



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *Expressivism and moral vagueness*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/230079/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Gamester, W. orcid.org/0000-0003-4376-4433 (Accepted: 2025) *Expressivism and moral vagueness*. *Synthese*. ISSN 0039-7857 (In Press)

This is an author produced version of an article accepted for publication in *Synthese*, made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Expressivism and Moral Vagueness

Will Gamester (University of Leeds)

Forthcoming in Synthese

Abstract: Moral concepts are vague. For example, while some actions are clearly permissible and others are clearly impermissible, there are also borderline cases of moral permissibility. The first part of this paper argues that moral vagueness poses a problem for moral expressivists. In short, it is hard to see how expressivists can make sense of the orthodox idea that borderline sentences differ in alethic status to non-borderline sentences. The second part provides a solution to the problem. I argue that expressivists can make sense of moral vagueness, and normative indeterminacy more broadly, in terms of inquiry-resistance; and I show how to recover a variety of views on the alethic status of borderline moral sentences from the resulting framework.

1. Introduction

Some actions are clearly morally permissible. Other actions are clearly morally impermissible. “It’s fine to kick a football, but you mustn’t kick a puppy,” or so mother always said. But there are also borderline cases of moral permissibility. Consider the following case from Miriam Schoenfield (2016: 262):

Darryl is watching his two-year-old daughter play in a city park. It is permissible to divert his attention from her for one second. It is not permissible to divert his attention from her for five minutes. Is it permissible to divert his attention for 30 seconds? 31? 32? Plausibly, we can create a Sorites series, admitting of borderline cases of permissibility, out of a series of diversions whose lengths differ by a second.

This is an example of moral vagueness. It is easy to generate sorites series for other moral concepts, including *right*, *wrong*, *good*, *bad*, *may*, *ought*, *must*, and *reason*.

For the purposes of this paper, I am going to assume that moral vagueness is, as they say, a thing.¹ So, to be plausible, a metaethical theory must be able to make sense of it. Fortunately, we

¹ Some are sceptical that moral (or more broadly normative) matters can be indeterminate (Dworkin, 2011: ch.5; Wedgwood, 2018); others, interestingly, are sceptical that they can be determinate (Schiffer, 2002; Pravato, 2022). For defences of the distinction, see, e.g., Sorensen (1990), Shafer-Landau (1994), Kramer (2009: ch.3), Dougherty (2014), Williams (2017).

have independently developed theories of vagueness, to which the metaethicist can appeal.² However, it is an open question which theories of vagueness are compatible with which metaethical theories. As J.R.G. Williams (2014b: 380) points out, there are two ways in which a philosophical position can be revisionary: it can be revisionary of common sense, or “it may be revisionary of theory by undercutting what we previously took to be the leading account of some phenomenon.” A metaethical theory that is incompatible with our leading theories of vagueness threatens to be revisionary in this second sense.

In this paper, I investigate this dialectic as it plays out for moral expressivism.³ In §2, I argue that moral vagueness poses a problem for expressivism. In short, it is hard to see how expressivists can make sense of the idea, orthodox among theories of vagueness, that borderline sentences differ in alethic status to non-borderline sentences. In §§3-4, I articulate a solution to the problem. I propose the expressivist makes sense of moral vagueness, and normative indeterminacy more broadly, in terms of inquiry-resistance: indeterminate normative matters are those that are irresolvable through inquiry. I explain how the expressivist can make sense of inquiry-resistance and use this framework to explain how borderline sentences and non-borderline sentences can differ in alethic status.

