

MORAL MIND-INDEPENDENCE*

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I. Realism, Projectivism, and Quasi-realism

The moral realism debate features two main contestants. In one corner, there is the 'realist', who thinks that moral judgements cognize a range of real moral facts, states of affairs or situations. In the other corner, there is the 'projectivist', who thinks that moral judgements express non-cognitive states — such as attitudes, emotions, or desires — which we 'spread' or 'project' onto the natural world.¹

However, moral projectivism appears to face a knock-down objection. The objection is that projectivism cannot account for certain crucial features of the way we speak and think in moral terms; so it is forced to embrace an unpalatable 'error-theory' about our ways of thinking [10, ch.1]. Only realism seems to be able to do justice to moral thought as it is. This is where the programme which Simon Blackburn has called 'quasi-realism' is important [1, 2, 3, 4, 6]. For quasi-realism is the program of attempting to block this objection by showing how projectivism can capture the features of ordinary thought which seem to be beyond its reach. Quasi-realism has enabled the realism debate in moral philosophy to take a new and hitherto unsuspected dialectical turn.

Quasi-realism can also be described with a different emphasis as follows. We have a problem with deciding whether our thought in certain areas is realistic or projectivistic. In some areas it is obvious, but in other areas it is more difficult to tell. Certain features of our thought might be proposed as 'litmus-tests' for realistic thought. Quasi-realism then attempts to argue that such litmus-tests are inadequate because projectivism can also explain the fact that our thought has the proposed features.²

II. Features and Techniques

There are two variables to be considered when discussing quasi-realism.

First, there are the various *features* of our moral thought which quasi-realism attempts to capture. The most important of these are the following: possible defectiveness (the bare idea that judgements can be better or worse, more or less appropriate);

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¹ There are sometimes thought to be other contenders. But they are either implausible, or else, when probed, they collapse back into one or other of these positions. (I am thinking primarily of dispositional accounts.)

² A different and more radical face of quasi-realism is its potential for undermining the difference between realism and projectivism. I shall not discuss this 'quietist' ambition here. I have done so elsewhere in [12].

‘supervenience’ (the claim that moral truths depend on natural truths); the capacity of moral propositions to figure in unasserted contexts (such as conditionals or propositional attitude contexts); and, lastly, ‘mind-independence’, which I shall describe in a moment.

Second, there are the *techniques* which are used to account for one or more of such features. Blackburn has at least three different techniques. The techniques are often combined, but we can and should examine their credentials separately. In this paper, I shall examine one of Blackburn’s techniques, which I will call the ‘internal reading’ technique. I shall describe this after having said something about mind-independence. I shall not consider Blackburn’s idea that a sensibility can be assessed in the light of our ‘needs’ and ‘purposes’, and I shall not consider his idea that we may critically turn our attitudes upon our moral sensibilities, except insofar as the internal reading technique involves these ideas. Moreover, I shall only examine the effectiveness of the internal reading technique in accounting for the feature of mind-independence. I will not consider its application to possible defectiveness or supervenience. And I will not consider its application to unasserted contexts, except insofar as mind-independence is an example of an unasserted context (see [13] for independent discussion). I will look at one technique as applied to one feature.

III. Mind-independence

What exactly does the principle of moral mind-independence amount to? Mind-independence should not be understood as a statement of realism. This would be strategically inadvisable since we would begin by begging all the important questions. *In the end*, we might want to argue that only realism can *explain* mind-independence. But if we *define* mind-independence in terms of realism, we will have arrived there too quickly, by definitional fiat. Moral mind-independence needs to be characterized in terms of a certain conditional relation which fails to hold between the values of things and our judgements about them. Blackburn usually states the relation by saying: ‘If we had different attitudes it would still be wrong to kick dogs’. But we need to generalize such a formulation, since mind-independence concerns more than dogs. Cats also get kicked! And the independence of values and judgements is a two-way affair: value judgements do not necessitate values and values do not necessitate value judgements. Moral mind-independence is really the conjunction of two theses. Taking the moral property of badness, then, we have two negated conditionals:

It is not the case that if we think that X is bad then it is bad.

and

It is not the case that if X is bad then we think that it is.

Contraposed, the latter is the more familiar principle:

It is not the case that if we do not think that X is bad then it is not bad.

These conditionals are the kind of thing we are inclined to assert. For example, the

mass-murders carried out by the crusaders would be bad whatever you or I or they thought about them. The opposite of these mind-independence conditionals are mind-dependence conditionals:

If we think that X is bad then it is bad.

and

If X is bad then we think that it is.

