Attitudinal Ambivalence: Moral Uncertainty for Non-Cognitivists

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ABSTRACT

In many situations, people are unsure in their moral judgments. In much recent philosophical literature, this kind of moral doubt has been analysed in terms of uncertainty in one's moral beliefs. Non-cognitivists, however, argue that moral judgments express a kind of conative attitude, more akin to a desire than a belief. This paper presents a scientifically informed reconciliation of non-cognitivism and moral doubt. The central claim is that attitudinal ambivalence—the degree to which one holds conflicting attitudes towards the same object—can play the role of moral doubt for non-cognitivists. I will demonstrate that ambivalence has all of the features that we would expect it to have in order to play the role of moral doubt. It is gradable, can vary through time, covaries with strength of motivation, and is suitably distinct from the other features of our moral judgments. As well as providing a defence of non-cognitivism, this insight poses a new challenge for the view—deciding how to act under moral ambivalence.

1. Introduction

If we conceive that a thing, which is wont to affect us painfully, has any point of resemblance with another thing which is wont to affect us with an equally strong emotion of pleasure, we shall hate the first-named thing, and at the same time we shall love it. […] This disposition of the mind, which arises from two contrary emotions, is called vacillation; it stands to the emotions in the same relation as doubt does to the imagination.

[Spinoza 1667: E3, p17]

It has been argued that non-cognitive attitudes have insufficient internal structure to accommodate the features that common sense tells us are part of moral judgments. Whereas moral judgments vary in certitude, importance, and robustness, non-cognitive attitudes only possess two structural features—strength and stability over time. Therefore, moral judgments cannot be non-cognitive attitudes [Smith 2002].

Could the 'vacillation' described by Spinoza reveal a feature of non-cognitive attitudes that is overlooked by this critique? In this paper, I will argue that such internal conflict, or ambivalence, can play the role of moral doubt that is missing from conventional non-cognitivist accounts of moral judgments.

In addition to providing a defence of non-cognitivism, reinterpreting the phenomenon of moral doubt in terms of attitudinal ambivalence provides an alternative perspective to the recent literature on moral uncertainty. Ambivalence, as a fundamentally different state to uncertain belief, requires a fundamentally different response.

Section 2 will present the problem, retracing Michael Smith's argument that non-cognitivism cannot accommodate all three structural features of moral judgments. Section 3 will introduce and characterise the notion of ambivalence. Section 4 will demonstrate how ambivalence can play the role of certitude and thus provide a defence of non-cognitivism, while Section 5 will anticipate and respond to some potential objections to this defence.

2. The Problem: Non-Cognitivism and Moral Uncertainty

What should we do when we do not know what we should do? There is a growing philosophical literature built on attempts to answer this question and others like it. A number of philosophers have argued for various norms that we should follow when uncertain about moral facts [Lockhart 2000; Ross 2006; Sepielli 2009, 2012; Gustafsson and Torpman 2014; MacAskill and Ord 2020]. Others have argued that no such subjective norms exist, that what we should do is in fact what the true moral theory says we should do, regardless of our beliefs [Weatherson 2014; Harman 2015].

The use of terms such as 'facts', 'belief', and 'true' appear to betray an underlying presupposition in favour of metaethical realism. Indeed, debates on the topic of moral uncertainty and the very question that defines it seem to depend on assumptions about the nature of morality that are by no means uncontroversial. Non-cognitivists, for example, would deny that any of these three terms accurately describe moral judgments. This is a form of moral anti-realism; its proponents deny the existence of objective moral facts. Rather than asserting that all moral beliefs are mistaken, however, non-cognitivists state that moral judgments are not beliefs at all and cannot be true or false. Moral judgments, according to the non-cognitivist, are some variety of conative attitude, more akin to desire than to belief.

Thus, non-cognitivism can be characterised as comprising three central claims:

(1) **Moral antirealism.** There are no objective moral facts.
(2) **Psychological non-cognitivism.**
   (i) Moral judgments are not beliefs.
   (ii) Moral judgments are some variety of conative attitude.
(3) **Semantic non-factualism.** Moral sentences are not truth-apt; they take no truth values.

