property-dependent. The account of the representation would say that for predicate P to represent property F is *for F to be the property* which is sufficiently joint carving, sufficiently close to the applications of P, and best trades off joint carvingness and closeness to the application of P. This brings F into the account of the representation; F is represented by P *because F is the property* that meets the above criteria. The above theory could be straightforwardly adapted to describe how concepts represent, rather than predicates.

To repeat, in the above case, the predicate in question does not achieve property-dependent representation. But it would, if a suitable property were added to the world. Thus, assuming P is a normative predicate, the view of this error theorist is correctly classified by *Representation Explanation (First Pass)* as a cognitivist view.

Other theories of how normative terms or concepts represent could lead to the same error-theoretic result. For example, an error theorist could adopt a causal theory of reference along the lines of Kripke (1980) and Putnam (1975), and then claim that there is just no property “on the other side” of the causal relation for the term or concept to refer to. This theorist could claim that normative concepts function essentially just like natural kind concepts, with the difference that there is just no natural kind on the other end. For example, she thinks water stands in a certain causal, reference-determining relation to the concept WATER, but that there is no property that stands in that causal, reference-determining role to GOODNESS. And yet, GOODNESS plays a role in our

psychology fundamentally akin to the role of WATER. Thus, if there *were* a certain property in the world -- if there were goodness -- then GOODNESS would achieve property-dependent representation of it, in just the same way that WATER achieves property-dependent representation of water.⁴¹ Thus, *Representation Explanation (First Pass)* is superior to *Tempting*, for it correctly classifies these error theorists as cognitivists.

Representation Explanation (First Pass) does need to change, however. It erroneously categorizes certain non-cognitivist views as cognitivist. The problem comes from non-cognitivists who think that it is *metaphysically impossible* for there to be normative properties, and who accept the standard semantics for counterfactuals.⁴² On this standard semantics, any counterfactual with a necessarily false antecedent comes out trivially true.⁴³ Thus, if it is metaphysically impossible for there to be normative properties, the counterfactual “if there were normative properties, then there would be property-dependent representation of them” is trivially true. Thus this non-cognitivist accepts the counterfactual, and is thereby classified by *Representation Explanation (First Pass)* as a cognitivist. We need to revise *Representation Explanation (First Pass)*.

There is, intuitively, an important difference between the error theoretic views sketched above and the non-cognitivist just described, despite the fact that they both accept the counterfactual, “if there were normative properties, there would be property-

⁴¹ Some “externalist” theories of mental representation will reject the idea that representation can be factored in this way, into part the mental state is responsible for and part the world is responsible for. This may be the position of Burge (2007). I need not deny these views. I am just trying to make sense of how a theorist who denies the existence of normative properties could yet be a cognitivist, and I think the best way to do so is via this sort of factoring. It might turn out that there is no such thing. But we still need to classify as a cognitivist the error theorist who believes there is.

⁴² These would be non-cognitivists who do *not* accept a deflated conception of properties, which makes their existence, and thus possibility, fairly trivial.

⁴³ See e.g. Stalnaker (1968) and Lewis (1973).

dependent representation of them.” This non-cognitivist accepts the counterfactual merely because of the impossibility of there being normative properties. The error theoretic cognitivist, however, thinks the counterfactual is true because normative terms and concepts really have set things up such that, if properties of a certain sort were to be added to the world, the terms and concepts would representationally latch onto them. For example, in the first error theoretic view described above, facts about a normative concept’s pattern of application determined that if there were a sufficiently joint-carving property with a certain extension, the concept would represent it. Facts about the concept and its usage, on this view, *establish conditions* under which the concept would achieve property-dependent representation of the property. This is not so on the non-cognitivist view sketched. This view counts the counterfactual true, but *not* because it holds that facts about normative concept determine conditions under which it would achieve property-dependent representation of a property. The non-cognitivist counts the counterfactual true simply because it holds that there cannot be any normative properties.

This gets us to the correct view:

Representation Explanation: Cognitivism is the thesis that facts about our normative thought and talk determine conditions under which our normative terms, concepts, etc. would achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. Non-cognitivism is the negation of cognitivism.

Spelling out the notion of property-dependent representation, we have:

Representation Explanation (Spelled Out): Cognitivism is the thesis that facts about our normative thought and talk determine conditions under which our normative terms, concepts, etc. would represent normative properties in such a way that all accounts of the representation would appeal to the represented normative property. Non-cognitivism is the negation of cognitivism.

Finally, we have done it. This sets out what it is for cognitivism to say that normative thought and talk are “in the business” of representing the normative, “hold up their end of the representational bargain,” or “try” or “aspire” to (robustly) represent the normative. The cognitivist may or may not think there *is* property-dependent representation of the normative. But she does think that our normative thought and talk set out conditions under which there would be, if the world contained the appropriate properties.

The idea of “conditions” under which normative concepts would achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties needs elucidating. Conditions, as I understand them, are not possible worlds. The facts about our normative thought and talk could determine that a certain normative concept would achieve property-dependent representation of a normative property under the condition that *p*, even though *p* is metaphysically impossible. Suppose an error theorist thinks that our use of RIGHT determines that it would achieve property-dependent representation of a property, if there were one, which is both mind-independent and necessarily motivating.⁴⁴ She further thinks that this is the only sort of property that RIGHT could represent, and that it is metaphysically impossible for there to be such a property. Thus on her view there is no

⁴⁴ The error theorist would have a view similar to that of Mackie (1977).

possible world in which RIGHT achieves property-dependent representation of a property. However, she still *does* think there is a condition under which RIGHT would achieve this representation. This is the condition just identified, of there being a property which is both mind-dependent and necessarily motivating.

I make this clarification to avoid the objection that *Representation Explanation* will erroneously classify such a theorist as a non-cognitivist. The theorist *does* think that facts about RIGHT determine conditions under which it would achieve property-dependent representation of a property. It is just metaphysically necessary that those conditions do not obtain.

One might object that any theorist who thinks that it is *metaphysically necessary* that normative concepts do not achieve property-dependent representation should be counted as a non-cognitivist. However, this draws the line in the wrong place. As we have seen above, the error-theoretic cognitivist who thinks that it is metaphysically necessary that there are no normative properties may well think that normative thoughts are *in themselves* no different than paradigmatic representational states. Non-cognitivism is supposed to be a theory about the nature of normative thought (and talk). Thus it is a datum that any theorist who holds the only difference between normative thoughts and some kind of paradigmatically representational thought is their *success* in achieving representation should count as a cognitivist. The Representation Explanation respects this datum.

5. Conclusion

Once again, I define cognitivism and non-cognitivism as follows:

Representation Explanation: Cognitivism is the thesis that facts about our normative thought and talk determine conditions under which our normative terms, concepts, etc. would achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. Non-cognitivism is the negation of cognitivism.

Suppose this is correct. We could have two reactions. One is to think that, as it turns out, the divide between cognitivism and non-cognitivism is not that important, after all. Perhaps, after all this time, we should even stop talking about cognitivism and non-cognitivism, and focus on other divisions between meta-normative views. This would be an interesting result.

However, I do not think that this is the correct reaction to have. I think the divide marked by the *Representation Explanation* is an important one. Not the *only* important one, of course, but important nonetheless. What is at stake between cognitivists and non-cognitivists is the *point* of normative thought and talk, what business they are in. Cognitivists think it is property-dependent, robust representation of the normative. They think it is the establishment of a full-blooded representational connection with the normative. Non-cognitivists think that it is something else. Insofar as one is interested in meta-ethics at all, interested in the nature of the normative, one should be interested in this debate.

Now that we understand exactly what cognitivism and non-cognitivism are, we can properly investigate which is true.

Chapter 2: The Regulation Argument for Non-Cognitivism

1. Introduction

In Chapter One, I defended a particular definition of non-cognitivism. In this chapter, I will present a new argument that non-cognitivism is true. It makes use of a kind of thought experiment first proposed by Hare (1952), and more recently developed by Horgan and Timmons in a number of papers, including their (1991), (1992), and (2000). Horgan and Timmons use the thought experiment to target certain naturalistic forms of cognitivism. I argue that it undermines *all* forms of cognitivism.¹

We start with the definition of non-cognitivism. In the last chapter I defined cognitivism and non-cognitivism as follows:

Representation Explanation: Cognitivism is the thesis that facts about our normative thought and talk determine conditions under which our normative terms, concepts, etc. would achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. Non-cognitivism is the negation of cognitivism.

Spelling out the definition of property-dependent representation, this says:

Representation Explanation (Spelled Out): Cognitivism is the thesis that facts about our normative thought and talk determine conditions under which our normative terms, concepts, etc. would represent normative properties in such a

¹ However, going forward I will largely ignore contextualist and error theoretic cognitivist views.

way that all accounts of the representation would appeal to the represented normative property. Non-cognitivism is the negation of cognitivism.

On this view, there are two ways to be a cognitivist about the normative. The first is to think that normative concepts actually do achieve property-dependent representation of the normative. This is the view that normative concepts actually do represent normative properties in such a way that all accounts of the representation would appeal to the represented normative property. The second is to adopt an error theoretic view and claim that, while normative concepts do not actually achieve property-dependent representation of the normative, this is only because the world lacks normative properties. For simplicity's sake, I will now set the error theoretic view aside. While the argument below tells equally against error theoretic and non-error theoretic cognitivist views, it will streamline discussion to focus just on non-error theoretic views. I will simply argue against the majority of cognitivist views, on which normative concepts actually achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties.

I will adopt an abbreviation. I will use capital-R 'Represents F' to mean: achieves property-dependent representation of F. Thus, my target is the view that normative concepts Represent normative properties.

There are a number of ways to argue that normative concepts do not Represent normative properties. I will argue indirectly. I will first aim to show that it is *explanatorily useless* to think that normative concepts Represent normative properties. That is, I will argue that claiming that normative concepts *do* Represent normative properties gives a theory no additional ability to explain anything that we want to explain.

There is some theory of normative concepts which denies that they Represent normative properties, but which is just as explanatorily powerful as any theory that says that they do.

However, I do *not* think the analogous claim is true in the non-normative case. Regarding concepts that represent water, electrons, democracy, or the number two, it *is* explanatorily useful, even explanatorily necessary, to posit that they Represent their respective subject matters. There are facts about the representation of items like these which are best explained by accounts of the representation that *do* appeal to what is represented. The first step of the argument, then, is identifying a feature of normative concepts that makes them importantly different from all of those non-normative concepts. I will use the notion of *regulation* to do this.

A *regulation relation* is a kind of relation that can obtain between a concept and a property. In particular, it is a certain sort of *representation relation*. Before proceeding, I need to very broadly say how I am thinking about representation.

Roughly, I think of the property represented by a concept as the property that the concept contributes to the truth conditions of thoughts containing that concept. For example, the concept SQUARE stands in many relations to many properties. Which of those properties does it represent? It represents the property that SQUARE contributes to the truth conditions of thoughts containing SQUARE. Roughly, when the thought amounting to the application of SQUARE to some object *x* is true because *x* is *F*, *F* is the property that SQUARE represents. Such a thought is true because *x* is square, so the property of being a square is what SQUARE represents.

I want to leave open the possibility that, for different concepts, it could be

different relations that determine what property the concept contributes to truth conditions. Perhaps SQUARE represents the property of being water in virtue of some causal relation between squares and tokenings of the concept SQUARE. But perhaps the concept REASON TO Φ , for example, contributes a property to truth conditions of thoughts in virtue of standing in some *other*, perhaps non-causal, relation between the concept REASON TO Φ and a property. That is, perhaps the story that underlies what makes it the case that various thoughts have truth conditions is different in different cases. Perhaps there are different representation relations. Again, I am not yet committed to thinking this is so, I will simply leave open the possibility.

Now we can introduce regulation relations. Some potential representation relations count as regulation relations, while some do not. I will more precisely define regulation below, but here is the rough idea. If R is a regulation relation, then for a concept C to stand in R to a property F, at least a certain class of tokens of C must tend to be applied to things that are F. For concept C to stand in a regulation relation to the property F that it represents, at least a certain class of applications of C must tend to be *accurate*. There must be a fair degree of match between the application of a certain class of tokens of concept C and the extension of F, in order for C to stand in a regulation relation to F. However, the class in question need not be *actual* tokens. The tokens in question could be those formed in certain idealized circumstances, circumstances that never actually obtain. Many of the popular views of representation describe relations which count as regulation relations.²

² I have in mind the views along the lines of Stampe (1977), Dretske (1981) and (1986), Millikan (1984), Fodor (1987) and (1990), Jackson and Chalmers (2001), Lewis (1970) as well as Lewis (1983) and (1984), and the sorts of views of representation naturally associated with theories of concepts found in the more psychological literature, such as the prototype theory, the theory theory, etc. See Laurence and Margolis

I will argue that the most general lesson of the Moral Twin Earth thought experiment is that the representation of normative properties is *not* regulation. In order for a concept to represent a normative property, it is *not* required that there be any class of tokens of the concept that is applied accurately. A concept can represent a normative property even without any sort of matching between a certain class of (perhaps non-actual) tokens of the concept and the extension of the normative property. This makes normative thought importantly different from thought about everyday or scientific matters, and arguably most kinds of thought. And this paves the way for the second step in my argument.

The second step is arguing that, given that normative representation (i.e. representation of a normative property) does not amount to regulation, it is explanatorily useless to posit that normative thoughts Represent normative properties. That is, given that normative representation is not a regulation relation, it is explanatorily useless to appeal to normative properties in the account of normative representation. Here is the broad reason for accepting this. Given that normative representation is not regulation, normative practice can be, in a certain sense, totally divorced from normative properties. The absence of regulation in effect drives a wedge between normative properties and thought about those properties. When there is no such wedge the property is an essential part of the account of the concept's representation of the property, in ways I will discuss below. But, with the wedge in place, the property is no longer tightly connected to representation of it. Thus, I will argue, it becomes superfluous. An account of normative representation can be fully satisfactory even without appealing to normative properties.

The third, and briefest, part of the argument is the claim that, given this explanatory parity between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, we should believe non-cognitivism because it is the simpler theory.³ If two theories are equally explanatorily powerful, but one is simpler, we should believe the simpler, or at least lend it more credence. This has seemed plausible to many, although it is of course controversial and the explanation of exactly *why* this is so is unclear. In the third section, I will take this principle on board, and focus on arguing that the non-cognitivist does indeed deliver the simpler theory. Thus, insofar as we have reason to prefer simpler theories, we have reason to think non-cognitivism is true.

What I will call the Regulation Argument, then, goes as follows:

- 1) Normative representation is not a regulation relation.
- 2) If normative representation is not a regulation relation, then we can give a satisfactory account of normative representation that does not appeal to normative properties.
- 3) If we can give a satisfactory account of normative representation that does not appeal to normative properties, then we should think non-cognitivism is true.
- 4) We should think non-cognitivism is true.

The paper will proceed as follows. In Section Two, I will defend Premise One, arguing that normative representation is not a regulation relation. Here I will make use of the Moral Twin Earth thought experiment. In Section Three, I will defend Premise Two,

³ I am much less concerned at present with the third step than the other two. If I could convince the reader of the explanatory parity between the views, I would be satisfied.

arguing that, normative representation is not a regulation relation, then we can give a satisfactory account of normative representation that does not appeal to normative properties. Here I will canvass a number of things we might want explained by an account of normative representation, and argue that in no case will we need to appeal to normative properties in the account. Section Four briefly defends Premise Three, arguing that this all means we should think non-cognitivism is true. Section Five concludes.

2. Arguing for Premise One: Normative Representation is not Regulation

Premise One states:

- 1) Normative representation is not a regulation relation.

To make the above gloss on regulation a bit more precise, we offer a first pass at defining regulation as follows (a small amendment will be added below):

Regulation (First Pass): Relation R between concept C and property F is a regulation relation =_{df} There is certain kind K of token of concept C such that part of what it is for C to stand in R to F is for tokens of C of kind K to tend to be applied to instances of F.

Some examples will help make this clear.

Consider the concept HAPPINESS, which represents the property of happiness.⁴

⁴ I am thinking of concepts as mental particulars of some kind, rather than as abstract objects. See Margolis

There is some representation relation R that HAPPINESS stands in to the property of happiness. We ask: What is it for a concept to stand in this representation relation R to a property?

Suppose the answer is this: It is for the concept, when applied under normal conditions, to tend to be applied to instances of happiness. If so, then R counts as a regulation relation. The tokens of kind K are the tokens of the concept applied under normal conditions (whatever exactly normal conditions are). And the account says that what it is for HAPPINESS to stand in R to the property of happiness is for the tokens of this kind to tend to be applied to instances of happiness.

Some theories, such as that of Jackson and Chalmers (2001), would appeal to a certain kind of *idealized* condition, rather than merely normal conditions.⁵ In particular, they think that what is relevant are the tokens of the concept which are applied under conditions in which one has full information of a certain kind about the situation, and perfect logical acumen. Roughly, CHAIR represents the property shared by all and only the objects that a person, when given full microphysical and phenomenal information about a scenario and an instrument which processes that information, applies the concept CHAIR to.

This sort of regulation is important to bring up because it shows that, even taking representation of ordinary objects to be regulation, the brain in the vat can be radically deceived about her circumstances. For it might be that, when the brain is given *full* information about her world, she does *not* apply CHAIR to any of her experiences, or to

and Laurence (1999) for discussion. Nothing really turns on this choice, everything could be cast slightly differently to accommodate the abstract object view.

⁵ For further development, see Chalmers (2012).

any part of the apparatus causing those experiences. Given full information, she would presumably apply it just to the sort of thing her mad scientist captor sits on. Thus, on this view, all of her previous applications of CHAIR had been misapplications. Thus, thinking that representation of chairs amounts to regulation does *not* require adopting the anti-skeptical conclusion of Putnam (1981).

Considering this kind of regulation also shows one way in which a property with no actual instances can be represented via regulation.⁶ For example, suppose that there are no actual instances of the property of being a ghost. And yet, the concept GHOST represents this property. This representation could still be representation. For when presented with full microphysical and phenomenal information about certain non-actual circumstances, we *would* apply GHOST to certain things in those circumstances. Thus, GHOST represents a property via a regulation relation, despite there being no actual instances of the property.

Here is another example. Take the concept ELECTRON, which stands in some representation R to the property of being an electron. We ask: what is it for ELECTRON to stand in R to the property of being an electron?

Suppose now that the answer is: It is for tokens of ELECTRON applied by the relevant experts in the community to be applied only to things which are negatively charged, microscopic, the causes of certain experimental results, etc., and for electrons to be the things that best fit that description. Once again, we have regulation. The kind of token K is now the tokens of the concept applied by the experts in the community. And what it is for ELECTRON to stand in R' to the property of being an electron is for the

⁶ Another will be discussed below.

tokens of kind K to be applied only to certain things, things which turn out to be instances of the property of being an electron. Thus, R is a regulation relation.

Causal theories of representation will also count as describing regulation relations. The general idea behind causal theories is that, for example, HORSE represents horses because it is horses that cause one to token the concept HORSE. Of course, as stated this is much too crude, as an extremely wide and disjunctive variety of things could cause HORSE to be tokened, and it is implausible that HORSE has such a disjunctive content. So theorists try to narrow down exactly *which* causal connection matters for determining what a concept represents.⁷ On such views, if one applies a concept to those things which cause (in the right way) the concept to be tokened, one will be applying the concept correctly. Thus, causal theories will say that for a concept C to represent a property F is for certain tokens of C, namely those caused in a certain way, to at least tend to be applied to instances of F.⁸ And so the relations they describe count as regulation relations.

The notion of regulation is very broad. I think it very plausible that the majority of concepts we deploy stand in some regulation relation to the properties they represent. To discuss a further case, take the concept two, which represents the property of being two in number (as opposed to the number two itself). It might be somewhat mysterious how exactly we manage to represent mathematical properties. But it seems relatively clear that, whatever it takes for TWO to represent the property of being two in number, this has something to do with the concept being generally applied to pairs of things.⁹ This will be

⁷ See, for example, Stampe (1977) and Fodor (1987).

⁸ This may look like a slightly unfamiliar way of characterizing causal theories of representation. But I think it is ultimately what they amount to. If this turns out to not be right, then we could modify our definition of regulation to make sure it includes causal theories as well. This would not affect the arguments below.

⁹ I take it that it is simply impossible for a community to apply a concept strictly to dogs, or to strictly to

yet another case of representation that counts as regulation.

The account of regulation does need an addition, however, in order to capture what I want. The problem comes from defined concepts, and is made most vivid by concepts that represent a property with an empty extension, such as the concept CIRCULAR AND SQUARE. Representation of the property of being circular and square could not amount to regulation, as defined, for the simple reason that it is impossible to apply any token of a concept to an instance of the property, since it is impossible for there to be any instances. And yet, to make the argument in the next section go through, I will want to allow that the most plausible accounts of how it is that CIRCULAR AND SQUARE represents the property of being circular and square count as regulation nonetheless.

The fix goes as follows. A representation relation counts as regulation if it meets the above criteria *or* if the case is of the above form. The form can be illustrated as follows. CIRCULAR represents the property of being circular via a regulation relation. SQUARE represents the property of being a square, also via a regulation relation. The logical concept AND represents conjunction, in some way. Put together, the concepts form the concept CIRCULAR AND SQUARE. This defined concept represents the property that is derived by putting together, in an analogous manner, what is represented by the concepts individually. In this way, we can say that the defined concept represents the correspondingly defined property. When all the individual concepts (perhaps excluding the logical concepts) represent via regulation relations, the defined concept will count as representing via a regulation relation. Thus, we can offer a final, recursive definition of

groups of eight things, and yet have the concept be the concept two (in number). Similarly, in looking for evidence that a term in some language expresses the concept two, we naturally look to see whether it is applied to pairs of things, and only pairs of things, regardless of what those things are. The best explanation for these fact is that such application is intimately related to what it is for a concept to be the concept two. For an amenable discussion, see Shapiro (1997), chapter four.

regulation:

Regulation: Relation R between concept C and property F is a regulation relation
 $=_{df}$ There is certain kind K of token of concept C such that part of what it is for C
 to stand in R to F is for tokens of C of kind K to tend to be applied to instances of
 F, or C represents F due to being wholly defined (excluding logical concepts) out
 of concepts that represent via regulation.

What would a relation that does *not* count as a regulation relation, and yet could plausibly
 taken to be a representation relation, look like? They could take a variety of shapes. I will
 present two examples.

First, a certain sort of deflationary theory of representation might say the
 following. For a concept C to stand in representation relation R' to property F is just for
 the concept to be expressed by the word (or phrase) 'F'. For example, for HAPPINESS to
 stand in R' to the property of happiness is just for HAPPINESS to be expressed by
 "happiness." And, for a word to be the word "happiness" is not a matter of how it is
 applied, it is simply an orthographical matter. The representation relation R' (granting
 that it is in fact a representation relation), does *not* count as a regulation relation. It says
 nothing about how any tokens of HAPPINESS are applied.

Second, a different theory might say that for the concept VALUABLE to stand in the
 representation relation R'' to the property of being valuable is for the concept VALUABLE
 to generally play a certain motivational role in the psychology of those who possess it.
 Namely, it motivates one to pursue, promote, etc. the things that one applies the concept

to. Of course, it is arguable if this should count as a sort of representation. But it is certainly not a regulation relation between VALUABLE and the property of being valuable. For the account of what it is for the relation to obtain says nothing about where VALUABLE is applied, it only says something about the motivational upshot of applying it. So, once again, the relation described is not a regulation relation.

Now that we understand regulation, we can argue for Premise One. Again, it says that normative representation is not a regulation relation. That is, whatever it is for a normative concept to represent a normative property, this does *not* involve a certain kind of tokens of the normative concept being accurately applied.

The argument for this claim starts with thought experiments like Hare's (1952) *Missionary and Cannibals*, Dreier's (1990) *Sadists*, and Horgan and Timmons' *Moral Twin Earth* thought experiments, introduced in their (1991). The thought experiments all have a common form. Imagine that there is some actually existing community that has no contact with our own. Their community is very similar to the community of English speakers on Earth. They have a certain spoken word, "reason", and a corresponding concept, REASON*. Their usage of this word and concept is in many ways similar to English speakers' usage of the English word "reason" and the corresponding concept. In this community, they often say that some fact is a "reason" to perform an action in order to recommend weighing that fact in favor of performing an action. When deliberating, they try to gather and weigh all the factors they deem to be "significant reasons." They criticize and often blame those that they deem to have acted, believed, or felt in ways that they had "no reason" or "not enough reason" to act, believe, or feel. When they come to think that someone did have a "good reason" to act as they did, they often cease feeling

as hostile towards the person, and are less critical. In general, their spoken word “reason” and the associated concept play, in the intrapersonal and interpersonal lives of the community, the same sort of deliberative, action-guiding role that the English “reason” and the associated concept play in our community.

They also use the word “reason” when they offer causal explanations, and non-causal explanations. They would say that the throwing of the baseball is the “reason” the window broke. And the philosophical among them would say that there being particles arranged tablewise in the room is (at least part of) the “reason” that a table exists in the room.

Their concept REASON* also figures in a rich set of connections with other concepts. They have another concept, OUGHT*, that they express with the word “ought,” and which, once again, plays much the same intra- and inter-personal motivational, deliberative, action-guiding role that the concept that we express with “ought” plays. Their community has a debate about the semantics of their word “ought” that looks virtually identical to the debate we have regarding the semantics of “ought.” In this community, they are prepared to accept, for their “reason” and “ought,” all of the platitudes we take to connect facts about reasons and facts about what people ought to do. For example, they would say that if a person has “most reason” to do something, the person “ought” to do it. And they (almost) all believe that facts about “reasons,” “oughts,” etc. supervene on descriptive or “non-normative” facts.

In this community, they also divide up reasons into various domains. For example, the philosophical among them talk about “epistemic reasons,” which are “reasons” to have certain beliefs and credences, and they debate whether the practical

effects of having certain beliefs and credences can count as “reasons for beliefs”. They also divide up what they take to be “reasons for action” into domains, in a way analogous to the way that we divide up the prudential from the moral. They debate how exactly to think about these domains. Some think that all the domains are simply sets of the facts which are “reasons,” demarcated by subject matter. Some think that certain domains have a special status, in that the reasons from that domain always override, or silence, or something like this, the “reasons” from other domains, where these notions are understood just as we understand them.

However, in addition to these being these domains, they are also committed to there being what they call the “all things considered ought,” and “reason” in what they call the “substantive” or “oomphy” or “robustly normative” sense, as opposed to some “merely formal” sense. Their discussions of what these amount to look almost identical to ours, differing only in the examples chosen to illustrate the ideas. Most of them think that it may well be that the reasons from one domain favor one action, the reasons from another domain favor a different action, and that there is a good further question, of what one has “most reason” to do, or what one “ought” to do, where these are not indexed to particular domains.

To sum up, this community’s “reason” and “ought,” and the associated concepts REASON* and OUGHT*, work just like our “reason” and “ought” and our associated concepts, in terms of their in the deliberative, action-guiding, and social roles, as well as in terms of the sorts of structural platitudes about them that the community accepts.

Let us consider now a particular regulation relation, for example, one that focuses on how a concept is applied under normal conditions. And let us suppose that the

representation relation that REASON FOR ACTION stands in to the property of being a reason for action is this sort of regulation relation.¹⁰ Part of conditions' being "normal" is that what can be independently identified as biases are not at work. And suppose that in our community under the sort of normal conditions in question, we would apply REASON FOR ACTION only to the fact that an action would make some contribution to happiness.

The other community under consideration, however, differs from us in this way. Under the same sort of normal conditions, with the same sorts of biases eliminated, they would apply their concept, the one they express with "reason for action" to a different set of facts. They apply it to facts which bear on the promotion of *autonomy*. Thus, the concepts are applied to wholly different sets of facts. We apply it only to facts of the form *ϕ -ing would promote S's happiness*, while they apply it only to facts of the form *ϕ -ing would promote S's autonomy*. It might well be that people in the two communities are often led to perform the same actions on the basis of our deployment of these concepts. But they are applied to sets of facts with no overlap.

What I will now argue is this. First, their concept and ours represent the very same property, the property of being a reason for action.¹¹ We will see this from observing that we can genuinely *disagree* with people from the other community via use of these concepts. Second, given that the concepts represent the same properties, it cannot be that representation of these properties requires regulation in the normal-conditions way just sketched. For, given that the concepts are applied so differently under normal conditions, there is no extension that the property of being a reason could have that would

¹⁰ I ignore the fact that it is really a reason for action *relation*, holding between facts, actions, and agents in circumstances. I will continue to call it a property, as this makes no difference to the argument.

¹¹ I am not concerned with the related claim that we possess the *same concept*. That will turn on issues unrelated to present concerns.

mean that, under normal conditions, both concepts are applied to it. Thus, at least one of the concepts must represent the property of being a reason without being applied to it under normal conditions. Thus, being so applied is not a necessary condition on representing the property. But this means that being so applied is not part of what it is to represent the property. Thus, the representation of being a reason is not a case of regulation of the normal-conditions kind. And this verdict will repeat for *all* the kinds of regulation one might think that representation of the property of being a reason might amount to.¹²

Before arguing that our REASON and their analogous concept represent the same property, we can add one more detail to the description of the other community. The people in the community have heard exactly the story just told. They know how we use our words “reason” and “ought,” and the associated concepts. They think that our concepts and the concepts they express using their words represent the same normative properties. They think that they substantively disagree with us about what facts are reasons for action and what people ought to do. They would say about us: “while they have a different normative theory, they are thinking about normative properties; they really disagree with us, rather than merely talking past us.”

I submit that they are right about this; we really do possess concepts that represent the same normative properties, and we really can disagree in our normative judgments. Suppose a person from our community says “the fact that an action will promote autonomy is *not* a reason to perform it,” and a person from their community says “the fact that an action will promote autonomy *is* a reason to perform it.” This constitutes a

¹² This includes views that tie representation to concept application in conditions of full information, maximum reflection, etc.

disagreement. We can truly report that the person from the other community and the person from our community disagree about whether the fact that an action will cause pain is a reason to perform it.¹³

The intuition is *not* that we share the same concepts of REASON, OUGHT, etc. For many concepts are arguably akin to Kaplanian characters, in that they can have different contents in different contexts.¹⁴ Just because the people in the community share the concept that we express using “I,” this obviously does *not* mean that we disagree when they say “I am not on Earth” and we say “I am on Earth.” While we share the concept, it has different contents in different contexts, and thus there is no disagreement. The point is that our concepts represent the very same properties in our different contexts.

The point is also *not* that what the thought experiment shows is that the words “reason” and “ought” and their associated concepts do not represent different properties in different contexts. It is totally uncontroversial that “ought,” at least, is context dependent in this way.¹⁵ The point is that, in the contexts that we are focusing on, namely in which the words and concepts are being used in a particular deliberative, motivational, and social context, they *do* come to share contents. And thus we have disagreement, rather than talking past.¹⁶

Why think that there really is disagreement between us when we say the fact that an action would promote happiness is a reason to perform it, and they say that it is “not a

¹³ See Cappellen and Hawthorne (2009), chapter 2, for discussion of this third-party reporting test for disagreement.

¹⁴ See Kaplan (1989).

¹⁵ At the very least, “ought” has both normative and epistemic uses, as in “one ought to give to charity” and “they left ten minutes ago, they ought to get there soon.”

¹⁶ I am relying on the common assumption that disagreement requires that the two parties represent the same property. This has recently come into question, see e.g. Björnsson & Finlay (2010), Plunkett & Sundell (2013), and Khoo and Knobe (2016). Evaluating this assumption, and the relationship between the views that emerge when one denies it and non-cognitivism, is quite tricky. Thus I will simply work with the common assumption.

reason”? There are a number of reasons.

The first reason is simply the widely shared intuition that we really are disagreeing with them and not merely talking past.¹⁷ Most of the responses to Horgan and Timmons *accept* that there is genuine normative disagreement, and try to show how a cognitivist can explain this. Moreover, it is extremely plausible that people’s intuitions are reliable regarding such matters. Consider a monolingual English speaker who receives a detailed description of how the French use the word “chien.” She will judge that “chien” means what “dog” means. And she will judge that English and French speakers could disagree due to beliefs expressed in part by these words. And she will be correct.

Similarly, consider this speaker receiving a detailed description of how French speakers use the word “proche.” The obvious pattern is that they call something “proche” when it meets a contextually determined standard of physical proximity to the speaker.¹⁸ This person would *not* think that a French person and an American person disagree when a French person a few streets from the Eiffel Tower has a belief that she would express by applying “proche” to the Eiffel Tower, and the American in California has a belief that she would express by labelling the Eiffel Tower as “not close.” The person would realize that due to the content in a context of “proche” depending on the location of the speaker, this would amount to mere talking past, rather than disagreement. Once again, this person would be right. Obviously, examples can easily be multiplied. This is at least *prima facie*

¹⁷ Most of the responses to the Moral Twin Earth thought experiment *accept* that there is genuine normative disagreement, and try to show how a cognitivist can explain this. See e.g. Copp (2000), Merli (2002), van Roojen (2006), Wedgwood (2007), Schroeter and Schroeter (2009), Dunaway and McPherson (2016), Williams (2018).

¹⁸ Of course, most people would not say this explicitly. But people implicitly know this is how “close” works in English, and so could, without technical expertise, come to know that a word in another language works like this too.

reason to think that our intuitions are reliable.¹⁹

Contrast this with Putnam's original Twin Earth case, where the concept in question is WATER.²⁰ When we say "water contains hydrogen" and they say "water does not contain hydrogen," there is *no* intuition that we are having a genuine disagreement. We are clearly talking past each other. We are talking about H₂O, they are talking about XYZ. This is a marked contrast between the cases.

Similar results can be produced in cases other than natural kinds. Suppose that we apply our concept CHAIR to certain things. We find another community, and they have a concept, CHAIR* that they apply to broadly similar things. It turns out that CHAIR applies only to things that are intentionally produced for sitting. There are different potential explanations of why this is, we can suppose it is due to how we would apply CHAIR after sustained reflection. In the other community, however, CHAIR* is applied similarly, but, after sustained reflection, they settle on the view that CHAIR* applies to anything that is good to sit on for one person.

In this case as well, there is no intuition that there is a disagreement when they apply CHAIR* to an object, but we believe that CHAIR does *not* apply to that object. We simply have slightly different concepts, and some things fall under theirs but not ours. It may well be that we are both correctly applying our concepts. We could repeat this exercise for many different concepts, over and over we will be happy with the result that there is no disagreement, just a difference in concept and talking past. In most non-normative contexts, we are completely satisfied to judge that the concepts are simply a bit

¹⁹ Dowell (2016) questions the importance of semantic intuitions in this context. I do not have space to discuss her view here.

²⁰ See Putnam (1975). Putnam is discussing the referent of "water" as opposed to the concept WATER, but as Burge (1979) and (1986) show, the same sorts of considerations apply to concepts as well as words.

different, and that nobody is making a mistake.²¹ But the normative case is different.²²

In the above scenario, the imagined community differs from ours in how they apply their concept under normal conditions. But we can construct other communities that differ from us in other ways, corresponding to other regulation relations that one might think are the way in which normative concepts represent normative properties.²³ For example, if the regulation were causal, we could imagine another community, similar to ours in all of the ways discussed above, but whose tokenings of their concept analogous to REASON FOR ACTION are caused by different sets of facts. Yet we would have the same intuitive judgment of disagreement. Despite our beliefs being generally caused by one set of facts and the beliefs in the other community being caused by a different set of facts, our REASON and their concept still represent the same property. Just because our judgments are caused in a different way, this does not mean they are failing to think or talk about reasons.

The lesson from this is that normative representation is *not* a regulation relation. A concept in one community and a concept in another can represent the very same normative property, despite there not being any kind of tokens of both that tend to be applied to the same things. Normative representation is not regulation.

There is a second reason to think that normative representation is not regulation.²⁴

Take the concept CREDENZA. I possess the concept CREDENZA, but I am not sure what

²¹ Matters may be different when the concept is a defined concept. We might have intuitions of disagreement, despite such differences in application. But this will be due to *similarities* of application of the concepts that figure into the definition.