Contrapositing the latter gives us

If we do not think that X is bad then it is not bad.

These are nasty or ‘unlovely’ as Blackburn sometimes says. They are not the kind of thing we are inclined to say. And what goes for the mind-independence of badness also goes for other moral properties, such as goodness, rightness, obligation, and justice.

These claims can equally well be cast in terms of whether the *judgement* that X is bad would be *true* if we did not think that X is bad. Nothing hangs on whether we cast mind-independence in terms of the badness of things or in terms of the truth of judgements about the badness of things. Semantic ascent changes nothing.

There is one complication. The notion of moral mind-independence that we need is one that is morally neutral. But it might be objected that in fact mind-independence begs the question against certain substantive moral views. In particular, it might be suggested that mind-independence rules out consequentialist views according to which the moral value of something depends on its effect on people’s minds. Reply: moral value may be ‘mind-dependent’ in the sense that the value of an action depends on its effects on people’s minds. But what is meant by mind-independence, when the moral realism issue is being discussed, is the notion that the moral value of something is independent of the fact that we judge that it has a certain moral value. Consider rudeness: rudeness is usually wrong because it upsets people (as well as because it is a product of disrespect). Its badness resides partly in its consequences. The wrongness of rudeness is in part due to its effects on people’s minds. Imagine, for simplicity, that I am neither the person being rude, nor the person who is the recipient of the rudeness. I am a moral spectator, not a participant. Rudeness may be wrong because of its effects on the *recipient*, but it is surely not wrong because of its effect on *me* — the spectator. And even if it so happens that I am the one who is the recipient of rudeness, my being upset, which makes the rudeness wrong, is independent of my *judgement about* the action *plus* its upsetting effect on me.³ The wrongness of an action plus its consequences does not depend on my judgement about the action plus its consequences. It is convenient but loose, to talk of moral value being independent of our minds, but what we mean to say is that the moral value of a

³ Even the truth of indexical moral judgements about oneself is ‘judgement-independent’. Suppose I praise my own generosity. I judge that it is a good thing. Then whether my generosity really is a good thing depends on some fact about my mind, namely that I am indeed generous. But it does not depend on the existence of my moral judgement about my generosity.

thing does not depend on the judgement that it has that value. I shall ignore this complication in what follows.

IV. The Internal Reading

Here is one place where Blackburn employs the internal reading technique in the attempt to capture mind-independence:

The counter-factual 'If we had different attitudes it would not be wrong to kick dogs' expresses the moral view that the feature which makes it wrong to kick dogs is our reaction. But this is an absurd moral view, and not one to which the projectivist has the least inclination. Like anyone else he thinks that what makes it wrong to kick dogs is that it causes them pain. To put it another way: he approves of a moral disposition which, given this belief as an input, yields the reaction of disapproval as an output; he does not approve of one which needs belief about our attitudes as an input in order to yield the same output, and this is all that gets expression in the counterfactual. [2, p.179], [3, pp.217-218].

Blackburn's technique here is to read his mind-independence counterfactual as expressing a *second-order moral attitude*. (*Approval* and *disapproval* are positive and negative attitudes.) Someone who asserts mind-independence is said to express a second-order *disapproval* of a sensibility in which first-order attitudes to X hinge on beliefs about attitudes to X's natural features, rather than just on beliefs about X's natural features. Or it expresses an approval of a sensibility in which attitudes hinge just on beliefs about X's natural features. Someone who asserts *unlovely* mind-dependence conditionals expresses the opposite second-order attitudes. Mind-independence and mind-dependence are both interpreted as second-order moral attitudes to a disposition to form moral attitudes in a certain way.⁴ Such second-order attitudes embody *substantive moral views* and are not totally formal or abstract. They are not 'external framework' principles but 'internal' commitments from within the sort of thought.

The clever thing about this idea of Blackburn's is that it seems to allow the projectivist to *reject* the potentially embarrassing mind-dependence conditionals as expressing repugnant second-order moral views. It follows that it can no longer be thought that projectivism makes morality objectionably mind-dependent. And the commitment to mind-independence can no longer be thought to be symptomatic of realism.⁵ That result would be extremely important. For it would bring projectivism back into line with ordinary moral thought. That's why quasi-realism is news.