This conception of non-cognitivism might be contested by quasi-realists, such as Simon Blackburn [1984, 1993] and Allan Gibbard [2003], who adopt a minimalist theory of truth to claim that terms like 'fact', 'belief', and 'true' can be applied to moral judgments, even though they are not representational. Indeed, there has been extensive debate in this journal about whether quasi-realism is equipped to make sense of self-doubt and moral fallibility [Egan 2007; Blackburn 2009; Köhler 2015; Beddor 2020; Lam 2020]. However, I will set these accounts aside for now, and will focus on non-cognitivism as characterised above, since quasi-realism is sufficiently distinctive to require its own separate analysis.

Because uncertainty is a measure of degrees of belief and non-cognitivism holds that moral statements are not beliefs, discussion of moral uncertainty *per se* presupposes that non-cognitivism is false. However, might not this phenomenon be redescribed in a way that is consistent with non-cognitivism? Is there some gradable feature of non-cognitive attitudes that can stand in for moral uncertainty for those who deny that moral statements express beliefs? Michael Smith [2002] has argued that there is not.

Smith argues that moral judgments have three structural features. The first is *certitude*. This is the degree of confidence one has in a judgment. For example, I feel more confident that it would be right to save a drowning child than that I should donate most of my wealth to overseas development charities. This is the feature that has gained much recent attention under the banner of normative or moral uncertainty. I shall refer to the phenomenon of low moral certitude as *moral doubt*.

The second feature is *importance*. This is a measure of how desirable or undesirable, good or bad, right or wrong, one judges something to be. Importance is distinct from certitude. For example, I am equally confident that lying is wrong and that torturing an innocent person is wrong, but I judge torture to be much worse than lying. These two judgments are equal in certitude, but they differ in importance.

Lastly, we have *robustness*. This is the stability of moral judgments over time, as an individual reflects and receives new information. Whereas certitude and importance are synchronic, robustness is diachronic: it is a measure of change through time. While Spinoza's use (above) of the term 'vacillation' refers to what I will call 'ambivalence', modern usage of the term might be thought to refer to a lack of robustness. Note that Smith defines robustness as the temporal stability of certitude only, but there may also be changes in importance over time. For example, as I learn about the various successes of non-violent protests in history and I reflect on current political injustices, I might judge political activism as more important than I did previously, *while also* feeling more confident in this judgment.

Any acceptable account of the nature of moral judgments must adequately capture certitude, importance, and robustness. The central claim in Smith's argument is that cognitivist metaethical theories can accommodate these three features, but that non-cognitivism cannot. This point can be made clear by comparing the archetypal cognitivist and non-cognitivist interpretations of a typical moral judgment.

Suppose that an individual X makes the moral judgment that an action φ is morally right. The cognitivist will interpret this as '*X believes that φ is right.*' This judgment is the belief that φ has the property of rightness. There are two features that can vary independently—the degree of belief and the degree of rightness. The former captures the certitude of X's judgment; the latter captures its importance. The stability of these features through time gives the judgment's robustness. Thus, a cognitivist interpretation of moral judgments captures all three structural features.

The non-cognitivist interpretation, on the other hand, is something like '*X desires that φ.*' For simplicity, we will proceed with desire as the non-cognitive attitude in question, but note that there are numerous varieties of non-cognitivism and that this discussion applies to non-cognitivism, broadly construed. Desire could be replaced with a range of alternative non-cognitive attitudes and the analysis herein should remain intact.

Rather than a property of φ and a belief about this property, on this interpretation there is only one variable component—a desire. Therefore, this desire alone will have

to capture the certitude, importance, and robustness of X's judgment. However, as Smith points out, it seems that desires have only two gradable features—strength and the stability through time. The latter clearly represents robustness, but the strength of a desire cannot be equivalent to both the certitude and the importance of a moral judgment. For example, if my judgment, 'telling the truth is good', is simply a desire for truth-telling, I might desire this more or less strongly. But common sense tells us that there is a meaningful difference between a confident judgment that telling the truth is slightly good and a less confident judgment that telling the truth is extremely good. By varying only in strength, desires alone cannot capture this difference. In summary, the argument goes as follows:

> **P1** Moral judgments have three structural features.
>
> **P2** Non-cognitive attitudes have only two structural features.
>
> **C** Moral judgments are not non-cognitive attitudes.

Note that a committed non-cognitivist might well perform a Moorean shift, inverting this argument to deny that moral judgments vary in both importance and certitude. If we take the strength of a non-cognitive attitude to capture the importance of a moral judgment, then the asymmetry between desire-like attitudes and moral judgments appears to show that we cannot have both non-cognitivism *and* moral doubt.