²² This is connected to the fact that, while we are generally happy to attribute *vagueness* to a matter of semantic indeterminacy or indecision, we do *not* think the same thing about normative vagueness. See e.g. Schoenfeld (2016).

²³ Horgan and Timmons call the thought experiment a “recipe” for coming up with cases that show certain forms of cognitivism to be false. See Horgan and Timmons (2000).

²⁴ The following discussion is similar to discussions in Horgan and Timmons (1992), Schoenfeld (2016), and standard objections to cultural relativist views found in e.g. Rachels (2014).

exactly counts as a credenza. How would I come to learn this? By looking at how CREDENZA is and has been applied, particularly by the furniture experts. Once I know this, the question is pretty much settled. Why is this? Because what it is for CREDENZA to represent a property has something to do the things to which it is applied. The representation relation between CREDENZA and credenzas is, very plausibly, a regulation relation. Because representation of the property of being a credenza amounts to regulation, this is the right way to learn which things are credenzas.

Contrast this with normative concepts. I *cannot* settle the question of which facts REASON applies to simply by looking at how (a certain class of tokens of) it is applied. That is simply not how we come to normative knowledge. Thus, normative representation is not regulation.

Here is another way to put the point. Wherever representation of a property amounts to regulation, if we know what sort of regulation relation the representation relation is, and we know how the tokens of a concept singled out by that regulation relation are applied, then we are in a position to know the extension of the property represented by the concept. For example, if the representation of normative property is a normal-conditions kind of regulation relation, then knowing this and knowing how tokens of REASON are applied under normal conditions would put us in a position to answer the normative question of which facts are reasons.

This is simply not how we come to have normative knowledge. Coming to know how people actually apply REASON, or apply it under normal conditions, or conditions of full non-normative information, or knowing what causes people to apply REASON to things are all just not the kind of conclusive evidence regarding which facts are actually

reasons which these views make them out to be.²⁵ It may be that they are evidence; it may be that learning that full informed and unbiased people would all think that p is a reason to ϕ is evidence, even very strong evidence, that p is a reason to ϕ . But learning even this does not simply close deliberation, as does learning exactly how the experts apply CREDENZA. In the normative case, one would in effect have excellent testimonial evidence that p is a reason to ϕ . But in the credenza case, one has more than this, one has evidence that simply puts an end to all discussion. If representation of the property of being a reason were a regulation relation, then facts about the normative views of others could amount to evidence of this latter kind. But it does not. Thus, normative representation is not regulation.

There is a third reason to think that normative representation is not regulation. Suppose it were. Thus, we are able to construct a community, such as the one discussed above, whose phrase “reason for action” expresses a concept that represents a different property than our concept REASON FOR ACTION. Suppose that they accept, in their language, “the fact that an action promotes happiness is not a reason to perform it.” If this is not about reasons, their acceptance of it should not affect our credences about reasons credences in any special way. That is, when we learn this fact, we simply learn another non-normative fact, and this should only affect our normative credences in whatever normal way that learning a non-normative fact should affect our normative credences.²⁶ But, crucially, we have not encountered any normative disagreement. And so there is no

²⁵ I ignore trivial cases, of course knowing how people apply REASON when they are *correctly* applying it would be extremely helpful! I also ignore the fact that, in general, non-normative information is helpful in knowing which facts are reasons. I mean that none of the above facts are helpful in the special way in which they would be, if some regulation view of normative representation were correct.

²⁶ I am assuming that they are not representing some other normative property or relation, i.e. some property or relation represented by one of our normative terms other than “reason.”

need to adjust our normative credences in the way that we need to when we encounter normative disagreement (whatever that is).

That strikes me as the wrong result in the case. When we discover this community with concepts very similar to our normative concepts, but which applies (a certain class of tokens of) the concept differently than we do, it seems that the proper epistemic response is the response, whatever it is, we should give to someone with whom we have a genuine normative disagreement.

Here is a way to bring out the intuition. You meet a person, and start discussing normative matters. You disagree about whether some fact is a reason to perform some action. Some epistemic response is called for, very plausibly some (possibly slight) lowering of your credence in the debated proposition. But on the regulation view, it will very likely make a crucial difference whether this person is from your own community, or from the Twin Earth community. If she is from your community, you are genuinely disagreeing and credence lowering is called for. But if she is from the other community, then you are merely talking past and credence lowering is not called for. But, intuitively, it does *not* matter which community she is from, as long as we hold fixed everything else about her: the view she defends, her arguments for it, etc. But the correct response being credence lowering *does* depend on there being a genuine disagreement, about you both talking about the same property. Thus, we get the result that we can genuinely disagree with people in the other community, and thus that no regulation view of normative representation can be correct. Once again, the conclusion is that normative representation is not regulation.²⁷

²⁷ One could resist this argument by claiming that disagreement *per se* is not relevant to one's epistemic

It is worth noting a consequence that does *not* follow from normative representation not being regulation. It does not follow that a concept's being applied in *any* way is consistent with it representing normative properties. The view suggested by the above thought experiments says that *all* it takes for a concept to represent a the property of being a reason is for it to play a certain motivational, deliberative, social role.²⁸ But this seems to lead to the result that a community with a concept that plays those roles and applied in *any* way could represent the property of being a reason. And this might seem implausible.

For example, consider the Pentars, introduced in Sarkissian et al. (2011). These are beings who judge that one “ought” to do whatever maximizes the number of pentagons in the universe. Correspondingly, they judge that the only facts which are “reasons” to perform actions are facts bearing on how an action will increase the number of pentagons in the universe. The concepts they possess that are expressed by these words play a broadly similar motivational, deliberative, and social role to our REASON FOR ACTION and OUGHT. But they are applied to facts and to actions which are *radically* different than the facts and actions we apply our normative concepts to. And, we can add, this difference is reflected in how they would be applied under normal conditions, in what causes people in the two communities to apply the concepts, etc.

We might want to say that the Pentars are simply not thinking about the property of being a reason or about what actions one ought to perform; their usage is just too bizarre to be about the normative properties that we think about. However, saying this

response to what seems to be disagreement. Adjudicating this issue will be difficult, however, so I do not rest too much weight on this third argument.

²⁸ This is plausible only for “thin” normative concepts, like the concept of a reason for action and the concept of the all-things-considered ought, as opposed to thicker normative concepts like those of prudence, justice, courage, etc.

does *not* require that we take normative representation to be regulation. It could be part of what it is for a concept to represent the property of being a reason that it must be applied (perhaps under certain conditions) to considerations that have something to do with either: well-being, autonomy, the will of God, respect for persons, happiness, desire-satisfaction, or other things that humans actually sometimes take to be reasons for action. This would rule out the Pentars from representing the property of being a reason, for considerations bearing only on the number of pentagons in the universe have nothing to do with anything on the list.

However, adding this kind of restriction into the account of what it is for a concept to represent the property of being a reason does *not* make the kind of representation into a regulation relation. A person or community could apply the concept in conformity with the above restriction, and yet still be systematically totally misapplying it. That is, while the account of what it is for the concept to represent the property requires application to be in the very broad ballpark listed above, it does *not* require that any sort of token of the concept tends to be applied accurately. And thus we do not yet have regulation. Building in such a relaxed requirement does not make the representation count as regulation. Only a far stricter requirement, regarding some class of tokens of the concept, would do that. Thus, accepting that the people from the other community described above are representing the property of being a reason does *not* require accepting that even the Pentars are.

If the arguments of this section are successful, we have the result that normative representation is not regulation. The account of what it is for (thin) normative concepts to represent normative properties does not say that some kind of token of the concept must

be accurately applied. This is the first premise of the argument.

3. Normative Properties are Not Needed

The second premise of the Regulation Argument says:

- 2) If normative representation is not a regulation relation, then we can give a satisfactory account of normative representation that does not appeal to normative properties.

Assuming that normative representation is not a regulation relation, I will argue that the minimal satisfactory view of normative representation does not appeal to normative properties. That is, accounts of what it is for a concept to represent a normative property can be given that do *not* appeal to normative properties, but *do* explain everything we want to explain about the representation.

There is a general reason that this should not be surprising. When a representation relation is a regulation relation, there is an intimate relationship between the represented property, specifically its extension, and the representation of that property. Part of the explanation of why a concept represents the property will appeal to (the extension of) that property. The representation of the property amounts to a certain sort of match between application of the concept and extension of the property. Thus, it seems inevitable that there will be important features of the representation of the property that we will only be able to explain by giving an account that appeals to the property. The property will play an essential role.

However, when the representation is *not* regulation, there is not this intimate connection. It is *not* due to a match between the application of a certain kind of token of the concept and the extension of a property that that property is represented by the concept. This opens up a new possibility. Perhaps appealing to the property is simply not useful in explaining anything about the representation. I will now argue for exactly this, in the case of the normative.

A crucial question is, of course, what sorts of things an account of normative representation needs to explain. I know of no definitive list. So the thing to do is to argue inductively. I will canvass six things about normative representation that we want explained, and argue that, given that normative representation is not regulation, appealing to normative properties is just not helpful in explaining these things. Regarding some *explananda*, I will argue that it is never the case that appealing to the represented property is helpful. But regarding others, it is precisely because normative representation is not regulation that appealing to normative properties is not helpful.

Before moving on to the explanations of these features of normative representation, it is worth noting again how what I am doing goes beyond the work of Horgan and Timmons. They argue, in effect, that normative representation is not regulation. The most common response on behalf of cognitivists has been to agree with Horgan and Timmons that it is not regulation, but to argue that cognitivism is compatible with this.²⁹ What Horgan and Timmons say does not touch these cognitivists. But I am arguing that, even if a cognitivist view can be produced on which normative representation is *not* regulation, the view will have no explanatory advantage over non-

²⁹ See note 14 for references.

cognitivist views (and thus is less parsimonious). Thus, my argument goes considerably beyond that of Horgan and Timmons. Now to the six features of normative representation. I will argue that, given that normative concepts are not regulated by normative properties, an account that helps explain all of this can be given, without appealing to normative properties.

First is the extent of the representation, i.e. where such representation is found. Normative representation is here helpfully contrasted with representation of water. People on Earth represent water. But people on Putnam's Twin Earth do not. This is an interesting fact about the representation of water: we find such representation on Earth, but not Twin Earth. An account of representation of water should help to explain this fact.

A regulation account of the representation is perfectly poised to do that. Let us suppose that what it is for a concept to represent (the property of being) water is for tokens of the concept to be caused, in a certain way, by water. We on Earth have a concept the tokens of which are caused by water. But on Twin Earth, they do not. Thus, this sort of causal theory nicely explains why there is representation of water on Earth, but not on Twin Earth.

In the normative case, however, I have argued that a difference in application between communities does *not* lead to only one representing normative properties. Rather, the above examples indicate that to explain where normative representation is found one will need to appeal to an account of normative representation that has two parts. The first regards whether the concepts play the sort of motivational, deliberative,

and social role described above. The second regards whether (certain tokens of) the concepts are applied in the very general ballpark discussed above. This gives us a potential working non-cognitivist conception of what it is for REASON FOR ACTION to represent the property of being a reason for action:

Normative Representation: For REASON FOR ACTION to represent the property of being a reason for action is for REASON FOR ACTION to play the motivational, deliberative, and social role described above, as well as to generally be applied in the ballpark described above.

Crucially, neither part of this account involves any normative properties. Thus, the non-cognitivist can accept it, and it successfully explains the extent of normative representation.

One might object that the cognitivist is in a better explanatory position here, because only she can give a principled explanation of why *that* is the ballpark in question. A concept must be applied to facts in *that* ballpark in order to represent the property of being a reason for action because *those* are the facts that are, in some sense, similar to the facts which really are reasons for action. If a concept is applied to facts extremely dissimilar to the facts which are reasons for action, then the concept simply cannot be one that represents the property of being a reason for action. But clearly this appeals to reasons for action. Thus, *this* explanation of why the Pentars, for example, do not represent the property of being a reason for action is not available to the non-cognitivist. The question then is, does she have an explanation that is equally satisfactory?

The non-cognitivist does. It comes in two steps. First, she adopts a view on which REASON's representing the property of being a reason simply amounts to it playing a certain role, most centrally characterized by the distinctive motivational, deliberative, and social role described above. Second, she simply adds that part of that role is to be applied in the ballpark identified by the cognitivist. It lies in the nature of the property of representing the property of being a reason that, if a concept represents the property of being a reason, then it is applied in the specified ballpark. Regarding the question of why it is *that* ballpark that lies in the nature of the property of representing the property of being a reason, this is not the sort of question that has an answer. Why does it lie in the nature of water to be H₂O? There is simply no answer to this question.³⁰ That is simply how it is. It is no cost to a theory if it fails to give an explanation to a question of this sort. Thus, there is no cost to a non-cognitivist theory if it fails to explain why the nature of the property of representing the property of being a reason contains a requirement regarding one ballpark of facts, rather than another.

There are still nearby questions the non-cognitivist should have an answer to, however. We might ask for an explanation of why it is that people find it useful to express a concept with *this* associated ballpark, as opposed to some other concept. The cognitivist might explain this by simply saying that it is useful to express a concept that represents the property of being a reason. The non-cognitivist cannot just rest with such an explanation, but she can offer others.³¹ Perhaps that is the ballpark containing all the facts that any humans are disposed to judge are reasons for action. It is useful to deploy a concept that allows any for disagreement, rather than talking past, with a wide variety of

³⁰ See Dasgupta (2016) for discussion.

³¹ See Bjornsson and McPherson (2014) for related discussion.

people. Since a main point of possessing and expressing normative concepts is to allow people to influence each other's thought and behavior in a distinctive way, this point is best served if the same concepts can be possessed by people with a very wide variety of substantive views. Thus, we have a natural explanation of why the ballpark would be as wide as it is. However, it is useless to deploy a concept with a ballpark so expansive as to even count the Pentars as representing normative properties. We will (I assume) never encounter creatures with practices *that* different from ours. And if we did, there would likely be no prospect of constructive normative dialogue with them anyway; it would be more useful to just dismiss them as not *really* thinking about normative matters than trying to engage with them. Thus, the sort of ballpark sketched above is plausibly the most useful, given the general point of having normative concepts.

I conclude that the non-cognitivist is at no explanatory disadvantage when it comes to explaining the extent of representation of the normative.

Second, as discussed above, representation helps to explain truth conditions. This may be the most important, central role that representation plays. Plausibly, a relation simply does not count as a relation of representation if it does not help ground something like truth, correctness, or accuracy.³² The thought that is comprised of GREEN and GRASS, syntactically combined into the thought that grass is green, is true just in case grass is green. Why? A plausible explanation says: because GRASS represents grass, GREEN represents the property of being green, and $\text{I}\square$ is the copula. The thought is true just in case the thing represented by the concept playing the subject role has the property

³² Truth alone might be narrow. When a picture represents a person, the picture might be accurate or inaccurate, but we would not say the picture is true or false.

represented by the concept playing the predicate role.³³ Thus, the concepts' representation explains the thought's truth conditions.

The question is: in order for a concept's representing a property to play this role in helping to explain truth conditions, does the account of the representation need to appeal to the represented property? If so, then the non-cognitivist needs to argue that truth conditions are simply not explained in the above way. This is a route she could take. But I want to argue that whether or not the represented property appears in the account of the representation simply has no bearing on whether or not the above sort of explanation is correct. That is, a non-cognitivist can deny that, for example, the property of being a reason appears in the account of what it is for REASON to represent the property of being a reason, and yet still accept exactly the above explanation of how it is that a thought containing REASON gets its truth conditions.

The non-cognitivist simply says exactly what was said above, but with a particular account of what the relevant kind of representation amounts to. For a concept to represent the property of being a reason is for it to play a certain motivational, deliberative, and social role.³⁴ Certain thoughts amount to applications of this concept, whatever exactly it is to *apply* a concept. When a (simple) thought applies the concept REASON, it thereby represents (the proposition) that some fact has the property of being a reason. And the thought is thereby true just in case the fact has the property of being a reason. The thought has the truth conditions that it does, namely that it is true iff the fact is a reason, (in part) because it is the application of REASON, which represents the property of being a reason. The difference between the non-cognitivist and cognitivist is

³³ See e.g. Field (1972) for discussion of this sort of account of truth conditions.

³⁴ Perhaps with some broad restriction in application, as just discussed.

simply in the analysis of that last part, of what the representation amounts to.

The cognitivist can complain that the non-cognitivist's task is tougher than she has made it out to be. The above line of reasoning makes it look like the non-cognitivist can just pick *any* feature of REASON, call *that* the property of representing the property of being a reason, and then say that feature explains truth conditions. But clearly that is incorrect, not just any feature could play that explanatory role. So the non-cognitivist owes an explanation of why it is that the features of REASON she has highlighted *are* able to explain truth conditions, while others are not.

Looking at what goes wrong in the bad case helps us see how the non-cognitivist should respond. Suppose a theorist offers the silly claim that for a concept to represent the property of being a square is simply for the concept to be first tokened on a Tuesday. She then goes on to say that thoughts that amount to the application of SQUARE have the truth conditions they do because SQUARE represents the property of being a square, where this amounts to being first tokened on a Tuesday.

This view is bad because it will deliver the wrong truth conditions for thoughts. Obviously, it is possible for there to a thought that is true just in case a certain object is a square, but which does *not* involve a concept first tokened on a Tuesday. But the theory rules out this possibility; it will not deliver the correct truth conditions for such thoughts. And so it is unsatisfactory.

The non-cognitivist view just sketched, however, does not have this difficulty. As I have just argued, its account of the representation of the property of being a reason delivers the correct results regarding the extent of the representation. Thus, the claim that playing the role sketched is what explains the concept's contribution to the truth

conditions of thoughts containing it will not produce incorrect results. The account, due to its extensional adequacy, will attribute exactly where it should a concept that contributes the property of being a reason to the truth conditions of thoughts containing it. Thus, at least the most obvious worry about the non-cognitivist claiming that her conception of normative representation helping to explain truth conditions is not borne out.

Another potential cognitivist complaint, however, is that the non-cognitivist's account of representation is not capable of explaining how normative thoughts can be true in a *robust* sense. Perhaps for a thought to be robustly true, it cannot have truth conditions in part explained by property-independent representation, such as the non-cognitivist's account of normative representation. The objection might go roughly as follows.

When a property is represented via property-independent representation, it is not a fully *real* property. The fully real properties are those that play a role in the account of our thought about them; they are “there anyway,” and our thought latches onto them. But when a property is the sort of property that is represented in the property-independent way, it is not there anyway, waiting for our thought to latch onto. Thus, facts involving such properties are not fully real. And so the truth of propositions about such matters cannot be understood in terms of correspondence, with the facts, which is how the present notion of robustness should be understood. Normative facts, on this view, are too metaphysically lightweight to explain the truth of normative propositions. And thus normative propositions, and so normative beliefs as well, are not *robustly* true. The non-cognitivist may be able to correctly assign truth conditions to normative thoughts, but the

kind of truth in question is not the full, robust kind of truth.

There is not yet a *problem* for non-cognitivism. The non-cognitivist is likely perfectly fine with normative facts' being metaphysically lightweight, and thus normative truth's being accordingly lightweight. So thus far all the "complaint" has done is (potentially) identify an interesting feature of the non-cognitivist's view.

One might think that there are problems lurking, however. There are a battery of objections to deflationary theories of truth, and the non-cognitivist has just embraced a view of normative truth that is, in some sense, less than robust.³⁵ If the only theory of truth that is ultimately workable is a robust, correspondence theory of truth, but the non-cognitivist's account of normative representation is only capable of explaining how normative propositions and thoughts can be true in some deflated sense, then the non-cognitivist is *not* able to give an account of normative representation that allows us to explain everything that needs explaining. But it is *far* from clear that that is the case. Thus, if there is a problem for non-cognitivism here, it is very hard to see just what it is.³⁶

The cognitivist may have another worry about the non-cognitivist's account of normative representation being able to explain everything we want explained about the truth conditions of normative beliefs. The cognitivist can point out that the kind of account of normative representation given does not help explain why it is that a normative concept contributes exactly the truth conditions that it does, in the sense of contributing the *extension* that it does. That is, the account does not help explain why it is that REASON contributes a property with an extension such that fact *p* falls under the

³⁵ For many of these objections (and replies), see Horwich (1998).

³⁶ Further, it should not be assumed that all of the objections facing deflationary views like Horwich's will automatically apply to whatever position to the non-cognitivist adopts. She could take up a wide variety of views of truth, more or less similar to extant deflationary theories.

extension, but fact *q* does not.

If normative representation were regulation, such an explanation would plausibly be on offer. Take a normal-conditions based regulation account, on which a concept *C* represents those things to which it is applied under normal conditions. Under normal conditions, *C* is applied to *x* and *y* but not to *z*. Thus, we have an explanation of why *C* represents a property with *x* and *y* in its extension, but not *z*. It is because, under normal conditions, *C* is applied to *x* and *y* but not to *z*. On any regulation view, there will be a story along such lines.

On the non-cognitivist's view of normative representation, however, there is no such story. REASON represents a certain property due to its playing a certain motivational, deliberative, and social role, and being applied in some broad ballpark. But what is the extension of the property that REASON represents? Perhaps it is limited by the broad ballpark, but other than that, we are in the dark. So, there is something left unexplained.

However, this is a *virtue* of the theory, not a vice. As discussed above, it should *not* be that, by looking at how some class of tokens of REASON are applied, we can learn the substantive normative facts regarding what reasons there are. Discovering this is a matter of substantive normative inquiry, not examining the application of concepts. So, while something important *is* left unexplained, this is just as it should be.

Thus, I conclude that there is not yet reason to think that an account of normative representation must appeal to normative properties in order to explain anything about the truth conditions of normative beliefs.

Third, it very plausibly is important and useful that we represent normative

properties. One might want an account of what it is to represent normative properties to help explain this. And one might suspect that, without appealing to normative properties, no account that explains this can be given.

When representation is regulation, this line of thought is very plausibly correct. What is useful about having a concept that stands in a regulation relation to a property is plausibly that the concept carries *information* about (the extension of) the property. It is useful to have a concept that represents (the property of being) water, for example, because having such a concept amounts to having a certain sort of epistemic connection with water. But to give an account of the representation that explains why possessing the concept amounts to an epistemic connection to *water*, it seems plausible that water will need to appear in the account of the representation. Thus, I grant that, where representation is regulation, it is very plausible that accounts of representation will need to appeal to the represented property in order to help explain what is important or useful about representing the property.

However, when a kind of representation is *not* regulation, it is not possible to explain the usefulness of having that sort of representation of a property in terms of carrying information. It is not part of what it is for a concept to represent (in this way) the property that any kind of token of the concept tend to be applied to it. Thus, a person or whole community might be systematically misapplying the concept, and yet still have it represent the property. The concept, then, need *not* carry information about the extension of the property it represents. Insofar as representing the property is useful, it is not useful in this way. And this makes it more plausible that an explanation of what is useful about representing the property can be based on an account of the representation that does not

appeal to the property.

To avoid misunderstanding, I am not denying that it might turn out that a person or community's concept REASON is tokened in a way that does carry information about which facts are reasons. But, if so, this is just a contingent feature of the way the person or community applies the concept. Someone else, or another community, might systematically misapply REASON, and thus their concept would carry no information about reasons. Thus, it is not the fact that REASON represents the property of being a reason that helps explain why REASON carries information about the reasons. But this does not preclude some particular person's tokening of the concept from carrying such information.

The natural question at this point is: what is useful and important about representing normative properties? The non-cognitivist's answer will follow naturally from her account of what the representation amounts to. For a concept to represent a normative property is, again, primarily for it to play a certain motivational, deliberative, and social role. And it is useful to have concepts that play such roles for a variety of reasons that I need not rehearse here.³⁷ Crucially, spelling these out does not require appeal to normative properties. Thus, the account of normative representation will not need to appeal to normative properties in order to help explain why it is useful to represent the normative.

Fourth, one might want an account of normative representation to help explain normative *disagreement*. When one person believes that p is a reason to ϕ , and another

³⁷ Such reasons have been discussed in various places, see e.g. Gibbard (1990) and (2003), Blackburn (1993), and Korsgaard (2009).

believes p is not a reason to ϕ , they disagree. But perhaps in order for this to be the case, having these beliefs must involve *property-dependent* representation of normative properties. There are a number of ways to run such an argument. Maybe in order for there to be real disagreement, there must really be a fact of the matter to disagree about, and there is only really a fact of the matter to disagree about if the facts are about the instantiation of properties which are represented in a property-dependent way. If so, then the non-cognitivist will not be able to explain real disagreement, and this is a problem for the non-cognitivist.

I think there is a strong, although *prima facie* case that this is not so. Start by noting that, even granting that *real* disagreement can only be explained by property-dependent representation, we can define up disagreement*, which can be explained in the same manner, but by property-independent representation. Now the question is: is it crucial that the non-cognitivist deliver disagreement, and not just disagreement*?

Here is a reason to think it is not. The non-cognitivist's goal is to provide an account of our normative practice, our normative thought and talk. Part of that includes our practice of disagreeing with one another, or claiming that two people do or do not disagree about some issue. The target practice is the practice of regular people, not philosophers with complex philosophical views. As such, while the practice will determine certain social features of disagreement, it will *not* speak to difficult metaphysical questions about its nature, such as whether it can only be explained by property-dependent representation. For example, our practice *does* determine that disagreement is expressed (in English) via words and phrases like “no” and “that is not true” and “I disagree.” When two people disagree, there is at least some sense in which

they cannot both be right. But our practice leaves open many things about disagreement. For example, debated is whether there is such a thing as “faultless” disagreement, and what this might amount to. People are often unsure and give conflicting answers about whether a certain case counts as disagreement.³⁸ Disagreement is a social phenomenon, its boundaries determined by ordinary practice. And such ordinary practice is simply silent on questions of difficult metaphysics. Thus, I see no reason that the non-cognitivist is compelled to give an account of disagreement, where this can be explained only via property-dependent representation, as opposed to disagreement*, which can be explained via property-independent representation.

Fifth, the cognitivist might argue that only an account of normative representation that appeals to normative properties will be able to explain the essential similarity between normative representation and representation of non-normative properties. Perhaps there are different notions of representation. But they still form *some* sort of unified kind. However, to include as a kind of representation a relation an account of which can be given without appealing to a normative property would be to make representation an *extremely* disjunctive notion. But it is not. Thus, the non-cognitivist cannot explain the unity of representation, without appealing to normative properties in the account of normative representation.

One possible line of response from the non-cognitivist goes as follows. As discussed above, I am thinking of representation primarily as whatever feature of concepts (for example) which explains their contributions to the truth conditions of

³⁸ See e.g. Sarkissian et al. (2011), Knobe and Yalcin (2014), and Knobe and Khoo (2016).

thoughts containing them. A certain thought, the thought that fact p is a reason for action, is true just in case fact p is a reason for action. This is explained in part by what is represented by the concepts the thought contains. In this case, the truth conditions are partially explained by the fact that one concept represents the property of being a reason for action. Thus, whatever feature of REASON FOR ACTION explains its contribution to the truth conditions of thoughts containing it, that is what its representation of the property of being a reason for action amounts to. One might have thought that, at least for all concepts expressed by predicates, this feature would be the concept's standing in some regulation relation to a property. But as the thought experiments above show, that is simply not the case.

Is it a cost that representation becomes a disjunctive notion on the non-cognitivist's view? Not obviously. First, it is not totally disjunctive. There is a common role, that of helping to explain truth (or accuracy) conditions, that all cases of representation have in common. The question then is whether it is costly to think that, in different cases, what does this explaining is something different. I do not see a reason to think it is. It would be totally reasonable to think that the story of how HORSE and OR get their contents is quite different, the first via some sort of regulation relation between HORSE and horses, and the second via the concept's inferential role. Here, disjunctiveness seems perfectly fine. Of course, one might think this is because OR is a logical constants, and logical constants are importantly different from concepts expressed by predicates, so we should not be surprised that OR gets its content in a special way. But a very natural conclusion to draw from the Normative Twin Earth cases is that normative concepts, too, are importantly different from non-normative concepts. So it seems entirely plausible that

they too come to have their contents in a different way. There is no clear problem for the non-cognitivist here.

A sixth feature of representation that we might think can only be explained by positing property-dependent representation is helpfully illustrated by asking a contrastive question. Why does a certain normative concept, given that it plays a certain functional role, represent *this* (normative) property, rather than *that* one? Why is it that, for example, when a concept plays the motivational, deliberative, and social role described above, the concept represents the property of being an action that one ought to perform, rather than the property of being, for example, an action that is *wrong* to perform?

This seems like the sort of question that should have an answer. Moreover, it seems like the sort of question that will only be answered via appeal to the represented property. The answer will say that normative property N1, rather than normative property N2, is represented by concept C, not just because C plays a certain sort of role, but because there is some sort of match between that role and N1, rather than N2. To take a non-normative example, we might say that a given concept represents the property of being a horse because it is applied to a certain set of things, *and the property of being a horse is shared by those things*. Since it is *this* property, rather than some other property, whose extension matches the pattern of application of the concept, *this* property is represented. But the non-cognitivist cannot say anything like this; she cannot appeal to the property. This raises the worry that she will not be able to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of why we have representation of the property that we do. It seems

that only a theory that posits property-dependent representation of the normative will be fully explanatory, as only it will be able to answer this contrastive question.

My response to this worry comes in two parts. The first is to suggest that what makes the above question seem pressing is a background picture which the non-cognitivist can and should reject. The non-cognitivist thinks that normative properties exist only in a deflated sense. That is, while it is no mistake to say that there is a property of being an action that I ought to perform, this does not in any substantial sense go beyond saying that there are some actions that I ought to perform. Normative properties, on this view, should not be thought of as substantive entities that we can point to independently of thinking normative thoughts. And so, we cannot point to one and ask why *it* is represented by a given concept. We talk of normative properties, but to talk of them is just to express normative judgments. And we think of normative properties, but, as stated above, to think of them is just to make those judgments, i.e. to think thoughts deploying concepts with functional roles along the lines of that described above. Normative properties do not have the kind of independent existence needed to get the above sort of questioning off of the ground.

Seeing things this way helps us see why the non-cognitivist can, in a principled way, refuse to give the sort of answer the cognitivist would to a question regarding why a certain normative concept represents the property that it does, as opposed to some other property. A concept's representing a particular normative property, on the non-cognitivist's view, is nothing over and above the concept playing a certain sort of functional role. There is no question of why playing that role establishes a representational connection to *this* property rather than *that* property; to represent

normative property N1 *just is* to play that role. Again, as discussed above, there is never an informative answer to the question of why to be F *just is* to be G. And so there is nothing amiss about the non-cognitivist's unwillingness to give an answer here.

One might of course object that property-independent representation simply should not count as a kind of representation. Perhaps that is so, but it is beside the main point. The real question is whether or not we need property-dependent representation to explain anything about normative thought and talk that we need to explain. The non-cognitivist contends that what she calls property-independent representation of normative properties -- but which one could simply call the playing of certain deliberative, motivational, and social roles -- is enough; she contends that property-dependent representation is not needed. What gets labelled as "representation" is not what really matters.

A question of explanatory power still remains. On the cognitivist view, the question, "why does a concept that plays the role of OUGHT represent the property that it does, as opposed to some other?" is a question that will have a substantive, informative answer. Moreover, it is an answer of a sort that only the cognitivist can give. On the non-cognitivist's view, however, the question has no substantive answer, and *a fortiori* no answer that the non-cognitivist can provide. Does this make cognitivism more explanatorily powerful? I think it does not. The cognitivist offers an explanation to a question, the non-cognitivist offers an explanation of why the question has no substantive answer. Both provide answers that, if correct, leave no relevant mysteries remaining or phenomena unexplained. And so neither is to be preferred to the other due to being more explanatory.

As stated above, there is always the possibility that we will identify some hitherto unnoticed feature of normative representation. And there is always the possibility that, for an account of normative representation to explain this feature of it, an appeal to the represented normative property will be necessary. If so, Premise Two of the Regulation Argument is false. And, as discussed, it could be that appealing to a property-independent conception of normative representation leaves the non-cognitivist with an ultimately unworkable theory of (normative) truth. But there is at least a strong case to be made that, given that normative representation is not regulation, a fully satisfactory account of normative representation can be given without appealing to normative properties.

4. Arguing for Premise Three: Parsimony

Premise three states:

- 3) If the minimal satisfactory view of normative representation does not appeal to normative properties, we should think non-cognitivism is true.

This premise relies on simplicity being a theoretical virtue. A common idea, both in science and in philosophical disputes, is that, if two theories both explain the relevant data, the simpler theory is to be favored. I have just argued that an account of this that does not appeal to normative properties will be sufficient to explain everything about normative explanation that we want explained. Due to not appealing to these properties, this theory will be simpler than the cognitivist's. Thus, we should think normative properties do not figure in the account of normative representation.

This is *not* to say that there is no explanatorily adequate account of normative representation that appeals to these properties. There certainly will be. It goes as follows. The non-cognitivist says that, for normative concept C to represent normative property F is for C to play a certain motivational, deliberative, and social role. The cognitivist can say that for normative concept C to represent normative property F is for C to play that role *and* for F to be in some sense apt to be represented by any concept that plays that role.³⁹ The cognitivist will always have such an option available. My point is simply that such an account is inferior to the non-cognitivist's, as it is less simple. It appeals both to normative properties *and* to some feature of these properties which make them apt to be represented by concepts playing roles of the above sort; the non-cognitivist explains normative representation without such appeals. Thus the non-cognitivist view should be preferred.

The cognitivist may object in two ways. First, she might argue against the claim that the more parsimonious account should be accepted. Why think that, at least when it comes to the account of what it is for a concept to represent a normative property, parsimony is a guide to truth? I will not try to address this question here. If the cognitivist agrees that the non-cognitivist can explain everything there is to explain about normative representation, and do so in a more parsimonious fashion than the cognitivist, I am happy to accept that and leave the fight over the significance of parsimony in accounts of items for another time.⁴⁰

However, the cognitivist might also object to the claim that the non-cognitivist

³⁹ The view of Wedgwood (2001) and (2007) is a prominent example of a view very similar to this.

⁴⁰ The fight will be interestingly complicated if one adopts a plenitudinous conception of essence. For then there really will be multiple relations, one with a more complex essence and one with a simpler one. The fight then becomes not over which relation obtains, but over something else: which relation we talk about, which relation we *should* talk about, which relation plays more interesting roles, etc.

really has offered a more parsimonious account. In particular, as discussed, many cognitivists will be able to claim that their accounts make normative representation out to be just the same sort of thing as non-normative representation, whereas the non-cognitivist must posit some importantly different sort of representation. Arguably this counts against the non-cognitivist's parsimony, as, *ceteris paribus*, she recognizes more forms of representation than the cognitivist.

The cognitivist's additional parsimony matters only if she can actually explain the data revealed by the Normative Twin Earth thought experiments. Can she explain how people whose concepts are applied in such different ways nonetheless represent the very same normative properties, allowing for disagreement? And can she explain the epistemological results above? If she cannot, then questions of parsimony do not arise, since the cognitivist's view does not even explain the data. But if they *do*, then we can again return to parsimony. A cognitivist will likely need to appeal to some new resources in order to explain the data. Now the question becomes: is a view with those resources more parsimonious than the non-cognitivist's? Obviously, cognitivist views vary greatly, so no general answers are available here. But my suggestion is that, even if a cognitivist view is shown to be workable, considerations of parsimony will make it far from clear that we should accept it over a non-cognitivist view.⁴¹

⁴¹ For example, Dunaway and McPherson (2016) propose a cognitivist theory of this kind. They argue that, by claiming that normative properties are highly *natural* or *elite*, in the sense of Lewis (1983) and (1984), and thus "reference magnetic," they can show how a standard account of mental representation can give the proper results in Normative Twin Earth cases. But on the way to doing so they take on a number of heavy-duty commitments, including to a much more metaphysically loaded notion of eliteness or naturalness than even Lewis accepts. So while they appeal to a very general theory of representation, they also appeal to a number of controversial resources. This makes any claim to increased parsimony over the non-cognitivist highly suspect.