2. The problem

2.1 *Expressivism*

First, let me explain what I mean by ‘expressivism’. For present purposes, a rough characterisation will do. Expressivists aim to offer a naturalistically acceptable explanation of moral thought and talk. To do so, they deny that we ought to explain such discourse, in the first instance, by postulating a moral aspect of reality – e.g., moral properties or facts – that we use moral talk to describe. Instead, they postulate practical attitudes that we use moral talk to express, such as desires, intentions, plans, preferences, or attitudes of approval and disapproval. For example, ‘ ϕ -ing is wrong’ might express *disapproval of ϕ -ing*. On this view, the function of a moral judgement (the mental state expressed by a moral sentence) is not to represent the world, but to push us into action.⁴

² Moral vagueness has recently been treated as a kind of “test case” for various theories of vagueness. See Constantinescu (2014), Dougherty (2014), Schoenfield (2016), Williams (2017), Sud (2019), Hawthorne (2022), Abasnezhad (2023). I won’t enter into these debates here.

³ For discussion of moral vagueness in relation to other metaethical views, particularly realism, see Shafer-Landau (1994; 1995) and the citations in the previous footnote. Baima (2014) also discusses moral vagueness as a problem for expressivism. Since we approach the matter in very different ways, I discuss Baima’s argument in a footnote (fn.12).

⁴ Some paradigms: Gibbard (1990; 2003), Blackburn (1993; 1998), Sinclair (2021).

Importantly, while the expressivist *starts* her explanatory story with a conception of the world shorn of moral properties or facts, she may not *end up* saying that there are no moral properties or facts. Instead, she might endeavour to offer an expressivist-friendly explanation of how such talk makes sense. The project of developing expressivist-friendly explanations of realist-sounding talk – perhaps not just of moral properties and facts, but objectivity, truth, fallibility, and so on – is typically called *quasi-realism* (Blackburn, 1993; Sinclair, 2021: ch.3).

2.2 The challenge

Vague predicates have clear cases and borderline cases. Call the application of a vague predicate to a borderline case in a token utterance, a *borderline sentence*, and the application of a vague predicate to a clear case in a token utterance, a *non-borderline sentence*. It is contentious what the alethic status of a borderline sentence is.⁵ There are five main theories, represented in the middle column of Table 1:⁶

	Borderline sentences...	Non-borderline sentences...
<i>Gaps</i>	...are neither true nor false.	...are either true or false.
<i>Degrees</i>	...have an intermediate degree of truth.	...are either fully true or fully false.
<i>Unknowable</i>	...have an unknowable classical truth-value.	...have a knowable classical truth-value.
<i>Gluts</i>	...are both true and false.	...are either just true or just false.
<i>Indeterminate</i>	...are indeterminate in classical truth-value.	...have a determinate classical truth-value.

Table 1

Nonetheless, the orthodox view that all these different (and in other ways sometimes quite heterodox) theories subscribe to is that borderline sentences and non-borderline sentences *differ* in alethic status. So, to be compatible with the orthodoxy on vagueness, a metaethical theory must be able to make sense of this idea.

⁵ *Alethic status* is a broader category than *truth-value*: *Unknowable* and *Indeterminate* hold that borderline and non-borderline sentences are alike in being either just true or just false; the difference is that, with borderline sentences, it is unknowable or indeterminate which it is.

⁶ Some examples: for *Gaps*, see Fine (1975), Keefe (2000); for *Degrees*, see Smith (2008); for *Unknowable*, see Williamson (1994); for *Gluts*, see Hyde (1997); for *Indeterminate*, see McGee & McLaughlin (1995), Barnes & Williams (2011). *Indeterminate* collapses into *Unknowable* under epistemic conceptions of indeterminacy, but not under ontic conceptions.

As Roy Sorensen (1990) once argued, this is problematic for traditional non-cognitivists. Non-cognitivism about a discourse, as Sorensen understands it, denies that the sentences of that discourse have truth-values. But if *no* sentence of the discourse can so much as have a truth-value, the borderline and non-borderline sentences of the discourse cannot differ in alethic status.