There have been a number of attempts to defend the compatibility of non-cognitivism and moral doubt in response to this argument. James Lenman [2003] and Michael Ridge [2003, 2006] have proposed modified versions of non-cognitivism, introducing a belief component to moral judgments in addition to the desire-like attitude. This is belief about the desires of some suitably idealised advisor. They therefore accept Smith's conclusion that non-cognitive attitudes alone cannot capture moral doubt, but instead add beliefs into the mixture to do the job. More recently, Andrew Sepielli [2012] and Julia Staffel [2019] have attempted to show that moral doubt can be accommodated without invoking cognitivist attitudes, by building upon Mark Schroeder's [2008a, 2008b] 'being for' version of non-cognitivism. According to this account, moral judgments involve two non-cognitive attitudes—a conventional non-cognitive attitude, such as blame or praise, and a second attitude, being for, which is directed at the first attitude. By introducing two non-cognitive attitudes, rather than one, this account provides the structure to accommodate both importance and certitude.

These attempts to rescue non-cognitivism share a basic strategy: they accept that Smith's argument undermines extant non-cognitivist theories, and proceed to modify those theories with extra components, be these beliefs or further non-cognitive attitudes, to accommodate certitude. All of these proposals face problems of their own, but here I want to take a different tack.[1] Drawing on evidence from social psychology, I will show that P2 of the above argument is false, and that even the most unsophisticated non-cognitive attitudes have sufficient structure to accommodate robustness, importance, and certitude. The missing ingredient was, all along, a feature of attitudes—namely, ambivalence.

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[1] See Bykvist and Olson [2011, 2017] and Eriksson and Olinder [2016] for more on these problems.

3. The Solution: Ambivalence

Leontius the son of Aglaeon was coming up from the Piraeus, outside the North Wall but close to it, when he saw some corpses with the public executioner standing near by. On the one hand, he experienced the desire to see them, but at the same time he felt disgust and averted his gaze. For a while he struggled and kept his hands over his eyes, but finally he was overcome by desire; he opened his eyes wide, ran up to the corpses, and said, 'There you are, you wretches! What a lovely sight! I hope you feel satisfied!'

[Plato, *Republic*: 439e–440a]

Leontius faces a problem in deciding how to act: he concurrently wants to see the corpses and to avert his gaze. He has conflicting desires, which cause doubt and hesitation. In the end, he gives in to his morbid fascination and he looks, but it is his state of mind before this moment that is of interest here.

Recall P2 of Smith's argument: non-cognitive attitudes have only two structural features. These are the strength of an attitude and its stability over time. Stability is diachronic, so that at a single moment non-cognitive attitudes have only a single structural feature: strength. How might the case of Leontius fit into this unidimensional account of non-cognitive attitudes? His attitude towards seeing the corpses appears to contain more complexity than merely its strength. This suggests that P2 is worthy of closer inspection.

To scrutinise an empirical claim about attitudes, such as P2, it seems appropriate to turn to the discipline of social psychology, historically branded as the description and explanation of attitudes [Thomas and Znaniecki 1918]. For much of the past century, the scientific consensus seems to have been with Smith. In most psychological research, attitudes were considered unidimensional and were standardly measured by the semantic differential technique, with positive and negative valence represented as opposite ends of the same scale. As Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin [1995: 363] note, the very methods used to measure them '*construe attitudes as falling on some point along an evaluative dimension, assessed by such bipolar scales as: favourable-unfavorable, positive-negative, good-bad, or like-dislike.*' So, if the attitude in question was desire and the object of this desire was a proposition *p*, we would have a strong desire that *p* at one end, a strong desire that not-*p* at the other end, and indifference somewhere in the middle.

However, in 1972, K.J. Kaplan proposed a modification to the semantic differential technique. He claimed [1972] that the positive and negative components of attitudes should be measured separately, rather than on a single bipolar scale. On this method, the degree to which an individual desires that *p* would be measured on one scale, from no desire that *p* to strong desire that *p*, and the degree to which they desired that not-*p* would be measured separately. In many simple cases of desire, this would yield the result that an individual has a desire that *p* and no desire that not-*p*. In simple cases of indifference, this would yield the result that an individual has no desire for either. However, from its earliest uses, this modified semantic differential technique also revealed what Plato had been indicating, more than two thousand years earlier: individuals can evaluate something concurrently as both positive and negative. They can both desire that *p* and desire that not-*p*. They can be *ambivalent*.