A potential worry about my argument is that it will overgeneralize. There may be a number of concepts that do not represent via regulation, for example logical concepts and the concept of metaphysical necessity. It seems that I am committed to thinking that non-cognitivism is true in these cases as well. But, for a number of reasons, I would rather not be committed to these results. I would like to be able to show, then, that there is some difference between the normative cases and these other cases which does not commit anyone who accepts the Regulation Argument in the normative case to accept analogous arguments in the case of logic or metaphysical necessity.

I suspect that premises analogous to Premises One and Two of the Regulation Argument would hold in these other cases. Regarding Premise One, I think it is plausible that the way in which these concepts represent is not based on regulation. And regarding Premise Two, I think it is plausible that, given this, an account of their representation could be given that is both property-independent and explanatorily satisfactory, i.e. it would help to explain everything that a theory of the representation should be able to help explain. To avoid reaching the conclusion that we should be non-cognitivists about logic and metaphysical necessity, then, the best way is to deny the premises analogous to Premise 3.

In the case of logical concepts, this premise would say: if the minimal satisfactory theory of logical representation (i.e. what it is for logical concepts to represent) does not appeal to logical objects (such as truth functions), we should think logical non-cognitivism is true. I suspect that this is not true. The property-independent theory of representation on offer, although explanatorily satisfactory, is *not* to be preferred to some property-dependent rival. This is because, I suspect, there is a yet more explanatorily

powerful theory of logical concepts' representation which is property-dependent. It is more explanatorily powerful because it is more general; it subsumes many other concepts as well. That is, there will be some highly general theory of representation that will produce the correct (property-dependent) account for not just the logical concepts, but also for other concepts, such as HORSE and ELECTRON, and likely METAPHYSICALLY NECESSARY as well. It would take us too far afield to discuss what such a theory might look like, and why it would successfully apply to the cases of logic and metaphysical necessity, but not to the case of the normative. It would require closely examining a number of theories of normative representation, such as that of Wedgwood (2001) and (2007), and Dunaway and McPherson (2016), and arguing that they do not succeed. These theories try to do just what I am skeptical of: provide a general theory of representation (perhaps not maximally general, but fairly general at least) which is both property-dependent and is plausible even for the case of normative concepts. The theories are importantly different and there is much to be said about each, and so they cannot be addressed here.

Now we have arrived at an unsurprising place, regarding the cases of logical concepts and the concept of metaphysical necessity. If some general, property-dependent theory of representation works for the logical concepts and the concept of metaphysical necessity, then we should be cognitivists about these. If not, we should be non-cognitivists. And similarly for the normative case; Premise 3 of the Regulation Argument plausibly only works if there is no independently plausible, general theory of representation that works for the normative case as well. What I have tried to show is simply *why*, if things go this way, the cognitivist theory should be accepted. *Not* because

it alone can explain what we want explained regarding normative representation; I have argued that the non-cognitivist's view can do that as well. The cognitivist's advantage will be, at most, that she can offer an account of representation that is more explanatorily powerful due to its being more general, i.e. subsuming normative representation under a more general theory of representation.

But I am overall less concerned with Premise Three. My main concern is to show that a non-cognitivist theory is workable. If the cognitivist can *also* give a workable theory, and one that in one stroke explains all representation (or lots of it), then the cognitivist has the more explanatorily powerful theory, and very plausibly thus has the preferable view, depending on just how plausible the general theory of representation is. But, even if so, cognitivism would win only by decision, not by knockout. It would win only due to superiority regarding an ancillary theoretical virtue, rather than due to it being the only view that can meet the minimum requirement of explaining all the relevant data.

5. Conclusion

My argument is not that the thought experiments of Hare, Dreier, and Horgan and Timmons directly show that cognitivism is false. My argument is that, once we abandon the kinds of cognitivism these thought experiments show to be false, views that say that normative representation is a kind of regulation, appealing to normative properties in the accounts of normative representation does not help do any additional explanatory work. They may well be able to explain everything about normative representation that they need to. But they contain an extraneous part.

The end result is that we plausibly have reason to prefer an account of normative

representation that does not appeal to normative properties. Still setting aside certain error-theoretic cognitivist views, if the account of normative representation does not appeal to normative properties, then non-cognitivism is true. And while I have not had the space to argue for the claim here, the thought experiments described above tell against these error-theoretic cognitivist views just as well as against regulation-based views.⁴² Thus, we end up with substantial reason to believe that non-cognitivism is true.

⁴² In short, this is because these views, in order to make normative concepts determine conditions under which they would achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties, would need to make them behave just like concepts whose representation is in fact regulation.

Chapter Three: Atomic Credences about Reasons, Part One

1. Introduction

The last chapter argued that the non-cognitivist has an account of normative representation just as explanatorily powerful as any cognitivist account. I argued for this claim by trying to show that given that normative representation is not a *regulation* relation, there is no explanatory power that is gained by appealing to normative properties in one's account of normative representation. That chapter aimed to give a general argument that the non-cognitivist's view of normative representation will be just as explanatorily powerful as the cognitivist's.

In this chapter and Chapters Four and Five, I have a very similar objective, but approach from a different angle. My focus will not be on normative *representation*, but on normative *thought*; I will discuss the mental states that do the representing, not the representation itself. I approach from another angle in the following sense. In the last chapter, I argued that what the non-cognitivist *does not* have access to *is not* explanatorily helpful. She cannot appeal to normative properties in her account of normative representation, but such appeals do not help explain anything. Now, I will argue that what the non-cognitivist *does* have access to *is* explanatorily helpful. I will show just how much a non-cognitivist can build into her account of normative thought. Of course, this will not show that the non-cognitivist can explain *everything*; we might always think of something else. But it will help to illustrate just how much is available to the non-cognitivist, and how full and familiar of an account of normative thought the non-cognitivist can give.

The fruits of this will come in the second half of Chapter Five. There, I will argue

that the non-cognitivist can explain the normative properties of normative credences. In particular, I will argue that the non-cognitivist can explain, just as well as the cognitivist, why it is in some sense *bad* or *irrational* to have normative credences that fail to obey the probability axioms. The argument there will rely on the premise that the non-cognitivist can deliver just the same account of what it is to be a normative credence that the cognitivist can, with the obvious exception of being a state that achieves, or “tries” to achieve, property-dependent representation of a normative property. For every aspect of a potential account of normative credences that only the cognitivist can accept, there is a risk that *that* is what explains these normative features of the states. Thus, by illustrating just how full of an account the non-cognitivist can give, we are given reason to think that, whatever exactly explains these normative features of the states, the non-cognitivist can accept that the states have those features. Thus, one major reason to fill out a non-cognitivist account of what it is to have these states is to support the argument that the non-cognitivist can explain the normative features of these states.

In this chapter, I will begin filling in a non-cognitivist view of normative thought. I will do so by responding to an objection to non-cognitivism posed in Smith (2002), that the non-cognitivist cannot provide an adequate account of states of normative uncertainty. This chapter aims to show how the non-cognitivist can deliver an account that at least accommodates the data that Smith presents. Chapter Four adds more to the picture. And Chapter Five addresses *logically complex* states of normative uncertainty. The cumulative effect will be to make the case that the non-cognitivist can provide a rich and explanatorily powerful view of these mental states.

I now turn to normative uncertainty and Smith’s objection.

2. Normative Uncertainty: Confidence and Strength

One can be less than fully confident in a normative proposition. A person can be unsure whether one ought to tell the truth in some given situation, or whether the fact that an action leads to the pain of a fish is a strong reason to not perform it. Any complete meta-normative theory -- any complete theory of our normative thought and talk -- must explain what normative uncertainty consists in. In this chapter, I begin to take up this task on behalf of the non-cognitivist.¹

Smith's objection begins with two important observations regarding credences about values. But his observations apply equally well to the focus of the next two chapters, credences about *reasons*. So I will transpose his observations and argument to the case of reasons; my response can also be directly transposed to the case of credences regarding values.

Smith's observations concern the *functional roles* of credences about reasons. A state's functional role is its position in the web of causal interactions between a person's perceptual inputs, mental states, and behavioral outputs. For example, the belief that grass is green plausibly has as parts of its role to be caused (given certain conditions apply) by the perception that grass is green. And another part of its role is plausibly to, in concert with other beliefs and desires, make one act as if grass is green. There are many difficult questions about functional roles, but the general idea is all we need. Not only do states have functional roles, but very plausibly a state's functional role comprises part of the account of what it is; part of what it is to be some particular normative credence, for

¹ Recently, a number of writers have examined how normative uncertainty affects what one should do. This is *not* my question. My question is what normative uncertainty *is*, not how it should be responded to.

example, is to have a certain functional role.²

Smith starts with a version of Judgment Internalism, the thesis that there is a special, tight connection between normative judgment and motivation.³ Roughly indicating the idea, he writes:

[W]hen an agent judges that some action is desirable she also appears to be in a state that has the potential to lead her all the way to action, at least in so far as she is rational. No additional desire to (say) do whatever it is that she happens to value doing is needed.⁴

Smith's idea, transposed to reasons, is that part of the functional role of judgments about reasons is to produce motivation. Insofar as the state plays its role, the judgment that p is a reason to ϕ will produce motivation to ϕ . If one is not so motivated, one suffers from *akrasia*, a form of irrationality.⁵ However, Smith goes on to point out that the actual situation is more complicated than just suggested, in two ways.⁶

One does not simply judge that p is a reason for one to ϕ . One is confident *to a certain degree* that p is a reason to ϕ . Further, one is confident to a certain degree that p is a reason *of a certain strength* to ϕ . (I ignore as irrelevant that the full judgment may

² This claim is much weaker than *functionalism* regarding normative credences, which is the thesis that *all there is* to having a certain normative credence is having a state that plays a certain functional role. I just claim that, very plausibly, having a state with a certain functional role makes up *part* of the account of what it is to have a certain normative credence.

³ For a helpful recent overview, see Björklund (2012).

⁴ Smith (2002), p. 305.

⁵ This may only be true while deliberation regarding whether to ϕ is ongoing. Perhaps it is perfectly fine to cease to be motivated by considerations that count in favor of a course of action that one has decided to not take. Smith's challenge will be a good one either way.

⁶ There is a third, having to do with the modal robustness with which a judgment is held. But this poses no problem for the non-cognitivist.

include an agent and a circumstance.) Smith's point is that judgments about reasons come both with a degree of confidence, what he calls certitude, and also with a degree of strength, what he calls importance. Thus, providing an account of the judgment that p is a reason to ϕ is not enough. What is needed is a general account of the state of being confident to degree c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ .

Smith next notes that degrees of confidence and strength both impact the degree of motivation that it is the functional role of the state to produce.⁷ To see this regarding confidence, consider the following two states: a *high* degree of confidence that the fact that an action would cause intense pain to a fish is a medium strength reason to not perform it, and a *low* degree of confidence that the fact that an action would cause intense pain to a fish is a medium strength reason to not perform it. Smith's very plausible idea is the higher degree of confidence will produce more motivation to ϕ than the lower. A higher degree of confidence that the fact that an action would cause intense pain to a fish is a medium strength reason to perform it produces more motivation than does a lower degree of confidence. I accept Smith's claim.⁸

Smith's claims are limited in scope, in two ways. First, he is only saying that the specified motivational role is *part* of the functional role of the credence. Smith recognizes that there is more to such a state than (this part of) its motivational role.

Second, Smith's claim is only about the role of particular credences, not the overall motivational upshot of a person's full credence function regarding what strength

⁷ I will sometimes write that a state *produces* a certain degree of motivation. I always mean that it is the state's functional role to produce this motivation. States sometimes fail to play their roles, so I do not mean that having such a normative credence *always* results in one's having the motivation in question.

⁸ I am working with an additive picture of motivation on which one has a number of motivational states of different strengths pushing one towards ϕ -ing, the same sorts of states pushing against ϕ -ing, and one will typically (try to) ϕ or not ϕ based on which set of motivations sums to the greater strength.

of a reason to ϕ p is. Two people could each have a *low* degree of confidence that the fact that an action would cause intense pain to a fish is a medium strength reason to not perform it, for instance, and yet, due to differences in their *other* credences (and other differences), end up with vastly different degrees of motivation to perform the action. A person's total motivation to ϕ will be based on many different aspects of her overall mental state; Smith's claim is just about the upshot of the particular credence in question.

Smith's observation about the motivational upshot of degree of confidence is accompanied by an exactly parallel point about degree of reason strength. Consider now the following two states: a .7 credence that the fact that an action would cause intense pain to a fish is a *strong* reason to not perform it, and a .7 credence that the fact that an action would cause intense pain to a fish is a *weak* reason to not perform it. Smith claims that the credence that the fact is a *weak* reason will lead to less motivation than the credence that it is a *strong* reason.

A .7 credence that the fact that an action would cause intense pain to a fish is a *strong* reason to not perform it will lead to more motivation to not perform the action than will a .7 credence that the fact that the action would cause intense pain to a fish is a *weak* reason to not perform it. Again bearing in mind the two senses in which Smith's claim is limited in scope, I accept Smith's claim about the motivational upshot of degree of reason strength.⁹

Smith argues that the non-cognitivist is unable to identify features of normative judgments that correspond to the different degrees of confidence and reason strength. In his terminology, the non-cognitivist cannot give accounts of what degrees of certitude

⁹ The motivation that is produced is in need of explication. For our purposes, we can simply think of these as desires of various strengths.

and importance are. His argument proceeds along the following lines.

Suppose a non-cognitivist thinks that to judge that p is a reason to ϕ is to desire to ϕ because p , i.e. to have a desire to ϕ based on one's belief that p . Desires have one relevant dimension of variation. They can be stronger or weaker. But the state in question has *two* independent dimensions of variation: its degree of certitude and its degree of importance. Both of these, as they increase, increase the amount of motivation produced. Clearly the strength of desire also does this. But this is only one dimension. The problem for the non-cognitivist, Smith argues, is that she will not be able to produce a second dimension.

Here is another way to see the challenge. It is possible to have a *high* degree of confidence that p is a *weak* reason to ϕ , or a *low* degree of confidence that p is a *strong* reason to ϕ . These two states, we can suppose, produce an identical, medium strength motivation to ϕ . The simple non-cognitivist view just sketched would thus claim that these two states are identical; they are both simply a medium strength desire based on the belief that p . But the states are *not* identical.¹⁰ Thus, this simple non-cognitivist view is inadequate. Smith goes on to examine a more complex non-cognitivist view, which defines normative credences as higher-order desires, but finds that proposal unsatisfactory as well. He challenges the non-cognitivist to do better.

There are two pieces of data about credences about reasons that we have so far identified. The first is that they play a certain motivational role. Each credence has as its role to produce a certain amount of motivation. More specifically, the credence of c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ produces motivation to ϕ of a degree proportional to both c

¹⁰ One could respond to Smith by claiming that the states really are identical. I agree with Smith that the states are distinct; below I will identify how.

and m . This first datum is easily accommodated by a very simple non-cognitivist view that defines normative credences as states which motivate, to a certain degree.

That simple view, however, does not accommodate the second datum. The second datum is that distinct credences can produce identical amounts of motivation. The produced motivation to ϕ is proportional to both c and s . Thus, a high c and a low s will result in the same motivation to ϕ as a low c and a high s . And a state with both a middling c and middling s will produce still the same motivation to ϕ .¹¹ That is, the motivation to ϕ produced by a high credence that p is a weak reason to ϕ may well be the same as that produced by a low credence that p is a strong reason to ϕ , and by a medium credence that p is a medium strength reason to ϕ . If the non-cognitivist holds that *all* there is to these states is (this part of) their motivational roles, she will end up identifying these distinct states. Any simple such view is therefore false, because these states are not identical.

The problem is not that the non-cognitivist has said anything false. Her view is correct in saying that all of the credences just mentioned motivate one to ϕ to an equal degree. The problem is just that the non-cognitivist has not said enough. The second datum, that the states are distinct, has not yet been accommodated. The non-cognitivist must build into her account the way or ways in which these states differ, despite their being identical in the motivational role we have discussed.

If she can do this, she will have met Smith's challenge. She will be able to account for the different roles of certitude and importance. For example, starting from a middling credence that p is a reason of middling strength to ϕ , she will be able to account

¹¹ Again, different people with these states may differ in their *other* motivations regarding ϕ -ing, resulting in very different net motivations.

for the difference between a credence that has a higher degree of certitude, and a credence that has a higher degree of importance. She will be able to account for the different parts that degrees of certitude and importance play in making a state the state it is.

Note that at this point we do not know what these parts are. All we have said thus far is that credences about reasons play motivational roles, and that certain distinct credences about reasons play identical motivational roles regarding the action they are about. We do not yet know what difference makes states differ in degrees of certitude, as opposed to degrees of importance.

Before offering my own solution to this Smith's challenge, I will argue that its best extant rival, that proposed by Andrew Sepielli (2012), fails.¹²

3. Sepielli's Solution

Andrew Sepielli (2012) argues that any non-cognitivist view which is able to give a satisfactory account of negated normative judgments -- such as the belief that lying is *not* wrong -- is able to give an adequate account of normative credences. The idea is this. A non-cognitivist must factor normative judgments into parts in order to adequately account for negated beliefs. If she simply claims that to believe that lying is wrong is to disapprove of lying, then she will have no good account of what it is to believe that lying is *not* wrong. She needs to add more structure to normative beliefs to meet this challenge.¹³

¹² Here I set aside "hybrid expressivist" responses to Smith, such as those of Lenman (2003) and Ridge (2007). I think they do not succeed, largely for reasons discussed in Bykvist and Olsson (2009).

¹³ For discussion of the "negation problem" for non-cognitivism, see especially Schroeder (2008).

Sepielli takes the account of Schroeder (2008) as an example of how this can be done. Schroeder proposes, on behalf of the non-cognitivist, that to believe that lying is wrong is to have the attitude of *being for* the action of blaming for lying. This leads to a promising account of the belief that lying is *not* wrong: it is to be for *not* blaming for lying. Schroeder argues that the key for the non-cognitivist's being able to provide a satisfactory account of the belief that lying is not wrong is to factor the belief into an attitude like *being for* and a content like *blaming for lying* or *not blaming for lying*.

We can adapt this proposal to the case of beliefs about reasons. To believe that p is a reason to ϕ is to be for being motivated by p to ϕ . To believe that p is *not* a reason to ϕ is to be for *not* being motivated by p to ϕ .

Sepielli notes that this leads to a natural way to account for both Smith's importance and certitude. The state to be accounted for is a credence of c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ . Adapting Sepielli's proposal to the case of reasons, the suggestion is that to have such a state is to be for, to degree c , being motivated, to degree s , to ϕ . Degrees of being for are degrees of certitude, while degrees of motivation are degrees of importance. For example, to be *very confident* that the fact that an action causes intense pain to a fish is a *weak* reason to not perform it is to be *very strongly for* being *weakly* motivated to not perform the action by the fact that the action would cause intense pain to a fish. Structurally, this looks very nice.

Unfortunately, we have not yet made real progress on our current question. We wanted to know, for example, what the difference is between a high credence that p is a weak reason to ϕ , and a low credence that p is a strong reason to ϕ . Sepielli will respond: the first is a state of *strongly* being for being *slightly* motivated to ϕ , while the second is a

state of *weakly* being for being *weakly* motivated to ϕ . The problem is that, until we have a grasp on what it is to *be for* something, to a certain degree, we have no grasp on the difference between these states. We have labelled the different states, but have not yet learned what they actually are.¹⁴

The problem is actually worse than this, however. On the most natural interpretation of the state of being for view, Sepielli's view delivers the *wrong* result about the motivational upshot of normative credences.¹⁵

This interpretation goes as follows. The state of being for ϕ -ing pushes one towards ϕ -ing. The stronger the degree of being for, the stronger the push. The state of *strongly* being for ϕ -ing pushes one strongly towards ϕ -ing, while the state of *weakly* being for ϕ -ing pushes one only weakly towards ϕ -ing. The more strongly one is pushed towards ϕ -ing, the more likely is it that one will ϕ . Thus, *ceteris paribus*, a person with a state of being strongly for ϕ -ing will be more likely to ϕ than a person with a state of being weakly for ϕ -ing. But the only two possible outcomes are that the state's push will succeed, or that it will fail. The state may succeed and one will end up ϕ -ing, or it may fail and one will not end up ϕ -ing.

We can now apply this interpretation to the case of credences about reasons. The view is that a high credence that p is a weak reason to ϕ is the state of strongly being for being weakly motivated to ϕ by the belief that p . This is a state that strongly pushes one towards being weakly motivated to ϕ by the belief that p . The only possible outcomes of this state's motivational role are 1) a weak motivation to ϕ , based on the belief that p , or 2) nothing. Since the state pushes strongly, the first outcome is more likely.

¹⁴ Schroeder says very little in his (2008) which helps in this regard.

¹⁵ Thanks here to helpful discussion with Nat Tabris.

The story for a low credence that p is a strong reason to ϕ is analogous. This is the state of being weakly for being strongly motivated to ϕ by the belief that p . This is a state that weakly pushes towards being strongly motivated to ϕ by the belief that p . The only possible outcomes of this state's motivational role are 1) a strong motivation to ϕ , based on the belief that p , or 2) nothing. Since the state pushes only weakly, the second outcome is more likely.

These predictions about the motivational upshots of the two states, produced by the most natural interpretation of Sepielli's view, are incorrect. On this view, a low credence that p is a strong reason to ϕ will either produce no motivation to ϕ , as is likely, or will produce a strong motivation to ϕ . But the role of this state, as we have seen, is to produce a *medium* strength motivation to ϕ . Similarly with a high credence that p is a weak reason to ϕ . This view says that the role of the state is to make it very likely that one ends up with a weak motivation to ϕ . But that is wrong. Its role is *also* to produce a medium strength motivation to ϕ . This view delivers the wrong answer in both cases.

As Smith pointed out, the degree of credence affects the motivation produced by the state. It does not just affect the *likelihood* of an independently specified outcome. It affects that outcome itself. But the most natural interpretation of Sepielli's view does not give this result.

Of course, we could look for other ways to interpret Sepielli's view, ways that give us the correct result that a high credence that p is a weak reason to ϕ and a low credence that p is a strong reason to ϕ have the role of producing the same motivation to ϕ . And then, of course, we would need to identify the difference between the two states; to say how a difference in degree of being for differs from a difference in degree of

reason strength. But this is just to say that we need to identify the difference between degrees of certitude and degrees of importance. We are back where we started, with Smith's challenge. Thus, while some interpretation of Sepielli's view might be correct, he has not yet said enough to respond to Smith.¹⁶

I turn now to my solution to Smith's challenge.

4. An Initial Problem and Smith's Challenge

Let us start with an extremely simple non-cognitivist view. It says that a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ motivates one to ϕ , and that it motivates to a degree proportional to both c and s . Since we have seen that this is in fact a feature of the normative credence, we have the beginning of our account of these credences:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

- 1) Motivates one to ϕ , to a degree proportional to c and s

There is an obvious problem with stopping here, even independent of Smith's challenge.

It turns out that the solution to this problem is also the solution to Smith's challenge.

The obvious problem is that the account so far does not distinguish between a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ , and a credence c that q is a reason of strength s to ϕ . Since these states are obviously different, the account is deficient.

The non-cognitivist can accommodate this by adding to her account of the states.

¹⁶ It also faces other objections, presented in Bykvist and Olsson (2012). But, for reasons I cannot go into here, I do not think those objections are successful.

One's credence that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is tightly linked to one's credence in p . Very plausibly, part of the role of the credence that p is a reason is to be regulated by one's credence that p .¹⁷ One's credence that p is a reason will never (absent odd cases of irrationality, perhaps) exceed one's credence that p obtains at all.

For example, suppose I am considering going fishing. I am weighing the reasons for and against, and I am .7 confident that the fact that my going fish would result in the pain of fish is a weak reason to not go fishing. However, I then see a study about the physiology of fish, and my credence that fish feel pain at all drops to .3. Accordingly, my credence that my going fishing would result in the pain of fish drops to .3 (or a bit below) as well. It would be some kind of failing to *still*, in weighing the reasons for and against going fishing, be moved by a .7 degree of confidence that the fact that my going fishing would result in the pain of fish is a weak reason to not go fishing. If I am to be rational, I must drop my credence in the proposition that p is a reason to ϕ so that it is no higher than my credence that p obtains at all.

This provides a way to differentiate a credence that p is a reason from a credence that q is a reason. While one state is responsive in this way to one's credence that p , the other is similarly responsive to one's credence that q . More specifically, a credence of c that p is a reason to ϕ has as part of its role to cease to exist (and perhaps be replaced by another, lower, credence), if one's credence that p obtains drops below c . A credence that q is a reason to ϕ is responsive in the same way to one's credence that q . Thus, they differ.

Thus, the non-cognitivist can differentiate these two states, by adding to her

¹⁷ I do not mean "regulation" here in the defined sense of the last chapter.

account:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

- 2) Has the role of not existing along with a credence in p of less than c ¹⁸

We can now turn to Smith's objection. He claimed that the non-cognitivist is unable to successfully account for the fact that normative credences have two independent degrees of freedom, certitude and importance. The problem for the non-cognitivist is that she is in danger of falsely identifying certain credences with the same motivational outputs. The non-cognitivist must show that she can in fact distinguish these states.

Fortunately, we can now do this. Take a credence of .8 that p is a medium strength reason to ϕ , and a credence of .4 that p is a strong reason to ϕ . The first of these states has as part of its role to not exist unless one has a credence of at least .8 in p . The second does not have this role. Instead, it has as part of its role to not exist unless one has a credence of at least .4 in p . This is a difference between them. The states are differently constrained by one's credence in p . Smith's challenge is thus met.

To spell this out a bit more, take state S, a .5 credence that p is a medium strength reason to ϕ . We compare this to a state, state A, that differs just in importance: a .5 credence that p is a *strong* reason to ϕ . These states differ in the motivation to ϕ they produce; A produces more. However, they do *not* differ in their regulation by one's credence that p . Regarding this, they both have the same role: to not exist unless one has

¹⁸ This is an instance of it being part of the role of credences generally not to exist in probabilistically inconsistent sets. I discuss this further in Chapter Five.

a .5 or higher credence that p .

Now we compare state S to a further state, state B, that differs just in certitude: a .9 credence that p is a medium strength reason to ϕ . This state, once again, differs from S due to its producing more motivation to ϕ ; B produces more than S, due to B's higher degree of certitude. But now, B *also* differs from S in how they are regulated by one's credence that p . B has the role of not existing unless one has a .9 or higher credence that p , whereas S (and A) lack this. Thus, we see the differing roles of degrees of certitude and importance. Importance does not affect regulation by one's credence in the relevant p , but certitude does. This is the sort of answer Smith wanted.

One might worry that this solution is not fully satisfactory.¹⁹ For it does not help to distinguish two states closely related to those under discussion. These states are credences in conditionals regarding reasons. Credences regarding counterfactual, indicative, and material conditionals ultimately need to be addressed. Consider what is very plausibly the hardest case: credences in counterfactual conditionals.²⁰ The states we then want to tell apart are these: a high credence that, if p had been true, then p would have been a weak reason to ϕ ; and a low credence that, if p had been true, then p would have been a strong reason to ϕ . Having either is compatible with having any credence that p , so they cannot be differentiated in the same way as the simpler states. How then, can the non-cognitivist distinguish *these* states?

The first thing to say is that, setting the normative and non-cognitivism aside, it is a great question what it is to have a certain credence in *any* counterfactual. What is it to be 30% confident that, had the United States lost the Battle of Midway, Japan would have

¹⁹ Thanks to Gideon Rosen and Adam Elga for suggesting that I discuss the following issue.

²⁰ Credences in material conditionals will be addressed in Chapter Five.

won the war? Perhaps it is something like a state with the role of making one, upon suppositionally adopting a certain set of credences including certainty that the United States lost the Battle of Midway, suppositionally adopt a .3 credence that Japan wins the war. This seems plausible.

If that is so, then we *can* distinguish the credences about the normative counterfactuals in question. A *high* credence that, if p had been true, it would have been been a *weak* reason to ϕ is a state that causes one to, upon suppositionally accepting p , suppositionally adopt a high credence that p is a weak reason to ϕ . On the other hand, a *low* credence that, if p had been true, it would have been a *strong* reason to ϕ is a state that causes one to, upon suppositionally accepting p , suppositionally adopt a low credence that p is a strong reason to ϕ . I have just argued that the non-cognitivist can differentiate these two states that a person is led to suppositionally adopt. If that is correct, then the non-cognitivist can distinguish the credences in counterfactuals as well.

5. Conclusion

I conclude that the non-cognitivist can meet Smith's challenge.²¹ She can explain the different roles of certitude and importance; she can explain the difference normative credences, even when they have the same motivational output. Moreover, the solution is not a surprising one. If two states are identical in terms of what *they* cause to exist, a natural place to look for a difference is in what states cause *them* to exist (or not exist).

²¹ I have of course addressed a version of the challenge transposed to talk of reasons, rather than values, which was Smith's original target. But my solution in that case is exactly the same. My credence that Michelangelo's *Pietà* is valuable should not exceed my credence that it *exists*. I cannot rationally only be .6 confident that it still exists, and yet be .9 confident that it is valuable. Of course, one might think the latter is really the credence that, *if* it were to exist, then it would be valuable. But the non-cognitivist can analyze this state in just the same way as suggested above. So, the solutions are the same.

This is where the solution lay.

The non-cognitivist cannot stop her theorizing about normative credences here, however. It might turn out that, while she can answer Smith's challenge, there is some other advantage that the cognitivist has over the non-cognitivist in giving the accounts of what it is to have various credences about reasons. The non-cognitivist needs to show that there is no such advantage. So, the non-cognitivist must continue. She needs to argue that, for whatever the cognitivist can add to her account, the non-cognitivist can either accept that, or posit something analogous that does similar work.²²

²² There is another reason to keep theorizing. The above solution no longer works if we move to a framework on which "credences" is, in David Lewis's phrase, a "bogus plural." [Lewis (1994), p. 311]. On this view, really there are just whole credence functions, not divisible into distinct states of having one credence that q , another that r , etc. If we take this view, the regulation by one's credence in the non-normative fact in question does not help to solve Smith's problem. There are distinct whole credence functions regarding what strength of a reason p is to ϕ which produce the same motivation to ϕ , but which are also regulated in the same way by one's credence that p . These can be easily constructed. Thus, we need to keep theorizing to show that the non-cognitivist is able to distinguish these whole credence functions just as well as the cognitivist. I will not explicitly return to the issue, but at least some of the considerations I discuss below potentially help differentiate whole credence functions regarding the strength of reason that p is to ϕ .

Chapter 4: Atomic Credences about Reasons, Part Two

1. Introduction

The last chapter argued that the non-cognitivist can deliver an account of credences about reasons that satisfies the data presented by Smith (2002). To do so, I started constructing a non-cognitivist account of normative credences, claiming that they have roles that involve both producing motivation, and being regulated by certain other (non-normative) credences. In this chapter I go further by identifying more features that a non-cognitivist can build into her account. This will put significant distance between the states that non-cognitivist identify with normative thoughts and mere desires, plans, etc. It will also close the gap between the non-cognitivist's theory of normative judgments and the cognitivist's. It will show just how familiar the non-cognitivist's theory of normative thought can look. The non-cognitivist does not need to be as revisionary as one might think.

2. Groundrules

Before examining just what the non-cognitivist can build into her account of normative credences, it is worth being clear on just what restrictions she is operating under. What the non-cognitivist can and cannot build into her account of normative thoughts depends, of course, on what non-cognitivism is. In the first chapter, I defended the *Representation Explanation*:

Representation Explanation: Cognitivism is the thesis that facts about our normative thought and talk determine conditions under which our normative

terms, concepts, etc. would represent normative properties in such a way that the account of the representation would appeal to a normative property. Non-cognitivism is the denial of cognitivism.

Thus, the non-cognitivist is constrained in her theorizing. When giving a theory of normative terms, concepts, etc., she cannot build in anything which would make these determine conditions under which they would represent normative properties in such a way that the account of the representation would appeal to a normative property. She cannot have a view on which normative concepts “try” to achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. This entails that she cannot appeal to normative properties in her account of what it is for normative concepts to represent normative properties, for this would mean that the concept actually achieve this property-dependent representation.

Very plausibly, an analogous constraint obtains regarding what sorts of accounts of normative credences she can give. It would be very odd if normative properties appeared in her account of what it is to have a normative credence, or any other normative propositional attitude. It is not totally straightforward to spell out exactly what the connection is between a ban on using normative properties in an account of representation of the normative and a ban on using normative properties in an account of what it is to be a normative thought. But here is a rough picture. If normative properties do not appear in the account of representation of the normative, then our normative thought and talk is not really a matter of establishing a full-blooded connection to the normative domain. Normative properties are more like *projections* of our normative

thought and talk, rather than something we latch on to. But it would be very strange to claim that a merely projected property figures in the account of the very state that projects it. This would lead to a sort of explanatory circle: we understand the property in terms of the state that projects it, but then give an account of the state using the property. This seems suspect.¹ Thus, the non-cognitivist is best off not appealing to normative properties in her accounts of normative states. Since accepting this addition to the non-cognitivist's burden only make the task of defending non-cognitivism more difficult, I can (and do) accept it, even without a fully satisfactory defense.

Given this, I will assume non-cognitivists must not build into their accounts of normative thoughts:

- A) Anything which determines conditions under which normative concepts would achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties,
- or
- B) Normative properties.

Violating either stricture would result in the offered theory simply being a cognitivist one.

There are two ways in which the non-cognitivist can proceed in giving accounts of normative credences, or mental states in general.² The first is to try to reduce normative credences to familiar mental states such as desires, plans, emotions, etc. For

¹ Not everyone rejects this sort of picture, however. McDowell (1987), for example, famously endorses something like it.

² See Horgan and Timmons (2006) for discussion in this context.

example, a theorist might say that credences about reasons are really desires, or desires to have certain desires, or plans to have certain desires, etc.

Taking this kind of approach is ill-advised, because it severely constrains the non-cognitivist. Suppose some feature of a certain normative credence is identified. For example, suppose we hold, as we did in the last chapter, that credences about reasons play a special motivational role. On this approach, the non-cognitivist must attempt to identify some already familiar mental state that plays this special motivational role, or try to derive this motivational role by defining the credence as some pattern of familiar mental states. The problem is that there is no guarantee that a reduction is possible. Very plausibly, many mental phenomena are not reducible to other familiar mental states. Bratman (1987), for example, argues that intentions cannot be reduced to patterns in one's beliefs and desires. Perhaps normative attitudes are in this respect similar. Thus, I will *not* take this approach to giving an account of normative credences. Perhaps it can be made to work, but it is not the only way for the non-cognitivist to go.

The alternative route is to build the mental state in question from the ground up. This is the method I used in the last chapter. The raw materials on this approach need not be full blown propositional attitudes. Rather, the theorist can in principle appeal to anything in her effort to properly characterize the state. Of course, the non-cognitivist is somewhat restricted. But in many cases, when a certain feature of a certain normative credence is identified, such as a special motivational role, the non-cognitivist can simply build into her account that the state has that feature. She need not start with the state being defined as some state we are already familiar with, or a certain pattern of such states, and then seek to derive from that the fact that the state has the feature in question. I

will take this route, because it offers much more flexibility in the construction of the account of the state.

Thus the game is this. The non-cognitivist adds to her theory of what normative credences are by *stipulating* that they are states with the various features that normative credences are known to have, but without violating the strictures noted above. If she manages to give the full account without violating her strictures, she wins.³ Or, she wins this round; the game must be repeated for all mental states. If it cannot be won for any mental state, cognitivism is true. This is the game I will play in this chapter.

There is no obvious way to know when the full account has been given. At any point, we might realize that there is something else to being a normative credence, something we had previously overlooked. Thus, all I can do is to canvas every option that seems plausible, and argue either that the non-cognitivist can accept it, or something that gives her equivalent explanatory power.