Contemporary quasi-realist expressivists, however, do not deny that moral sentences have truth-values. Instead, they aim to offer an expressivist-friendly explanation of how talk of moral truth and falsity makes sense. To this end, quasi-realists typically appeal to deflationism about truth and falsity.⁷ Deflationists postulate a strong equivalence between the left-hand and right-hand sides of biconditionals (T) and (F), such as cognitive equivalence, analytic equivalence, or even synonymy:

(T) ' p ' is true iff p .

(F) ' p ' is false iff not- p .

According to deflationism, to say that ' p ' is true just is, more or less, to say that p . So, to say that ' φ -ing is wrong' is true is just to say that φ -ing is wrong. So, by expressivist lights, saying that ' φ -ing is wrong' is true is just another way of expressing disapproval of φ -ing.

By appealing to deflationism, expressivists can accept that declarative moral sentences have truth-values, and in particular that applying a moral predicate to a clear case yields a truth or falsehood. Deflationism thus enables the expressivist to avoid Sorensen's objection to non-cognitivism. But it is one thing to make sense of the idea that non-borderline sentences have truth-values; it is another to make sense of the idea that they differ in alethic status to borderline sentences. Can the expressivist armed with deflationism make sense of any of the possibilities listed in Table 1?

To answer this question, let's consider each option in turn. We will see that, in some cases, appealing to deflationism is actively a hindrance (§§2.3-2.4). In other cases, it isn't a hindrance, but the expressivist faces other difficulties, with which deflationism is impotent to help (§§2.5-2.6). Since each of the options is problematic, we have a problem on our hands (§2.8). (Note that, in arguing that each of the options is *problematic*, I am not arguing that the problems that arise cannot be overcome. On the contrary, I aim to provide a solution in §§3-4. My point is just that there is a difficulty here that has thus far been overlooked.)

2.3 *Gaps*

⁷ E.g., Blackburn (1998: 75-83), Gibbard (2003: 63).

Notoriously, schemas (T) and (F) are incompatible with truth-value gaps (Williamson 1994: 187-192; Greenough 2010):

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| (1) | ' <i>p</i> ' is neither true nor false. | <i>Assumption for reductio.</i> |
| (2) | ' <i>p</i> ' is not true. | <i>(1), conjunction elimination.</i> |
| (3) | ' <i>p</i> ' is not false. | <i>(1), conjunction elimination.</i> |
| (4) | Not- <i>p</i> . | <i>(2), (T), modus tollens.</i> |
| (5) | ' <i>p</i> ' is false. | <i>(4), (F), modus ponens.</i> |
| (6) | <i>Contradiction.</i> | <i>(3), (5), conjunction introduction.</i> |

Unless we are willing to go highly non-classical with logic, deflationism is inconsistent with *Gaps*.⁸

2.4 Degrees

Deflationism also does not leave any room for degrees of truth (Haack 1980; Henderson 2021). If "' ϕ -ing is wrong' is true" is just another way of saying ' ϕ -ing is wrong', then (7) is equivalent to (8):

- | | |
|-----|--|
| (7) | ' ϕ -ing is wrong' is true to degree <i>d</i> . |
| (8) | ϕ -ing is wrong to degree <i>d</i> . |

However, even granting that wrongness comes in degrees, there is clearly a difference between saying that ϕ -ing is a borderline case of wrongness and saying that ϕ -ing is wrong to some intermediate degree. In the Darryl case, for example, what is unclear is whether diverting his attention for 30 seconds is wrong *at all*. (Indeed, as originally described, the case concerns moral permissibility, which does not come in degrees.)

2.5 Unknowable

Given deflationism, to say that ' ϕ -ing is wrong' has an unknowable classical truth-value is to say that it is unknowable whether or not ϕ -ing is wrong.⁹ Can the expressivist make sense of such moral unknowability? It's far from clear that they can. To see this, consider expressivist

⁸ Note that the primary Gappers are supervaluationists who want to retain classical logic.