The early models of attitudes, varying along a single dimension, seem unable adequately to represent Leontius' desires with respect to seeing the corpses. It would be misleading to suggest that he is somewhere in the middle, neither wanting to look nor wanting not to look. In fact, the opposite is true: he holds both of these strong

desires at once. There is a clear difference between a person like Leontius, who has a strong desire to do something *and* a strong desire not to do that same thing, and a person who has no strong feelings either way. If we represent desires as varying along a single dimension, however, we cannot distinguish between these two states. Kaplan's proposed modification of the semantic differential technique was an attempt to provide a conceptual and methodological distinction between indifference and ambivalence in individuals' attitudes. This attempt succeeded, and ambivalence has proven, ever since, to be a rich vein of psychological research.

There are, of course, some pitfalls in this sort of cross-disciplinary approach, because terms are not always taken to have the same meaning in different fields. For instance, the indifference to which Kaplan refers—the absence of any strong feeling either way—is different from the meaning of indifference within philosophy, where decision theorists take it to mean that neither of two options is strictly preferred to the other. In social psychology, one might be ambivalent, indifferent, or neither, but not both. Decision-theoretic indifference, however, is entirely consistent with ambivalence if the opposing attitudes lead one to have no strict preference for one option over another. Similarly, attitudes are not conceived of in exactly the same way in philosophy and psychology. Whereas an attitude in psychology is taken to be an evaluative appraisal of an object of almost any kind, including social groups, policy positions, abstract concepts, or physical objects, attitudes in philosophy are taken to be the relation that an individual bears to a proposition, and need not involve any psychological element. As noted by Frank Ramsey, '*the beliefs which we hold most strongly are often accompanied by practically no feeling at all; no one feels strongly about things he takes for granted*' [1926: 65].

There is, however, an important lesson that can be learnt from the psychological study of ambivalence, which is relevant for the philosophical analysis of attitudes— namely, that agents can have a varying degree of internal conflict in their attitudes, and that this affects the ways in which we think about and act on attitudes. We simply require a definition of ambivalence that coheres with a philosophical understanding of the relevant concepts.

A desire provides an agent with at least *pro tanto* reason to act. My desire for ice cream provides me with some reason to seek ice cream. Often, our desires give rise to reasons that cannot all be satisfied. It is this presence of competing reasons that I aim to capture with the label 'ambivalence'. Reasons are competing if they support mutually exclusive options or courses of action. This conception of ambivalence does not require a commitment to any metaphysically loaded notion of objective normative reasons. The reasons at play here should be thought of as an agent's particular, contingent, motivating reasons [Raz 1975; Smith 1994; Parfit and Broome 1997]. These need not be 'good' reasons; nor must they reflect any moral, prudential, or even empirical truths beyond the simple fact that they motivate the agent in question.

Furthermore, reasons might apply not only to concrete courses of action, but also to mental attitudes themselves. Indeed, in so far as we take ourselves to have reasons for our desires, we might even be ambivalent with respect to which desires to have in the first place. The same can be said of other propositional attitudes for which we have reasons. An agent who has some reason to believe or desire that *p*, and some reason not to believe or desire that *p,* should be considered ambivalent, even though these mental attitudes are not conventionally considered options of choice. Thus, for any two alternatives A and B, an agent is ambivalent iff

   (i)   the agent has motivation reason for A,
  (ii) the agent has motivating reason for B, and
 (iii) if B then not-A.

If an agent is ambivalent in virtue of the reasons that are provided by their moral judgments, then they may aptly be described as morally ambivalent. Ambivalence may be due to conflict in desires, or due to conflicting reasons that arise from any other source. Thus, ambivalence is relevant for a wide range of non-cognitivist views concerning which attitudes comprise moral judgments. Of course, we might also be ambivalent in our reasons for action that play no part in our moral psychology. Buridan's ass is clearly ambivalent, torn between reasons for two equally delicious piles of hay, even though it makes no moral judgment about the conflicting options.