In this chapter I will focus on the same sort of normative thought as in the last chapter: logically simple credences about reasons, such as a .8 credence that the fact that an action would cause a fish pain is a strong reason to not perform it. However, everything I say here applies much more broadly; it all applies to all normative credences. It applies to credences about values, virtues, oughts, etc. And it applies to logically complex normative credences, such as a .7 credence that p is a reason to ϕ **or** q is a reason to ψ . I will have more to say about logically complex credences in the next chapter.

³ Of course, a particular non-cognitivist might have other goals. For example, she might want to account for everything in a naturalistically acceptable way. But this is not part of non-cognitivism, strictly speaking. For related discussion, see Hawthorne (2002).

3. *Credences about Reasons*

I concentrate on logically simple credences regarding *reasons*, rather than about other normative matters -- right and wrong, good and bad -- for one main reason. It is plausible that at least some other kinds of normative credences can be defined largely in terms of credences regarding reasons.⁴ For example, it is plausible that to have a credence of x that one ought to ϕ can be defined, at least in part, in terms of having a credence of x that one has most reason to ϕ . If the non-cognitivist gives an account of credences about reasons, she is plausibly well on her way to an account regarding credences regarding what one ought to do. This may well succeed in other cases as well, such as credences regarding values or virtues. Thus, an account of credences about reasons may be very helpful in giving accounts of other normative credences.⁵ However, the discussion below goes through equally well for other sorts of normative credences. If nothing stops the non-cognitivist from building feature F into her theory of what it is to have a credence about reasons, then likewise nothing will stop her from building feature F into her theory of what it is to have a credences about values. Thus, my focus on reasons here is ultimately of little importance.

From the last chapter, we already have the beginnings of a non-cognitivist account of credences about reasons. We saw that:

⁴ This is something like a mental analogue to the “reasons first” approach to the normative.

⁵ Despite this, non-cognitivists have said very little about judgments about reasons. The primary exception is Blackburn (2010), but he does not address *credences* regarding reasons.

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to φ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

- 1) Motivates one to φ , to a degree proportional to c and s ,
- 2) Has the role of not existing along with a credence of less than c that p ⁶

We can now build the account further. The first addition is that of connections to linguistic dispositions. A high credence that p is a strong reason to φ has the role of, in concert with a desire to say what one thinks about the matter, lead to the assertion that p is probably a strong reason to φ .⁷ Similarly for other credences and corresponding assertions. Thus:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to φ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

- 3) Is connected to certain assertions via desires to speak one's mind

Another feature is a certain degree of modal robustness. Perhaps part of what it is to be a normative credence, as opposed to just a passing whim, is that one is disposed to have it under a suitably large range of circumstances.⁸ This gives:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to φ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

⁶ This is an instance of it being part of the role of credences generally not to exist in probabilistically inconsistent sets. I discuss this further in the next chapter.

⁷ See Gibbard (1990), p. 57.

⁸ See Smith (2002) and Blackburn (1998).

- 4) Has a sufficient degree of modal robustness

Another feature is a general sensitivity to other normative and non-normative beliefs. It is plausible that a normative credence that something is a reason must be connected, to some degree at least, to a sufficient number of one's other mental states. That is, there must be inferential or quasi-inferential connections between the states. If a state were not so connected, it would plausibly be just some aberrant feature of a person's psychology that happened to push one towards some action or attitude, rather than a full-fledged credence that something is a reason. This gives:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is to be (at least in part) a mental state that:

- 5) Has a sufficient degree of inferential or quasi-inferential connection to other mental states

The non-cognitivist has come at least some distance towards filling out the full picture of credences about reasons. The view at this stage says:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is to be (at least in part) a mental state that:

- 1) Motivates one to ϕ , to a degree proportional to c and s
- 2) Has the role of not existing along with a credence in p of less than c
- 3) Is connected to certain assertions via desires to speak one's mind
- 4) Has a certain degree of modal robustness

- 5) Has a sufficient degree of inferential or quasi-inferential connection to other mental states

The key point is that the non-cognitivist can accept all of this without violating her strictures. First, none of it appeals to normative properties. Second, in no case does the addition contain anything that makes a normative credence a state that tries to achieve property-involving representation of a normative property. Adding these features does not violate her strictures.

Another potential piece of the account of a normative credences is phenomenological. A theorist might think there is a feeling of conviction that one experiences when considering certain issues, and a feeling of lack of confidence when considering others. Describing these feelings is difficult. But perhaps part of what it is to be the state of being highly confident that p is a weak reason to ϕ is to be associated, causally or constitutively, with a feeling of conviction. And perhaps the state of having a middling degree of confidence that p is a medium strength reason to ϕ is associated with a feeling of lack of conviction.

The non-cognitivist can agree to this just as well as the cognitivist. No normative properties are needed to characterize a feeling of conviction.⁹ And there is no reason to think that being associated with a certain phenomenology of conviction makes a state one that tries to achieve property-involving representation of a normative property.¹⁰ It is unclear how much work a difference in associated feelings does in differentiating various

⁹ I am not saying that we *never* need to appeal to properties of things in the world to give an account of some part of our phenomenology. I claim only that to characterize a feeling of assuredness associated with a normative credence, we need appeal to no normative property.

¹⁰ Again, I am not claiming that a phenomenological aspect *never* makes a state represent some property or proposition. I am just claiming that a feeling of conviction or lack of conviction does not do this.

degrees of uncertainty, normative or otherwise.¹¹ But this proposal is available to the non-cognitivist. Thus the non-cognitivist is not barred from adding another piece to the account:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

- 6) Is associated with a feeling of conviction with intensity corresponding to c

Another way the non-cognitivist could fill out her account of the states is via facts about the way that normative credences are realized in the brain. There are many different ways a view of this sort could go. Perhaps there is some sort of common feature present when a state is a high credence, or a middling one, or a low one.

Repeating the usual refrain, this internal feature will not feature anything normative in its account. It is just a fact about internal features of a brain state; this does not involve the state's standing in some relation to some normative property. And, similarly, there is no reason for the non-cognitivist to think that having such an internal feature is sufficient for a state's trying to achieve property-involving representation of a normative property. Thus, the non-cognitivist can accept this addition. And the same approach could obviously be carried out regarding the strength of the reason, rather than the degree of certainty. That is, the non-cognitivist can claim that there is some internal feature of the brain state that realizes attitudes regarding strong reasons, rather than weak or middling reasons.

¹¹ Ramsey (1926) famously doubts that this is a promising way to go.

Obviously there will be doubts about the effectiveness of this strategy. Multiple realizability arguments are widely taken to show that beings with vastly different internal compositions can nonetheless have the same propositional attitudes.¹² But still, it is worth highlighting that it is yet another aspect of an account of mental states that the non-cognitivist is able to give, another way in which the cognitivist and non-cognitivist are on equal footing. The non-cognitivist is free to add:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

- 7) Is realized by a brain state with features that correspond to c and to s

These were easy cases, where there was never any serious doubt that the non-cognitivist would be at a disadvantage, unable to accept the feature as part of the account of normative credences, while the cognitivist could. I now turn to places where it is more plausible that the cognitivist enjoys an advantage over the non-cognitivist, due to her unique ability to build some feature into her account of normative credences. In every case I will argue that the cognitivist has no such advantage.

4. *Contents*

One might think that having a certain *content* is part of the account of a certain normative credence, and that only the cognitivist can say this. If so, the cognitivist has a potential advantage over the non-cognitivist.

¹² See e.g. Putnam (1967).

The idea is that (part of) what makes a state a credence that p is a strong reason to ϕ is having as content a proposition of the form: p is a strong reason to ϕ . It is a very common thought that propositional attitudes can be defined via a two-step process; to be a certain propositional attitude is to be a certain sort of attitude borne towards a certain content. To be the belief that grass is green is to be the belief attitude borne towards the proposition that grass is green. To be a .6 credence that the fact that an action would cause pain is a reason to not perform it is to be the .6 credence attitude borne towards the proposition that the fact that an action would cause pain is a reason to not perform it. One might think that this is a fully satisfactory account of what it is to have a credence, normative or otherwise. And it is an account the cognitivist can certainly accept.

However, it is less clear that the non-cognitivist can accept it as well. A state's content is commonly taken to be its representational upshot: in the case of belief a representation of what one takes the world to be like, in the case of desire a representation of the way one is motivated to make the world, etc. But since the non-cognitivist thinks that normative thoughts do not even try to achieve property-involving representation of normative properties, it is unclear if her view is compatible with normative properties having contents, or at least contents which are propositions of the form: p is a reason of strength s to ϕ . Thus, perhaps the cognitivist has an advantage here. If the non-cognitivist cannot appeal to this sort of account of what normative credences are, but the cognitivist can, perhaps only the cognitivist has a satisfactory account of what these states are.

This line of thought is mistaken. Appealing to contents does *not* help give accounts of mental states in any way that gives the cognitivist an advantage over the non-

cognitivist. No plausible view says that having a certain content is a *fundamental* fact about a mental state. A mental state has the content that it does *because* of some other features of it, such as its functional role. A certain states counts as the state of the attitude of belief borne towards the proposition that grass is green *because* the state plays a certain functional role in one's mental economy, for example. One does not *simply* bear the belief relation to the proposition that grass is green. There is some more basic story of what it is to stand in that relation to that proposition. This should be uncontroversial.¹³

The key question, then, is whether or not the non-cognitivist can give this more basic story. If she (in principle) cannot, then her view is false. But it is false not because of her inability to accept something about content, but her inability to accept some more fundamental feature of the mental state. But if the non-cognitivist *can* accept that normative credences have these more fundamental features, then she has no problem here. For if she can provide the full account of these more fundamental features, then she will be in a position to explain everything that there is to be explained about the states.¹⁴ Thus, there is no danger that non-cognitivism is false specifically because it is unable to accept a claim about normative contents. The focus should just be on those features which the cognitivist takes to explain *why* some state has the content that it does, or, rephrasing, to (metaphysically) explain why a person has that state.¹⁵

¹³ I am *not* claiming that facts about propositional attitudes are fully reducible to non-mental, non-intentional facts. It might be that there are irreducibly mental elements in the more basic account of what it is to stand in the specified relation to a certain proposition. But still, there is some more basic account.

¹⁴ I spell out the argument for this claim in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁵ Another response to this argument is available. The non-cognitivist can claim that she *can* assign propositional contents to normative attitudes. I think this argument will very likely succeed, for reasons discussed in Chapter Six.

5. *Other Effects on Action?*

In general, credences do not have just one potential effect on action. Having a high credence that there is water in my bottle may contribute to the production of an indefinite number of actions: drinking it, pouring it over a plant, pouring it over a fire, etc. The credence that there is water in my bottle plays a role in the production of action whenever it matters to me in a decision situation whether or not there is water in the bottle. When deciding whether or not to raise the bottle to my lips, or overturn the bottle over a fire, the way I evaluate the potential outcomes of these actions is different if I assume that there is water in the bottle, or assume that there is not. And so the credence is part of what produces my action, along with other relevant credences, and with utilities.

In looking at the effects of normative credences, we have only paid attention to their effects regarding a very specific sort of motivation and action. Where the credence is a credence that p is a reason of some strength to ϕ , we have looked only at the motivational effect of this on ϕ -ing. But this might leave out quite a bit.

For example, suppose I am deciding whether or not to stay in certain room, or to leave it. There are a number of factors that will influence my evaluation of the different outcomes that might arise if I stay, and if I leave. But one could be this: I might want to not be in the room with anyone who has done things that they had a strong reason to not do. Suppose I am certain that Max is in the room and that Max has told a lie. Given my desire to not be in the room with anyone who did something that they had a strong reason to not do, my evaluations of the outcomes which might result if I leave the room, and the outcomes which might result if I stay in it, depend on whether or not the fact that an action is the telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it. My decision matrix might

look like this:

	The fact that an action is the telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it	The fact that an action is the telling of a lie is <i>not</i> a strong reason to not perform it
Leave Room	-5	-5
Stay in Room	-10	0

As is standard, the leftmost column lists the actions available to me, while the top row lists different ways things might be that I have not ruled out. The numerical values represent the utility I assign to the outcome of taking a certain action given a certain ways things might be. Leaving the room is a pain, so if I leave it, the outcome has -5 utility. The best outcome would be to stay in the room given that the fact that an action is the telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it. That way, I do not have to leave the room, but I am also not in a room with someone who did something that they had a strong reason to not do. Worst of all, however, would be staying in the room with someone who has done something they had a strong reason to not do. That is, the worst option would be staying in the room given that Max told a lie and that the fact that an action is the telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it.

In this situation, my credence that the fact that an action is the telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it will affect how I end up acting. The proposition that the fact that an action is the telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it is relevant to my decision in just the same way that the proposition that there is water in my bottle is often relevant to my decisions. If I have a high credence that the fact that an action is the

telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it, I will likely leave the room. For this is the action that will have highest expected utility. But if I do *not* have a high credence that the fact that an action is the telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it, I will likely *not* leave the room. For, without such a high credence, staying in the room will have highest expected utility. Thus, my credence that the fact that an action is the telling of a lie is a strong reason to not perform it plays an action guiding role. It does so in exactly the way that a non-normative credence does; all of this is totally standard.

There are two questions the non-cognitivist must answer at this point. One is whether she can legitimately appeal to states like the *desire* to not be in the room with someone who has done something she had a strong reason to do, or having certain *utility* assigned to an outcome specified in normative terms. Can she legitimately appeal to desire-like states with normative contents? And the second question is whether she can add this further action-guiding role onto her account of normative credences, without violating her strictures. The answer is yes, in both cases.

First, can the non-cognitivist appeal to desires and utilities with normative contents? She can if she can give the correct account of what these states are, i.e. if her strictures do not prevent her from giving the correct account. Of course, as with any mental state it is unclear just what this will be, which is why I am currently canvassing so many possible features of normative credences. However, there is reason to be optimistic that the non-cognitivist will be able to succeed here as well.

The central role of these normative desire-like states is, presumably, the way they interact with credences and other utilities to produce action. This is good news for the non-cognitivist. For she can simply build into the account of these motivational states that

they interact with normative credences in just the way that the cognitivist thinks they do, i.e. just the way decision theory says they should. Here is the idea. The central part of what it is to be a utility regarding a normative outcome is to be a state that leads to the production of action along with one's credences and other utilities. So, given whatever conception of (normative) credences we have -- cognitivist or non-cognitivist -- can simply define normative utilities as states that interact with these credences in the way specified by decision theory. For example, part of what it is for a state to be a utility of ten assigned to the outcome of leaving the room and p being a strong reason to not ϕ is that it interacts with one's credence regarding whether p is a strong reason to not ϕ in the way specified by decision theory. In particular, the utility has the role of, along with one's other relevant utilities and credences, leading one to perform the action with highest expected utility. The non-cognitivist is equally able to say this as the non-cognitivist. Whether or not the cognitivist or non-cognitivist is right about the nature of normative credences, everyone is able to claim that normative credences and utilities interact in the way specified by decision theory.

The key point is this. Plausibly, the most important part of the account of a desire or utility is the way in which it motivates one. The way that it does this is along the lines of decision theory: one's credences and utilities relevant in a decision situation work together to produce the action that maximizes expected utility. Or at least, they have the function of doing so and do so when all goes well; sometimes things go awry. Thus, the most important part of the account of utilities is the way in which they lead to action, along with other utilities and credences. However, it does not matter what the other features of these credences are. In particular, it does not matter whether they achieve, or

try to achieve, property-dependent representation of normative properties. Thus, this difference between the cognitivist and the non-cognitivist regarding normative credences will have no impact on their relative ability to successfully give the account of what normative utilities are. Whatever she says about normative credences, a theorist can define normative utilities as states that work with them to produce action, in the way specified by decision theory.

Making this claim does not violate either of the non-cognitivist's strictures. Assigning this role to normative utilities clearly does not bring in normative properties. Further, it does not make any normative states -- credences or utilities -- into ones that determine conditions under which they would achieve property-involving representation of normative properties. The non-cognitivist can safely claim that if a state was not already such a state, then adding that it, along with other states, leads to action, will not make it one. This is not to say that there is no possible view that would deny this.¹⁶ It is just to say that the non-cognitivist is in the company of virtually every theorist about representation if she denies it, so she can assume she is not being forced into ruling out the correct view of property-dependent representation. Thus, the non-cognitivist can accept that normative credences have a wide variety of motivational roles.¹⁷ She can add:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

- 8) Guides action along with motivational states (such as utilities) regarding p

¹⁶ Ralph Wedgwood's (2001) and (2007) view is the only one I know of that makes a claim even close to this.

¹⁷ One sort of motivational role would have to do with dispositions to buy certain bets. Betting dispositions will be discussed further in the next chapter.

being a reason of strength s to ϕ

6. Conclusion

Putting together everything, we end up with the non-cognitivist being able to claim:

To be a credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ is (at least in part) to be a mental state that:

- 1) Motivates one to ϕ , to a degree proportional to c and s ,
- 2) Has the role of not existing along with a credence in p of less than c ,
- 3) In concert with the desire to speak one's mind, leads to the assertion that p is (un)likely to be a reason of strength to ϕ ,
- 4) Has a certain minimal degree of modal robustness,
- 5) Has a sufficient degree of inferential or quasi-inferential connection to other mental states,
- 6) Is associated with a feeling of conviction with intensity corresponding to c ,
- 7) Is realized by a brain state with features that correspond to c and to s ,
- 8) Guides action along with motivational states (such as utilities) regarding p being a reason of strength s to ϕ .

The non-cognitivist can thus give a well-developed, fleshed out account of what it is to have credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ . Note that, in some cases, a faulty

view of what non-cognitivism is might lead one to think that her view must be impoverished in some way. For example, suppose one's guiding idea is that the non-cognitivist thinks that normative credences are desire-like states. On that conception, it is unclear if the non-cognitivist can agree that normative credences can interact in the above way with normative utilities. For *desires* certainly do not, and neither do plans or any other familiar desire-like state. Seeing exactly what non-cognitivism is helps reveal just how full of a picture of normative thought the non-cognitivist can accept, and how familiar it can end up looking.

In fact, in this chapter and the last we have encountered *no* feature of normative credences that we have discovered that the cognitivist can build into her theory of these states, while the non-cognitivist cannot.¹⁸ The only such thing we have seen was in Chapter Two; only the cognitivist can think that normative credences involve concepts which (try to) achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. But as I argued there, such an account gives the cognitivist no explanatory advantage over the non-cognitivist. Thus, there is no respect that we have discovered thus far in which the cognitivist has any explanatory advantage over the non-cognitivist. And this is what I aim to show.

In the next chapter, I move beyond logically simply normative credences and focus on logically complex credences. Once again, we will find that the non-cognitivist is

¹⁸ One might worry that the non-cognitivist has not yet explained equally well the connection between (normative) credences and action. One might think that part of what it is to be a credence is to be a state that *should* (in some sense) interact with utilities in a certain way. A view along these lines is explored in Davidson (1980). If the “should” in question is normative in the present sense, the non-cognitivist cannot accept the proposal. However, for reasons discussed in Section Three of the next chapter, a cognitivist who adopts such a view gains no explanatory advantage over a non-cognitivist who adopts a certain analogous non-cognitivist view.

able to provide a satisfactory account of what these states are. And, moreover, she will be able to provide just the same explanation of it is problematic or irrational to have certain combinations of normative credences, namely ones that violate the probability axioms.

Chapter 5: Logically Complex Credences about Reasons

1. Introduction

I argued in the last chapter that we have an adequate non-cognitivist account of the mental state of having credence c that p is a reason of strength s to ϕ . Suppose that we do. There is an obvious question to now ask: what about *logically complex* credences about reasons? These are, for example:

- 1) A credence c that p is **not** a reason of strength s to ϕ .
- 2) A credence c that (p is a reason of strength s to ϕ **or** q is a reason of strength t to ψ)
- 3) A credence c that (p is a reason of strength s to ϕ **and** q is a reason of strength t to ψ)
- 4) A credence c that (**if** p is a reason of strength s to ϕ , **then** q is a reason of strength t to ψ)

The need to move from the logically simple case to the logically complex is not new for the non-cognitivist. Theorists like Ayer and Stevenson described what people were doing when they asserted atomic normative sentences like “lying is wrong.” But this leaves unaddressed the question of what people are doing when they assert logically complex normative sentences like “lying is wrong or stealing is wrong.” A complete non-cognitivist theory must have an account of what it is to express logically complex sentences, not just atomic ones. Similarly, the non-cognitivist cannot stop with an account of logically simple credences about reasons. She must also address logically

complex states. The question, to repeat, is, *What is it* to have these mental states? My claim is that the non-cognitivist can give the correct answer to this question.

There is another question of crucial importance for the non-cognitivist to address, regarding logically complex normative credences. This regards the sense, or more likely senses, in which it is *bad*, *problematic*, or *irrational* to have certain combinations of credences. In particular, it is widely regarded as in some sense problematic to have credences that violate the probability axioms, e.g. to be .7 confident that *p* and .7 confident that *not-p*. It is actively debated what *exactly* is problematic about having probabilistically incoherent credences. But, if the non-cognitivist is unable to give a satisfactory account of the sense or senses in which it is problematic, then her view is in danger of being explanatorily inadequate.

I will argue that the non-cognitivist *is* able to explain this. I will canvas three senses in which it is problematic to have probabilistically incoherent credences, and argue that the non-cognitivist can accept all three. The three sense center on the facts that: probabilistically incoherent credences make one susceptible to dutch books, they are accuracy dominated by some probabilistically coherent set of credences, and they (perhaps) guarantee that one has improperly responded to one's reasons. I will argue that the non-cognitivist is just as able to accept these explanations of what is problematic about having probabilistic credences, normative or otherwise, as the cognitivist.

2. *The Account of the States*

As we saw in the last chapter, a wide variety of features could potentially figure in the accounts of what it is to have normative credences states. And everything I canvassed

the non-cognitivist was able to accept. All of my arguments from the last chapter regarding the non-cognitivist's ability to accept these carry over to this case. If a cognitivist thinks that some combination of features like those discussed exhaust the account of logically complex normative credences, then the non-cognitivist can simply agree. This of course does not settle the matter of what exactly these states are. But if the non-cognitivist has shown that she can accept an account of these states that is just as explanatorily powerful as the cognitivist's account, there is no pressing need for the non-cognitivist to take a stand on exactly what the state is. She can rest easy that, whatever it is, she can give it.

It would be nice to be able to say more, however. In the case of atomic credences about reasons, the non-cognitivist has a relatively clear conception of at least one part of the functional roles of these states: their motivational roles.¹ They are states that motivate us, that push us towards performing certain actions (at least in the case of credences about reasons for action). It would be nice if the non-cognitivist had a concrete proposal about at least one part of the functional roles of logically complex credences about reasons as well. But it is not clear what this functional role is. While a credence that p is a reason to ϕ pushes one towards ϕ -ing, what about a credence that p is a reason to ϕ **or** q is a reason to ϕ ? What does this state do?

To identify this role, we can first note that there is plausibly a tight connection between the rational requirements that govern a state and a state's functional role. On a plausible and fruitful conception of functional role, a state's functional role is what, under a certain sort of idealization, it would cause and what would cause it to come into or go

¹ As we saw in Chapter One, strictly speaking, the non-cognitivist is not required to think this. But to my knowledge all non-cognitivists in fact do.

out of existence. Rational requirements govern what combinations of mental states one would, under a certain sort of idealization, have or not have.² So, assuming the relevant kinds of idealization are the same, a possible simple link between functional roles and rational requirements says that the functional role of a state is to cause and be caused in a way such that one conforms to the rational requirements that govern the state.

The rational requirement of means-ends coherence plausibly fits this simple link. A rough version of this rational requirement says: rationality requires that, if a person intends to ϕ and believes that ψ -ing is necessary for ϕ -ing, she intends to ψ . It is a failure of rationality to intend to go to the store, believe that getting in the car is necessary for going to the store, but not intend to get in the car. The functional role of intention matches up with this. It is plausible that part of what it is to be an intention to ϕ is to be a state that has the role of, in concert with the belief that ψ -ing is necessary for ϕ -ing, causing one to intend to ψ . Or, perhaps the role of the intention to ϕ is to, in concert with the belief, cause the intention to ψ *or go out of existence*. Or, perhaps it is something still more complex, but related.³ This is all very rough, of course. But we can conclude the following: if we are searching for the functional role of a state, a potentially promising place to look is at the rational requirements that hold of the state.

The rational requirement regarding credences that I will focus on is *probabilism*. Probabilism is the thesis that one is rationally required to have credences that obey the axioms of probability. It is a form of irrationality or mental failure if one's credences fail to conform to these axioms. For example, it is irrational to have a credence of .7 that it is

² This is on an understanding of rational requirements as “state” requirements, rather than “process” requirements. On the process requirement reading, the connection between rational requirements is plausibly even closer. See Kolodny (2007b) for discussion.

³ See Bratman (1987) for canonical discussion. He argues that part of intention's functional role is along these lines.

raining and a .7 credence that it is *not* raining. On the view just sketched, this fact will be connected to the functional roles of credences. For example, it might be part of the role of a credence to go out of existence if it is held along with other credences which together form a set which violates the axioms of probability. Of course, this does not mean that the account of what it is to be a credence is *exhausted* by this role. The idea is just that this role forms part of the account.

For a set of credences to be probabilistically coherent is for them to conform to the probability axioms. Writing “ $P(p)$ ” for the probability that p , these axioms are:

- 1) For all propositions p , $P(p) \geq 0$
- 2) For any tautologous proposition p , $P(p) = 1$
- 3) For mutually exclusive propositions $p, q, r, \dots$, $P(p) + P(q) + P(r) + \dots = P(p \vee q \vee r \dots)$ ⁴

The first axiom says that the probability of any proposition is greater than or equal to 0.

There are no negative probabilities. The second axiom says that all tautologous propositions are assigned probability 1. And the third axiom says that whenever any countable set of propositions are mutually exclusive, the probability of their disjunction equals the sum of their individual probabilities. Below I will address the question of whether or not the non-cognitivist can accept that there are (normative) propositions, that

⁴ What we mean by “tautologous” and “mutually exclusive” will depend on how we are thinking of propositions. If they are sets, then, the tautologous proposition is that which contains every element contained in any proposition, and mutually exclusive propositions are ones that share no element. If we think of propositions as sentences, then tautologous propositions are logically true sentences, and mutually exclusive propositions are logically inconsistent sentences. Matters are less clear if propositions are taken to be structured entities distinct from sentences.

some are tautologous, and that some are mutually exclusive.

From the above axioms, many further results can be derived. For example, if $P(p) = x$, then $P(\text{not-}p) = 1-x$. If a person's credences are to obey the axioms, their credences must conform to all of these results. Thus, if a person has a .9 credence that it will rain tomorrow, she must have a .1 credence that it will not rain tomorrow. Further results give us more restrictions. For example, if $P(p) = .2$ and $P(q) = .3$, then it cannot be that $P(p \vee q) = .9$. If one's credence that it will rain tomorrow is .2, and one's credence that it will snow tomorrow is .3, then one's credence that it will rain tomorrow *or* snow tomorrow cannot be .9, on pain of being probabilistically incoherent.

The rough idea above was that it is part of the functional role of states to cause mental states, and be caused to come into or go out of existence, in ways that lead to the conforming to rational requirements. This could be implemented in a few ways in this case. A very simple way of going is positing that it is part of the role of a credence to go out of existence when a person has credences that, along with it, form a probabilistically inconsistent set. On this view, it is part of the role of the state of a .9 credence that p to go out of existence if one comes to possess a credence of anything other than .1 in *not- p* . Likewise, it is part of the role of the state of a .1 credence that *not- p* to go out of existence if one possesses a credence of anything other than .9 in p . This proposal is simple, but it would help to explain the fact that people's credences tend to obey the probability axioms. For whenever their credences fail to do so, they have the role of disappearing.⁵

More complex possibilities are available, however. For example, it could be part of the role of credences to, when they come to exist alongside other credences which

⁵ Of course, this is not the full explanation. We still have no account of the mechanism by which this happens, i.e. of why it is that, at least in this case, the states actually play their roles.

together form a probabilistically incoherent set, trigger a re-evaluation process of the propositions in question, where this re-evaluation will result in the loss of at least one of the credences. On this view, it is part of the role of a credence of .9 that p to, upon coming to exist along with a credence of anything other than .1 that *not-p*, cause a re-evaluation of whether p is the case. I will work with the simpler view just for convenience.

The view being explored is not that this sort of role is unique to logically complex normative credences. Rather the idea is that it is part of the role of *all* credences: atomic and complex, normative and non-normative. A theorist can posit that it is part of the functional role of *every* credence that it not exist alongside other credences which would together be probabilistically incoherent. So, for example, it is part of the role of a credence of .2 that grass is green to not exist alongside a credence of .3 that snow is white and a credence of .9 that grass is green or snow is white.

This includes “mixed” credences as well, such as a credence of .7 that either lying is wrong or grass is green. This credence has in its content one normative disjunct and one non-normative disjunct, making it mixed. But the fact that it is mixed makes no difference. Part of the role of this state, for instance, is to not exist alongside a .2 credence that lying is wrong and a .2 credence that grass is green -- this would make one’s credences violate the probability axioms.⁶

The account thus far allows us to explain the difference between different logically complex credences. The credence of x that (p is reason to ϕ **or** q is a reason to

⁶ In a number of places, Schroeder emphasizes the importance of the cognitivist address both “pure” logically complex states and “mixed” ones. Thus, the fact that my account effortlessly generalizes to them is a nice feature. See e.g. Schroeder (2008), (2015a), and (2015b).

ψ) is obviously a different state than the credence of x that (p is reason to ϕ **and** q is a reason to ψ). This is borne out by the different roles the present approach will assign them. A credence of x that r *and* s is probabilistically incoherent with a credence in r that is less than x . For example, it is probabilistically incoherent to have a .3 credence that it will rain tomorrow, but a .4 credence that it will rain tomorrow *and* the next day. Thus, part of the role of a credence of x that r *and* s is to go out of existence when one comes to have a credence in r that is less than x . However, this is clearly not the case with a credence of x that r *or* s . It is probabilistically fine to have a credence of .3 that r , and a .4 credence that r *or* s . It is probabilistically fine to have a .3 credence that it will rain tomorrow, and a .4 credence that it will rain tomorrow *or* the next day. Thus, a credence of x that r *or* s does *not* have the role of going out of existence when one comes to have a credence in r that is less than x . In this way (among others) we differentiate it from a credence of x that r *and* s .

There will be, unsurprisingly, questions about credences in logical truths or falsehoods. On this approach, a credence of anything other than 1 that p *or not-p* has the role of never existing, since *any* set of credences that includes it will be probabilistically incoherent. The same goes for a credence of anything other than 1 that q *or not-q*. Thus, as far as this part of the functional roles of these states go, they are indistinguishable. More generally, a credence of less than 1 in a logical truth has the role of never existing, as does a credence of more than 0 in a logical falsehood.⁷ Thus, the states will, insofar as

⁷ Note that we do not have the result that it is part of the role of a credence of 1 in a logical truth, or a credence of 0 in a logical falsehood, *to* exist. That we could get from adding that it is part of the roles of credences *to* exist, whenever having the credences is necessary to conform to the probability axioms. I will not take a stand on whether this should be added as well.

they truly are distinct, need to be differentiated in some other way.⁸ But how to do this is a good question for everyone. It has nothing in particular to do with non-cognitivism.

A lot of distance in identifying the roles of credences can be covered given a general result that follows from the probability axioms. This regards entailment: if p entails q , then $P(p) \leq P(q)$. For example, since *it will rain today and tomorrow* entails *it will rain today*, $P(\text{it will rain today and tomorrow})$ must be less than or equal to $P(\text{it will rain today})$. We can use this to find the roles of many credences.

For example, Sam being happy entails that someone is happy. Thus, the probability of someone being happy must be at least as high as the probability of Sam being happy. One is probabilistically incoherent if one has, for example, a .9 credence that Sam is happy, but only a .6 credence that *someone* is happy. From this, we can infer that part of the role of a credence of x that Sam is happy is to not exist along with a credence of less than x that someone is happy. And, it is part of the role of a credence of x that someone is happy to not exist along with a credence of more than x that Sam is happy.⁹ In this way, we can begin to give an account of what it is to have a credence that *some* x is F , and thus move beyond propositional logic, to predicate logic.

Similarly, the proposition that *most* F s are G s entails that it is not the case that Sam and Max are the only F s, and neither is G . For example, the proposition that most boys in the room are happy entails that it is not the case that Sam and Max are the only boys in the room, and neither is happy. Thus, one is probabilistically incoherent if one has a .8 credence that all the boys in the room are happy, but a .3 credence that it is not

⁸ This is somewhat related to the famous problem of logical omniscience faced by certain views of belief. For related discussion, see Stalnaker (1984).

⁹ Strictly speaking, it is part of the role of a credence of x that someone is happy that it not exist along with, for any a , a credence of more than x that a is happy. The role of state does not mention Sam in particular.

the case that Sam and Max are the only Fs, and neither is G. Thus, we can identify part of the functional role of the state of having a credence of .8 that most of the boys in the room are happy. It is to not exist along with a credence of less than .8 that it is not the case that Sam and Max are the only boys in the room, and neither is happy.¹⁰ In this way we can start to discern the functional roles of credences that *most* Fs are Gs. And this sort of pattern can be repeated for other sorts of logically complex credences.

One might worry that the non-cognitivist has not earned the right to say any of this, because she has not yet made sense of propositions, tautologous propositions, mutually exclusive propositions, or propositions entailing each other. The above line of thought might have been interpreted as saying that, for example, it is part of the role of a .2 credence that *p* to not exist along with a .5 credence that *not-p because* this would be a violation of the probability axioms, where the explanation of this fact would in part depend on the credences having the propositional contents that they do. But if the non-cognitivist has not yet given some conception of (normative) propositions and shown that her view is compatible these being the contents of normative thoughts, then she cannot use them to do this explanatory work. Thus, the non-cognitivist must make sense of propositions, tautologous propositions, mutually exclusive propositions, and propositional entailment before she can give the correct account of normative credences, since giving this account involves attributing to normative credences certain functional roles which can only be explained via (normative) propositions.

The non-cognitivist has two dialectical options at this point. One is to give a

¹⁰ Again, strictly speaking, the role will not bring in Sam and Max. Better would be to say that part of the role is to not exist along with, for any *a* and *b*, a credence of less than .8 that *a* and *b* are the only boys in the room, and neither is happy.

theory of propositions, what it is for propositions to be tautologous, what it is for propositions to be mutually exclusive, and what propositional entailment is. She would then need to show that her view is compatible with propositions helping to explain states' having the functional roles. The other option is to show that, even without propositions, she is not worse off than the non-cognitivist (at least with regard to the present issue). This option is to show that propositions do not the explanatory work the objection alleges. I will now pursue the second option.¹¹

One way of doing this is by arguing that the functional role of a state is an *unexplained* part of what it is to be that state. Compare the case of being a chair and being something made for sitting on. It is part of the nature or essence of a chair that it is something made for sitting on. There is no further explanation of this fact. It is just (part of) what a chair is to be something made for sitting on. We ask, Why is it that part of what it is to be a chair is to be something made for sitting on? The answer is: there is no further explanation; that is just part of what it is to be a chair.¹²

The non-cognitivist can plausibly claim just the same for mental states. It is part of the functional role of a .7 credence that *p* to not exist along with a .5 credence that *not-p*. The functional role of a state is simply part of what it is to be that state, and this fact is not itself explained. *A fortiori*, it is not explained by the fact that the state has a certain propositional content. Thus, the non-cognitivist can agree that normative credences have the parts of their functional roles we have been discussing, even without positing propositions.

¹¹ In the next chapter, I argue that the non-cognitivist can adopt most of the standard conceptions of propositions, and perhaps all of them.

¹² See Dasgupta (2016) for discussion.