⁹ The "unknowability" in question need not be in-principle unknowability even to superbeings, but rather (roughly) unknowability to humans.

approaches to *fallibility*.¹⁰ Ordinary moral discourse includes acknowledgements of first-personal fallibility: even if I think that ϕ -ing is wrong, I acknowledge that I might be mistaken about this; and there are no doubt moral truths of which I am currently ignorant. Expressivists typically try to make sense of such expressions of first-personal fallibility in terms of what the agent *would* believe under improved epistemic circumstances: even if I don't presently think that ϕ -ing is wrong, it might be that I would do so were I, say, better informed or more coherent. For more on this, see §3.2. For now the important point is just this: such an approach seems to allow for *unknown* moral truths, but not for *unknowable* ones. Indeed, this is an anti-sceptical result that some expressivists have openly embraced (Blackburn, 1996; Bex-Priestley, 2018).¹¹ *Unknowable* thus appeals to resources that the expressivist is not obviously entitled to, and which some openly reject.

2.6 Indeterminate

Suppose we say that it is indeterminate whether ' ϕ -ing is wrong' is true or false. Given deflationism, this is to say that it is indeterminate whether ϕ -ing is wrong. So, the expressivist is entitled to this view iff she can *independently* make sense of moral indeterminacy. How might she do this? There are three leading families of theories concerning what it is for a matter to be indeterminate: epistemic, ontic, and semantic.¹² However, each proposal uses resources that the expressivist does not seem to be entitled to.

¹⁰ Blackburn (1984: 198-202; 1993: 19-22, 127-128; 1998: 318; 2009), Egan (2007), Lenman (2014), Horgan & Timmons (2015), Köhler (2015), Ridge (2015), Bex-Priestley (2018), Beddor (2020), Gamester (2022).

¹¹ It is worth stressing that deflationism only allows the expressivist to make sense of the idea that ' p ' is true if she can *already* make sense of the idea that p . So, unless she can *already* make sense of her fallibility – i.e., the possibility that p when she does not think that p – the deflationary schema cannot help make sense of the possibility of unknown (let alone unknowable) moral truths.

¹² *Contra* these theories, the expressivist might maintain that the question of *what it is* for a moral matter to be indeterminate is the wrong one to ask. Instead, we should ask what it is *to think that* a moral matter is indeterminate. This is the "expressivist sidestep" (Dreier, 2015; Bex-Priestley & Gamester, 2023), which I employ in the next section. (Thanks to Graham Bex-Priestley, Sebastian Köhler, and Christine Tiefensee for recommending this strategy to me.) For now, I'm interested in the question of whether it is *possible* for the expressivist to confront moral indeterminacy head-on in one of these ways. By contrast, Baima (2014: 596) seems to construe epistemic, ontic, and semantic theories as answering the side-on question. He says that epistemicists explain this mental state in terms of (a) uncertainty, and the others in terms of (b) indeterminacy; and argues that expressivists cannot account for (a) or (b). Against (b), he argues that expressivists are not entitled to ontic or semantic accounts of indeterminacy. I find some of his arguments problematic, but also think there are reasons to be concerned (§§2.6.2-2.6.3). Against (a), Baima argues that expressivists cannot make sense of moral uncertainty, echoing arguments by Smith (2002) and Bykvist & Olson (2009). Moral uncertainty certainly poses a problem for expressivists. But if they cannot solve this problem, the view is doomed, regardless of moral vagueness. Insofar as we are interested in the problems posed by moral vagueness *in particular*, we ought to grant a solution to the problem of moral uncertainty. But this will not suffice: thinking that a matter is vague cannot *merely* consist in uncertainty. I am uncertain as to how much cash there is in my wallet. But I do not think the matter is vague. I am confident that it is *not* vague. (No

2.6.1 Epistemicism

According to epistemicists, indeterminacy is a distinctively resilient kind of ignorance. Imagine a long line of otherwise identical people, each differing in height from the last by only a tenth of a centimetre. Epistemicists argue that there is a fact of the matter about which person in this line is the first tall one, and thus a sharp cut-off between those who are tall and those who are not tall. Indeterminacy consists in the fact that it is impossible to know where the cut-off lies. Applied to Schoenfield's Darryl case, there is a precise number of microseconds for which it is permissible for Darryl to divert his attention, and thus a sharp cut-off between quantities of time that are permissible and those that are impermissible. But it is impossible to know where the cut-off lies. However, as we've already seen, it's by no means clear that the expressivist can make sense of unknowable moral truths. (Indeed, if vagueness is an epistemic phenomenon, then *Indeterminate* collapses into *Unknowable*.)