Perhaps there exist some attitudes, emotions, or desires that are in some sense conflicting, but that do not feature as reasons for agents. For example, the emotion of regret regarding a one-off event in the past appears not to provide any particular reason for an agent to do anything, but seems to conflict with feelings of satisfaction or pride about the same event. Similarly, conflicting desires for things that are entirely out of one's hands, such as the desire for both sun and rain, might seem to manifest ambivalence without providing reasons [Prinz 2004]. However, recall that we are considering a broad range of reasons, including those for the adoption of mental attitudes. These emotions and desires might themselves provide competing reasons for adopting further mental attitudes, thereby satisfying the criteria for ambivalence, so-defined. In fact, I do not deny the possibility of some forms of internal conflict without competing reasons. This possibility is simply not relevant to the present discussion. We are looking for a feature of moral judgments that might contribute to our understanding of the nature of moral doubt, and the presence of competing reasons might provide just such a feature. This account of ambivalence might not encompass all varieties of internal conflict, but mental states that do not provide reasons in the way that moral judgments do are not relevant to understanding the phenomenon of moral doubt.

The degree of an agent's ambivalence is jointly determined by the balance and weight of their reasons. An agent is ambivalent to the degree that their conflicting reasons are strong and closely balanced. Thus, (1) the stronger the conflicting reasons are, the greater the degree of ambivalence, and (2) the more closely balanced the conflicting reasons are, the greater the degree of ambivalence. Thus, an agent might be considered ambivalent when they have conflicting reasons, even if one set of reasons decisively outweighs the others to settle a choice. This might appear to clash somewhat with the everyday use of the term, which is normally reserved for cases in which someone has mixed feelings that are at least approximately equal in strength. However, the present definition is apt, since, even when one set of reasons decisively outweighs the other, the outweighed reasons persist and are relevant to practical deliberation. When an agent is ambivalent, they cannot avoid taking an action against which they have at least some reason, no matter what they choose. This might make a choice difficult, require careful deliberation, and leave the nagging tug of residual reasons, even if an agent acts in accordance with the most compelling reasons, all things considered.

This is a fairly general conception of ambivalence, lacking the precision of the various social-psychological methods for quantifying ambivalence from the strength

and closeness of conflicting attitudes. For the purposes of this paper, however, it will suffice to acknowledge that ambivalence exists as a result of the balance and weight of conflicting reasons, without the need for an exact measure. Recognising that agents can be ambivalent in their desires, along with a range of other attitudes, shows that P2 in Smith's argument is false. Non-cognitive attitudes vary not only in strength and robustness, but also in degree of ambivalence. However, more is required in order to reconcile moral doubt and non-cognitivism: ambivalence in non-cognitive attitudes must be able to play the role of low certitude in moral judgments.

4. Playing the Role of Certitude

As in the case of Leontius, the presence of ambivalence might cause an agent to be unsure of how to act, making it difficult to know what to do, and producing a form of practical doubt that is distinct from partial belief. Ambivalence poses a challenge when deciding what to do, not because of a lack of information, like uncertainty, but because weighing competing reasons is difficult. In cases of moral ambivalence, this leads to doubt about what moral statements to assert, how to appraise the actions of others, and, ultimately, what choices we make as morally conscientious individuals. The more ambivalent an agent's attitudes, the less confidence they might have in their moral judgments. Just as uncertainty gives rise to moral doubt according to cognitivism, ambivalence does so according to a non-cognitivist view.

Consider a classic case of what cognitivists would describe as moral uncertainty. In his 1946 lecture 'L'existentialisme est un humanisme', Jean-Paul Sartre recounted the story of a student of his who, during World War II, was struggling to choose between leaving home to join the Free French Forces, or staying in France with his mother. On the one hand, he yearned to fight the Nazis and avenge the death of his brother. On the other, he felt duty-bound to care for his mother, who would be devastated to be abandoned by her only surviving child. Sartre says that his student '*was hesitating between two kinds of morality.* […] *He had to choose between those two*' [1946: 40].

A cognitivist interpretation of this case of moral doubt would explain it in terms of the student's partial degrees of belief about what he ought to do. He is uncertain about which of two statements is true—that he should go to war, or that he should stay at home with his mother. Conversely, non-cognitivists can explain this case in terms of the student's ambivalence. He faces difficulty in deciding what to do, because he concurrently has reasons for going to war and for not going to war. Due to the circumstances in which he finds himself, his desire to care for his mother conflicts with his desire to defend his country and avenge his brother. The experience of Sartre's student seems to capture the feature of certitude that Smith identifies. However, ambivalence in non-cognitive attitudes seems equally well equipped to make sense of the student's state of mind as cognitivist degrees of belief. While a sense of filial duty provides a compelling reason to stay, fraternal loyalty and patriotism provide reasons not to do so. Explaining the difficulty of this decision and the hesitation of the student does not require attribution of moral beliefs. If anything, ambivalence seems to give a truer account of the student's experience. He does not feel merely uncertain, as one might about tomorrow's weather. He feels torn. Conflicted. Divided. The very language of moral dilemmas connotes ambivalence over uncertainty.