⁴ Hence this use of 'second-order' is not that of John Mackie, who used 'second-order' to refer to philosophical views about the nature of moral judgements. (See [10, pp.9-10].) A 'second-order' attitude, as I use the expression, is one which has first-order attitudes figuring in its content.

⁵ Blackburn also applies the internal reading to other features. At [4, pp.5-6] possible defectiveness is treated internally; and at [1, p.36] bivalence is given the internal treatment. We might wonder why Blackburn does not show more enthusiasm for applying the internal reading to supervenience. Perhaps, when we assert supervenience, we express a second-order approval of a person who has a disposition to impose a certain consistency among attitudes. In [12], I discuss an internal reading of claims such as 'There are F facts'.

V. Preliminaries

Before turning to assess this technique, a couple of preliminary observations need to be made.

First, the internal reading technique cannot be *sufficient* for a successful piece of quasi-realism. The internal reading depends on an independent explanation of our right to the idea that attitudes can be defective. Otherwise we will have no right to the thought that the second-order attitude which mind-independence expresses is preferable to the second-order attitude expressed by mind-dependence. So the internal reading needs to be supplemented, perhaps by a yet higher-order approval of the feature which has been read internally, or else by appeal to our needs and purposes in a certain discipline of thought. Any difficulties which beset those quasi-realist techniques will also infect the internal reading. However, I shall assess the internal reading technique in its own right, regardless of the fortunes of the techniques in conjunction with which it needs to be deployed.

Second, since mind-dependence involves negated conditionals, it might be said that we should interpret the internal reading of mind-independence as an application of Blackburn's general theory of conditionals (see, for example [3, ch.6, §2]). The general problem with conditionals is that we need an account according to which a moral proposition which is embedded in the antecedent means the same as when asserted straight out. It is difficult to see how a projectivist can explain the identity of meaning. However, the problem with the negated mind-independence conditionals is not about how the embedded moral proposition can mean what it does when asserted. The problem is about why we would ever assert the conditionals at all. The two problems are separable. So, in order to assess the internal reading of mind-independence, it is not necessary to delve into the general topic of conditionals. Besides, most published discussions of Blackburn's quasi-realism have focused obsessively on his treatment of embedded moral propositions, when there is much else of interest.⁶

VI. Discomfort

There is something unsettling about the internal reading technique. Something about it strikes one as unsatisfactory — as a bit of a cheat. The problem, however, is to put one's finger on what it is. As we shall see, this proves rather difficult to do.

To illustrate the difficulty, consider Stig Alstrup Rasmussen's reply to Blackburn. He responded, in effect, with no more than the simple retort that the strategy is obviously absurd [11, p.187]. This is inadequate as a reply to Blackburn. For Rasmussen does not explain *why* it is absurd. We may want to agree with him about its absurdity. But Blackburn might not agree. So the accusation of absurdity needs to be supported.

In *other* areas, it may be more obvious than an internal reading cannot be pursued. Take mathematics. Is 'It would have been true that $7+5=12$ whatever we thought about

⁶ Blackburn has in fact changed his general theory of conditionals in some respects in his [7]. But the internal-reading of mind-independence can be found alive and kicking only one year earlier in [6]; and he does not retract it in [8, p.346]. I shall presume that the change in his general theory of moral conditionals has not caused Blackburn to change his mind about the internal reading of mind-independence.

it' really a *mathematical* truth? Surely not. An internal reading would be obviously absurd here. But we need to stick with the moral case, for it is possible that morality differs from other areas in the respect which is the *source* of the absurdity or lack of it.

The difficulty is to do more than evince scepticism. We need to find some way of expressing our discomfort with the internal reading technique that would amount to an objection.

VII. Status and Generativity

One attempt to fashion something approaching an objection would be this: surely the notion of mind-independence which is employed throughout metaphysics has a different *status* from any ordinary commitment. Intuitively, moral mind-independence seems more like a *formal principle* than a *substantial moral opinion* — first-order or second-order. Mind-independence seems to be a quite different kettle of fish from any ordinary run-of-the-mill commitment. This 'status-difference' may not be absolute; it may be a matter of degree. But its existence seems indisputable.

I think most philosophers would feel some sympathy with this protest. But it is not clear how much it should worry the quasi-realist. For there is at least one respect in which quasi-realism can be more successful than one might think in accounting for the existence of a significant status-difference between mind-independence and run-of-the-mill moral commitments.