There is a further reason that expressivists should be wary of epistemicism. It is incumbent on the epistemicist to explain *why* we cannot know the location of sharp cut-offs in sorites series. The leading proposal here – that of Williamson (1994) – claims that vague terms like 'tall' are *metasemantically plastic*: even small variations in use (that is, in which things we predicate 'tall' of) would suffice to change exactly which things 'tall' can be truly predicated of. As such, any belief about the location of the cut-off could very easily be false and therefore does not constitute knowledge. However, some of the most prominent arguments for moral expressivism rely on the premise that moral terms are *metasemantically stable*: even large variations in use (e.g., in which things we predicate 'wrong' of) do not suffice to change which things they can be truly predicated of. This is evidenced by intuitions that people – even whole communities of people – who predicate 'wrong' of substantially different things are having substantive disagreements rather than merely talking past each other. Expressivists advance expressivism as the best explanation of this purported metasemantic stability (e.g., Hare, 1952: 148; Horgan & Timmons, 1991).¹³ Since expressivists have a vested interest in the metasemantic stability of moral expressions, they should be particularly wary of Williamson-style epistemicism.

2.6.2 Onticism

borderline currency for me.) One *also* has to think the matter is *inquiry-resistant*, I suggest. I take up this suggestion in §3.

¹³ Williams (2017: 657) discusses metasemantic stability of normative expressions as a problem for Williamson-style epistemicism.

Metaphysical or ontic explanations maintain that indeterminacy is not a symptom of our ignorance about the world or our representations of it, but a (potentially irreducible) feature of the world itself. If it is indeterminate whether Bob is tall, then the world itself is fuzzy in this respect: it is not determinately the case that Bob instantiates this property, nor is it determinately the case that he does not. Applied to the Darryl case, the idea would be that the world itself is fuzzy with respect to whether or not diverting his attention for 30 seconds is morally permissible: it is not determinately the case that this action instantiates this property, nor is it determinately the case that it does not. However, expressivists start out with an entirely non-moral conception of what the world is like. They do not initially assume that the world is *anyway*, morally speaking; and so cannot assume that it is determinate in some moral respects and indeterminate in others.

Now, contemporary quasi-realist expressivists do not typically deny that there are moral properties or facts. Instead, they aim to offer an expressivist-friendly explanation of how talk of moral properties and facts makes sense. To this end, quasi-realists often appeal to deflationism about properties and facts.¹⁴ Deflationists postulate a strong equivalence between the left-hand and right-hand sides of biconditionals like (Pr) and (Fa):

(Pr) a instantiates the property of F ness iff a is F .

(Fa) It is a fact that p iff p .

According to deflationism, to say that stealing instantiates the property of wrongness is just to say that stealing is wrong; that is, by expressivist lights, to express disapproval of stealing. So, by appealing to deflationism, expressivists can accept that there are moral properties and moral facts, and so “a way the world is,” morally speaking.

However, when it comes to indeterminacy, this just shifts the bump in the rug. To say that it is indeterminate whether ϕ -ing instantiates the property of wrongness is just a fancy way of saying that it is indeterminate whether p . Deflationism entitles the expressivist to say that the world is indeterminate in some moral respect if *and only if* the expressivist can *already* make sense of talk of moral indeterminacy.¹⁵ So, unless she already has some other way of making sense of moral indeterminacy, the expressivist cannot be an onticist.