In addition to this example, a quick survey of the literature on moral uncertainty reveals that many of the cases that these authors discuss could plausibly be redescribed in terms of attitudinal ambivalence. They cite uncertainty about the truth of liberal values or religious moral codes, or about the morality of abortion, trolley cases, and eating meat [Gracely 1996; Lockhart 2000; Ross 2006; Sepielli 2010; MacAskill 2014; Harman 2015]. Yet these examples might alternatively be characterised as involving ambivalent non-cognitive attitudes. Moreover, the few cases that do seem unequivocally to comprise degrees of belief rather than ambivalence involve implausible moral psychology. In a recent paper by Will MacAskill and Toby Ord [2020], for example, we are asked to consider the case of an agent who has a credence of 40% in some form of non-consequentialism and 60% in hedonic utilitarianism: she is uncertain as to which is the true moral theory. This certainly sounds like uncertainty rather than ambivalence, but surely nobody (a handful of moral philosophers aside) undertakes moral reflection in this way, considering each moral theory in turn and assigning it a credence. At the very least, non-cognitivists might be able to set this sort of case to one side as a problem particular to cognitivism. Some might find themselves in just such a quandary, but this is due to their mistaken understanding of the nature of moral judgments, and it is no major loss to non-cognitivism if it cannot accommodate these situations. It is the true-to-life moral dilemmas such as that of Sartre's student that we should be concerned to explain, and in these cases ambivalence fares at least as well as uncertainty.

In order to serve as the missing link between non-cognitivism and moral uncertainty, however, ambivalence must be able to play the role of certitude in moral judgments. There are a number of desiderata that comprise this role. First and foremost, ambivalence should be gradable. Moral certitude is not binary, but comes in varying degrees as individuals feel more or less confident of their moral judgments. Likewise, it seems clear that ambivalence comes in degrees. It is routinely quantified in the scientific study of attitudes, and there a number of methods for its measurement. It also seems intuitively right that agents can be ambivalent to a greater or lesser extent: the stronger and more closely balanced their conflicting attitudes, the greater their degree of ambivalence.

Second, ambivalence should be able to vary through time, to give a moral judgment's robustness. This feature of ambivalence follows straightforwardly from its gradability. For example, if Leontius were to reflect on the fact that death is a natural part of life, his feeling of disgust and desire not to look might diminish, thereby reducing his ambivalence. As an agent's reasons arise and fade away, and as the strengths of these reasons wax and wane, there will be a consequent change in the degree to which that agent is ambivalent.

Next, certitude is distinct from importance, and so ambivalence should be distinct from strength. These features are not entirely orthogonal, since the strength of conflicting desires partly determines ambivalence. However, ambivalence does not merely track strength and they are distinct variables. One might feel more ambivalent about lying out of politeness than about murder, because the competing reasons for and against the former are more closely balanced, even though the latter elicits stronger reasons overall. In fact, an increase in the strength of reasons not to murder would make one less ambivalent, not more so. Likewise, certitude and importance are distinct, but not completely orthogonal. Considerations that would increase importance in the judgment that it would be wrong to lie, such as having taken an oath to tell the

truth, or speaking to a friend who highly values honesty, also seem to confer additional certitude in this judgment. Suppose, however, that one were to learn of additional considerations both against and in favour of lying. Then we might expect the matter to be considered one of greater importance but reduced certitude; or, as per the proposed analysis, one of stronger non-cognitive attitude and greater degree of ambivalence. Thus, although ambivalence and strength are not completely orthogonal, the relationship between them appears to be just what we should expect for an account of certitude and importance in moral judgments.

Smith describes how the strength of a rational agent's motivation covaries with the certitude of their moral judgments. Ambivalence should therefore bear this relation to motivation in order to play the role of certitude. And indeed it seems to do so. If Leontius had a desire to look at a beautiful sunset, equal in strength to his desire to look at the corpses, and no conflicting desire not to do so, we would expect him to be more motivated to look at the sunset than at the corpses. Moreover, there is strong scientific evidence to support this relationship. Numerous studies have found that a higher degree of ambivalence leads to a weaker attitude-behaviour relationship, with attitudes less predictive of behaviour. Ambivalence weakens the link from attitudes to intentions and from intentions to behaviour. This effect has been observed in a wide range of behaviours, including diet [Armitage and Conner 2000; Berndsen and van der Pligt 2004], smoking [Lipkus et al. 2001], and recreational drug use [Conner et al. 2002; Conner and Armitage 2008]. In summary, the greater the degree of ambivalence in an individual's attitude, the less likely they are to act on that attitude, just as should be the case for an account of certitude.