What I have in mind is the *generativity* of mind-independence. It is important that the principle of mind-independence can be instantiated by infinitely many particular cases. Mind-independence is the principle that 'It is not the case that the wrongness of *anything* depends on my attitudes'. Quasi-realism needs to achieve such a general formulation and not merely a formulation in terms of kicking dogs. From mind-independence as a general principle, we need to be able to infer that the wrongness of kicking dogs does not depend on our attitudes, and also that the wrongness of kicking cats does not depend on our attitudes, and the same goes for whatever sentient beast we might get the urge to torment. And we also need to be able to infer that the wrongness of strangling dogs does not depend on our attitudes, nor does the wrongness of poisoning them, squashing them, or whatever form of abuse we have in mind. We need to capture the 'generative' nature of mind-independence: together with the relevant beliefs, the one principle must yield a potential infinity of attitudes. This is a metaphysically neutral thought to which both realist and quasi-realist must aspire.

To capture generativity, the projectivist must say that mind-independence, read internally, expresses a very basic moral principle — a 'central plank' of our 'moral theory' — from which many other more particular views can be derived. It would have to be like 'killing innocent people for fun is wrong', except even more basic. What the quasi-realist needs is some account of how mind-independence could be such a central principle.

Now, as noted, it is central to Blackburn's account that he explains mind-independence as the expression of a disapproval of sensibilities which are disposed to let attitudes to X hinge on what we believe about attitudes to X, rather than just on beliefs about X's natural features (or there is an approval of sensibilities which do not work in

this way). This can be put to work to help with the problem of generativity. The idea would be that this very general input/output disposition explains the many particular dispositions concerning the doing of nasty things to dogs, rats, aardvarks and wallabies, whether it is kicking, strangling, squashing or poisoning. We have a disapproval of a *general* function from beliefs about attitudes to X to attitudes to X; and we have an approval of a *general* function from beliefs about X to attitudes to X. Mind-independence expresses the pro-attitude to a sensibility such that for *all* subject matters, X, our attitudes to X are based on nothing but our beliefs about X. Or it expresses the negative attitude to a sensibility such that for *all* subject matters, X, our attitudes to X are based on beliefs about attitudes to X. Particular instances of mind-independence would follow as instances of a universal generalization over the proper ways of forming attitudes.

So generativity provides no quick knock-out objection to the internal reading. Quasi-realism can explain it. So quasi-realism seems to be able to go some way towards the admission that mind-independence is not *simply* another ordinary moral commitment. For there may be logical *structure* in a system of attitudes; and a relatively important place might be given to the attitude which is expressed by mind-independence.

Is this enough to account for the status-difference which we intuitively think exists? Well, it is certainly enough to account for *a* status-difference. And that is considerable success for quasi-realism. However, it does still *seem* to be intuitive that there is some significant difference in status — between the sense of mind-independence which quasi-realism needs and that which the internal reading yields — which is not just a matter of generativity. But at the moment, this is no more than a nagging feeling, and as yet, it is nothing on which to base an argument. So far, the dialectical state of play is that the anti-quasi-realist needs to provide more argument to the effect that there is some remaining status-difference which the quasi-realist has not explained. To say this is to play ‘onus tennis’: it is not the case that the onus of proof lies with the quasi-realist. The onus lies equally with the anti-quasi-realist to show that there is some status-distinction which is beyond the grasp of the quasi-realist.

VIII. Conceptual Status

What probably lies behind the status-difference objection, in my view, is the thought that mind-independence has a status approaching or attaining that of a *conceptual truth*. We want to say that it is *constitutive of competence* in moralising to think that if we thought that killing the innocent for fun was alright, that would not make it alright. (It is plausible that something similar is also true of supervenience and possible defectiveness.) To deny the doctrine of mind-independence is to change the subject away from morality.

The idea that mind-independence is a conceptual truth will be important, so I shall say a bit more about what this does and does not entail.

To say that a truth is a conceptual truth is to say something about the way we can know it. What gives a truth conceptual status is the fact that it is knowable ‘by conceptual means’. Of course, saying what is meant by ‘knowing by conceptual means’ or ‘knowing by reflection on our concepts’ is no easy task. Very roughly, it is the idea that we attain the knowledge in question by following out the implications of what we must

know in order successfully to deploy a concept. Use of the concept presupposes that we hold certain beliefs, and its successful use presupposes that those beliefs amount to knowledge.

The claim to conceptual truth should be distinguished from three other claims.