2.6.3 Semanticism

¹⁴ E.g., Blackburn (1998: 79), Gibbard (2012: 49).

¹⁵ Again, one might think that the primary task facing the expressivist here is thus to say what attitude is expressed by ‘It is indeterminate whether p ’ for moral p . Nothing I say here supposes otherwise – see fn.12.

A semantic explanation of the vagueness of a non-moral predicate like ‘tall’ postulates a plenitude of perfectly precise candidate extensions – e.g., being at least 182.56cm, being at least 182.57cm, etc. – and maintains that our use of the term ‘tall’ leaves open exactly which of these is the extension of the predicate. Borderline cases arise when something falls within some but not all of the candidate extensions; clear cases when something falls within all or none of them. Applied to a moral predicate like ‘wrong’, we would postulate a plenitude of perfectly precise candidate extensions – call them, $wrong_1$, $wrong_2$, etc. – and say our use of ‘wrong’ leaves open exactly which of these is the extension of the predicate (Sud, 2019: 687). Expressivists, however, do not explain the meaning of ‘wrong’ in terms of its extension – that is, by which things it applies to – but by postulating a practical attitude that it expresses. So postulating a *plenitude* of candidate extensions for this purpose is way off the table.¹⁶

The obvious expressivist analogue of the semanticist’s explanation is to postulate a plenitude of in some sense “perfectly precise” practical attitudes – say, disapproval₁, disapproval₂, etc. – and say that our use of ‘wrong’ leaves open exactly which such attitude we are expressing. The only remotely plausible way of fleshing this out that I can think of is to say that the attitude expressed by ‘wrong’ is gradable – for example, if ‘wrong’ expresses disapproval, that one can disapprove of something to a greater or lesser degree – and that our use of ‘wrong’ leaves open exactly what degree of that attitude we are expressing. To think that it is indeterminate whether ϕ -ing is wrong is then, presumably, to disapprove of ϕ -ing to some but not all of the candidate degrees.

However, this strategy faces at least four potential shortcomings. First, if we use ‘wrong’ to express some practical attitude like disapproval, then one might think that disapproving of ϕ -ing to *any* degree is sufficient to think that it is wrong to *some* degree. So, it’s not obvious that this strategy will work to explain how it can be indeterminate whether something is wrong *simpliciter*. Second, semanticists maintain that indeterminacy is a “purely semantic” phenomenon on the grounds that, if we had predicates ‘tall₁’, ‘tall₂’, etc. with perfectly precise extensions, then these predicates *would* have sharp cut-offs, *because objects have perfectly precise degrees of height*. (In this sense, the world itself is perfectly determinate with regards to height.) To maintain the analogy, the expressivist would need to say that, if we had predicates ‘wrong₁’, ‘wrong₂’, etc. that expressed perfectly precise degrees of disapproval, then these predicates would have sharp cut-offs. But on what grounds can she say this? She cannot take for granted that actions have perfectly precise degrees of wrongness – this is something she would need to independently make sense

¹⁶ Of course, expressivists might *earn the right* to say that such predicates have extensions, and so might try to earn the right to say that they have multiple candidate extensions of the kind the semantic explanation of vagueness postulates. See §4.2 for one such proposal. My point here is just that this will take work and is not something the expressivist can take for granted.

of, and I'm not sure how that could be done. Third, it's not clear that this strategy is sufficiently generalisable. Expressions like 'permissible' and 'must' are vague but not do not seem to be gradable (witness the Darryl case). Finally, not all practical attitudes seem to admit of degrees, for example, *planning* or *intending* to φ seems like an all-or-nothing affair (Bykvist & Olson, 2009: 205; though compare Goldstein, 2016). If so, then this strategy is not available to expressivists who appeal to such practical attitudes (e.g., Gibbard, 2003).