It should now be clear that ambivalence has all of the features that we would expect it to have in order to play the role of low certitude in our moral judgments. It is gradable; it can fluctuate through time; it is suitably distinct from importance; and it covaries with motivation. So, the presence of moral doubt need not pose a problem for non-cognitivism. I do not mean to claim that ambivalence is the only possible way of understanding moral doubt. It can, after all, be interpreted by cognitivists as uncertainty. But ambivalence at least provides an account that matches the true phenomenon of moral doubt and is consistent with non-cognitivism. We shall now consider some potential objections to the claim that ambivalence can play the role of moral doubt in non-cognitivist accounts of moral judgments.

5. Objections

5.1 Ambivalence and Uncertainty

One might accept that there is ambivalence in moral judgments, but claim that this is in addition to, rather than instead of, moral certitude. The problem facing non-cognitivism arose because non-cognitive attitudes have fewer structural dimensions than moral beliefs do. If we introduce ambivalence, this gives a richer structure to non-cognitive attitudes. But this move also produces an equivalent increase in the structural complexity of moral beliefs, since they come with their own degree of ambivalence.[2] Because ambivalence is not unique to non-cognitive attitudes, its introduction does not close the gap between them and moral beliefs.

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[2] See Makinson [1965] and Klein [1985] for more on ambivalence in belief.

While it is true that there might be ambivalence over and above uncertainty in beliefs, this does not mean that moral judgments must also have both. The crux of the problem was not that non-cognitive attitudes have less structure than beliefs, but that they have less structure than moral judgments seem to have. In order for this objection to have force, it must be shown that we should also separate uncertainty and ambivalence in moral judgments. But it is a necessary feature of non-cognitivism that there is no uncertainty *per se*, because moral judgments aren't beliefs. Moral judgments, being non-cognitive attitudes, are fundamentally different from beliefs. Why should we expect them to have the same structure? What matters is that non-cognitive attitudes can be shown to have the same structure as actual moral judgments. And, as we have seen, they can. There is nothing missing from the non-cognitivist's explanation of realistic moral judgments, such as those regarding the dilemma facing Sartre's student.

5.2 Uncertainty about Desires

It may be objected that ambivalence is unnecessary for accommodating certitude, because an agent might simply be uncertain about their desires. Bradley and Dreschler [2014] suggest that the desirability of an outcome in a decision problem might depend not only on features of that outcome itself, but also on those of the decision-maker, such as their tastes, preferences, or needs. An agent might be just as uncertain about their own desires as they are about the features of an outcome itself. Similarly, Jerzak [2019] has suggested that agents might be uncertain or mistaken about their own desires. Surely it is this uncertainty about our own desires that, for non-cognitivists, should stand in for moral doubt.

There are two reasons for non-cognitivists not to analyse moral doubt in terms of an agent's beliefs about their desires. First, there seem to be examples in which agents experience moral doubt despite being certain in their beliefs about their desires. Sartre's student is just such an example: he believes with certainty that he desires to stay with his mother, and he believes with certainty that he desires to join the French resistance, but he feels moral doubt nonetheless, because of the conflict between these desires.

Second, an important idea underlying non-cognitivism is the Humean theory of motivation, according to which motivation stems from a desire for some end and from beliefs about how to realise it. Analysing moral doubt in terms of beliefs about desires would suggest that we act on the basis of what we believe our desires to be, rather than on the desires themselves. This is in tension with the Humeanism that underpinned non-cognitivism in the first place, and so hardly provides a suitable non-cognitivist account of moral uncertainty. A truly non-cognitivist theory of metaethics needs an account of certitude without recourse to beliefs. Ambivalence remains the only plausible candidate.

5.3 A Property of What—Desires or Agents?

One potentially troubling feature of the definition of ambivalence offered above is that it describes a property of an agent, rather than of an attitude. Ambivalence is the state of having attitudes that give rise to reasons for mutually exclusive options, but moral certitude is a feature of an attitude itself. This is unlike the cognitivist conception of

moral uncertainty in terms of degrees of belief, since this is a property of the belief itself.