First, when I say that mind-independence has a distinctive conceptual status, I do not intend to imply that it has a distinctive *modal* status — that mind-independence is necessary, while ordinary moral truths are contingent. The conceptual status-difference is not obviously a modal status-difference. The reason is not that mind-independence is not necessary, but that it is plausible either that ordinary moral truths are necessarily true or else that for every moral truth there is some related moral statement which is necessarily true. Suppose that what is bad about kicking dogs for fun is our sadistic desires. Then surely those sadistic desires could not have been good. (They might have been good *for all we know*, but that is a different matter.) It is only a contingent fact that someone has those desires, but given that they do, their desires are necessarily bad. Someone can only be the bearer of a contingent moral value because there is a necessary moral truth in the wings. We may pick out the object of moral evaluation by some of its natural properties other than the whole set which necessarily determines its moral value. An illusion of contingency can thus be generated. Now while ordinary moral truths are either necessary or else involve a necessary truth, it could not be maintained that the *recognition* of such necessary truths is constitutive of competence in moralizing and that one could not reject such truths without ceasing to moralize. So it is not the *necessity* of moral mind-independence that marks it off from ordinary moral truths, but its epistemic status.

Second, by talking about the conceptual status of mind-independence, I am not emphasizing the *a priori* of our knowledge of the mind-independence principle, where *a priori* amounts to some non-empirical source of cognition. The distinction between *a priori* and empirical truths is not the same distinction as that between conceptual and non-conceptual truths. It would not harm the present point if it turned out that our ordinary moral judgements are beliefs which are held on *a priori* grounds — perhaps by some kind of non-empirical Moorean intuition. It may be that when we believe that kicking dogs for fun is wrong, the belief is not grounded in any way in the perceptual experience of dogs or kickings. Such Moorean *a priori* intuition would, however, be quite different from conceptual knowledge; for the denial of a truth acquired by means of Moorean *a priori* intuition would not necessarily imply conceptual incompetence. Some people think that it is perfectly alright to kick dogs for fun. But they grasp the concept of morality nonetheless. Presumably Moorean intuition would deliver truths like ‘The joy of friendship and the love of beauty are intrinsically good’, and such truths would not be conceptual truths but controversial, substantive moral truths [cf. 5, p.56]. If we accept the commonly accepted thesis that conceptual knowledge is a species of *a priori* knowledge, then the present point could be put by saying that Moorean intuition would not be the same *sort* of *a priori* knowledge as conceptual knowledge.

Third, to say that mind-independence has a status approaching or attaining that of a conceptual truth is not to say that it cannot be rejected. But it does mean that someone who recommended rejecting mind-independence would be recommending that we abandon thinking in moral terms. (It should be noted that in this situation, we would *not* come to accept that the moral truth is mind-dependent; instead we would just cease

thinking in moral terms.) Quine may be right that no propositions are unrevisable. But to say that some truths are conceptual truths need not mean that one is committed to an unQuinean range of truths which are completely immune from revision. It is just to say that a truth is unrevisable so long as we want to carry on thinking and talking in certain terms. (Perhaps those who lean Quine's way will feel more comfortable if the point about mind-independence is put by saying that to deny the doctrine of mind-independence is to change the subject away from morality to a far greater degree than if we were to deny any ordinary moral view. Such Quinean scruples need not worry us here because the argument which follows can be rephrased in Quinean terms.)

So much then for what the claim to conceptual truth does not entail. The claim that mind-independence is a conceptual truth is not merely the thesis that it is necessary; it is not merely the thesis that it is known *a priori*, and it is not at all the thesis that it is unrevisable.

IX. Conceptual Status and the Internal Reading

Now, the internal reading says that a person who asserts mind-independence expresses a (second-order) moral attitude, and thus the mind-independence negated conditionals state a substantive moral truth. The argument against the internal reading is this: if mind-independence is a substantive moral truth, then it cannot be a conceptual truth. For substantive moral truths are eminently controversial, and if so they are unlikely candidates for conceptual truths. If mind-independence has some kind of conceptual status that no ordinary moral truth has, the internal reading cannot succeed in capturing this crucial aspect of the notion of mind-independence. If mind-independence is a conceptual truth, while the truth of any ordinary first-order or second-order moral judgement is not, then there is a discrepancy between the sense of mind-independence which projectivism needs to capture, and its sense when read internally. The internal reading will have failed to enable projectivism to respect the way we ordinarily think. The discrepancy between the sense of mind-independence which projectivism needs to capture and its sense when read internally is a matter of conceptual status. And this would explain why it is so unintuitive to read mind-independence as just one more moral view among many. We appear to have here an argument in support of the accusation of absurdity: on the face of it, a quasi-realist has not merely to account for the fact that features such as mind-independence are truths, but also for the fact that they are conceptual truths. *This* is the respect in which their status is quite different from any first-order or second-order moral judgement. And this is the aspect of their meaning which the internal reading fails to capture for projectivism.