2.7 *Gluts*

The final option is to say that borderline sentences are both true and false. As it happens, I don't see any particular obstacle to expressivism armed with deflationism here. The expressivist thus has at least one way of meeting the challenge. Nonetheless, for the rest of this paper I'm going to set this aside and ask whether it is possible for the expressivist to meet the challenge *without* being a dialetheist. This is because dialetheism is a highly controversial view in its own right (Lewis, 2004). If it's only possible for the expressivist to make sense of moral vagueness by embracing contradictions, that is a startling conclusion, and one that will put many philosophers off of expressivism. It is thus worth seeing if it is possible to meet the challenge in some other way.

2.8 *Conclusion to section 2*

Setting *Gluts* aside, we've seen that deflationism about truth by itself does not enable the expressivist to make sense of the idea that borderline sentences and non-borderline sentences differ in alethic status. Deflationism is incompatible with *Gaps* and *Degrees*. It is compatible with *Unknowable* and *Indeterminate*, but expressivists face independent obstacles here, with which deflationism is impotent to help. Since each of these options is problematic, we have a problem on our hands. Broadly speaking, there are two ways to solve the problem. The first is to embrace a more substantive conception of moral truth that is compatible with *Gaps* or *Degrees*. The second is to overcome the obstacles that arise for *Unknowable* or *Indeterminate*. In the next section, I provide a framework within which the problem can be solved; in the following section, I will explain how this framework can be fleshed out in different ways to provide different solutions to the problem.

A quick note on the scope of the problem. To fix ideas, I have focused on moral vagueness. But moral vagueness is a species of a broader genus: normative indeterminacy. Vagueness plausibly infects other normative language, besides the narrowly moral (e.g., epistemic, prudential, all-things-considered, etc.). And some cases of moral or normative indeterminacy might not result from sorites-susceptibility, but from, say, incommensurability between

competing values.¹⁷ Given that moral expressivists are typically expressivists about other regions of normative discourse, the challenge presented above will likely generalise. In the following discussion, I switch focus to the broader challenge of explaining the difference in alethic status between determinate and indeterminate normative sentences, where ‘p’ is indeterminate iff it is indeterminate whether p, and ‘p’ is determinate iff it is determinately the case that p.

3. Indeterminacy for expressivists

To solve this problem, we will employ a manoeuvre that expressivists have employed to solve other problems, which James Dreier (2015) calls the “Expressivist Sidestep”. Instead of asking *what it is* for a normative matter to be indeterminate, we ask what it is *to think that* a normative matter is indeterminate. I will show how, by giving a plausible account of the relevant state of mind, expressivists can earn the right to say that indeterminate and determinate normative sentences differ in alethic status.¹⁸

The Expressivist Sidestep is employed to show that expressivism is compatible with various *prima facie* plausible (and typically realist-seeming) claims. It comes in two stages.¹⁹ Take a target sentence like:

- (9) It is indeterminate whether it is wrong for Darryl to divert his attention for 30 seconds.

The first stage involves showing that (9) is meaningful and coherent with expressivism. This requires giving a plausible and expressivist-friendly story of what mental states sentences like (9) express. The second stage involves showing that claims like (9) can be justified. The following two subsections execute each of these stages in turn.

3.1 Stage one

¹⁷ See Williams (2017: 647-652) for discussion of “varieties of moral indeterminacy”.

¹⁸ I do not suggest that this is the only way the expressivist might go. In particular, Ridge’s (2014) hybrid expressivist view is argued to be compatible with substantive accounts of truth, facts, and so on, so might be able to overcome the difficulties highlighted in §2. I have misgivings about Ridge’s view, however, so I leave development of a Ridgean alternative to others.

¹⁹ For elaboration, see Bex-Priestley and Gamester (2023), where we note *contra* Dreier that the method is best construed as a strategy for solving problems by approaching them from a different angle, rather than a method for avoiding the problems. See also Köhler (2021), whose “conciliatory expressivism” and “quasi-realism” roughly map onto my first and second stages of the sidestep.