Of course, there will be an explanation of why it is that a certain brain state realizes a certain mental state, just as there will be an explanation of why a certain object is a chair. Object O counts as a chair (in part) because it was created with the intention that it be sat on. Brain state B realizes, in person S, a credence of .7 that *p* because brain state B plays, in person S, a particular causal role.¹³ But this does not change the fact that there is no explanation of the fact that part of what it is to be a credence of .7 that *p* is to play that causal role.

Given this, the non-cognitivist can accept all of the causal roles discussed above. She can accept that a .3 credence that someone is happy has the role of not existing if one has a .4 credence that Sam is happy. This is not explained by its propositional content. It is simply part of what it is to be a .3 credence that someone is happy. Similarly with credences of arbitrary logical complexity.

Of course, propositions may play other useful explanatory roles, even if they do not explain why mental states have their functional roles.¹⁴ Thus, ideally, the non-cognitivist would provide a full theory of normative propositions, and in the next chapter I argue that she can accept the most popular extant theories.¹⁵ But the present point is simply that propositions are not needed to help explain the functional roles of normative states, which is the current task. Even without propositions on the scene, the non-cognitivist is not barred from assigning to credences just the roles needed to make these states behave like probabilities. She cannot yet say that a .7 credence that lying is wrong

¹³ The story will look different on different accounts of what exactly functional roles amount to.

¹⁴ There are a number of extant arguments that we need to posit propositions. See e.g. King, Soames, and Speaks (2014), chapters 1 and 2. But I have never come across the argument that we need them to explain state's functional roles.

¹⁵ Even if she cannot, there are a number of other ways she can go. See e.g. Gibbard (2003), Yalcin (2012), Schroeder (2013) and (2015), Ridge (2014), and Silk (2015).

and a .7 credence that lying is not wrong have mutually exclusive contents. But she *can* say that they have functional roles that include not co-existing.

There is another way to see the point. We start with all of the mental states. They have, as parts of their functional roles, to not exist in certain combinations. *This* mental state and *that* mental state, for example, have as parts of their roles to not exist together. The non-cognitivist can say that. And she can say it every time that the cognitivist can. Thus, the non-cognitivist and cognitivist can together survey the field of all mental states, and agree that *this* state has as part of its role to not exist with *those*, that *that* state has part of its role to not exist with *these*, etc. Nothing yet depends on the non-cognitivist having an account of normative propositions. It is one thing to be able to say that there is a certain mental state and that it has as part of its role to not exist with certain other mental states, it is another to have an account of the *content* of that state.

Can the non-cognitivist now claim that, for example, the credence of .2 that lying is wrong has the role of not existing along with a credence of .2 that lying is not wrong? At least to the extent that matters, yes. She can take two mental states, each with the role of not existing with the other, and say that, on her view, they are the state of having a .2 credence that lying is wrong and the state of having a .2 credence that lying is not wrong. And so, on her view, these two states have the role of not existing with each other. Imagine that she now repeats this process an infinite number of times, for all of the mental states.

What matters for present purposes is not whether the non-cognitivist can speak of propositions. What matters is that, for each mental state, the non-cognitivist can deliver the correct account of that state. And she can, even if she cannot talk of propositions. She

is not able to say that a mental state has the functional role that it does *because* it has the propositional content that it does. But nobody should want to say that, for it is exactly backwards; mental states have their propositional contents *because* of their functional roles. So, to repeat, even if the non-cognitivist cannot talk of propositions, this is no bar to her giving the correct accounts of what it is to be each mental state.

As always, the non-cognitivist must show that she can accept the proposed account of normative credences. She must show that it does not violate her strictures. She can. It does not require appealing to normative properties to say that part of the functional roles of certain states is to not exist along with other states.

Second, this proposal does not make it the case that facts about our normative thought and talk determine conditions under which our normative terms, concepts, etc. would represent normative properties in a way such that the account of the representation appeals to a normative property. It does not make normative credences “try” to achieve property-dependent representation of the normative. There is just no reason to think that having a functional role that includes not existing with certain other states, in the way just discussed, would make a state one that tries to achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. Thus, the non-cognitivist can safely adopt all of this, without violating her restrictions.

I conclude, then, that the non-cognitivist is able to provide the correct account of logically complex credences about reasons, at least involving the logical complexity of propositional logic, and very plausibly beyond. And, again, the discussion of the last few chapters applies equally to credences regarding values, oughts, etc. Thus, it seems promising that the non-cognitivist has the correct account of normative credences

generally.¹⁶

3. *The Badness of Probabilistic Incoherence*

Thus far we have addressed views of *what it is* to be a normative credence. But we have not yet addressed another crucial aspect of credences, namely their normative properties. The clearest and most widely discussed such property involves credences that violate the probability axioms.¹⁷ It is almost certainly problematic, in some sense or senses, to have credences that violate the probability axioms.¹⁸ For example, it is problematic to have a credence of .2 that *p*, a credence of .3 that *q*, and a credence of .9 that *p or q*. The question at hand is, can the non-cognitivist, given her view of what normative credences are, explain this fact, even when the credences in question are normative credences?

The first thing to say is that it is a very hard question exactly what is bad or problematic about having credences that do not conform to the probability axioms. There are a variety of arguments purporting to show why it is in some sense problematic to have such credences, and an immense literature concerning many of them.¹⁹ It is, of course,

¹⁶ We can go even further. If non-cognitivism is correct regarding the nature of normative credences, it is hard to see how it could be false about other propositional attitudes. If a credence that *p* is a reason does not try to achieve property-involving representation of the normative, then normative properties are plausibly just not the sort of thing that is represented in that way. Thus, it is plausible that *no* propositional attitudes - - desires, hopes, fears, etc. -- try to achieve property-involving representation of the normative. If this is so, non-cognitivism is true. For more discussion of non-cognitivism and non-doxastic attitudes, see Schroeder (2010) and (2013).

¹⁷ Another prominent example are those that connect credences to knowledge about objective chance, such as David Lewis's Principal Principle, discussed in his (1980), and successor principles. Since there is no objective chance regarding normative matters, this is not presently relevant.

¹⁸ See Háyek (2008) for critical discussion. Also, it may be different violations are bad or problematic in different ways. Failing to have credence 1 in an enormously complex logical truth, while less than ideal in *some* sense, may turn out to be problematic in an importantly different way than having both a .9 credence that *p* and a .9 credence that *not-p*, for example.

¹⁹ Again, see Háyek (2008).

not the non-cognitivist's job to settle this question. However, she would have a problem if her view of normative credences barred her from appealing to a promising answer in this domain. For then she would run the risk of not being able to give the correct answer. Thus, the non-cognitivist's task is to show that at least the most promising views in the area are compatible with non-cognitivism. I will discuss a few of these, arguing that the non-cognitivist is able to accept them.

Perhaps the most famous argument for probabilism is the Dutch Book Argument.²⁰ One version of the argument says that, if an agent has credences that fail to conform to the probability axioms, then she will regard as fair or favorable a set of bets that would guarantee her to lose money if she bought all of them. For example, suppose one has a credence of .9 that p and a credence of .9 that $not-p$. Given her credence in p , she regards as favorable paying some amount more than \$.50 for a bet that pays \$1 if p . And given her credence in $not-p$, she regards as favorable paying some amount more than \$.50 for a bet that pays \$1 if $not-p$. Thus, the argument goes on, she regards as favorable paying more than \$1 to take both bets. But given that there is no way she can win both bets -- necessarily, p and $not-p$ are not both true -- the most she could win back is \$1. Thus, given her probabilistically incoherent credences, she regards as favorable a set of bets that guarantees her to lose money. But this is problematic, and not a position that an ideally rationally person would be in. Thus, ideal rationality demands conforming to the probability axioms.

The non-cognitivist can accept this line of reasoning, as I will now argue. The non-cognitivist, as I argued in the last chapter, can accept that normative credences have

²⁰ The literature on this sort of argument is vast. See Háyek (2008) for an extensive list of references.

a wide variety of action-guiding roles. She can thus agree that they guide the bets one decides to buy or not buy, and say exactly what the cognitivist does about exactly which credences guide in which way. She can agree that, when one has a certain normative credence, one thereby considers certain bets are fair, favorable, or unfavorable. Thus, she can agree that, even for a normative p , a person with a .9 credence in p and a .9 credence that *not-p* will regard the above described bets as favorable.

One might object that the non-cognitivist cannot, in fact, make sense of normative bets. For, on her view, there is nothing for them to be *about*. Given this, the objection goes, the non-cognitivist cannot claim that normative credences guide betting behavior.

There are a few ways the non-cognitivist can reply to this objection. One is to argue that she can say exactly what the cognitivist says, i.e. that normative bets are about the truth of normative propositions. The non-cognitivist may acknowledge that she has a different view of normative propositions than the cognitivist, but can go on to argue that this does not prevent her from saying that people entertain, consider, and bet on them. I think this is a promising line of response, but I will not take it up here.

A second line of response is to question that normative bets make sense in the first place. One might think that the practice of buying and selling bets makes sense only regarding propositions for which there is an established method for coming to know the truth of the proposition. Bets on horse races make sense because it is established that watching the race will tell us the winner. Even bets on mathematical propositions make sense; we might have sensibly bet on whether Fermat's Last Theorem was true, since there is an established method for coming to know its truth. Finding the proof of the theorem played the same role as watching the end of the horse race. But with the

normative, there is simply nothing like this. There is no established event that we will see, proof we will find, etc. that we know in advance will tell us the truth of a normative proposition. Hence, as far as I know, no normative bet has ever been placed.²¹

If normative bets do not really make sense, then it is far from obvious that the dutch book argument can be used to explain why is it bad to have probabilistically incoherent credences. If these credences do *not* guide betting behavior, and do *not* make one regard normative bets as fair or favorable, then the dutch book argument does not get off the ground. If so, then the non-cognitivist need not worry about whether or not she can accept the argument.

Still a third line of response is available to the non-cognitivist. She can point out that a subject for normative bets to be *about* is not what is needed for a theorist who wants to claim that normative credences have a role in guiding betting behavior. The basic idea is that these are states that combine with other states to produce actions of a certain type, in certain circumstances. For example, the state will guide one towards paying money to a person, given the belief that she has uttered a sentence with a meaning along the lines of the sentence “I will sell you a bet for five dollars, which pays ten if utilitarianism is true.”²² For a credence to have as part of its role guiding behavior in such situations, there is no need for there to be a subject matter for bets to be about. Thus, even if there is nothing for normative bets to be about, normative credences can still guide betting behavior.

The non-cognitivist has more to do however. She still needs to show that she can

²¹ By “bet” here I restrict myself to the literal paying of money to a bookie. If we adopt a looser definition, according to which deciding to act in a situation of moral uncertainty counts as a moral bet, then there have been normative bets.

²² Similarly, the states might guide behavior regarding when people demand payment from people who have sold the bets.

agree that certain combinations of bets are guaranteed to lose money, due to certain necessary truths. For example, the bets discussed above, on the propositions that p and that $\text{not-}p$, are guaranteed to lose one money due to the fact that necessarily, p and $\text{not-}p$ are not both true.

In order to make this claim, the non-cognitivist must earn the right to it, by giving an account of what it is to believe (or have a high credence) that it is true. I will not attempt to do this here; the question of what it is to have thoughts about metaphysical necessity is far too large.²³ However, I know of no reason to think that the non-cognitivist will not be able to give the true account of such thoughts. So I will simply assume that the non-cognitivist can give a satisfactory account of thoughts about metaphysical necessity. Thus, I assume that she can earn the right to claim that that, necessarily, p and $\text{not-}p$ are not both true.

Given this, the non-cognitivist is able to run the Dutch Book argument. She can say just as well as the cognitivist that one's credences are rationally required to conform to the probability axioms due to the fact that, if they do not, one will regard as fair or favorable a set of bets that is guaranteed to lose one money. Again, I am not claiming that this is ultimately a successful argument in favor of probabilism. I am simply claiming that the non-cognitivist, assuming she can earn the right to claims of metaphysical necessity regarding normative propositions, can accept it just as well as the cognitivist.

A second argument for probabilism, prominently defended by Joyce (1998), is the

²³ For discussion from a number of different angles, see Stalnaker (1984), Rosen (1990), Blackburn (1993d), Thomasson (2007), Brandom (2008), and Divers and Gonzalez-Varela (2012).

Accuracy Dominance Argument.²⁴ This argument claims that ideally rational agents will never have a probabilistically incoherent set of credences because any such set is accuracy dominated by another set. I claim that the non-cognitivist is able to accept this argument for probabilism as well.

Arguments of this sort begin by establishing a way to measure the accuracy of a set of credences, relative to some way things can be. Different measures can be used, but the idea is simple: a high credence that p gets a high score when p is true, and a low score when p is false. Similarly, a low credence that p gets a low score when p is true and a high score when p is false. A middling credence that p gets a middling score regardless of whether p is true. The accuracy of an entire set of credences, relative to a way things can be, is produced by somehow aggregating the scores of the individual credences in the set.

The next step of the argument is a proof that, given a certain scoring system, if a set of credences violates the probability axioms, there is a set of credences that strongly dominates with regard to accuracy. That is, there is some other set of credences which gets at least as high of a score relative to every way things could be, and a higher score relative to at least one way things could be.

Last comes the claim that it is irrational to have a set of credences that is accuracy dominated, according to the measure of accuracy used. In particular, it is *epistemically* irrational. It is not irrational because of the *practical* effects, such as being susceptible to dutch books. Rather, it is irrational because, in some sense, credences “aim” at accuracy. It is due not to the action-guiding aspect of credences’ nature, but to the fact that

²⁴ See Pettigrew (2016) for more recent discussion.

credences are “supposed,” in some sense, to reflect how things are. Given this, it is irrational to have a set of credences when there is another that is guaranteed to be epistemically either as good or better, and is in some cases better.

The non-cognitivist is just as able as the cognitivist to accept this argument for probabilism. Suppose that the above accounts of logically complex credences are correct. If so, then the non-cognitivist has given an account of the state of having a high credence that: if lying is wrong, then a high credence that lying is wrong gets a high score.²⁵ Let us assume that such a state is the state expressed by an assertion that if lying is wrong, then a high credence that lying is wrong gets a high score.²⁶ Given this, the non-cognitivist has “earned the right” to assent to this conditional claim, since she has shown that she can give the account of what it is to accept it. And the same goes for all (material) conditionals of this form, linking the scores received by normative credences to the associated normative claims. And, as above, I will simply assume that the non-cognitivist can also make sense of beliefs regarding metaphysical possibility and necessity, even regarding normative matters.

The non-cognitivist can make use of whatever scoring system the cognitivist uses. She is able to assign accuracy scores to sets of credences, relative to all the different ways things -- normative and non-normative -- can be. She can also go on to offer the proof that any set of credences which does not conform to the laws of probability is accuracy dominated. This is a bit of pure math, so the non-cognitivist can happily accept it.

²⁵ The conditional here is simply the material conditional.

²⁶ Of course, it is controversial whether this is so. Assuming that an assertion expresses a full, coarse-grained belief, the question is whether this can be reduced to a high credence. I will assume that it can for simplicity's sake. But if it cannot, more work needs to be done to give an account of this state. Fortunately, the sorts of arguments given in the last few chapters seamlessly carry over to the case of full belief, and so the non-cognitivist should be able to produce a satisfactory account.

The non-cognitivist has almost everything she needs to run Joyce's argument. She has the space of possibilities, since she has beliefs about what is metaphysically necessary and metaphysically possible. She has all the different sets of credences one could have. She has a system of assigning scores to the sets of credences, relative to the different possibilities. And she has the mathematical proof that shows that each of the sets of credences which violates the probability axioms is dominated by some other set.

The non-cognitivist still needs, however, to complete what might be the hardest task. She needs to show that it is *epistemically* problematic to have a set of credences that is dominated in this way. But there is a worry that thus far the non-cognitivist has done little more than show that she can accept that certain sets of credences have certain mathematical properties. But we wanted more, we wanted to show that those sets of credences were defective in a particularly epistemic sense.

It is not clear, however, that the non-cognitivist can show this. She does not think that normative credences try to achieve property-involving representation of normative properties. She does not think that normative credences try to represent in the same sort of robust way that credences about things being square or tall try to represent. And so, she does not think that they do in fact represent in this way. But perhaps it is this robust sort of representation that is needed for mental states to be assessable in the particularly epistemic way that Joyce's argument appeals to.

However, this difference ultimately does not cut into the non-cognitivist's explanatory power here. She can accept that it is epistemically problematic in whatever sense that Joyce thinks it is epistemically problematic, and can explain it in just as satisfactory a way as the cognitivist does. The reason is simple. While the cognitivist

might cite property-dependent representation as part of the explanation of normative credences aiming at accuracy, the cognitivist does not think that achieving property-dependent representation is a brute property of normative concepts or credences. Rather, she thinks it is explained by more fundamental features. And, if the arguments of the last few chapters have been correct, the non-cognitivist can accept that normative concepts and credences have exactly those more fundamental features that the cognitivist can cite. Thus, while the non-cognitivist cannot appeal to property-dependent representation, she can appeal to what is *really* doing the explanatory work for the cognitivist. And so she is in just as strong of an explanatory position as the cognitivist. I will now spell the argument out more carefully.

Our starting idea is that there is some sense in which (normative) credences aim at being accurate, and it is this which explains why having accuracy-dominated credences is epistemically problematic. But it is not a *brute* fact that credences aim at accuracy. Hopes and imaginings do not aim at accuracy. It is something about credences that *make* them aim at accuracy. Their aiming at accuracy is explained by some of their other, more basic features. Exactly which more basic features does not matter for our purposes, but to me the most plausible candidates are aspects of the state's functional role.²⁷ The feature is either 1) the fact that the credences (or some concepts they contain) try to achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties, 2) some other features, or 3) both.

²⁷ Note that this explanation will not be a trivial one, it is no *part* of a state's functional role that it has a certain aim. The functional role of the state is, as I am thinking of it, what causes the state to exist, and what the state causes, under a certain sort of idealization. But the *aim* of the state, as we are here thinking of it, is the *correctness* condition for the state. These are distinct although I suspect that the former explains the latter. It is something about the causal role of the belief that grass is green that makes it a state which is correct just in case grass is green, rather than just in case snow is white.

If it is some other feature or features, the non-cognitivist can agree that the attitude has them. For, as the last few chapters have argued, the non-cognitivist can give just the same account of what it is to be a normative credence as the cognitivist, as long as the account does not run into trouble regarding Normative Twin Earth cases. That is, when it comes to all of the features discussed in the first half of this chapter and the previous two, the non-cognitivist can agree with the cognitivist that normative credences have those features. Thus, if the cognitivist thinks that some of those explain why normative credences aim at accuracy, the non-cognitivist can offer exactly the same explanation for why these states aim at accuracy.

The cognitivist can, and the non-cognitivist cannot, consistently with her view accept that normative concepts represent normative properties via a regulation relation. However, as we learned in Chapter Two, it is simply false that this is so. Thus, this is not the explanation for why normative credences aim at accuracy; the explananda does not obtain.

This covers option number two. If the cognitivist simply appeals to features of normative credences other than their alleged property-dependent representation of normative properties, the non-cognitivist can agree both that the credences in question have those features, and agree that they explain the normative property of the credences, namely that they aim at accuracy.

The potential problem for the non-cognitivist, of course, is if part of the explanation of why normative credences aim at the truth involves property-dependent representation of the normative, either by the states or concepts they contain. If this is so, then there is a feature of these states that only the cognitivist can explain, and non-

cognitivism has a huge problem.²⁸ However, this problem simply does not materialize. The key point, put in terms of concepts, is this. A concept's achieving property-dependent representation of a property is not a fundamental feature of the concept. It is explained by more basic features. For example, the concept *WATER* does not *brutely* achieve property-dependent representation of (the property of being) water. It does so in virtue of, for example, there being some causal relation between tokens of the concept and instances of the property. Similarly, if *REASON FOR ACTION* were to achieve property-dependent representation of the normative property of being a reason for action, this would be due to some feature of the concept. This feature could potentially either be the obtaining of a regulation relation between the normative concept and a normative property. As we saw in Chapter Two, such regulation relations do *not* obtain. So it cannot be that. Thus, it must be something else. But if it is something else, the non-cognitivist can *accept* that the concept has just the feature in question. And thus she can offer an explanation with equal explanatory power. She cites this very same feature in the explanation of why it is that normative credences aim at accuracy.

The situation is this. The cognitivist cites certain features of normative credences, that they are F, claims that *this* explains their achieving property-dependent representation of normative properties, and claims that this is (part of) the explanation of the credences aiming at accuracy. The non-cognitivist cuts out the middle step. She agrees that the normative credences are F, but jumps right from there to the claim that this is (the equivalent part of) the explanation of the credences aiming at accuracy. But

²⁸ The non-cognitivist's only good option at this point would be to offer an error theory of why we *think* that normative credences aim at accuracy just like other credences, despite the fact that really normative credences do no such thing.

this is just as explanatorily powerful. In the end, for both sides it is the states being F that is bearing the explanatory burden.

To emphasize this last point, consider an analogy. Theorist One thinks that there are people socializing in a particular way in a house. She thinks that this metaphysically explains there being a party. And she thinks that this makes it the case that the house has a normative property: it is a house that Sam ought to enter. Theorist Two completely agrees with Theorist One about how people are socializing in the house. They agree about how many people are there, what they are doing, etc. Theorist Two, however, does *not* think that this qualifies as a party. She denies that these more basic facts explain that there is a party in the house. I submit that, when it comes to explaining the normative fact that the house is one that Sam ought to enter, Theorist Two is in just as good a position as Theorist One. What ultimately carries the explanatory burden are the more basic facts about what is going on in the house. Whether or not that counts as a party is beside the point. The middle step can be cut out, without explanatory cost.

The same goes for the case at hand. The cognitivist and non-cognitivist agree on the basic facts about what it is to be a normative credence. The cognitivist thinks that these facts make it the case that the state achieves property-dependent representation of normative properties, the non-cognitivist does not. But that does not affect the explanatory power the two sides have, since they have the same basic story. Thus, their agreement about the more basic facts means they are equally well positioned to explain the target fact, that normative credences aim at accuracy.

The cognitivist can object in two ways at this point; she can point to two potential ways in which the non-cognitivist is still at an explanatory disadvantage. First, she can

claim that I have misconstrued what the cognitivist thinks is doing the explanatory work. I have focused on just the features of the normative credences themselves. But the cognitivist might appeal to more than that. For it takes more than just features of a mental state to explain the fact that it achieves property-dependent representation. The features of the state determine conditions under which they *would* achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. But to explain the actual achieving of property-dependent representation, there actually being a suitable property plays an essential role. So, just by appealing to certain features of the state, the non-cognitivist does *not* thereby appeal to something with the same explanatory power as appealing to the fact that the credences achieves property-dependent representation of a normative property. The cognitivist appeals to the state having these features *and* to there being a suitable normative property. And so the cognitivist is still offering more in her explanation of the fact that normative credences aim at accuracy. She might well still have an advantage.

The cognitivist's advantage here, however, is illusory. What explains the credences' aiming at accuracy is *not* their *achieving* property-dependent representation of normative properties. It is, at most, their having properties which determine conditions under which such representation might be achieved. We can see this by looking at cases in which property-dependent representation is *not* achieved, and yet having credences that violate the probability axioms are still problematic in just the way that Joyce identifies. For example, suppose that someone truly believes in the existence of phlogiston. She has a .8 credence that phlogiston will be isolated in the next fifty years, but also a .8 credence that phlogiston will *not* be isolated in the next fifty years. This is problematic for just the reason Joyce identifies. It is not as though the non-existence of

phlogiston gets this person off the hook. But no property-dependent representation of phlogiston occurs, since there is no such thing. Thus, it is not *achieving* property-dependent representation that matters. What matters is simply what the state is like.

The point can be illustrated by recalling the lesson of the “New Evil Demon Problem” for reliabilism.²⁹ In that problem, two people have identical perceptual experiences throughout their lives. One’s perceptions are largely veridical, the other is being radically deceived. However, insofar as they form the same beliefs in the same ways based on these perceptions, they beliefs are equally justified and rational. What matters for these epistemic statuses of their beliefs is *not* whether the world matches up to one’s perceptions, but simply what those perceptions are like and how one forms beliefs based on them.

Here the situation is similar. Consider two people, one in a world with phlogiston and another in a world without it, but in all other respects similar. Both accept that phlogiston exists. Thus, one has credences that achieve property-dependent representation of phlogiston, the other has states which are in every respect the same, but they do *not* achieve property-dependent representation of phlogiston.³⁰ What matters for the epistemic status of the beliefs is *not* whether the world contains properties that match up to what one’s concepts are trying to represent. Rather what matters is more internalist in nature: what those concepts and the states containing them are like. Thus, there is at the very least a good case to be made that it is not whether property-dependent representation of normative properties is *achieved* by normative credences that affects

²⁹ See e.g. Cohen (1984).

³⁰ To be more precise we might need to appeal to *substance*-dependent representation, but the point is the same.

whether they aim at accuracy. What matters is e.g. the functional role of the states. And here the cognitivist and non-cognitivist will be in agreement. Thus, the non-cognitivist is at no explanatory disadvantage.³¹

There is another potential argument for the conclusion that the cognitivist is better placed to explain the fact that normative credences aim at the truth. The cognitivist might claim the fact that (normative) credences aim at truth is the essences of credences themselves. It is simply *part of what it is to be a credence* that the state has this normative property, of being correct just in case a certain fact obtains. On this view, it is not a normative fact explained by some other features of credences, such as their functional roles.

The non-cognitivist cannot accept this. She cannot appeal to normative properties in the account of what it is to be a normative credence. But the cognitivist can. Thus, the cognitivist might have an explanatory advantage over the non-cognitivist. For only the cognitivist can explain credences' aiming at accuracy in this way.

The advantage is slight, at best. Suppose the cognitivist claims that to be a normative credence is to be a state with an essence that specifies a certain functional role *F* and that the state is accurate, to a certain degree, just in case a certain fact obtains. The non-cognitivist claims that to be the normative credence is *just* to have functional role *F*; she accepts only the first half of this cognitivist's account. She goes on to claim that being *F* is what explains the state's aiming at accuracy. Now compare the positions. *N* is

³¹ The non-cognitivist has another potential reply to this argument. It is that she *can* use normative properties for certain explanatory purposes. As I argue in Chapter Seven, the non-cognitivist's conception of normative properties does *not* bar her from using normative properties in *any* explanatory context; she can use them to help explain other normative properties. And since the goal is explaining a normative property, the non-cognitivist can use them here. However, this argument alone might not succeed, as the cognitivist might think what is needed is not just normative properties, but normative properties of a certain robust kind that only she accepts. Thus, the argument in the main text is needed.

the normative property of aiming at accuracy. The cognitivist says: to be a normative credence is to be F and N, where being F does *not* explain being N. The non-cognitivist says: to be a normative credence is to be F, and a state's being F explains its being N. I see no reason to consider the cognitivist in better shape here.

And I do see reason to think this cognitivist is in worse shape. It seems highly plausible that the normative properties of our mental states apply to them *because* of what the states are. For example (and roughly), one should only *intend* to ϕ if one should ϕ . But it is not the case that one should only *imagine* ϕ -ing if one should ϕ . Is this just a brute difference; different normative properties are built into the natures of the states and that is all there is to be said? This is implausible. One should only intend to ϕ if one should ϕ *because* of what an intention is, because intending to ϕ is the sort of state that will often lead one to ϕ . Since imagining ϕ -ing has no such action-guiding role, it is not the case that one should imagine ϕ -ing only if one should ϕ . Examples abound. It seems reasonable to think that this pattern will continue for all normative properties of mental states, including that of aiming at the truth.³²

I conclude that the non-cognitivist is able to accept Joyce's Accuracy Dominance Argument for probabilism. The part that presented the most potential trouble was accepting that normative credences aimed at accuracy, which is needed to turn the mathematical parts of Joyce's argument into an argument that it is epistemically problematic for normative credences to be accuracy-dominated. But, as we have just seen, the non-cognitivist is in just as good a position to explain the fact that normative

³² The non-cognitivist may have another argument here as well. Being F is modally sufficient for being N; whenever a state plays the credence role, it aims at accuracy. The non-cognitivist has the beginnings of an explanation of this fact. It obtains because being F explains being N. But if being N is simply built into the nature of being a credence, why couldn't there be other states which are F but *not* N? It is not obvious how the explanation will go.

credences aim at accuracy as the cognitivist is. She can accept that a .9 credence that p is a reason to ϕ is accurate to degree .9, given that p is a reason to ϕ , and she can accept that this amounts to a *normative* property of the credence. And she can explain this fact in just as satisfactory a way as can the cognitivist. Thus, regarding Joyce's argument as well as the dutch book argument, the non-cognitivist can explain the fact that it is problematic to have credences that violate the probability axioms.

A third argument for probabilism can be constructed along lines explored by Niko Kolodny.³³ The idea is that the problem with having probabilistically incoherent credences is that one is thereby guaranteed to have improperly responded to one's reasons. For example, there is no possible set of evidence that could justify having a credence of .9 in p and a credence of .9 in *not-p*. Thus, if someone has both of these credences, it is guaranteed by the logical forms of the credences that she has failed to respond to her evidence; at least one of her credences is unjustified. It is, of course, a tall order to demonstrate that in *all* cases, when one has probabilistically incoherent credences, one has improperly responded to one's reasons. I will not speculate on the likelihood of the project's success.

What presently matters is that, insofar as the strategy works for the cognitivist, it will work for the non-cognitivist as well. For the non-cognitivist need not disagree with the cognitivist regarding substantive claims about reasons for mental states. She has earned the right to make these claims. And we saw above that the normative properties that a mental state has, such as the property of being supported by a certain body of

³³ See his (2007a), (2008a), and (2008b). I do not know if Kolodny would endorse the following argument. He does not address the case of credences specifically.

evidence, depends on what the mental state is like. Since the non-cognitivist agrees with the cognitivist about the natures of these states, she is thereby able to agree about the patterns that emerge regarding the reasons for them. She can accept, for example, that there is no possible set of evidence that can justify both a credence of .9 that p and of .9 that *not-p*. And she can give just the same explanation for why this is so.³⁴ Thus, the non-cognitivist can accept this explanation of why it is problematic to have probabilistically incoherent credences is successful, just as well as the cognitivist can.

4. Conclusion

I conclude that the non-cognitivist can do two things. First, she can give an adequate account of logically complex credences regarding reasons, at least up to the complexity of propositional logic, and very plausibly beyond. Second, she can accept several prominent arguments for probabilism, the thesis that it is in some sense problematic to have one's credences fail to obey the probability axioms. In this respect as well, the cognitivist has no advantage.

This ends Part One. What I have sought to make plausible is that the non-cognitivist has an adequate theory of normative *thought*. Her theory of our concepts' representation of the normative puts her at no explanatory disadvantage. Neither does her theory of what it is to have normative thoughts. At least in the case of normative credences, she can give satisfactory accounts of what it is to have the states, whether logically simple or complex, and she can explain the normative properties of these mental states. This all should make it plausible that, moving beyond normative credences, these

³⁴ She does, of course, need to give an account of what it is to think, for example, that it is necessary that one never has sufficient reason to have both a .9 credence that p and a .9 credence that *not-p*.

successes will continue. It should make it plausible that the non-cognitivist theory of all kinds of normative thought is at least as successful as the cognitivist's.

However, this is only half the battle. A complete meta-ethical theory must address not just normative thought, but normative talk as well. Thus, I turn now to normative language.

Chapter 6: Semantics and Meta-Semantics

1. Normative Language

Thus far, I have focused on normative *thought*. But the meta-ethicist's ultimate goal is to provide a theory both of normative thought *and* normative language. Thus, I now turn to normative language. This chapter and the next focus on the semantic and logical properties of normative language. Chapter Eight develops the non-cognitivist's view of what we *do* with normative language. Ultimately, I conclude that there are very likely no special problems for the non-cognitivist when it comes to giving an account of normative language.

Non-cognitivism is a thesis about normative representation. It says that there is no property-dependent representation of normative properties. Moreover, normative thought and talk do not determine conditions under which they *would* achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. Normative thought and talk “does not even try” to achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. As we have seen, this leaves open the possibility that there *is* normative representation, just not of the property-dependent kind. Perhaps for normative concepts to represent normative properties is just for them to play a certain motivational, deliberative, and social role, but one that can be spelled out without appeal to normative properties.

What effects does adopting such a thesis have on the way one can or must theorize about normative *language*? As it turns out, very little.

We can begin to see this by looking at the *semantics* of normative terms. In doing semantics, we assign *semantic values* to words, larger subsentential constituents of sentences, and to sentences. Different sorts of words receive semantic values of different

types. These semantic values combine in order to produce the semantic value of a sentence.

My first question is: does the non-cognitivist need to adopt non-standard semantic values for anything? My answer is no. The non-cognitivist can simply accept the independently most attractive semantic theory for normative terms, non-normative terms, and sentences. Non-cognitivism is semantically neutral.

To see this, it will help to have on hand at least a simple view of what the semantic value of a normative term is, along the lines of standard views.¹ Such a view might say that the semantic value of “is wrong” (disambiguated to single out its relevant normative use) is a function, from possible worlds to sets of actions.² That is, there is a set of wrong actions in each possible world, and the semantic value of “is wrong” is the function that goes from a world to the set of wrong actions at that world. The semantic value of “lying,” we can assume, is the action of lying.

The non-cognitivist can accept that this is the semantic value of “wrong.” What is needed is two things. First, that there is such a function. And second, that this function is the semantic value of “is wrong.” The second presents no particular difficulty, if the non-cognitivist has such a function available, she can assign it as the semantic value of “is wrong.” She will need to explain, however, *why* this is so; more on this below.

Regarding the first, what the non-cognitivist is simply that, in each possible world, there is a (possibly empty) set of wrong actions. The non-cognitivist can agree to

¹ See e.g. Heim and von Fintel (2011).

² This treats semantic values as akin to Kaplanian characters, as opposed to contents. On another sense of semantic value, the semantic value of “is wrong” at a world is simply the set of wrong actions at that world. This sort of semantic changes from context to context, like the referent of “I.” I will address the more complex, constant semantic values, as these will be no easier, and possibly harder, for the non-cognitivist to accept.

this. She can for just the same reason that she can claim that there is a set of actions which are wrong. First, she judges that a certain action is wrong, where this amounts to having a certain mental state, one along the lines of the normative mental states I have sought to characterize in Part One. Moving on to more cases, she judges that certain other actions are wrong, and judges that certain actions are not wrong. Further, she thinks that there is a set that contains all and only those actions which are wrong; she thinks that this is the set of wrong actions. Of course, someone else might disagree. Someone might think that some of the actions in the set are not wrong, or that it does not contain all of the wrong actions. This is just substantive normative disagreement. Regardless of exactly which actions are in the set, which is a matter for substantive normative theorizing, the non-cognitivist can happily accept that there is a set of wrong actions.

The actions the non-cognitivist can consider are not confined to actions performed in this world. She can think about actions in other possible worlds as well. For example, she can consider a world w' in which people's psychologies are different from how they actually are. Considering acts of lying in *that* world, she might judge that the actions are not wrong. And thus she judges that, in that world, lying is not wrong. However, when considering acts of lying in the actual world, she thinks the actions of telling lies are wrong. Thus, she thinks that in some worlds lying is wrong, and in some worlds lying is not wrong. While she will not actually consider most worlds, this puts her in a position to agree that there is a function from worlds to the sets of wrong actions at that world. And this, she can agree, is the semantic value of "is wrong."