There seems to be a discrepancy, then, between the conceptual status of mind-independence and what the internal reading captures. It might seem that we could point out this discrepancy and leave it at that — leaving quasi-realism in disarray, and realism victorious on the field. End of story. However, the dialectic now takes a new twist. Unfortunately, it may not be totally decisive to appeal to the exalted conceptual status of the features which concern us, and then argue that this is something which quasi-realism cannot emulate. For a quasi-realist might be difficult and reply that to assert that exalted status is to take a realist stance, and a projectivist can simply deny it. Perhaps what we

say about the nature of the controversial features is ‘theory-dependent’.⁷ When the realist claims that mind-independence has a conceptual status, the quasi-realist might retort: ‘Well you would say that wouldn’t you?’

This counterargument means that if we are to make dialectical progress, we need to be able to give an impartial argument, which does not beg the question against projectivism, to the effect that mind-independence is a conceptual truth. This will not be easy, for although there is obviously *some* status difference, it is not obvious that it amounts to a *conceptual* status difference. So how can we argue that ‘it would have been good whatever we thought about it’ is a conceptual truth?

X. An Argument for Conceptual Status

I do not think that the quasi-realist can be quite so glib as simply to assert that whether mind-independence is a conceptual truth is theory-dependent. Philosophical theses are not built out of thin air. They must answer to ordinary opinion, to a considerable extent. Perhaps the linguistic philosophers and the neo-Wittgensteinians were overly dogmatic about *their* rather odd intuitions about linguistic usage and concepts.⁸ But there must be some answerability. Whether a proposition is a conceptual truth cannot be a wholly theoretical matter — a matter of which highfalutin philosophical theory one buys into. There must be a plebeian opinion somewhere along the line. If moral mind-independence is a conceptual truth, then there should be some theoretically neutral way of establishing this.

We could simply ask people whether they think that mind-independence is a conceptual truth. But then if they get as far as understanding the question, they are likely to have been corrupted by philosophy and so be unreliable about the contents of their own mind.

The question concerning the conceptual truth of moral mind-independence is this: is it the case that if someone makes a moral judgement then he believes or assumes that it is not the case that it is true because he thought it was? The answer to this, it seems to me, is ‘yes’, for the following reason. It is part of making a moral judgement that it has a claim to *correctness* built into it. Call this the *normativity* of moral judgements. It is because of the aspiration to correctness in judgement that people sometimes disagree with the judgements of others and they sometimes express diffidence over their own. Disagreement and diffidence make no sense without such normativity. But then, given the normativity of moral judgements, it follows that it is part of making a moral judgement that one knows that there is a difference between making a judgement and making the right judgement. If so, one could not make a moral judgement without knowing that thinking something so doesn’t make it so. For if I know that my judgement can be incorrect then I know that it is not the case that if I make a judgement then it is correct. It fol-

⁷ Or to put it in more Quinean terms: whether denying the doctrine of mind-independence changes the subject away from morality to a much greater degree than denying any ordinary moral commitment might be theory-dependent.

⁸ Ironically they abused language more than any philosophers who had preceded them — e.g. ‘knowledge does not entail belief’ and ‘reasons are not causes’!

lows that I know that it is not the case that if I judge that X is good, then X is indeed good. So this negated conditional is built into moralizing.⁹ The step from normativity to mind-independence is small.

We can also appeal to moral *arguments* between people. We do not argue about all moral judgements, but we *might* argue about any of them. Moral arguments show that the claim of moral judgements to correctness, and thus the possibility of being defective, is a conceptual truth. For the possibility of error is a precondition for the possibility of moral arguments between people who hold opposite views. The disputants in a moral argument must think that there is a right answer about which they are arguing, or else they would not be arguing at all. They are arguing about what the correct or incorrect judgement is. They think that their opponent is misguided. This is why they tend to get so het up about it. Moral argument presupposes the idea of correctness in judgement. This is conceptually built into moralizing. It is this which explains the possibility of moral arguments. But, as we saw, the aspiration to correctness brings mind-independence in its train.