However, note that, in terms of both belief and non-cognitive attitudes, we talk about properties of the attitude itself and of the agent who holds it. With beliefs, we have a property of the attitude—degree of belief—and a property of the agent—uncertainty. An agent is uncertain concerning p if they hold a partial belief in p. In other words, if their credence in p is <1. Likewise, with non-cognitive attitudes we have a property of the attitude—conflict with other attitudes—and a property of an agent—ambivalence. An agent is ambivalent if they hold attitudes that give rise to reasons for mutually exclusive options.

This also coheres with the feature of moral judgments that we are trying to understand: there is a property of the judgment—certitude—and a property of the agent who makes it—moral doubt. Thus, the fact that the discussion so far has focused on the property of the agent, rather than of the attitude, should be no cause for concern. It is just like talking about uncertainty, rather than partial degrees of belief, or like talking about moral doubt, rather than the certitude of moral judgments.

However, a further problem might appear to linger. While the degree of a belief is an intrinsic property of that belief, the consistency of a desire with other desires is a relational property. It concerns the way in which one desire relates to the others that an agent holds. Another disanalogy, another possible weakness in the proposal. However, a disanalogy between ambivalence and uncertainty is not necessarily problematic. Indeed, in so far as this paper is attempting to propose an alternative understanding of moral doubt, it would be entirely uninteresting if there were no differences between the cognitivist and non-cognitivist conceptions of the phenomenon. As in response to the first objection considered, the question is not that of whether moral ambivalence is exactly like cognitivist moral uncertainty; rather, the question is that of whether moral ambivalence adequately matches the phenomenology of moral doubt. It would be question-begging for a cognitivist to claim, without further argument, that moral doubt must be explained in terms of an intrinsic property of moral judgments, like degrees of belief.

The question, then, is whether we should think of moral certitude as a feature of moral judgments' relations to each other, or as an intrinsic property of each separate judgment. The examples considered throughout this paper lend some support to the view that moral doubt takes the form of conflict between different judgments, rather than being an intrinsic property of each, but this support falls short of a knockdown argument. It is worth noting, however, that it only seems to be uncertainty that comes with a degree of ambivalence that poses a challenge when deciding how to act. If we are uncertain about some matter of fact that will determine the outcome of a choice between two options A and B, but option A is better than option B in all possible states of the world, then this uncertainty is of little practical import.[3] Uncertainty is relevant to our practical deliberation when the different partial beliefs provide reasons for mutually exclusive courses of action. For example, If I am uncertain about whether it will rain, I might be unsure of whether to take an umbrella. Suppose that I would prefer to take my umbrella if it does rain, and not if it doesn't. I believe, to

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[3] This assumes that the states are probabilistically independent of the options. If such independence does not hold, however, then the significance of the uncertainty also depends on the conflicting reasons that would arise from the effect of the choice on the probability of the states, which is another type of ambivalence.

degree *x*, that it will rain. This provides me with some reason to take my umbrella. However, I also believe, to degree *y*, that it will not rain. This provides me with some reason not to take my umbrella. Of course, I cannot both take my umbrella and not take it, and so these conflicting reasons, which depend on my partial beliefs, make me ambivalent. If I preferred to take my umbrella regardless of whether it rained, my uncertainty about the rain would be irrelevant to the decision of whether to take it, since it would be obvious that I should. Note that the ambivalence here is not intrinsic to the belief, but is a relational property of my partial beliefs in light of the reasons for action to which they give rise. If it is this relational property that explains the practical significance of uncertainty, then there seems little reason to think that a relational property is ill-equipped to make sense of the variations in moral certitude.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented one way of understanding the phenomenon of moral doubt that is consistent with non-cognitivism. On this view, moral doubt is not uncertainty in a person's beliefs, but is ambivalence in their non-cognitive attitudes—that is, the presence of conflicting reasons that arise from these attitudes and support mutually exclusive options. The existence of ambivalence controverts the claim that non-cognitive attitudes have only two structural features. This undermines a central premise in the argument for the view that moral judgments cannot be non-cognitive attitudes due to their structural differences. The principal upshot is that one can consistently be a non-cognitivist and recognise variation in the certitude of moral judgments. However, the differences between ambivalence and uncertainty also suggest a different understanding of, and practical response to, the phenomenon of moral doubt. This poses a new challenge: what should we do when ambivalent about what to do? This is a challenge that must be met by cognitivists and non-cognitivists alike.[4]

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