This is supposed to look exactly parallel to the cognitivist's explanation for thinking there is such a function. The cognitivist will say that certain actions in the actual

world are wrong, certain (potentially different) actions are wrong in other possible worlds, and thus that a function can be constructed mapping worlds onto the sets of wrong actions there. But of course exactly which actions will be in the set for a world is controversial, and a matter for substantive normative theorizing. There is no difference between cognitivist and non-cognitivist here.³

This fact has become increasingly accepted in the last few years.⁴ However, those that accept it hold that the non-cognitivist must hold a revisionary *meta-semantics*. A semantic view assigns semantic values (which I will now just call *meanings*) to sentences and subsentential constituents. A meta-semantic view offers a theory of *in virtue of what* a word, sentence, etc. has a particular meaning. It is one thing to say that the meaning of “wrong” is a certain function from worlds to sets of action. But it is a wholly different project to explain *why* it has that meaning. What about the word makes it the case that *this* is its meaning? These are questions that the practice of semantic theorizing is simply silent about. It assigns meanings, but does not say *why* those words, sentences, etc. have the meanings that they do.

Perhaps, even if the non-cognitivist need not be revisionary in her semantics, she needs to offer a revisionary meta-semantics. Perhaps, while her semantic view can stay standard, she must offer a different story about what facts about normative language make it the case that normative terms have those semantic values. I will argue that, while there are *some* meta-semantic theories she will not be able to accept, she *will* be able to accept the most plausible and widely accepted meta-semantic theories. Thus, even here

³ There is perhaps a simpler way to make the point. Both cognitivists and non-cognitivists will accept that there is a property of wrongness, at least if this is understood as the set of all of the (possible) things that are wrong. And we can simply assign this set as the semantic value of “is wrong.” Appealing to sets rather than functions in semantic theorizing is of no great importance.

⁴ See e.g. Chrisman (2012), Pérez Carballo (2014), and Ridge (2014).

she needs not reject the best, most plausible theories that a cognitivist will accept.

There are *some* meta-semantic views which the non-cognitivist cannot accept. These will be “language first” views that explain the meaning of a word like “wrong” by invoking some relation between (tokens of) it and the property which is its semantic value. To say that the property of wrongness is the semantic value of “wrong” is to say that “wrong” represents it. Thus, the non-cognitivist cannot give an account of what it is for this to be the case that appeals to wrongness. And so she cannot say that what it is for “wrong” to represent the property of wrongness is for there to be some relation between “wrong” and the property of wrongness.⁵ Thus, this is a meta-semantic view the non-cognitivist cannot accept. And if this were the best kind of theory of how it is that terms like “wrong” get their meanings, the non-cognitivist would be in trouble.

Fortunately, the theory just presented is a non-standard view. Much more common are the “head-first” views. These are views that consider linguistic meaning as derivative, to be explained partially in terms of the contents of concepts and thoughts. My claim is that, given a standard head-first view, the non-cognitivist need not be revisionary even about meta-semantics. She can accept standard head-first meta-semantic views of what it is in virtue of which normative words have their meanings. And since these are the best meta-semantic views on offer, the non-cognitivist is in good shape.

2. *Lewis and Convention*

I will take as an illustrative example David Lewis and his convention-based view

⁵ More precisely, as we saw in Chapter One, she cannot say there is some representation relation such that *all* accounts of what it is for the relation to obtain appeal to the normative property.

of how it is that words and sentences get their meanings.⁶ Lewis starts with the idea that linguistic meaning is *conventional*. A sentence like “It is raining” gets its meaning due to our conventions regarding its use. We can set aside Lewis’s precise definition of convention, *exactly* what a convention amounts to is not crucial. But the general idea is helpfully illustrated by the practice of driving on the right in a community. Everyone does it, everyone knows that everyone does it, given that other people are doing it one has a strong reason to do so oneself, but there is another alternative that would have worked just as well.⁷ Establishing a convention of driving on the right solves a coordination problem. There is nothing inherent about driving on the right that is better than driving on the left, but once the practice emerges, it sustains itself, as people have a good reason to follow it.

Lewis sees language use as also solving coordination problems. Just as we want some method that allows us to all get where we are going safely, we also want a method that allows us to communicate information, communally plan, etc. Spoken language is often our way of doing this; we conventionally associate certain sentences with certain states of mind in certain ways, and this helps us do a number of things which would very difficult to do otherwise.

Here is a rough picture of what these conventions might look like. It is a convention among English speakers to utter “It is raining” only when one believes that it is raining. Everyone acts in this way, everyone knows that one acts in this way, and the fact that people act in this way gives rise to a reason to act in this way oneself. For,

⁶ See especially Lewis (1969) and (1975), although I am not concerned with staying true to Lewis’s *exact* view. And, we could just as well start in a number of other places.

⁷ To make the example work we may need to ignore the fact that there are laws against driving on the left side.

suppose one wants to cause someone else to believe that it is raining. If one utters a sentence such that everyone knows that speakers utter that sentence only when they think that it is raining, hearers can end up coming to know that the speaker thinks it is raining. And from this, they can infer from the speaker's reliability on such matters that it is indeed raining. The presence of this convention in a community is very helpful for communicating the information that it is raining, for allowing a person who believes that it is raining to cause another person to share the belief.

Lewis thinks that the fact that "It is raining" is governed by this convention explains why "It is raining" has the meaning that it does. When a sentence *S* is governed by a convention that says speakers should assertorically utter *S* only if they believe that *p*, the sentence means that *p*. Since convention dictates that "It is raining" be assertorically uttered only when the speaker believes that it is raining, the sentence means that it is raining. The sentence's meaning is explained by its conventional connection to a state of mind. If, in some other community, a sentence that looks just like "It is raining" is governed by some other convention, then it means something else there.

This still leaves open the question of the meanings of subsentential parts of sentences. Lewis's view goes something like this.⁸ There are a number of conventions governing sentences, and thus a number of meanings assigned to those sentences. The meanings of the words in those sentences is the simplest assignment which will, in compositional fashion, deliver these sentence meanings. For a simple example, we have the data that "Sam is happy" means that Sam is happy, that "Max is happy" means that Max is happy, etc. An assignment of the function from worlds to the set of happy things

⁸ Lewis (1992) is relevant here.

in that world turns out to be part of the simplest assignment of word meanings that correctly determine these sentence meanings. And so, in English, “happy” has this meaning. Perhaps there will be some indeterminacy, as multiple different semantics for English would equally well produce the correct results regarding sentence meanings. If so, then the correct semantics for English is to some degree indeterminate.

This leaves a number of questions unanswered. We have not yet said what the meanings of sentences *are*, other than that they are identical to the contents of the beliefs that they are conventionally associated with in the above way.⁹ These meanings, which we can call *propositions*, could have any number of different natures; we have simply not said. Similarly, we have not yet said what the semantics will look like, i.e. what meanings will be assigned to subsentential constituents in order to generate the correct results.

Regardless of how these details are filled out, however, the crucial fact is that the non-cognitivist can happily accept this very standard meta-semantic picture. She agrees that we have normative beliefs; Chapters 3-5 worked to characterize what these states are.¹⁰ She then goes on to agree that these beliefs are associated with conventions in just the above way. We have a convention to assertorically utter “lying is wrong” only if one believes that lying is wrong. And this explains why “lying is wrong” has the meaning that it does. It inherits its meaning from the content of the belief that lying is wrong, whatever exactly that is. No deviation from this standard story is needed.

The key point is that, in head-first meta-semantic views such as Lewis’s, we will

⁹ Strictly speaking *identity* is optional here. We could have chosen some other function from contents of mental states to the contents of sentences. In fact, we may need to, in order to respect the distinction between “ingredient sense” and “assertoric content” from Dummett (1991).

¹⁰ I am assuming that we can reduce the mental states appealed to in the conventions, beliefs, to the states I tried to characterize, credences. If not, the non-cognitivist does need to do more work. But if the non-cognitivist really can give a satisfactory theory of normative credences, I think it is very plausible that she will be able to do with same with coarse-grained normative beliefs.

not need to appeal to any representational connection between normative terms and normative properties. Instead of saying that “wrong” has its meaning via some relation to the property of wrongness, we say that it has its meaning via a conventional connection to certain mental states. The non-cognitivist cannot appeal to the normative property, but she certainly *can* appeal to the mental states. And, at least thus far, we have seen no reason why it would matter whether those are mental states that (try to) achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. Thus, not only can the non-cognitivist accept standard *semantic* views, but she can accept standard *meta-semantic* views as well.

An objection to this claim should be addressed. A popular tool in meta-semantic accounts since the publishing of Lewis (1983) and (1984) is that of *reference magnetism* due to the metaphysical “naturalness” or “eliteness” of certain properties. Roughly, the idea is that certain properties are metaphysically privileged over others: green is more elite than is grue, the property of being an electron is more elite than the property of being an island, etc. There are a number of ways to understand eliteness, the details are not essential for present purposes.

One theorized feature of eliteness is that elite properties are *reference magnets*. They are, somehow, more eligible to be represented by our terms and concepts. How to think about this exactly is highly unclear. But many meta-semantic accounts make at least some use of the eliteness of properties to explain why it is that they, rather than other properties, are represented by certain terms.

It is very plausible that it is incompatible with non-cognitivism that normative terms represent the normative properties that they do in part due to the eliteness of normative properties. The non-cognitivist thinks that these properties exist only in a

deflated sense, as has been discussed in Chapter Two, and will be discussed further in the next chapter. This deflated status is, we can grant, incompatible with Lewisian eliteness. And so it seems that the non-cognitivist lacks what might be an important piece of a cognitivist's meta-semantic picture. This could, it seems, disadvantage the non-cognitivist.

However, there is no actual problem here. I have already granted that the non-cognitivist cannot accept certain language-first meta-semantic views for normative terms. My claim is only that she will be able to accept plausible head-first views. On a head first view that makes use of eliteness, the eliteness of normative properties would not be *directly* relevant to their being represented by normative terms. Rather, it would be indirectly relevant. The normative properties' eliteness would directly impact their being represented by mental items, such as concepts. They would then be represented by linguistic items due to being mentally represented. The story of how mental content determines linguistic content, however, need to change in any way. Thus, the fact that some cognitivists appeal to eliteness in their theories in mental representation does not stop the non-cognitivist from accepting the plausible head-first theories of linguistic representation that the cognitivist might also accept.

The non-cognitivist is not able to accept this theory of the mental representation of normative properties. However, this does not affect whether she can accept the meta-semantic story that follows, linking linguistic representation to mental representation. Since the eliteness of properties does not enter into the story of linguistic representation of a head-first theory, entering instead into the story of mental representation, the non-cognitivist can accept just the same theory as the cognitivist. The fact that the eliteness of

normative properties figures in a theory of *mental* representation does not affect the non-cognitivist's ability to accept a head-first view of *linguistic* representation that might be paired with the theory of mental representation. Thus, considerations of eliteness do not show that the non-cognitivist is limited in her (head-first) meta-semantic options.

The point can be put another way. Head-first theories explain linguistic representation by some sort of link, such as one determined by convention, between linguistic items and mental states. The properties represented do not enter into the picture here; they only enter in (if they do) antecedently, in the theory of how the mental items represent them. But since the properties do not enter in at these stage in head-first theories, *a fortiori*, the fact that they are (allegedly) elite will not enter in either. Thus, even if these facts show up in the theory of mental representation, they will not show up in a head-first theory of mental representation. And so they will not play a role in the account of linguistic representation for the cognitivist with a head-first meta-semantics, meaning the non-cognitivist is still able to accept whatever head-first view the cognitivist accepts.

3. *Contents of Normative Thoughts*

An objection needs addressing. Perhaps the non-cognitivist's claim about normative representation has an effect on the sort of contents that she can assign to normative attitudes. If this is so, then it will have repercussions for the non-cognitivist's semantic theorizing, at least given the sort of head-first approach just discussed. For on such views, normative sentences inherit their meanings from the contents of the mental states they are conventionally associated with. If the non-cognitivist is forced to adopt non-standard views about the contents of normative thoughts, this will almost certainly

lead her to accept non-standard views of the meanings of normative sentences. But this is costly, there is risk that such a view will run into problems. Thus, the non-cognitivist is best off if she can show that she does *not* need to be revisionary regarding the contents of normative thoughts.¹¹

Fortunately, she can show that it is at least very plausible that this is so. There are three main views of what the contents of thoughts, i.e. propositions, are. On the first, they are set-theoretic objects, such as set of possible worlds. On the second, Fregean approach, they are structured entities built up of concepts. And on the third, Russellian approach, they are structured entities built up of things like objects and properties. In the first two cases, the non-cognitivist can straightforwardly accept that these are the contents of normative thoughts. In the third case, there is a good case to be made that she can, although the matter will ultimately turn on an issue we cannot resolve here, namely that of the unity of the proposition.

Let us start with the view that says that propositions are sets of possible worlds. On this view, the content of the belief that Sam is happy is a certain set of worlds, the worlds in which Sam is happy. Similarly, the content of the belief that lying is wrong is another set of worlds, the worlds in which lying is wrong.

The question is: can the non-cognitivist identify contents of normative beliefs with sets of worlds in this way? Can she claim that the content of the normative belief that lying is wrong is the set of worlds in which lying is wrong? Yes.

Above we saw why the non-cognitivist can agree that there is a set of wrong actions. Similarly, we saw why she can agree that there is a function from a world to the

¹¹ The argument below is the argument promised in note 15 of Chapter Four.

set of the wrong actions at that world. A non-cognitivist considers the actions in various worlds and judges that some are wrong. Thus, she thinks that, in each world, some set of actions is wrong. Thus one can construct a function from worlds to the set of wrong actions in that world.

The present case is very similar. The non-cognitivist considers lying in the actual world, and judges that it is wrong. Then she considers another possible world, and judges that due to some difference in people's psychologies, for example, lying is not wrong in that world. Thus, she thinks that in some worlds lying is wrong and in some worlds lying is not wrong.

We can now move to sets: there is a set of worlds in which lying is wrong. In the opinion of the person under consideration, the actual world is part of this set, but the world with different psychologies is not. Of course, others might disagree about this; this is a substantive normative disagreement. But, regardless of one's particular views on what factors make lying wrong or not wrong, one will think there is a set of worlds in which lying is wrong. And this we can assign to be the content of the belief that lying is wrong, and thus, via a conventional connection to this belief among English speakers, the content of "lying is wrong."

The non-cognitivist can happily accept that the contents of normative beliefs are sets of possible worlds. And exactly analogous arguments show that she will also be able to accept that normative propositions are more complex set-theoretic entities: such as sets of <world, time> pairs, or centered worlds, i.e. <agent, world, time> pairs. I conclude that the non-cognitivist can accept that (normative) propositions are set-theoretic entities of this sort.

A worry should be addressed. An adequate theory of the contents of normative thoughts should not identify the contents of the belief that lying is wrong and the belief that lying fails to maximize happiness, or more generally the belief that lying has any non-normative property F. But the above proposal threatens to do just that. To see the problem, take a non-cognitivist who is also a utilitarian. She will say that, necessarily, an action is wrong just in case it fails to maximize happiness. Thus, the worlds in which lying is wrong are exactly the same worlds in which lying fails to maximize happiness. Thus, the belief that lying is wrong will have the same set of worlds as its content as the belief that lying fails to maximize happiness. But this is problematic. For if we assume that mental states can be individuated by their contents and their attitude type, the view will produce the incorrect result that these two beliefs are identical.

Of course, the above problem is a familiar one for theories that identify contents with sets of possible worlds. The view threatens to identify all beliefs in metaphysically necessary truths, for instance, since all have the content of the set of all possible worlds. Of dialectical importance here, however, is the possibility that the cognitivist has some potential route to solving this problem that is unavailable to the non-cognitivist. If she does, then she plausibly has an advantage over the non-cognitivist, significant to the degree to which one thinks the route is ultimately a promising one.

Such a route might come in two forms. The first is to deny supervenience of the normative on the non-normative. Given this, a theorist can adhere to utilitarianism, and yet hold that, in other possible worlds, utilitarianism is false. For example, there are worlds in which lying fails to maximize happiness, and yet it is *not* wrong. Armed with such worlds, the possible worlds theorist is able to identify different sets of worlds with

the propositions that lying is wrong and with the proposition that lying fails to maximize happiness. The far-out worlds just mentioned will be included in the proposition that lying fails to maximize happiness, but not in the proposition that lying is wrong, thus distinguishing the propositions. The question is whether the non-cognitivist can do the same thing.

Plausibly, she can; she can deny supervenience. To talk of pro- and con-attitudes, she can have a con-attitude towards lying when in the actual world, but also have (for example) a pro-attitude towards lying when in the other possible world, despite its being descriptively identical to the actual world. Given these attitudes, she thinks that lying is wrong here, but that it is not wrong in that other, descriptively identical world. Thus she can claim that only the former is included in the proposition that lying is wrong. But since both are included in the proposition that lying fails to maximize happiness, she is able to differentiate the propositions, just as the cognitivist did.

The above takes an unsurprising explanatory path for the non-cognitivist. She is asked about possible worlds differentiated by their normative features; she is given the task of explaining the difference between them. Whenever she is asked about something normative, be it a normative property or a possible world characterized in a certain normative way, her first task is to show that she can make sense of *judgments* regarding the matter in question. So her task in this case is to show that she can make sense of *judgments* that there are descriptively identical worlds which normatively differ.

A worry about the approach just taken is that the non-cognitivist will not have an explanation for how we can differentiate the two worlds in question in thought. The *cognitivist* can say that they differ in their normative laws, and due to this difference we

can distinguish them in thought. The cognitivist makes use of their antecedent difference to explain how we can distinguish them in thought. But it is unclear if the non-cognitivist can do the same. She claims that these are different worlds, and that we have different attitudes towards them. But when asked what the difference in the worlds is that enables one to differentiate them in thought is, the non-cognitivist is unable to appeal to their normative difference. Similarly, when asked why we should think these “two” worlds are distinct at all, the non-cognitivist is unable to appeal to their normative difference.

The non-cognitivist will, as far as I can see, be pushed into appealing to a bare haecceatistic difference between the world. While descriptively alike, they are yet numerically distinct. There is *this* world, and then there is *that* world. This non-cognitivist has a con-attitude towards lying in *this* world, but a pro-attitude towards lying in *that* world. If one thinks appeal to bare haecceatistic differences (in possible worlds) are illegitimate, in addition to thinking to thinking that a promising road for theorizing about content is the cognitivist’s denial of the supervenience of the normative on the descriptive, then one will think the cognitivist has an advantage here. But I take this to be a very minor advantage, at best.

The other way that the utilitarian theorist employing a worlds-based, set-theoretic conception of content can differentiate the proposition that lying is wrong from the proposition that lying fails to maximize happiness is to appeal to *impossible* worlds. The theorist can identify propositions with sets of worlds, both possible and impossible. While she will hold that all of the *possible* worlds in which lying is wrong are worlds in which lying fails to maximize happiness, she will also hold that there are *impossible* worlds in which lying is wrong but does not fail to maximize happiness, or *vice versa*. By

including these impossible worlds in the sets, she can differentiate the proposition that lying is wrong from the proposition that lying fails to maximize happiness.

The question, once again, is whether the non-cognitivist can make this move as well. If she cannot, then she is disadvantaged to the degree that it is a promising approach for the cognitivist to take. And once again, the non-cognitivist should not begin by focusing on the impossible worlds themselves. Instead, she needs to give an account of what it is to *judge* that there is an impossible world in which lying is both wrong and happiness maximizing. The route for her to do so is relatively clear. First, she should give an account of what it is to believe that it is *possible* that p and q , for arbitrary p and q . Then she should give an account of what it is to believe that it is *not* possible that p and q . Combined with accounts of what it is to believe that lying is wrong and to believe that lying maximizes happiness, this will put the non-cognitivist in a position to give an account of the belief that it is impossible that lying both is wrong and maximizes happiness. She will thereby have earned the right to claim that this is so. Of course, one might substantively disagree with the claim, but one at that point will not have an objection that the non-cognitivist cannot make sense of the thought.

The non-cognitivist should then claim that the thought that there is an (im)possible world at which p does not substantively go beyond the thought that it is (im)possible that p . So, when one judges that the worlds in which there are round squares and the worlds in which there are wrong actions that maximize happiness are all impossible, one is simply judging that it is impossible for there to be round squares, and impossible for there to be wrong actions that maximize happiness. No account of these worlds has been given, but this is not surprising. Just as the non-cognitivist's first priority is not to

give an account of wrongness, but judgments about wrongness, so her first priority should not be to give an account of impossible worlds at which certain actions are wrong, but to give judgments about such worlds. And just as the question of which actions are in the set of wrong actions is a substantive normative question, so the question of which worlds involving normative properties are impossible is a substantive normative question. So, similarly to above, the non-cognitivist is in a position to claim that there is an impossible world at which lying maximizes happiness and is wrong.

All of this allows the non-cognitivist to identify the proposition that lying is wrong with a different set of (possible and impossible) worlds than the set of worlds she identifies with the propositions that lying maximizes happiness. For she judges that it is impossible that lying is wrong and does not have the property of failing to maximize happiness. Thus, she can say there is an impossible world at which lying is wrong and lying does not have the property of failing to maximize happiness. This impossible world is in the set of worlds identified with the proposition that lying is wrong. But it is *not* in the set of worlds identified with the proposition that lying fails to maximize happiness. Thus, the non-cognitivist can distinguish these propositions.

Likely the most controversial move in the above line of thought was from the non-cognitivist's ability to make sense of the judgment that it is impossible that p to the thought that there is an impossible world such that p . Deciding on the legitimacy of this move will depend on our final analysis of (im)possible worlds, their ontological status, and the function of thoughts about them. And so I cannot provide a full defense here. At most, then, I have offered one possible route the non-cognitivist can take, to try to differentiate propositions by appealing to impossible worlds. But if it is unsuccessful,

then I grant that, to the extent that appealing to impossible worlds is a promising theoretical move for the cognitivist, the non-cognitivist is at a disadvantage. I now move on to non-set-theoretic conceptions of propositions.

The non-cognitivist is able to accept Fregean views of propositions, according to which they are structured entities built out of concepts. The non-cognitivist accepts that there are normative concepts. Whatever these are understood to be -- abstract objects, types of mental particulars individuated by functional role, abilities of some sort, etc. -- the non-cognitivist can accept them.¹² Or, she can as long as they are not defined in terms of normative properties or anything which makes them try to achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties, but I have already argued against such views. And, as far as I can tell, nothing about her view of the way in which these concepts *do* normative properties would prevent them from being used to construct complex entities like propositions. So there is no reason to think that the non-cognitivist could not accept a Fregean view of propositions.

The non-cognitivist *might* run into trouble in one place: Russellian views of propositions. The Russellian thinks that propositions are constructed out of things like objects and properties. Thus, in the case of the belief that lying is wrong, its content is a structured entity, in part built out of the property of wrongness itself. Perhaps the non-cognitivist cannot say this, due to her view that the reason relation is not the sort of thing that is represented in the property-dependent way. Perhaps, while she can affirm the existence of normative properties, she is barred from using normative properties to construct propositions.

¹² See Laurence and Margolis (1999) for discussion of what concepts might be.

Ultimately, this will turn on the notorious question of the “unity of the proposition.” If Russellian propositions were merely *sets* of their constituents, then presumably the non-cognitivist would not be barred from using normative properties in the construction of Russellian propositions. Regardless of the status of the property of wrongness, if there is such a property, then there are sets that contain it. However, Russellians emphasize that the sense in which the constituents of a proposition are unified to form the proposition is *not* merely set-membership. If it were the proposition that Sam loves Max and the proposition that Max loves Sam would be identical, since they both contain exactly the same three constituents, namely Sam, Max, and the loves relation.

The question thus is: whatever it is that unifies the constituents of a proposition, could a normative property as the non-cognitivist conceives of it, i.e. as something not the sort of thing which is represented via property-dependent representation, be unified with other constituents in that way? Whatever it is for the action of lying and the property of wrongness (and perhaps other ingredients) to be unified into the proposition that lying is wrong, could wrongness as the non-cognitivist conceives of it be unified in that way? Since this is not the place to explore different Russellian solutions to the problem of the unity of the proposition, this question will have to go unanswered.¹³

These sorts of theories comprise the major options regarding the nature of

¹³ I will note though that on the prominent Russellian view of King (2007), it does appear that the non-cognitivist is in good shape. On that view, *roughly*, the proposition that lying is wrong is the fact that the action of lying and the property of wrongness stand in a certain relation, namely that: *there is a context c such that lying is the semantic value in c of a lexical item e of some language L and the property of wrongness is the semantic value in c of a lexical item e' of L such that e occurs at the left terminal node of the sentential relation R that in L encodes ascription and e' occurs at R 's right terminal node.* [I have here adapted a quotation from King, Soames, and Speaks (2014), p. 50.] Given that what unifies lying and wrongness is a fact about the syntax of a possible language, it does not seem that the exact nature of the property of wrongness will enter the picture. Thus, I think it plausible that the non-cognitivist will be able to accept at least King's Russellian view of propositions.

propositions. There are others, however, such as the view of Soames (2010). On this view, propositions are types of mental acts. Ridge (2014) argues that Soames' view fits very well with a non-cognitivist view of normative thought. So, without going into the details, I think there should be no concern that the non-cognitivist is restricted here. Similarly, there are deflationary views of propositions. But given that they do not assign a nature at all to propositions, only seeing thought and talk of propositions as serving some useful function, there is little danger that the non-cognitivist will not be able to accept such views. Concerns would only arise on more heavyweight conceptions of propositions, ones that in some way require the existence of associated robust properties, of the sort that the non-cognitivist thinks normative properties are not. Thus, the *only* potential restriction the non-cognitivist has in her account of the contents of normative thoughts is that it *may* turn out that she cannot accept (certain) Russellian views. So there is not much reason to think that the non-cognitivist will ultimately need to deviate from the best theory of the contents of normative thoughts.

The non-cognitivist also does not need to be revisionary about the semantic values of sub-sentential constituents. If the non-cognitivist agrees with the cognitivist about the contents of normative beliefs, and agrees with the cognitivist about the linguistic conventions governing the utterance of these sentences, then she can apply just the same process to generate semantic values for subsentential parts to the language. With the same inputs and the same process, she will produce just the same output; she will arrive at a semantic theory identical to that of the cognitivist.

4. Conclusion

It is thus very plausible that the non-cognitivist will be able to accept whatever semantic and meta-semantic story the cognitivist does. The non-cognitivist can accept standard views of the contents of normative thoughts, and thus, via some standard “head-first” meta-semantic theory, come to assign standard semantic values to normative words and sentences.

However, this does not end the concerns related to normative language. Normative sentences are not *just* tools made useful by convention for communicating, joint planning, etc. They have another important property; they stand in logical relations to each other. The non-cognitivist must make sense of this feature of normative language as well. The next chapter discusses why one might think she cannot, or only can do so in some revisionary fashion. However it turns out she need not be revisionary in this case as well.

Chapter 7: Logical Inconsistency

1. Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that the non-cognitivist is able to accept both standard semantic and standard meta-semantic views. However, more needs to be said about normative language. Normative sentences have logical properties, just as non-normative sentences do. The non-cognitivist must be able to explain these as well. I will focus on one such property, *logical inconsistency*.¹

There is a particular reason to worry that the non-cognitivist will not be able to explain logical inconsistency, or, at the very least, will need to be radically revisionary regarding what it amounts to. The orthodox definition of logical inconsistency says that for sentences to be logically inconsistent is for their logical forms to guarantee that at least one is not *true*. Truth appears in this definition. The question is: can the non-cognitivist use truth in this way? If not, she cannot, then she cannot accept the standard definition while at the same time acknowledging that normative sentences can be logically inconsistent, as they clearly can be.

Nicholas Unwin voices essentially this worry in one of his papers on non-cognitivism and negation. He writes:

“the notions of semantic complexity and logical validity are normally analysed in terms of the more basic semantic concepts of truth and satisfaction. Since expressivists claim that normative judgements are not factual, and therefore lack truth-conditions (as ordinarily understood), a lot of

¹ Discussion of logical *validity* will raise irrelevant issues, unless validity is simply understood in terms of logical inconsistency.

explaining clearly needs to be done.”²

G. F. Schueler raises a similar concern in an influential early criticism of Blackburn’s metaethical view in *Spreading the Word*:

“As these words are standardly used I am involved in logical inconsistency if I believe (or assert, etc.) a set of sentences which are such that, as a matter of logic, not all of them can be true. But the whole point of Blackburn’s antirealist account of moral language is that in uttering [moral] sentences... we are not doing these sorts of things, we are ‘expressing attitudes or commitments’ and the like.”³

The potential problem for non-cognitivists can be put as follows, when we focus on the definition of non-cognitivism that I have advocated. The non-cognitivist thinks that normative concepts and normative terms do not achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties. They do not achieve robust, full-blooded representation of normative properties. For a sentence such as “lying is wrong” to be true is for the thing represented by “lying” to have the property represented by “is wrong.” But since the representation that “is wrong” achieves is *not* of the robust sort, it is natural to think that the kind of truth that the representation can explain is also not of the robust sort. It is some thinner sort of truth. What is not clear, then, is whether this thinner kind of truth is able to help explain what logical inconsistency is. Perhaps only robust truth can

² Unwin (2001), p. 61.

³ Schueler (1988), p. 496.

do that. But since truth figures in the orthodox definition of logical inconsistency, this leads to the possibility that, in explaining the logical inconsistency of normative sentences, perhaps the non-cognitivist needs to appeal to some revisionary definition of logical inconsistency. The worry is that truth cannot be both as thin as the non-cognitivist's view makes it out to be, and as thick as it would need to be to help define or help explain logical inconsistency.

There is another, closely related problem. Not only is logical inconsistency standardly *defined* in terms of truth, but it *matters* because of its connection to truth. Accepting a set of logically inconsistent sentences -- having the beliefs they express -- is, in a certain sense or senses, *problematic*. It is highly intuitive to think that the central problem is intimately connected to truth, that the core of the problem is that one is guaranteed to have a belief that is *not true*. One reason that it is problematic to accept both "lying is wrong" and "lying is not wrong" is that it guarantees that one has a belief that is not true. Once again, truth is doing explanatory work. But can the non-cognitivist accept that truth plays such a role? If not, she may struggle to explain what is problematic here. Going forward, I will refer to the sense or senses in which it is problematic to accept a set of logically inconsistent sentences as the "badness of logical inconsistency." The question will be, once again, whether the non-cognitivist can accept an intuitive, standard explanation, or whether she needs to be revisionary.

Most of those thinking about non-cognitivism and logical inconsistency do not explicitly argue that the non-cognitivist must adopt revisionary accounts of logical inconsistency and its badness. They instead proceed directly to trying to provide such accounts. All of these have a particular form. In Mark Schroeder's words, "all

expressivist attempts to explain inconsistency... try to account for inconsistency of sentences in terms of inconsistency of the states of mind expressed.”⁴ Thus we see Simon Blackburn (1993b) appealing to mutually unrealizable goals, Allan Gibbard (2003) introducing a primitive relation of disagreement between mental states, and Schroeder (2008) relying on mental states standing in an unexplained “A-type inconsistency” relation.⁵ Their revisionary idea is that sentences are logically inconsistent due to their expressing mental states that clash in some way, and that this clash (not explicated in terms of truth) explains the badness of logical inconsistency.

Despite the ubiquity of the view that the non-cognitivist cannot accept the standard account of logical inconsistency and its badness, it has received shockingly little attention or defense. My claim is that when we examine possible motivations for this view, we find none of them persuasive. The non-cognitivist *can* accept the orthodox account of logical inconsistency and its badness. She can agree that in general, regardless of subject matter, for a set of sentences to be logically inconsistent is for their logical forms to guarantee that they are not all true. And she can agree that a core sense in which it is problematic to accept logically inconsistent sentences is that one is guaranteed to have a belief that is not true.

To support my claim, I will first address two arguments, both purporting to show that the non-cognitivist cannot accept the standard account of logical inconsistency. The first says that the non-cognitivist cannot accept the standard account, because she thinks that normative sentences do not have truth values. The objection rests on an outdated

⁴ Schroeder (2008), p. 39.

⁵ See also Blackburn (1984), Gibbard (2012) appendix 2, Dreier (2006) and (2009), Silk (2015), Baker and Woods (2015). Horwich is an exception to the rule, see e.g. his (1993) and (2005). I am not able to discuss his views here.

conception of non-cognitivism, and is invalid besides. But it gives rise to the second argument, akin to those suggested above. This grants that the non-cognitivist can agree that normative sentences have truth values, in a “deflated” sense, but claims that deflated truth can do no explanatory or analytic work. Rebutting this argument requires looking into what exactly non-cognitivism is, the sense in which the non-cognitivist thinks that truth is deflated, and what such deflated things can and cannot do. It turns out that this argument fails as well. As long as non-cognitivism is not false for independent reasons, logical inconsistency itself is deflated, and deflated things *can* figure in the definitions of one another.

I will then turn to the badness of logical inconsistency. Here I will argue that, despite the fact that the non-cognitivist does not think that normative beliefs are fundamentally in the business of representing normative truths, the non-cognitivist can accept the same truth-based explanations of the badness of inconsistency as the cognitivist. If non-cognitivism is not already false for independent reasons, it will be able to use deflated truth to explain the badness of logical inconsistency.

There is one main reason that it matters whether or not the non-cognitivist can accept the standard accounts of logical inconsistency and its badness. It is extremely important for how the non-cognitivist must conduct her constructive project of giving accounts of increasingly complex mental states. If she can accept the standard accounts, then the approach that guides a great deal of non-cognitivist theorizing, perhaps best exemplified by Schroeder (2008), is not mandatory.

Here is how that approach, which does not use truth for explanatory work and

which I will call the *old approach*, works.⁶ The non-cognitivist needs to explain the fact that, for example, “lying is wrong” and “lying is not wrong” are logically inconsistent. And she needs to explain the badness of accepting both. On the old approach, this is a three step process.

First, she identifies some relation between mental states such that it is, in some sense, bad to have states that stand in the relation. This relation is *not* defined in terms of truth; these are the relations like the ones listed above, posited by Blackburn, Gibbard, Schroeder, and others. I will call this the “problematic relation.” Second, she provides a revisionary account of logical inconsistency. Most simply, this would say that sentences are logically inconsistent when they express mental states that stand in the problematic relation.⁷ Third, she assigns a meaning to “not” (and to “lying” and “is wrong”) such that assertions of “lying is not wrong” end up expressing a mental state that stands in the problematic relation to the state expressed by assertions of “lying is wrong.” Thus, the theorist concludes that the sentences are logically inconsistent, because assertions of them express mental states that stand in the problematic relation. And she has explained the fact that it is bad to accept both sentences insofar as she can explain why it is that it is in fact problematic to have states that stand in the problematic relation.

Of course, ensuring that “lying is wrong” and “lying is not wrong” are logically inconsistent is far from the only thing the non-cognitivist must do regarding these two sentences and the beliefs they are used to express. First and foremost, she must ensure that she correctly characterizes the functional roles of the beliefs. And she must show

⁶ To be clear, the *old approach* is that which accepts *revisionary* accounts of logical inconsistency and its badness. My *new approach*, discussed below, accepts the standard accounts of these things.

⁷ Baker and Woods (2015) modify this, claiming that the sentences are logically inconsistent only if they, *due to their logical forms*, express mental states which are in rational tension.

how the meanings of the sentences' words compositionally determine the (contents of) the mental states which assertions of the sentences express. These tasks are unavoidable, *any* non-cognitivist must do these things.

The feature of the old approach that I want to highlight is that, in following it, the non-cognitivist's assignment of a meaning to "not" and her account of what mental states are expressed by "lying is wrong" and "lying is not wrong" are driven by her need to secure the chosen problematic relation between the states. However, finding such a relation, not defined in terms of truth, will be very difficult. This is well illustrated by the Preface Paradox. For sufficiently large sets of sentences, it might well be perfectly rational to accept all of them, despite knowing that they are logically inconsistent.⁸ Thus, the problematic relation cannot be the relation of being irrational to hold together. This makes it highly unclear what such a relation would be, or if there is any such relation to be found at all.⁹

On my new approach, which *does* allow logical inconsistency and its badness to be explained via truth, the non-cognitivists' constructive theorizing goes very differently. No search for such an alternative problematic relation takes place. First, the non-cognitivist accepts the standard accounts of logical inconsistency and its badness, both of which appeal to truth. Second, she assigns a meaning to "not" which makes it the case that "lying is wrong" and "lying is not wrong," due to their logical forms, cannot both be true together. Third, she gives an account of the beliefs that lying is wrong and that lying is not wrong which accurately describes the functional roles of the states; it is this I have

⁸ See Makinson (1965), and Easwaren and Fitelson (2015) for recent discussion.