It seems pretty clear then, that moralizing *is* a normative enterprise. But it is also clear that it *must* be. A system of moralizing with no normative aspirations would be merely a set of judgements about the *niceness* of people and their desires. It would be unrecognizable as a *moral* system of attitudes.

This, I hope, is a neutral argument for thinking that mind-independence is a conceptual truth. And this rescues the conceptual status argument.

XI. Quasi-realism and Conceptual Status

The dialectic now takes a different turn. Instead of playing the gambit of saying that the conceptual status of mind-independence is a realist prejudice, a quasi-realist might go on the offensive and try to *capture* conceptual status. It is initially difficult to see how this could be done, given the internal reading. For surely, as soon as we claim that mind-independence is a substantive moral view, we thereby deprive ourselves of the right to assert its conceptual status, since the view would not be substantive if its negation were incoherent.

But perhaps this is too quick. Perhaps there is a way that a quasi-realist can allow that there is a distinction — perhaps of degree — between views which are conceptually confused, and more normal but incorrect views. For example, perhaps a quasi-realist can agree that ‘The Grand Canyon is wicked’ falls towards the conceptually confused end of that spectrum. Just as there are constraints on the propositional contents of the emotion of pride, so there might be constraints on the propositional contents of moral attitudes. For instance, perhaps they can only be held towards a *person*, or to what is believed to be a person. If so, a quasi-realist may be able to say that ‘The Grand Canyon is wicked’ is conceptually confused. And there might be other constraints. Perhaps mind-indepen-

⁹ What about the ‘student relativist’ who asserts that the moral truth is mind-dependent? He may be wrong, but doesn’t he show that mind-independence is not a conceptual truth? (Brad Hooker put this point to me.) Reply: firstly, it is not completely unknown for people to assert things which are conceptually confused, especially if they are waxing philosophical. Secondly, the rest of the linguistic behaviour of the student relativist shows that he does not really believe what he says. When he is not being theoretical, he makes and resists just the inference which we would expect if he believed mind-independence. He constantly sins against his own doctrine.

dence can be put down as conceptually confused, but for some other reason.

One story would be as follows. The quasi-realist might deny that normativity is *intrinsic* to attitudes. The quasi-realist might agree that it is essential that our moral judgements have normative aspirations, but he might say that the *source* of this normativity lies outside the attitudes, perhaps in the needs and purposes which make having such a system of attitudes worthwhile. This external source explains the second-order attitude to our ways of forming attitudes. And it is this second-order attitude that we express when we assert mind-independence. A quasi-realist might say that a system of attitudes becomes a *moral* system of attitudes only when such a normatizing second-order attitude is in place. Without this second-order attitude, we are not moralizing in a decent and organized way — we just have a motley collection of nondescript attitudes. When we go in for the sophisticated practice of expressing attitudes in moral judgements, or even in moral language by using the words ‘morally right’ or ‘morally wrong’, this signifies that the second-order attitude is in place. A system of attitudes without a normatizing second-order attitude would not be a *moral* system, and what these attitudes express would not be *moral* judgements or *moral* language. Moral judgements require the second-order attitudes; and according to the internal reading, the second-order attitude is expressed by the mind-independence negated conditional; so if a judgement is a moral judgement, mind-independence must hold. Moral mind-independence is a conceptual truth because without the second-order attitude that mind-independence expresses, a system of attitudes would not be a moral system of attitudes. (If it is asked *how* the presence of the second-order attitude makes the system of attitudes into a moral system, and the judgements they express into moral judgements, and the utterances they generate into moral utterances, the reply is that *it just does*, and this is a descriptive fact about the way our moral sensibilities work.) This story seems to show how a projectivist can say that mind-independence is necessarily built into our moral judgements and moral language. A projectivist seems to be able to say that moral mind-independence is a conceptual truth.

However, there are two problems with this.

One problem is that the story has abandoned the internal reading. For if we give the second-order attitude the magical role of being that which converts a motley collection of nondescript attitudes into fine upstanding moral attitudes, the second-order attitude will thereby lose *its* status as itself a substantive *moral* attitude. What would make *it* a moral attitude? It seems that the second-order attitude which converts first-order attitudes into moral attitudes cannot itself be a moral attitude.