⁹ The most promising approach I know of appeals to the inability of mental states to all play their functional roles in the same person at the same time. This is at least hinted at in Blackburn (1993b), and discussed a bit more in Baker and Woods (2015).

attempted in Chapter 3-5. The crucial difference, again, is that the account does *not* need to find some alternative problematic relation, not defined in terms of truth, which is present in all cases of logical inconsistency. In identifying the meaning of “not” and providing accounts of the beliefs that lying is wrong and that lying is not wrong, the focus is now just on correctly characterizing the functional roles of the states. Thus the task takes a very different shape.

Of course, the key to the new approach is showing that the non-cognitivist *can* use truth to define logical inconsistency and explain what is bad about accepting logically inconsistent sentences. I turn now to the first of the arguments that the non-cognitivist cannot accept the standard account of what logical inconsistency is. I will then address an updated version of that argument. Finally, I will return to the issue of the badness of inconsistency.

2. *Argument One*

The standard account of logical inconsistency says:

For a set S of sentences to be logically inconsistent is for the sentences’
logical forms to guarantee that the sentences are not all true.¹⁰

The question is: Why can’t the non-cognitivist say exactly this when asked what it takes for a set of normative sentences to be logically inconsistent?

The flat-footed answer is that the non-cognitivist cannot say this because she

¹⁰ The fact that there are different ways to understand this claim will arise below. Maybe it is an identity claim, maybe a claim about an asymmetric definition relation.

thinks that normative sentences are not truth-apt.¹¹ This was a central feature of early non-cognitivist views. The objection continues: since the standard account defines logical inconsistency in terms of truth, even in the case of normative sentences, but the non-cognitivist denies that these sentences are truth-apt, the non-cognitivist cannot accept this account of logical inconsistency, at least in the case of normative sentences.

This objection fails for two reasons. The most glaring is that modern non-cognitivists think that normative sentences *are* truth-apt, albeit in a deflated way. So, as long as deflated truth makes sense and the non-cognitivist can make explanatory use of it (more on this below), the non-cognitivist can simply deny the main premise of this first argument.

The argument fails, however, even when the target is an old-school non-cognitivist theory. Suppose that normative sentences are indeed not truth-apt. Take the sentences “lying is wrong” and “lying is not wrong.” Two things guarantee that they are not both true. The first is that at least one is normative. But the second is their logical forms. Despite not being truth apt, they still have the logical forms *x is F* and *x is not F*. And having such forms *also* guarantees that they are not both true. The non-cognitivist can then go on to say that this is what makes them logically inconsistent. The non-cognitivist can both deny that normative sentences are truth-apt and accept the standard account; she will just think that the fact that some sets of logically inconsistent normative sentences are not all true is overdetermined. This first argument fails in two ways.

¹¹ The quotes above from Schueler (1988) and Unwin (2001) may fall into this camp, or they might be best interpreted as making the more sophisticated second objection.

3. *Argument Two*

The second argument that the non-cognitivist cannot accept the standard account of logical inconsistency seeks to update the first. It grants the non-cognitivist a deflated sense of truth. But it says that she cannot go on to use this deflated truth to define logical inconsistency. The idea is that, since the non-cognitivist thinks that truth is not *really* a property, the non-cognitivist must think it is unable to do explanatory or definitional work. Since the standard account defines logical inconsistency in terms of truth, the non-cognitivist cannot accept it.

For the same reason, the objector will maintain that the non-cognitivist cannot use normative properties in explanations or definitions. Even granting that the non-cognitivist's theory is compatible with there being normative properties in a deflated sense, their status as deflated precludes them from being used for explanations or definitions.

This worry might at first glance seem misguided. Suppose we grant that the non-cognitivist's view allows that the predicate "have logical forms which guarantee that they are not all true" is meaningful. Isn't it now trivially true that she can stipulate that "are logically inconsistent" has the same meaning? And isn't this all that is required to define logical inconsistency in the orthodox way? How could the deflated status of truth disallow something so simple?¹²

The objection, however, was not about the definition of "logical inconsistency," which I agree can just be stipulated. It was the definition of logical inconsistency, the relation that sentences can stand in. Truth's being deflated clearly does not affect the

¹² Thanks to Mark Schroeder for bringing a thought along these lines to my attention.

possibility of defining something in terms of “true,” but it is far less obvious whether it is possible to define some property or relation in terms of truth itself.

Developing this worry, and responding to it, will require looking deeper into what this notion of deflation is, just which things are deflated in this sense, and the connection between deflation on the one hand and explanation and definition on the other.

4. Non-Cognitivism and Deflationism

Recall, once again, that I define cognitivism and non-cognitivism according to what I call the Representation Explanation of the difference between them. Fully spelled out, it says:

Representation Explanation (Spelled Out): Cognitivism is the thesis that facts about our normative thought and talk determine conditions under which our normative terms, concepts, etc. would represent normative properties in such a way that all accounts of the representation would appeal to the represented normative property. Non-cognitivism is the negation of cognitivism.

The difference between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, on this view, has to do with whether or not normative thought “tries” to achieve a certain kind of robust representation of normative properties. The non-cognitivist thinks that normative thought does not achieve property-dependent representation of normative properties; it does not even try. But it is the lack of achieving it that is most central here.

Plausibly, the fact that normative properties are not represented via property-

dependent representation has important implications for the properties themselves. There is a certain conception of realism on which being fully real involves being “out there,” the sort of thing that we can latch onto in our thought. Fully real properties are ones such that, when we think about them, this can be thought of as a robust connection between mind and property.

But the non-cognitivist does not think normative properties are like that.¹³ When we represent these properties, we do not establish this sort of connection between between mind and world. Nothing about the property itself figures into the story of thought about the property; we do not look to the property to help answer why *it* is represented by a certain concept. Plausibly, this has a certain sort of anti-realist import for the property.¹⁴ Let us say that this makes the property *deflated*. We can roughly define a property’s being deflated as follows (a slight change will be needed):

Deflated (First Pass): For a property F to be deflated is for it to be necessary that there is no property-dependent representation of F.¹⁵

Spelling out property-dependent representation again, gives us:

Deflated (First Pass) Spelled Out: For a property F to be deflated is for it to be

¹³ I am assuming that the non-cognitivist does not hold that normative properties, in addition to *not* being represented in the property-dependent way by normative concepts, *are* represented in the property-dependent way by other concepts. If the non-cognitivist held that normative properties are *identical* to properties like happiness maximization, for example, this would result. But I know of no non-cognitivists who hold this view, although Gibbard (2003) comes close. Thanks to Tristram McPherson for discussion.

¹⁴ Something like this line of thought is needed to get the objection I am discussing off the ground. So if one finds it unconvincing, that is dialectically good for me.

¹⁵ It may be that a slightly different definition would serve better. This says that for F to be deflated is for neither F *nor* properties sufficient to define F to appear in the account of what it is for something to represent F. But the simple version will suffice.

necessary that there is no representation relation R such that there is some x which stands in R to F , and F figures in *all* accounts of what it is for x to stand in R to F .

It will turn out, however, that this does not quite capture the notion we want. The problem comes from properties that are definable, such as the property of being furry and happy. This is closely related to a problem addressed in Chapter Two. Suppose that the concept FURRY achieves property-dependent representation of the property of being furry. And suppose that the concept HAPPY achieves property-dependent representation of the property of being happy. And suppose that for a concept to represent the property of being furry *and* happy is simply for it to be a concept that one is disposed to apply to something just in case one is disposed to apply both FURRY and HAPPY to it. Thus, it turns out that, in the account of what it is for FURRY AND HAPPY to represent the property of being furry and happy, the property of being furry and happy did not appear. Intuitively, however, this does not give the property of being furry and happy some importantly status than the property of being furry, or the property of being happy. So, an amendment is needed.

The way to fix the problem goes as follows. While the property of being furry and happy did not appear in the account of the representation of the property, the properties of being furry and being happy did. The account of the representation appeals to the concepts FURRY and HAPPY. These concepts achieve property-dependent representation of the properties of being furry and of being happy. Thus, by extension the account of the representation of the property of being furry and happy appeals to the properties of being

furry and of being happy.¹⁶

This matters for the following reason. The properties of being furry and of being happy are sufficient to define the property of being furry and happy. What exactly it is for some properties to be sufficient to define another is unclear. But intuitively, the idea is that, when we say *what it is* for something to have the property of being furry and happy, all we need to appeal to is the property of being furry, and the property of being happy.¹⁷ While the account of the representation of the property of being furry and happy does not appeal to the property itself, it *does* appeal to properties sufficient to define the property of being furry and happy.

This makes the case importantly different from the representation that, for example, the non-cognitivist posits for normative properties. When REASON FOR ACTION represents the property of being a reason for action, due to the concept's playing a certain motivational, deliberative, and social role, neither the property of being a reason for action nor properties sufficient to define it are present in the account. The upshot of the representation of the property of being happy and furry being as I have just sketched is the same as the upshot of the property itself figuring into the account of representation of it. Thus, we should expand the definition of what it takes to be a deflated property:

Deflated: For a property *F* to be deflated is for it to be necessary that there is no representation relation *R* such that there is some *x* which stands in *R* to *F*, and *F* or properties sufficient to define *F* figure in all accounts of what it is for *x* to stand

¹⁶ On some views of concepts, ones that say e.g. that the same concept is shared by Earthlings and Twin Earthlings, but that it represents H₂O on Earth and XYZ on Twin Earth, this inference does not quite go through. But this problem can be easily dealt with.

¹⁷ We also need to appeal to conjunction. I will consider some properties sufficient if they, along with logical constants, define the property.

in R to F.

To illustrate again, take the property of being furry and happy. For this property to count as deflated, it is not enough that *it* not appear in every account of some way in which it is represented. There must also be no way in which it is represented such that all the accounts of the property being represented in that way appeal to both the properties of being furry and being happy.

Very plausibly, there is an important consequence of being deflated. If property F is deflated, it cannot figure in the definition of something which is not deflated (i.e. inflated). Rigorously arguing for this principle would take us rather far afield.¹⁸ And since it is a key piece in the objection to non-cognitivism I am addressing, it would be dialectically good for me if it were false. But thinking about an example of what such a definition would look like does make the principle plausible.

For example, suppose a theorist adopts the following view. She is a non-cognitivist regarding reasons. She thinks that REASON does not achieve property-dependent representation of the property of being a reason, and thus that this property is deflated. She thinks that for REASON to represent the property of being a reason is simply for REASON to play a certain motivational, deliberative, and social role.

Furthermore, she accepts a plausible definition: for an action to be the action that one ought to perform is for that to be the action she has most reason to perform. The real definition of the property of being an action that one ought to perform is simply being an action that one has most reason to perform.

¹⁸ See e.g. Fine (2001) for closely related discussion, however.

However, the theorist now accepts *cognitivism* about the property of being an action one ought to perform. She thinks that OUGHT, in this context, *does* achieve property-dependent representation of the property of being an action one ought to perform. The concept robustly represents this property, the property figures in the account of what it is to have thoughts about it.

I think that this is an unacceptable combination of views. If the property of being a reason is deflated, if non-cognitivism is true of it, then it simply cannot be that the property of being an action one ought to perform is both defined in terms of the property of being a reason *and* is an inflated property of which some cognitivist theory is true. It might well be acceptable to be a non-cognitivist about reasons and a cognitivist about oughts, if one thinks that neither helps define the other. But once one takes reasons to help define oughts, it is very plausible that one cannot be a non-cognitivist about reasons, but a cognitivist about oughts.

For the same reason that this non-cognitivist about reasons must take oughts to be deflated, she very plausibly must take truth to be deflated as well. Suppose the non-cognitivist wants to capture the common ideas that it is propositions which are the fundamental truth-bearers, and that for a proposition to be true is for it to correspondence with the facts. For the proposition that lying is wrong to be true is, in part at least, for there to be a fact that lying is wrong. And for there to be a fact that lying is wrong is defined at least in part in terms of the property of lying. Since the non-cognitivist takes the normative property of lying to be deflated, she must thereby take the fact that lying is wrong to be deflated. And since this helps define truth, she must take truth to be deflated as well.

Is this *all* truth, or only normative truths? This will turn on how exactly we define what it is for a proposition to be true. If it is for it to correspond with *all the facts*, and some of these facts include (deflated) normative facts, then *all* truth will be deflated. For the definition of what it is for *any* proposition to be true will appeal to, among others, deflated normative facts. On the other hand, if what it is for the proposition that *p* to be true is simply for it to correspond with the fact that *p*, then only normative truth will be deflated. However, this latter view has the strange consequence that, in effect, there are as many different properties of truth as there are facts. If the proposition that *p*'s being true is simply corresponding to the fact that *p*, and the proposition that *q*'s being true is simply corresponding to the fact that *q*, then these properties of being true cannot be identical. To avoid this consequence, we need to define truth as correspondence with *all* of the facts. Thus, a theorist who thinks that *any* property is deflated is led to think that truth *in general* is deflated.¹⁹

This is a way to make precise this second argument that the non-cognitivist cannot accept the standard definition of logical inconsistency. The non-cognitivist, due to her view of the representation of normative properties, is led to the conclusion that truth is deflated. But we have seen that deflated properties cannot help define inflated properties. Thus the worry arises that the non-cognitivist will not be able to use truth in her definition of logical inconsistency.

However, making the argument more precise also makes clear a potential like of response. Deflated notions cannot help define inflated notions. But we have not yet asked

¹⁹ There are of course assumptions one could drop to avoid this. The non-cognitivist could adopt a theory of truth that eschews correspondence with the facts, such as a coherence or pragmatist view of truth. Or, she could simply maintain that truth is inflated and claim that there are no normative truths. I assume that the non-cognitivist wants to maintain both the common thoughts that there are normative truths and that truth amounts to (some sort of) correspondence with the facts.

if they can help define other deflated notions. Suppose that we could argue that they *could*. And suppose we could argue that logical inconsistency is itself deflated. If so, then there would be nothing to stop the non-cognitivist defining logical inconsistency in terms of truth. She could still accept the orthodox definition of logical inconsistency. It is these two things that I will now argue for.

First, can the deflated help define the deflated? Returning to the example above will be helpful in making the case that it can. The theorist is a non-cognitivist about the property of being a reason. She defines the property of being an action that one ought to perform as an action that one has most reason to perform. But this time, the theorist is *also* a non-cognitivist about the property of being an action that one ought to perform. She thinks this property is deflated as well. She thinks that, much like REASON, the account of what it is for the concept OUGHT to represent the property of being an action that one ought to perform simply amounts to the concept playing a certain motivational, deliberative, and social role. I submit that, *prima facie* at least, it seems acceptable for this theorist to accept the definitional claim. Since she is a non-cognitivist about both of the properties involved, there is intuitively no problem here.²⁰

There is a second reason to think that a deflated property can help define a deflated property, or at least to dispel a reason to think that they cannot. One might reason roughly as follows. Deflated properties are have a sort of thin, less than fully real status. That robs them of the power or ability to “do” anything. But defining another property would be doing something. Thus, they cannot help define other properties.

The mistake here is in thinking of defining as “doing,” in any sense. All it takes

²⁰ That Fine thinks there can be deflated-deflated explanations is clear from his (2001), p. 17. I have not seen the question addressed elsewhere.

for G to be defined in terms of F is for G to be “nothing over and above” F (and perhaps some other things). For example, when we define the property of being a triangle as being a closed plane figure with three angles, we are saying that being a triangle is “nothing over and above” being a closed plane figure with three angles. It is not as though the property of being a plane closed figure, or the property of having three angles, has to “do” anything. If there is such a property, it is eligible to figure in definitions.

The same goes for deflated properties. If there are such properties, this is all it takes for them to potentially figure in the definitions of other (deflated) properties. It is not as though they need to “give rise” to these further properties. There simply need to be such properties.

Let us assume then, that deflated properties can figure in the definitions of other deflated properties. This means that, even given that the non-cognitivist has a deflated conception of truth, she can define logical inconsistency in terms of it, if logical inconsistency is deflated. I will now argue that, if non-cognitivism is not false for independent reasons, it is.

5. Logical Inconsistency

To show that logical inconsistency is deflated, the non-cognitivist needs to show that in the account of what it is for LOGICAL INCONSISTENCY to represent the property of logical inconsistency, neither the property of logical inconsistency, nor properties sufficient to define it appears. I will argue for two points. First, the non-cognitivist is already committed to this being the case, given the orthodox definition of logical inconsistency. So, she takes on no additional burden by accepting it. Second, it is in fact

independently plausible that logical inconsistency is deflated.

First, the non-cognitivist is already committed to logical inconsistency, given the orthodox definition, being deflated. As we saw above, the non-cognitivist is committed to truth being deflated.²¹ Thus, she is committed to anything that it helps define also being deflated. Truth helps to define the property of some sentences of having logical forms which guarantee that they are not all true. Thus, the non-cognitivist must take this to be deflated as well. This property as well, she must think, explains nothing inflated.

The non-cognitivist, before considerations of logical inconsistency come onto the scene, already has the task of showing that she can give a full account of our thought, given her commitments. This includes giving an account of what it is for a concept to represent some sentences' property of having logical forms that guarantee that the sentences are not all true. If the non-cognitivist's position regarding normative properties leads her to a view about truth that leaves her unable to account for this representation, then her view is false, independent of how she defines logical inconsistency. Thus, the non-cognitivist is already committed to providing an account of what it is for a concept to represent some sentences' property of having logical forms that guarantee that the sentences are not all true.

I will assume that this fact about what a concept represents is itself an inflated fact, due representation relations being inflated. This means that the non-cognitivist must say what it is for LOGICAL INCONSISTENCY to represent the property of logical inconsistency, without appealing either to truth or the property of sentences of having

²¹ We also noted that there are ways for the non-cognitivist to avoid this. But I will ignore these. If any of these work, then the non-cognitivist is in great shape, because the whole potential problem regarding logical inconsistency stemmed from her thinking that truth is deflated.

logical forms which guarantee they are not all true. And this is so *regardless* of how logical inconsistency is defined, it is simply a matter of the non-cognitivist not being able to use deflated properties in her definitions of inflated things. If the non-cognitivist cannot do this, her view is in trouble, and is so before the question of how logical inconsistency is defined has been raised.

Let us suppose that she *can* do this. That is, she can define what it is for LOGICAL INCONSISTENCY to represent the property of logical inconsistency, without appealing either to truth or the property of sentences of having logical forms which guarantee they are not all true. At this point, if logical inconsistency is defined in the orthodox way, then the non-cognitivist will be able to show that it is deflated. For she will be able to give an account of what it is for logical inconsistency to be represented, an account which appeals to neither the property itself or properties sufficient to define the property. If logical inconsistency is defined as the property of sentences of having logical forms that guarantee that they are not all true, and an account of what it is for this property to be represented does not include the property of sentences of having logical forms that guarantee that they are not all true, then the property itself does not appeal in the account of what it is for it to be represented.²² Similarly, if logical inconsistency is defined as the property of sentences of having logical forms that guarantee that they are not all true, and an account of what it is for this property to be represented does not include the property of truth, then properties sufficient to define logical inconsistency do not appeal in the account of what it is for it to be represented; without the property of truth, the properties

²² There are few remaining issues here, regarding the fact that definition may not be identity and that properties can be represented in multiple ways. I think neither is serious and for reasons of space will not explicitly address them.

that appear will not be sufficient.

This all shows that the non-cognitivist is already committed, due to her taking truth to be deflated, to being able to provide an account of the representation of logical inconsistency that makes it deflated, if it defined in the orthodox way. So, if non-cognitivist is not already explanatorily deficient, even before addressing the question of how logical logical inconsistency is defined, then she is in a position to show that logical inconsistency, as standardly defined, is indeed deflated. And so accepting that logical inconsistency is deflated does not put some *additional* burden on the non-cognitivist. If she is able to carry out tasks she already needed to carry out, then she is able to show that logical inconsistency is deflated.

This is enough to make a methodological point. The non-cognitivist need not explore alternative conceptions of logical inconsistency. If the fact about representation in question can be explained without appealing to truth, she can accept the standard account. If it cannot, then her view is already in major trouble, for its commitments regarding truth leave it explanatorily impoverished. Thus, there is no situation in which she would think that the best way to go is a pairing of non-cognitivism with a revisionary definition of logical inconsistency. That option need not be explored.

The question remains: is logical inconsistency deflated? That is, in the account of what it takes for a concept to represent logical inconsistency -- in the account of what it takes to think about logical inconsistency -- do either logical inconsistency or properties sufficient to define it appear? Are thoughts about logical inconsistency representational of facts about logical inconsistency in the way that thoughts about everyday and scientific properties are representation, or are thoughts about logical inconsistency more akin to

normative thoughts, as the non-cognitivist conceives of them? Obviously this is not a question I can even try to resolve here. But I will make a few remarks.

First, there is a long tradition, continuing to the present, of conceiving of logic and logical thought as having to do more with rules governing thought, as opposed to how things are.²³ On such views, accepting that some sentences are inconsistent is something like accepting a policy governing one's acceptance of the sentences. To believe that a given set of sentences is logically inconsistent is something like adopting a policy of not accepting all of some sentences which have the same logical forms as the given sentences.²⁴ This meshes well with a deflated conception of truth. If the concept of truth is most fundamentally a tool to help signal or regulate acceptance or denial of claims, it seems natural that the associated concept of logical inconsistency is used just to signal or regulate acceptance or denial of certain *sets of* claims, or the sentences which we use to express these claims. Of course, it is by no means obvious that this view is correct. But it is at least a serious contender.

Second, I think various worries one might have with such a view are ultimately misguided. Perhaps the most pressing is the worry that the view involves throwing out the standard model-theoretic conception of logical inconsistency we have inherited from Tarski. According to it, sentences are logically inconsistent just in case there is no model (a domain of objects and assignments of sets of n -tuples of those objects to n -place predicates) on which all the sentences are true. If the proposal that logical inconsistency were deflated required throwing out this standard view, that would be a major cost.

²³ For some recent examples, see Blackburn (1993c), Brandom (1994) and (2008), and Field (2015).

²⁴ Such a view will need to answer questions about Preface cases, in which we believe that a set of sentences are logically inconsistent, and accept them all anyway. Perhaps the policy is a defeasible one. Or perhaps, as on the view of Field (2015), the policy governs our credences; it leads us to not assign credences to the propositional contents of the sentences which would violate the probability axioms.

However, it does not. The model-theoretic approach to logical inconsistency is an attempt to substantively characterize just which sets of sentences are logically inconsistent, i.e. those such that their logical forms guarantee that they are not all true.²⁵ And it is a proposal that the deflationist about logical inconsistency is able to accept. Just as the deflationist about truth can accept that a proposition is true just in case it is known by God and the deflationist about the normative can accept that actions are right just in case they maximize happiness, so the deflationist about logical inconsistency can accept that sentences are inconsistent just in case there is no model on which they are all true. The deflationist could also accept some rival proposal regarding logical inconsistency. The move to deflationism about logical inconsistency leaves intact first-order debates over the correct criterion of logical inconsistency (be it model-theoretic, proof-theoretic, or something else), just as deflationism about the normative leaves intact the debate between consequentialists and non-consequentialists.

Another worry is about the following possibility: what if either logical inconsistency or materials sufficient to define it is not a part of the account of beliefs about it, but *is* part of the account of some other inflated fact? If this were so, then some mistake must have been made above. There I said that 1) something is inflated only if either it or materials sufficient to define it shows up in the account of beliefs about it, and that 2) only the inflated is part of the account of the inflated. Given these principles, the possibility in question is one in which logical inconsistency both is and is not inflated. It is inflated because it is part of the account of something inflated, but not inflated because neither it nor materials sufficient to define it is part of the account of beliefs about it. So,

²⁵ See especially Etchemendy (1990), chapter 1.

to hold on to the principles, I must deny that there are no such possibilities. I must deny that logical inconsistency is part of the account of any inflated fact. I know of only one such argument that says that it is.²⁶ Suppose that facts about metaphysical necessity are inflated, and that to be metaphysically necessary is to be logically entailed by the essences of things.²⁷ From this follows that logical entailment (at least of propositions, if natures are sets of propositions) is inflated. Depending on how one thinks about entailment, this could lead directly to the result that logical inconsistency is inflated. The non-cognitivist must avoid this result in order to accept the standard account. But there are a number of ways to do so. So while some such argument might be trouble, it is far from clear that any will succeed.

Another potential worry is that facts about logical inconsistency seem to just be easily read off from facts about the logical forms of sentences. This stands in marked contrast to what one might take to be a telling indicator of a property's being deflated, namely that one *cannot* simply read off facts about it. There seems to be a gap or an open question between an object having certain non-normative features and it having normative features. We cannot simply read off normative facts about something from its non-normative features. This sort of idea was crucial for the Regulation Argument of Chapter Two.

There does *not* seem to be such a gap between the facts regarding a set of sentences and facts regarding their logical inconsistency. Given the meanings of the logical constants and the syntax of some sentences, we *can* simply read off (perhaps with a bit of logical reasoning) whether the sentences are logically inconsistent. When

²⁶ Thanks to Gideon Rosen for bringing this line of thought to my attention in this context.

²⁷ The second of these positions is defended in Fine (1994).

presented with “Max is awake” and “Max is not awake,” there is no gap or open question between the meaning of “not” and the syntax of the sentences, on the one hand, and the fact that they are logically inconsistent on the other. There is no debate to be had, the case is simply closed. This feature of logical inconsistency, one might reasonably think, tells against a deflationary conception of it.²⁸

The difference, however, is illusory. The more accurate analogy between being able to read facts about logical inconsistency off from facts about syntax and the meanings of logical constants is with being able to read off facts about what a person ought to do from the facts about what reasons she has and their relative weights. In the latter case, the gap or open question disappears, because the facts one is given are already normative.

This is what we have in the case of logical inconsistency as well. In particular, facts about the meanings of logical constants can already be thought of as logical facts. In theorizing about the meanings of logical constants, a key datum to be accommodated is for the meaning to generate the intuitively correct results about logical inconsistency. Whatever “not” means, it must have a meaning that makes “Max is awake” and “Max is not awake” logically inconsistent. Suppose I am given two sentences: “Max is awake” and “Max is N awake.” I do not know what “N” means. Then I learn that “N” means what “not” means. This puts me in a position to read off that the sentences are inconsistent. For if any logical constant C has the meaning of “not,” whatever that is, it has a meaning that makes “Max is awake” and “Max is C awake” logically inconsistent. Thus, the fact that facts about logical inconsistency follow without open question or

²⁸ Thanks to Andy Egan for pressing an objection in this ballpark.

gap from facts about syntax and the meanings of logical constants does not tell against logical inconsistency being deflated, any more than the fact that facts about what people ought to do follow without open question or gap from facts about what they have reason to do.

In sum, there is a good case to be made that the non-cognitivist can accept the orthodox account of logical inconsistency. The argument that she cannot says that, since the non-cognitivist takes truth to be deflated, she cannot use it to help define logical inconsistency. However, closer examination that this is only so *if* logical inconsistency is inflated. But the non-cognitivist is already committed to giving a theory that would make logical inconsistency deflated. And the position that logical inconsistency is deflated, that it is akin to normative thought as conceived of by the non-cognitivist, has a number of defenders, and survives the objections just raised. Thus, the non-cognitivist should simply say what everyone says about logical inconsistency: it is the property of sentences of having logical forms which guarantee that they are not all true.

6. *The Badness of Inconsistency*

I now return to the fact that it is *problematic* to accept all of a set of logically inconsistent sentences. When one believes e.g. both that lying is wrong and that lying is not wrong (assuming this is possible), one's total mental state is in some sense or senses *problematic*, less than ideal. And at least one such sense is present *whenever* one accepts logically inconsistent sentences, regardless of the size of the set of sentences. Even in a Preface situation, in which one has excellent evidence for the truth of each of a large number of logically inconsistent sentences, there is *still* something which is, in some

sense, bad about accepting all of them.²⁹ It might be that, all things considered, the author should believe all of the Preface propositions. But still, there is clearly something less than ideal about one's situation when one does so.

What I take to be the most obvious sort of badness centers on considerations of truth. It is less than ideal to accept a set of logically inconsistent sentences because one is guaranteed, by the logical forms of the sentences, to have a belief which is not true. There are almost certainly other respects in which it is problematic, bad, or less than ideal to accept a set of logically inconsistent sentences. And some of these respects will almost certainly be present in some cases, but not others. But the sense that centers on truth is an obvious, central sort of badness. It would be a cost if the non-cognitivist could not agree that it is a sense in which it is bad to accept such sentences, even if she *could* provide some other sense or senses in which it is problematic.

What is problematic about having a guarantee of a belief which is not true derives from what is problematic about having a false belief.³⁰ If losing money were not bad, then being guaranteed to lose money would not be bad. Being guaranteed to lose money is bad (at least in part) *because* losing money is bad. Similarly, having beliefs which are guaranteed to not all be true is bad (in part) *because* having a belief which is not true is bad. The logical guarantee does make the situation more problematic, because the person could, simply by knowing the logical forms of the sentences which express her beliefs and doing a bit of logic, come to know that she has a belief which is not true. But, again, being in a situation where one can relatively easily know that one is F is only a specially

²⁹ See Makinson (1965).

³⁰ I will switch to talk of falsity rather than lack of truth, for convenience. But everything I say applies to beliefs which are not true but also not false, if there are any.

problematic situation if being F is problematic in the first place. The heart of the issue is that it is problematic to have a false belief.³¹

Our question is whether the non-cognitivist can accept this, in the case of normative belief, or whether she must resign herself to a revisionary view of the badness of logical inconsistency, one that does not explain this badness in terms of falsity. Theorists thinking about this have only explored revisionary options. But I think the non-cognitivist, once again, need not be revisionary here.

For many propositional attitudes, such as desiring or imagining, it is not problematic to hold the attitude toward a false content. It is not problematic to *imagine* that it is raining frogs, but it is problematic to *believe* it is (because the proposition is false). Something about belief, as opposed to imagining, explains this difference. Clearly the cognitivist thinks that normative beliefs have this feature, whatever it is, since cognitivists think that normative beliefs are fundamentally like non-normative beliefs, which have this feature. But non-cognitivists have a different view of what normative beliefs are, or at least of the sort of representation they go in for. It is an open question whether, on their view, normative beliefs have the feature which makes the falsity of the content of the attitude explain why it is bad to have it. So the thing to do is to look at what feature of belief the cognitivist takes this to be, and then ask whether the non-cognitivist can agree that normative beliefs have this feature.

One might explain why the falsity of a normative belief explains why it is problematic to have in two main sorts of ways. The first is based on the action-guiding role of belief. The second is based on ideas familiar from the literature exploring the

³¹ Plausibly the point can be made without direct appeal to truth or falsity: it is problematic to believe *p* when it is the case that *not-p*.

sense in which belief “aims at the truth.” I will take these in turn.

We choose to act one way rather than another in part because of our beliefs. This is a platitudinous fact about the action-guiding role of belief. Thus, when one has a false belief, one may be led astray. This is normally spelled out in terms of the frustration of one’s intrinsic desires. If I want to quench my thirst, but have a false belief about where I can get a drink, I will likely fail to satisfy my desire. The fact that the belief is false explains why it is bad to have, via the fact that beliefs (unlike other mental states) have a particular role in the production of action.

This is, however, at best an incomplete diagnosis about what is problematic about someone having false *normative* beliefs. Suppose someone believes that one ought to occasionally kill people at random. The main problem with this, I submit, is *not* that it will lead the person will likely frustrate her desires. The clear problem is that this false belief may lead the person to do terrible things. Generally, the main problem with false *normative* beliefs is not that they will frustrate one’s desires, but that they will lead one to act (or think or feel) in ways that one should not.

The non-cognitivist can clearly agree with this. Ask the non-cognitivist why it is problematic if someone believes that one ought to occasionally kill at random and she will respond, in her own normative voice, that it is bad if someone has that belief because it may well lead the person to kill at random, which would be a terrible thing.³² And she can claim that, in general, the falsity of a normative belief explains why it is problematic to have because it may lead one to act in ways that one should not.³³ Given that she can

³² Matters are a bit more complicated, for cognitivists and non-cognitivists alike, if someone else has a false normative belief that will likely lead her to bring about *good* outcomes.

³³ Things are less clear when the non-cognitivist does not have a settled opinion on the normative matter in question. But suppose that non-cognitivism is not already false due to its inability to correctly characterize

agree with this, it is not especially important whether she can also explain the badness of false normative belief via their possible tendency to lead to the frustration of one's intrinsic desires.

This might not seem much of an achievement, however. It is relatively unsurprising that the non-cognitivist is in a good position to talk about the effect of having false normative beliefs on one's actions, since the action-guiding role of normative belief is at the core of the non-cognitivist view. Where one would expect the non-cognitivist to struggle is with the other aspect of belief, the sense in which it *aims at the truth*.

It is unclear what exactly what it is for belief to aim at the truth; different conceptions of what this amounts to will be discussed below. But whatever it is, one might doubt that the non-cognitivist can accept that normative beliefs aim at the truth. Thus, if this is the feature of normative belief that helps explain why it is bad or problematic to have a false normative belief, then one might worry that the non-cognitivist will, at best, need to give some revisionary explanation here.

When we explore the two main conceptions of what it is for belief to aim at the truth, however, we see that the non-cognitivist is, once again, in just as good of a position as the non-cognitivist. The first main conception of belief's aiming at the truth, the "teleological" conception, simply is inapplicable to normative beliefs. For reasons relating to the Normative Twin Earth thought experiment discussed in Chapter Two, it is simply not the case that normative belief aims at the truth in *this* sense. The second main

what various mental states are. Thus, we grant the non-cognitivist an account of the belief that, if action A is wrong, then the belief that action A is not wrong might lead one to perform a wrong action. Given an account of this belief, she can express it in explaining why the falsity of a normative belief explains why it is bad to have it, even when unsure about the normative proposition.

conception of belief's aiming at the truth, the "normativist" conception, makes this property of aiming out to be a normative property. But, for reasons discussed in Chapter Five, the non-cognitivist has already shown that she is in a position to agree with the cognitivist about the normative properties of normative beliefs. Thus, the non-cognitivist is in as good a position as the cognitivist. I will start with the teleological conception of aiming at the truth.

The best version of the teleological approach says that, in order for a state to aim at the truth that *p*, one must have subconscious mechanisms that tend to make it the case that one has the state only if *p*.³⁴ Such mechanisms clearly do *not* exist for states like imagination or desire; nothing in our minds generally has the role of preventing us from imagining or desiring things that are not true. But this is more plausible in the case of belief. The clearest cases are perhaps perceptual; the impinging of our visual experience on our beliefs tends to make it the case that we believe that there is a desk in the room only when there is. And more sophisticated mechanisms might well operate on more sophisticated beliefs. The idea is not that beliefs can never be false. It is simply that, for a state to aim at the truth that *p*, whether one has the belief must be a matter regulated by these broadly accuracy-producing mechanisms.

The non-cognitivist *cannot* accept that normative belief aims at the truth in this sense. To claim that it does would be to define normative beliefs in terms of the normative. The non-cognitivist cannot define the belief that lying is wrong in part as being a state which is regulated by mechanisms that cause one to only have the state *if lying is wrong*. That would bring wrongness into the account. So, if normative beliefs *do*

³⁴ For defenses of views along these lines, see Humberstone (1992), Velleman (2000), and Steglich-Petersen (2006).

aim at the truth in this sense, non-cognitivism is false.

Fortunately, we have already seen in Chapter Two that normative beliefs *do not* aim at the truth in this sense. There we learned that people can be *radically* mistaken in their normative beliefs, and yet still have genuine normative beliefs. Whatever exactly representation of normative properties is, it is not what I there called *regulation*. But regulation of a certain sort is exactly what this conception of the aim of belief is. Thus, normative beliefs simply do not aim at the truth in *this* sense. It is no problem that the non-cognitivist cannot appeal to it in an explanation of why it is bad to have a false belief, because any alleged explanation involving it will be incorrect. We can turn now to the normativist conception of the aim of belief.

The normativist claim is that beliefs aim at the truth in the sense that beliefs have a certain normative status that connects them to truth.³⁵ The starting thought is that a belief is *correct* if and only if it is true, where correctness is a normative property. Whether and how this normative property should be reduced to some other normative property is unclear. For example, one might hold that for it to be the case that a belief is correct iff it is true is for it to be the case that one (objectively) *ought* to believe *p* only if *p*. But all such reductions are controversial. The normativist about the aim of belief can claim that what explains its being problematic to have a false belief is the fact that false beliefs have the (possibly reducible) normative property of incorrectness.

In Chapter Five, I argued that the non-cognitivist can accept that normative credences have whatever explains their aiming at accuracy, and so they can accept Joyce's Accuracy Dominance Argument for probabilism. The same argument can be used

³⁵ Some standard references: Wedgwood (2002), Boghossian (2003), Shah (2003), Engel (2004), and Gibbard (2005).

here, to show that normative beliefs have the normative property of being correct just in case their contents are true.

The non-cognitivist agrees with the cognitivist about what the states in question are like. For example, they will agree on the functional roles of the states. And they can accept the same normative principles, assigning normative properties to normative mental states due to the non-normative properties of the states. So, for example, the non-cognitivist can agree that a high credence that stealing is wrong has the property of being a state one *ought* to have. And she can agree that a belief that lying is wrong is correct just in case lying is wrong. Moreover, she can explain such facts by citing (almost) whatever feature of the credence that the cognitivist would cite in explanation.³⁶

The non-cognitivist can thus say the following: it is incorrect to believe that giving to charity is wrong, because 1) giving to charity is not wrong, and 2) the belief that giving to charity is wrong is correct if and only if giving to charity is wrong. She can say that giving to charity is not wrong by making a substantive normative claim. She can use this in the explanation, because, while she takes it to be a deflated fact, she takes the fact being explained to be deflated as well, since it is also a normative fact. And she can say that the belief that giving to charity is wrong is correct if and only if giving to charity is wrong. The non-cognitivist has earned the right to make this claim by showing that she can give a satisfactory account of the (logically complex) state that it expresses, as I did in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. This all means that the non-cognitivist can explain the fact that the normative belief has this property, of being correct just in case giving to

³⁶ In Chapter Five I addressed the objection that the non-cognitivist cannot appeal to the state achieving, or trying to achieve, property-dependent representation of a normative property. That is true, but I argued that neither restriction leaves the non-cognitivist at an explanatory disadvantage.

charity is wrong, via just the same features of the belief that the cognitivist would use to explain it.

Thus, the non-cognitivist has done everything she needs to in order to be able to claim that what is problematic about having a false normative belief is explained via the fact that normative beliefs aim at the truth, in the normativist's sense. What is problematic about having a false normative belief? It is the fact that such a belief is incorrect. Why is, for example, the belief that lying is wrong incorrect, given that lying is not wrong? It is incorrect because this state aims at the truth, and, if lying is not wrong, then it is not true that lying is wrong. Why does the state aim at the truth? We have not yet said. But I have argued that, whatever explanation the cognitivist gives, the non-cognitivist is in a position to give an explanation that is just as strong.

The non-cognitivist is thus able to explain the sense in which it is bad to have a false normative belief in just the same way as the cognitivist. If this is explained in terms of the effects of a false normative belief on action, the non-cognitivist is in good shape. The potential explanation offered by the teleologist's approach to the aim of belief does not apply to normative beliefs, so the fact that the non-cognitivist cannot accept it is no problem. This is supported by arguments in Chapter Two. But explanations going by way of the normative properties of normative beliefs are also open to the non-cognitivist to accept. This we learned in chapter Five. Of course, one might worry about how satisfactorily these approaches explain the sense in which it is bad to have a false belief. But as long as the non-cognitivist can accept all of the potential explanations the cognitivist can, there is no problem for the non-cognitivist.

I conclude that the non-cognitivist does not need to be revisionary either

regarding what logical inconsistency *is*, or regarding why it is *bad* to have logically inconsistent (normative) beliefs.

7. Conclusion: Whither Frege-Geach?

Perhaps the most famous and stubborn problem for non-cognitivists is the Frege-Geach problem, introduced by Peter Geach and John Searle.³⁷ In a nutshell the problem is a set of questions. Assuming that the non-cognitivist offers a non-standard semantic value for a sentence like “lying is wrong,” what semantic value does she assign to more complex sentences like “if lying is wrong, then stealing is wrong?” For example, if the semantic value she assigns to “lying is wrong” is what an assertion of the sentence *does*, such as performing the action of commanding others to not lie, then what semantic value is assigned to “if lying is wrong, then stealing is wrong?” What does someone *do* in asserting that? How do the meanings of the sentences’ constituents, and the way they are syntactically combined, produce the meanings of the sentences? How is it that the sentences are logically inconsistent, given that these are their meanings? And why is it bad or problematic, in a particular sense, to accept logically inconsistent normative sentences, given these meanings?

The Frege-Geach problem arises for any view that is committed to giving revisionary, non-standard answers to these questions. For if she rejects the most plausible, widely accepted theories, she puts herself at risk of embracing a view that ultimately will fail. Non-cognitivism is usually regarded as requiring revisionary answers to at least some of the above questions. And thus it is usually regarded as being in danger

³⁷ See Geach (1960) and Searle (1962).

of embracing some theory of semantics or logical inconsistency that ultimately will prove untenable.

What the last two chapters have argued is that the non-cognitivist can give standard answers to all of these questions. Non-cognitivism, as I have developed it, does not have the Frege-Geach problem. Of course, a particular non-cognitivist may have a view that faces it, if she does choose to be revisionary regarding one of the above questions. But non-cognitivism as such does not require such revisionism.

There is one task that remains to be addressed regarding normative language. I have thus far said very little about what we *do* with normative language. Several authors have argued that the non-cognitivist cannot explain the *point* of using normative language. However, the next chapter argues that, in fact, the non-cognitivist has a satisfactory story to tell here as well.

Chapter 8: The Point of Normative Language

1. Introduction

The non-cognitivist owes a story about what it is we do with normative language. In a variety of contexts, people assertorically utter sentences like “people like us should give to charity,” or “you should tell the truth.” Given the non-cognitivist’s view of normative representation and normative thought, the question is what we should see this practice as accomplishing, or aiming to accomplish. Given the non-cognitivist’s view of normative thought, what is the *point* (or, what are the points) of using normative language?

The question takes on particular urgency for non-cognitivists, because a number of writers have alleged that the non-cognitivist cannot provide a fully satisfactory answer to this question. They allege that there is some important point to normative discourse that the non-cognitivist simply cannot explain. I will thus call the objection The Pointlessness Objection to non-cognitivism.

I will discuss two places in which objections of this form have been raised in the recent metaethical literature, the work of Stephen Finlay and T.M. Scanlon.¹

2. Finlay’s Objection

Here is Stephen Finlay:

Despite non-cognitivists’ common claim that the characteristic interpersonal influence and role of normative language strongly support their views over

¹ Shafer-Landau (2003), p. 23, has a related objection. For reasons of space I will not address it here.

descriptivists', their accounts of this influence and role in advice are similarly radical and implausible. The non-cognitivist model of normative force is that the speaker merely expresses her own motivational attitudes. But it's hard to see why this would have much recommendatory force at all. Suppose we're standing at the dairy counter buying milkshakes, and I say to you, 'I like creaming soda', or perhaps, 'I want you to have creaming soda.' I would have expressed my attitudes, but intuitively wouldn't have performed the same act of recommendation as if I'd said, 'You ought to get creaming soda.'²

Finlay's concern is with the "recommendatory force" of normative language. When a person makes a normative assertion to another person, there is a certain force or pressure exerted. A certain sort of demand is placed on the hearer; the speaker is pushing her to adopt the normative position expressed.

Finlay thinks that the non-cognitivist cannot explain this fact. He understands the non-cognitivist as claiming that, in making a normative assertion, a speaker "merely expresses her own motivational attitudes." This stems from an understanding of non-cognitivism on which normative judgments are motivational attitudes and on which it further claims that normative assertions "express" these attitudes. I am happy to go along with these characterizations.

What exactly it is to express an attitude is not yet clear. But Finlay thinks that it carries with it the same conversational effects as does what is often called *reporting* an

² Finlay (2014), pp. 142-143.

attitude. That is, at least when it comes to “recommendatory force,” the effect of *expressing* the attitude which the non-cognitivist claims is identical to the judgment one ought to buy creaming soda is the same as the force of reporting that one has that attitude. The problem is that this is simply not the case. Asserting “you ought to buy creaming soda” has a force that asserting “I have a pro-attitude towards you buying creaming soda” does not. Asserting “you ought to buy creaming soda” has the force of pressuring one’s interlocutor to adopt a normative judgment, and perhaps to thereby act on it and buy the creaming soda. But asserting “I have a pro-attitude towards you buying creaming soda” does not have these effects. The only thing it pressures the listener to do, perhaps, is to believe something about the psychology of the speaker.

Older non-cognitivists, such as Stevenson and Hare, were of course very concerned to explain this sort of recommendatory force.³ Stevenson thinks of an ethical assertion as similar to an assertion of “I approve of this, do so as well,” which has a built-in imperative. Hare as well takes imperatives as his model for thinking about ethical sentences. Since imperatives certainly do have the recommendatory force that Finlay is after, these theorists seem well placed to account for this force. But modern day non-cognitivists, such as Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard, have not embraced the imperative model. So they still have work to do.

The first thing to notice in responding to Finlay is that, according to cognitivists, there is exactly the same difference in force between analogous assertions. To see where his argument fails, we can parody his reasoning as an objection to the *cognitivist*:

³ See Stevenson (1937) and Hare (1952).

The cognitivist model of normative force is that the speaker expresses her own normative beliefs. But it's hard to see why this would have much recommendatory force at all. Suppose we're standing at the dairy counter buying milkshakes, and I say to you, 'I have the normative belief that you ought to get creaming soda.' I would have expressed my normative belief, but intuitively wouldn't have performed the same act of recommendation as if I'd said, 'You ought to get creaming soda.'

This above line of argument should *not* make one reject cognitivism. The cognitivist will respond, of course, by pointing out the crucial difference between *reporting* that one has a certain normative belief and *expressing* that belief, i.e. assertorically uttering the sentence in the complement clause of the belief report. Saying "I have the normative belief that you ought to get creaming soda" and saying "You ought to get creaming soda." Are obviously different acts, with different conversational effects. The non-cognitivist's first line of defense against Finlay's objection, then, is to simply say that however the cognitivist explains the difference between these two is how the non-cognitivist will explain the difference between expressing an attitude and reporting that one has it.⁴

However, a more fully satisfying response would discuss what exactly this difference is. The cognitivist and the non-cognitivist alike should have a story about why it is that the effect of expressing a mental state -- be it classified as a belief or a motivational attitude -- is different than reporting that attitude. But the non-cognitivist

⁴ See Schroeder (2014) for related discussion.

has a pressing need to say more. Perhaps something in her view of normative thought will prohibit her from accepting the cognitivist's view, whatever it is. To dispel this potential problem, she needs to actually say what the difference is.

The non-cognitivist can explain the recommendatory force of normative assertions by looking at the linguistic conventions that govern various aspects of normative language. The idea will be that, according to the non-cognitivist, there is a linguistic convention that requires that a hearer of a normative assertion either to adopt the attitude expressed, or to signal her refusal to do so. Thus, the force of a normative assertion will be much the same as the force of a statement of "adopt this attitude, or signal your refusal." Thus a normative assertion, on the non-cognitivist view, will clearly have a recommendatory force, pushing the hearer to adopt the expressed attitude.

As in Chapter 6, I start with a framework along the lines of Lewis (1969) and (1975), although none of the details are crucial. The meanings of sentences are conventional; sentences mean what they do because of a linguistic community's conventions regarding how the sentence is to be used. Crucially, there are two types of conventions regarding a sentence. The first kind of convention can be expressed as an imperative governing the *production* of a sentence. It will say: *produce sentence S only if...* For example, we plausibly have a convention to assert "Sam is happy" only if Sam is happy. Call these production conventions.

Lewis emphasizes that there is another sort of convention regarding linguistic practices. These are conventions governing what audience members do, upon hearing the assertion of a sentence. Call these response conventions. For example, we plausibly have a convention to, upon hearing the assertion of "Sam is happy," either believe that Sam is

happy (or accept in some sense, for the purposes of the conversation, that Sam is happy), or signal that one refuses to do so.⁵

A very plausible thought is that the “recommendatory” force of an assertion stems from the production and uptake conventions governing the sentence asserted. If the conventions were different, the sentence would mean something entirely different, and thus assertions of it would have a different force. If our convention were to assert “you ought to buy creaming soda” only if a speaker believes that it is raining, for example, it would mean that it is raining, and thus the force of asserting it would be radically different. Thus, to find the source of the recommendatory force of the assertion of a sentence, we should look to the conventions regarding that sentence. And to explain the difference between the forces associated with “I have the normative judgment that you should buy creaming soda” and “You should buy creaming soda,” we should look to the difference between the conventions which govern them.

The two will have different production conventions. In general, a sentence means that *p* due to there being a convention to assertorically utter the sentence only if one believes that *p*. Thus, the convention governing “it is raining” is to assertorically utter the sentence only if one believes that it is raining, while the convention governing “I believe that it is raining” is to assertorically utter it only if one believes that one believes that it is raining. The non-cognitivist can appeal to a similar distinction. The production convention regarding “you ought to get creaming soda” says that it is to be assertorically uttered only if one believes that one’s interlocutor ought to get creaming soda. The production convention regarding “I believe that you ought to get creaming soda,” by

⁵ Lewis does not include the “or signal that one refuses to do so” part. But it can be derived from the conventions that Lewis describes.

contrast, says that it is to be assertorically uttered only if one believes that one believes that one's interlocutor ought to get creaming soda.

This is a difference between the conventions governing the sentences. The question is: can it help explain the difference in recommendatory force between assertoric utterances of the two? Not immediately. Suppose the story stopped here and the production conventions were the only ones in play. A person utters a sentence, and there is a convention that the speaker utter it only if she has a certain belief. This would be a fruitful thing to do; it would be an effective way to give others knowledge of one's mental states. Since competent listeners would know that speakers would only utter a sentence if they had certain mental states (and know that speakers know that hearers know this), they could infer from a speaker's assertorically uttering a sentence that the speaker had the mental state in question. However, recommendatory force has yet to enter the picture.

This is true regardless of cognitivism or non-cognitivism. Suppose cognitivism were true. And suppose there were a convention to utter "you should buy creaming soda" only if one believes that one's interlocutor creaming soda. From this, we can see that uttering the sentence would be a useful way to inform a hearer that one has this normative belief. But we do not yet have in view any recommendatory force. We do not yet have on the scene the sense in which the speaker is pressuring the hearer, not just to believe something about the speaker's psychology, but to herself take up a normative belief, that she should buy creaming soda. Thus, more needs to be added to the theory before recommendatory force enters the picture, regardless of whether cognitivism or non-cognitivism is true.

It is response conventions which explain recommendatory force.⁶ The non-cognitivist thinks that the response conventions governing “I disapprove of lying” and “lying is wrong” are different. When an audience member hears an assertion of “I disapprove of lying,” she must either believe (or accept for purposes of the conversation) that the speaker disapproves of lying, or signal her dissent. However, the non-cognitivist does *not* think that the same convention governs an audience member who hears an assertion of “lying is wrong.” In this case, the audience member is conventionally required to either share the attitude herself (or adopt it for purposes of the conversation), or signal her dissent. This is the crucial difference, for the non-cognitivist, between “I disapprove of lying” and “lying is wrong.” It is not in the conditions that must be met for speakers to produce the sentences, which may well be identical. It is in what audience members are called upon to do, after hearing such assertions.

This difference separates reporting that one has an attitude from expressing an attitude. When one *reports* that one has an attitude, one uses a sentence such that a listener is conventionally called upon to accept that the speaker has the attitude (or signal dissent). However, when one *expresses* an attitude, one uses a sentence such that a listener is conventionally called upon to adopt the attitude (or signal dissent). Expressing and reporting are thus clearly different.

This difference in conventions explains the divergence in recommendatory force between assertions that report one’s normative attitudes and those that express those attitudes. An assertion of “I disapprove of lying” by itself has no recommendatory force when it comes to the audience member’s normative attitudes, because these are

⁶ Egan (m.s.) discusses another way in which non-cognitivists might make use of response conventions.

irrelevant. All the audience member is called upon to do is believe that the speaker disapproves of lying. Not so, however, with an assertion of “lying is wrong.” Upon hearing that, the conventions of our language require that the audience member either adopt (at least for purposes of the conversation) an attitude of disapproval of lying, or signal that she is not doing so. In this way, the audience member’s attitudes *are* at issue. If she does not (come to) share the speaker’s attitude, she is now under conversational pressure to signal her refusal.

This captures well the recommendatory force of an assertion of “lying is wrong.” Upon hearing an assertion of this, an audience member, in order to conform with the conventions that govern our use of language, must do one of two things: she must either take on board this position (i.e., adopt the attitude of disapproval of lying, at least provisionally), or signal that she refuses to do so.

Refusing to do so is something of a combative move. In making an assertion, a speaker is trying to do something. She is trying to change the conversation’s common ground, i.e. she is trying to change what the participants (at least provisionally) accept. When an audience member refuses, she is thwarting something that the speaker is trying to do. Generally, there are social costs of various kinds to refusing to allow someone to do what she was trying to do. Many of these carry over to the case of conversations; asserting something is a species of action. Thus, there *is* pressure to accept the attitude in question, at least provisionally.⁷

The non-cognitivist sees an assertion, then, as having an effect that can be roughly captured as: *adopt this attitude, or declare that you refuse to do so*. Clearly this has a

⁷ One might wonder why there is reason to accept the attitude *non*-provisionally. I take up this question in the next section; Scanlon’s objection will be that non-cognitivism provides no such reason.

recommendatory force and exerts pressure on an audience member. Speakers know this. They know that, by asserting “lying is wrong,” they will put hearers in a position where they are under conventional pressure to either (provisionally) adopt a con-attitude towards lying, or suffer the social costs of signaling their refusal to do so. Thus, a speaker will choose to use “lying is wrong” as opposed to “I disapprove of lying” in order to bring about a change in the hearer’s attitudes. She will use the normative sentence to exert force or pressure on the hearer.

It is worth noting that the cognitivist will explain the recommendatory force of an assertion of “lying is wrong,” as opposed to “I believe that lying is wrong” in just the same way. It is true that the cognitivist is able to differentiate the production conventions of the sentences. Plausibly, the cognitivist can hold that convention dictates that one assert “lying is wrong” only if lying is wrong (alternatively: only if one believes that lying is wrong). In contrast, the cognitivist can plausibly hold that convention dictates that one assert “I believe that lying is wrong” only if one believes that lying is wrong (alternatively: only if one believes that one believes that lying is wrong). So, even without looking at response conventions, she can differentiate the two. However, this difference is insufficient to explain why assertions of either apply any sort of recommendatory force on hearers. The difference thus far explains a difference in information a hearer is able to infer from hearing an assertion of one rather than the other. But that does not suffice to explain the recommendatory force that Finlay points to.

What explains this force, on the cognitivist’s picture as well as on the non-cognitivist’s, are response conventions. On the cognitivist’s view, when a speaker asserts “I believe lying is wrong,” hearers are conventionally called upon only to come to believe

(or provisionally accept) that the speaker believes that lying is wrong, or signal their dissent. There is thus no pressure to adopt any normative view. However, when a speaker asserts “lying is wrong,” hearers are conventionally called upon to come to believe (or provisionally accept) that lying is wrong, or signal their dissent. There thus *is* pressure to adopt a particular normative view. And the difference stems from the difference in response conventions. So the non-cognitivist’s appeal to them is not some *ad hoc* maneuver. It finds the source of recommendatory pressure exactly where the cognitivist finds it, and where we would expect it to be. Finlay’s version of the Pointlessness Objection therefore does not succeed.

We can certainly imagine a community engaging in a linguistic practice involving normative sentences just as the non-cognitivist envisions it. That is we can imagine that the people have normative attitudes just as the non-cognitivist conceives of them, and these attitudes are tied to linguistic conventions in just the way described. I have just described a coherent language game, and shown that in it a certain sort of recommendatory force results from normative assertions.

However, one might still think that something crucial has been missed. One might worry that, on the view as stated, a listener must change her attitude in response to a normative assertion merely due to conventions of language, conventions that tell us to conform with each other. On this view, the only thing that is putting pressure on the listener is the other person and a social practice. But perhaps this misses the crucial role of the normative facts themselves. Perhaps what pressures the listener is the normative fact that the assertion conveys. T.M. Scanlon has just this objection to the view.

3. Scanlon's Objection

Here is T.M. Scanlon on non-cognitivist theories (focusing on Allan Gibbard):

I want first to consider their adequacy as explanations of the significance of normative judgment in interpersonal discourse, when we are giving advice, or discussing the justifiability of an action.

According to Gibbard, to judge that *p* is a reason to do *a* in circumstances *c* is to plan to weigh the fact that *p* in favor of doing *a* in such circumstances. It would seem to follow that to advise someone that *p* is a reason to *a* in her circumstances is to express my acceptance of a plan to weigh the fact that *p* in favor of *a* under such conditions. This does not seem to capture the normative grip that advice is intended to have on someone who believes what the adviser says. Why should she care what I plan to do?⁸

Scanlon goes on to write (p. 59):

The account I am defending avoids these difficulties. According to this account, when I offer someone advice, saying that *p* is a reason for him or her to do *a*, I am not expressing a plan or an imperative but, rather, calling that person's attention to what I claim to be a fact, independent of both of us, about what one has reason to do....Whether he agrees or not, my claim has

⁸ Scanlon (2014), p. 58.

normative force for someone in his position *if it is correct*, its force lying in the fact, if it is a fact, that *p* actually is a reason for him to do *a*.

Scanlon's core objection is the following. On the cognitivist model, when a person makes an assertion about some reason, they present their audience with a normative fact (assuming what they assert is true). This fact is something that the listener must respond to; she must believe this fact, if she is to properly respond to the normative facts. Pressure is put on the listener. But it is put on her by the normative fact itself, not merely by the speaker or any linguistic conventions. Normative assertions thus have a clear point: to inform others of the normative facts, so that they can then properly respond to them.

On the non-cognitivist model, the objection continues, there is no such fact to present. A normative assertion merely expresses an attitude; it does not inform the audience about a normative fact. But while it is clear that a person must respond to a normative fact, it is wholly unobvious that a person must respond to someone having a certain attitude. As Scanlon writes, why should someone care what someone else plans to do? Thus, since the point of normative discourse is to call attention to normative facts, but non-cognitivism denies this, non-cognitivism cannot adequately explain the point of normative discourse. And so it construes normative discourse as pointless, or at least missing one of its core points.

The non-cognitivist can reply in a few ways. The first is by pointing out that the discussion above helps to provide an answer to the question of why one person should care what another plans to do, at least in the context of normative assertion. When a

normative assertion is made, the speaker puts pressure on the listener to adopt the mental state expressed. Thus, this explains at least some of the grip that a normative assertion can put on a listener.

However, this is likely not fully satisfactory. Scanlon thinks that *the normative fact itself* has a normative grip on the listener, and presumably that the real point of making a normative assertion is to inform someone of such a fact. The response to Finlay does not yet do justice to this aspect of normative discourse; the non-cognitivist must say more.

The key fact she should appeal to is this: the point that Scanlon identifies for normative assertions is a *normative* point. The point of asserting that lying is wrong, for example, is to present one with a fact that one *must* respond to by believing that lying is wrong. Scanlon thinks that this is not true, on the non-cognitivist view. If the non-cognitivist denies that there are normative facts, then Scanlon is right. But the non-cognitivist does not need to do so. Rather, she can offer a deflationary account of such facts, of one sort or another. As discussed in Chapter Two, these facts may lack a certain sort of reality or metaphysical robustness, due to the properties they involve being ones that are not represented via property-dependent representation. But this is not yet to say that there are no such facts.

Further, the non-cognitivist can agree that normative assertions, when true, serve to call people's attention to such facts. A person assertorically utters, "lying is wrong" thereby expressing the belief that lying is wrong. This is a belief that has as its content the proposition that lying is wrong. This the proposition that is true just in case it is a fact that lying is wrong. In this way, the utterance of "lying is wrong" calls the listener's attention

to this fact; the listener comes to entertain the thought that lying is wrong.

The non-cognitivist can go on to claim that a further normative fact obtains: the fact that one must respond to an assertion that lying is wrong, which presents the fact that lying is wrong, by believing that lying is wrong. This is another normative claim, and the non-cognitivist is free to make such claims as long as she gives an account of what it is to believe it, which was a task of chapters Two through Four. Thus, the non-cognitivist is able to claim that one must respond to an assertion of lying is wrong, which presents the fact that lying is wrong, by believing that lying is wrong. If she is able to make this claim, then she is able to say just what Scanlon said: that the point of normative assertion is to present an audience member with normative facts, which the audience member must then respond to by accepting the fact (i.e. by coming to have a certain attitude).

The cognitivist can reply by appealing to the difference between her conception of normative facts, and the non-cognitivist's. On the cognitivist view, the normative fact presented by a true normative assertion is inflated; it involves only fully real properties. On the non-cognitivist view, however, the fact is deflated, involving the deflated property of wrongness. Wouldn't this make an important difference to how people must respond to an assertion calling one's attention to the such facts?

The answer is that, once we are paying attention to the distinction between deflated and inflated facts, the point is *not* the same. The cognitivist thinks that a (true) normative assertion presents one with an inflated normative fact, and that it is a further inflated normative fact that one must respond to the assertion that lying is wrong by believing that lying is wrong. The non-cognitivist thinks that a (true) normative assertion presents one with a deflated normative fact, and that it is a deflated normative fact that

one must respond to the assertion that lying is wrong by believing that lying is wrong. Scanlon may well be correct that the presentation of a deflated normative fact is insufficient to explain an *inflated* normative fact about how a person must respond. But it remains true that the presentation of a deflated normative fact is sufficient to explain a *deflated* normative fact about how a person must respond.

Here is another way to put the point: Scanlon is only partially engaging the non-cognitivist. He addresses their view when it comes to the explananda, but not the explanandum. He claims that normative assertion, as the non-cognitivist conceives of it, is not sufficient to explain a normative fact, as *he* conceives of it. Since he thinks of the fact that a person must respond to a normative assertion as inflated, he thinks the non-cognitivist cannot explain this fact. But the non-cognitivist offers not just a different conception of the normative fact that one draws attention to in assertion, but a corresponding conception of the fact that a person must respond to this fact. And it is one that allows the non-cognitivist to agree that normative assertion (as the non-cognitivist conceives of it) can lead to a person's being required to respond (as the non-cognitivist conceives of this fact). Thus the non-cognitivist can agree that part of the point of normative assertion is to draw the listener's attention to normative facts, and that the listener must respond to these facts accordingly.

Of course, it might turn out that normative facts, such as facts about how listeners must respond to assertions, are inflated. If this is so, non-cognitivism is false. But Scanlon has provided no argument for this conclusion. So there is as yet no problem here.

One might find this general kind of response to Scanlon unsatisfactory. Scanlon criticizes the non-cognitivist language game as pointless, because it does not present one

with normative facts. I then said that the non-cognitivist is able to respond to Scanlon by making certain moves *within that very game*. In particular, the non-cognitivist can express a certain attitude, the attitude she thinks one expresses by claiming that one must respond to the fact that lying is wrong by adopting the belief that lying is wrong. But if the game itself is being criticized, isn't there something unsatisfactory about a response that amounts to a move within that very game? Since Scanlon's critique is an external critique, it seems that any response must be external, not itself amount to a move in the game in question.⁹

While this line of thought is tempting, it is incorrect. To see this, let us apply the idea to the cognitivist. The cognitivist says that when we make normative claims, we present each other with fully real normative facts. Suppose a critic comes along and says that such a practice is pointless. The cognitivist responds by giving an assortment of reasons to engage in such a practice. The critic then alleges that this was illegitimate, because in defending her practice, she engaged in it. She defended the game of giving reasons by making moves within that very game; she gave reasons. Clearly, however, this response was *not* illegitimate. Thus, at least sometimes it is perfectly satisfactory to respond to a critique of a practice by engaging in that very practice.

Now the question for the objector is why it is legitimate for the cognitivist to respond to her critic by making moves within the game of making normative claims as she conceives of it, but it is *not* legitimate for the non-cognitivist to respond to her critic by making moves within the game of making normative claims as *she* conceives of it. It is wholly unobvious to me what this difference is. One could emerge. But until that point,

⁹ Thanks to Nat Tabris for this objection.

we should not regard this objection to my response on behalf of the non-cognitivist as successful.

There is a related, but distinct, objection to the non-cognitivist that can be found in the quotation from Scanlon. Scanlon asks why one person should care what another person plans. Let us grant that the non-cognitivist takes normative judgments are some sort of desire-like state. This leads to an objection which can be stated as follows:

The fact that someone else has a normative judgment is, sometimes, a reason for me to share that judgment. But the fact that someone else has a certain desire-like attitude is never a reason for me to share that attitude. Therefore, normative judgments cannot be desire-like attitudes.

This objection is related to the last one, but differs from it. The last objection claims that normative assertions are pointless, on the non-cognitivist view, because they do not put forth normative facts that a hearer must respond to. This objection claims that normative assertions are pointless, on the non-cognitivist view, because learning that someone else has a certain normative judgment provides a person with no reason to adopt that attitude. When person A asserts that lying is wrong, her audience learns that she believes that lying is wrong. But if *this* fact provides no reason to have the belief oneself, perhaps something is missing from the assertion.

To get at this point, we can criticise Scanlon's construal of the point of normative assertions. He made it seem that the point is simply that a normative assertion presents a

hearer with a normative fact (insofar as the assertion is of a true proposition). But this seems to assimilate the effect of saying 'lying is wrong' with the effect of saying 'here is a fact that might obtain: the fact that lying is wrong.' In the second case, the person does not commit herself to believing that lying is wrong, but she does present the fact that lying is wrong. But clearly there is a difference in the effect and point of making these statements.

One effect that seems important is that, in the first case but not the latter, the hearer learns that the speaker believes the proposition in question. Why is this important? There are a number of reasons that both the cognitivist and non-cognitivist can agree on. It allows the hearer to better explain and predict the behavior of the speaker. And it may lead to convergence of normative judgments via some brute mechanism that leads us to conform with others.

The cognitivist, however, can claim that it leads to convergence via another route: by the audience member responding to a reason to believe that the proposition in question is true, namely that the speaker believes it. The cognitivist can claim that one point of making a normative assertion is providing the hearer a reason to believe the asserted proposition, namely the fact that the speaker believes it. The worry is that the non-cognitivist cannot agree that the fact that a person believes that *p*, for some normative *p*, is a reason for someone else to believe it.

The reason to think this, roughly put, is simple. The non-cognitivist thinks that normative judgments are just motivational attitudes. But learning that someone else prefers vanilla ice cream gives me no reason to prefer vanilla myself. So, by analogy, learning that someone else has a con-attitude towards lying gives me no reason to adopt

that attitude myself.

The non-cognitivist has what seems like an obvious initial response, but it does not work. It is clear that, on the non-cognitivist view, there will often be practical benefits to coming to share normative beliefs with others. It may promote coordinated action and general harmony. The problem with this response, however, is that this is the wrong kind of reason to have the belief. The cognitivist is able to delineate between *evidence* that p , and practical reasons to believe that p . Roughly at least, the difference is that the former counts in favor of the truth that p – it makes p more probable (in some sense) – while the latter have to do with the practical benefits of having the belief. The non-cognitivist must explain why the fact that someone else has a normative belief is a reason to think that that belief is *true*.

The place for the non-cognitivist to start, as will not be surprising, is with the way in which a cognitivist would explain why this is so. Obviously, it is not the case that for *any* person, that person's believing a normative proposition is reason to believe it. The fact that a morally abhorrent person drunkenly concludes that some normative proposition p is true is no reason to believe that p . But the fact that a decent, thoughtful person carefully considers the matter and concludes that p is a reason to believe that p .¹⁰ The most obvious explanation of this difference is that it is only the second person's normative beliefs which are reliable indicators of the normative truth. Because of this person's excellent track record, her caring about the right things, and her habit of thinking carefully, it is likely that her normative belief in question is true. This is why the fact that she believes that p is a reason to believe that p .

¹⁰ Actually, it is not obvious that this is the case. But we can assume it to consider this aspect of Scanlon's objection.

There is no barrier stopping the non-cognitivist from accepting this explanation. The non-cognitivist accepts a number of normative claims. Thus, when she looks at the normative judgments of others, she takes some people to be accurate normative judges, and others inaccurate. She can notice that certain traits tend to lead people to make true normative judgments, while other traits lead people astray. She can thus agree with the cognitivist that some people's judgments are reliable indicators of the normative truth, while some people's judgments are not. She can go on to claim that it is *this* feature of a person that makes it the case that the fact that she has a normative belief is a reason to share that belief. The non-cognitivist can accept just the same explanation as the cognitivist.

One might still worry. Perhaps the non-cognitivist can accept that the fact that a certain person believes a certain normative proposition is a reason to have that belief. And perhaps she can also accept the explanation of this fact: it is due to the reliability of the person's normative beliefs. But perhaps where the non-cognitivist fails is in explaining this explanatory relationship. Perhaps only the cognitivist can say why it would be that a person's reliability is a reason to share their beliefs. Perhaps this is only so on a certain conception of what this reliability amounts to, if it is the correspondence between her view and the fully real facts of the matter. But for the non-cognitivist, it cannot be this. Thus, perhaps this is where the cognitivist's explanatory advantage lies.

There is another way to put the point. On the non-cognitivist's account so far, it may seem that truth has not yet entered in somewhere that it should. It is not a brute fact that the people who have track records of accuracy regarding the normative are those whose normative beliefs we have reasons to share. This fact is itself explained. It is

because the beliefs of those people are likely to indicate the fully real normative truths, *that* is why they are reasons. But the non-cognitivist cannot say this.

The question, of course, is whether or not the “fully real” part of the above explanation is crucial. The non-cognitivist can offer an explanation just like the cognitivist’s, besides this part. Here, she can make the same move she made above. If her target were to explain the *inflated* fact that one has reason to share the belief of a certain kind of person, then the “fully real” part of the explanation would be necessary. But this is not what she is trying to explain. Her goal is only to explain the *deflated* fact that one has reason to share the beliefs of a certain kind of person. Thus, there is no need for the sorts of normative truth appealed to in the explanation to itself be the inflated, fully real variety. It can be deflated, and the explananda will fit the explanandum.

Thus, the non-cognitivist is able to explain the fact that a certain kind of person has a certain normative belief is a reason to have it. She can meet the second objection to be found in the quote from Scanlon as well.

4. Conclusion

The Pointlessness Objection to non-cognitivism says that there is some aspect of the point of using normative language that the non-cognitivist cannot explain. Finlay claims that one point of using such language is applying “recommendatory force” on a listener. But by appealing to linguistic conventions applying to the hearers of normative assertions, we can explain that recommendatory force. Scanlon claims that a point of making normative assertions is to present one’s interlocutor with a normative fact, one that a person must respond to. Because the point in question is itself a normative one, the

non-cognitivist is able to adequately explain it, even using her lightweight normative facts. And the same lesson applies in the second objection from Scanlon. The non-cognitivist is also able to use her lightweight conception of normative truth, and reliability regarding these truths, in order to explain the grip that another's normative assertion has on a listener. Thus, we have found no reason to think that the non-cognitivist cannot fully explain the point of expressing our normative thoughts.

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