Another problem is that the story relies on saying something radically different about attitudes and about judgements. The quasi-realist is saying that an attitude only becomes a moral one and gains its normative aspirations by participating in a system of attitudes which includes a certain second-order attitude. This means that the fact that I have the *attitude* which a judgement expresses, does not by itself involve the idea that *it* is not necessarily justified or appropriate. So while the projectivist seems to have explained the normative aspirations of moral *judgements* and moral *language*, normativity does not attach to *attitudes* themselves. But it is counter-intuitive to say that our moral feelings are not appropriate or inappropriate in themselves, but only when regulated in a system of feelings. This loses track of the intuitive idea that the feeling, say, of moral horror, is

appropriate *just in virtue of that to which the horror is a response*. Intuitively, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of feeling consists in a match between an attitude type and propositional content. Projectivism is out of line with this aspect of the phenomenology of our moral feelings. There will be an illusion built into the way we think about our moral feelings. Hence, quasi-realism cannot attempt to capture conceptual status on the basis of the internal reading without lapsing into a certain sort of error theory.

Quasi-realism cannot explain how mind-independence is a conceptual truth.

XII. Realism and Conceptual Status

If it turned out that the moral *realist* could make nothing of the conceptual status of mind-independence, then the realist could no longer object that realism is superior to quasi-realism on this score. The realist's objection to the quasi-realist's employment of the internal reading would be neutralized. So it is worth contrasting the problems which beset the internal reading, with the *leisurely ease* with which the realist can explain our right to rely on the conceptual status distinction between the disputed formal features and ordinary judgements in the area.

In fact, it is as easy as falling off a log for the realist to explain why the formal features are knowable by conceptual means. If one is a realist, a fact of the matter is one thing and our belief about it is another. So the existence of each is independent of the other, just in the way that the existence of my hat and scarf are mutually independent. The separate existence of the two things explains why the mind-independence negated conditional holds. If we assume that there is a cognitive representation of a (non-mental) kind of reality, we can *infer* the mind-independence negated conditionals; they are a consequence of the truth of realism. The moral realist cannot even *think* about thinking that how things are depends on us; for that would not be an odd moral view but a retraction of realism.

There is a parallel dialectic in the philosophy of time: what Michael Dummett calls 'truth-value-links' are partly *constitutive* of realism about the past and future [9]. It may be that a non-realist also has some subtle way of achieving access to them. But for a realist, they are easily earned. Mind-independence is a necessary part of moral realism, just as truth-value-links are a necessary part of temporal realism.

Now, realism entails that mind-independence is true, but why would it be *conceptually* true? Presumably, if realism in some area is true, then we must know that true judgements are true in virtue of facts or states of affairs. We would grasp this in thinking in that way. We would grasp the metaphysics which is built into our thought. But if grasp of the idea of a non-mental truth-maker is built into our thought, then so is our grasp of the mind-independence conditional. Therefore, if realism is true, mind-independence will turn out to be a conceptual truth. For the moral realist, someone who asserts moral mind-dependence must be conceptually confused.

Thus, the realist can easily hold that lovely and unlovely conditionals have a quite different conceptual status from other views about how things are, as it were, *in* that sort of reality.

Possible defectiveness is easy too. For beliefs are beliefs about reality; so what explains the way beliefs aim at truth is the primitive metaphysical fact that the state of

affairs which a belief represents cannot both obtain and not obtain. So if there are moral beliefs, they must admit of possible defectiveness. For moral beliefs are defective when the state of affairs which they purport to represent does not obtain. And this would be built into ordinary thought and talk. It has to be admitted that the realist's explanation of supervenience is less easy. Blackburn has an ingenious argument for thinking that moral realism has a problem with explaining supervenience [5]. But I think there is an explanation to be had — although I shall not attempt to argue this here.¹⁰ For the realist, supervenience is a principle which constrains how the facts can turn out, given certain other facts; it is not merely a constraint on what it is to make moral judgements — although, if we seek to know moral truths, we do well to heed that constraint in our judgements.

At any rate, as far as mind-independence goes, the quasi-realist is unable to launch a counter-attack. The realist can easily explain the conceptual status difference.

Coda

We can now argue more straightforwardly as follows: the internal reading technique — according to which both lovely and unlovely conditionals express moral views — fails by failing to make sense of the conceptual status distinction. This is fatal because it means that quasi-realism has no access to the true content of mind-independence. Since mind-independence, so conceived, is an essential feature of our moral thought, we are now one step nearer being able to argue for the conclusion that *only realism can respect moral thought as it is*. Only one step, that is, because quasi-realism has other tricks up its sleeve. Other quasi-realist techniques may or may not meet a similar fate. However, this cannot be assumed. It needs to be argued.

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¹⁰ I reconstruct Blackburn's argument in the first part of [14].

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