What is it to think that a normative matter is indeterminate? It is a familiar thought that indeterminate matters are inquiry-resistant.²⁰ In the normal run of things, if you don't know whether Bob is tall, there are things you can do to find out. Measure him, for a start. But if it is *indeterminate* whether Bob is tall, then further inquiry into the matter seems pointless. No matter how precisely you measure him, you simply will not come to a verdict on the matter, one way or the other.

My proposal is that we see sentences like (9) as expressing the judgement that the relevant matter is inquiry-resistant, in the following sense: *the facts of the matter do not warrant a verdict one way or the other*. Let me expand on this.

By “the facts of the matter” I mean the descriptive, non-normative facts. In saying that the facts of the matter do not warrant a verdict one way or the other, we distinguish indeterminacy judgements from more mundane cases of normative uncertainty resulting from ignorance of, or mistakes about, the descriptive facts. Suppose Batman knows that it is wrong for Joker to press the button iff the button is connected to explosives, but he has no way of knowing whether the button is connected to explosives: it either definitely is, or it definitely isn't, but he doesn't know which. In Batman's epistemic situation, neither verdict on the matter is warranted. But that is due to a shortcoming in his epistemic situation, namely, his ignorance of whether the button is connected to explosives. If he *did* know that the button is connected to explosives, then he *would* be warranted in thinking that it is wrong for Joker to push the button. The facts of the matter thus do warrant a verdict about the case, Batman is just ignorant of those facts. By contrast, in the Darryl case, what makes us think that the relevant matter is indeterminate (if we do) is not merely that in our present epistemic situation we are not warranted in coming to a verdict either way. It is that we think there is no further fact about the case that *would* warrant a verdict either way, and thus that we would remain unwarranted in coming to a verdict either way no matter how much our epistemic situation improved.

Similarly, suppose that our friend Eric has the following mistaken but justified belief: Darryl's child will explode if he diverts his attention for more than 20 seconds (and Darryl knows this). Then Eric will be justified in thinking that it is wrong for Darryl to divert his attention for 30 seconds, and will therefore disagree with us when we say that the matter is indeterminate. But this is because Eric is *mistaken* about the descriptive facts of the case. Again, in thinking that the matter is indeterminate, we think that, if Eric's epistemic situation were to improve, then he would no longer be warranted in making a judgement one way or the other.

The second clarification concerns the notion of *warrant* in play. Suppose Fran thinks that it is perfectly permissible for Darryl to divert his attention for 30 seconds. But that is because Fran

²⁰ This dates back at least to Peirce – see Sorensen (2022: §1).

has a first-order moral view that, let's suppose, we think is mistaken: she thinks that the freedom young children gain from their guardians looking away while they play in public parks is well worth any additional risk of their coming to harm. Let's suppose this disagreement is not grounded in any disagreement about the descriptive facts of the case – it is instead, as they say, a *fundamental* moral disagreement.²¹ Now, Fran's judgement about the case is warranted by the facts of the case *by the lights of her moral judgements*. Nonetheless, *we* do not think that Fran's judgement is *in fact* warranted by the facts of the case, because we think that her moral judgements are mistaken. That's why we think the matter is indeterminate, while Fran does not. To think that a normative matter is indeterminate, then, is to think that neither verdict on the matter is warranted by the lights of (what you take to be) *the correct* normative principles.

So the notion of warrant in play here is a normative one. It concerns what judgement you *ought* to come to, in light of the facts about the case, given the correct normative principles. To think that a normative matter is indeterminate is thus itself a normative judgement, and the question of *which* normative matters are indeterminate is internal to normative discourse, to be answered by first-order normative inquiry, and not one the expressivist *qua* expressivist will need to take a stance on. This is all in keeping with this being the first stage of the Expressivist Sidestep. Justifying the claim that this or that normative matter is indeterminate comes in the second stage.

It is clear how this approach encompasses *derivative* normative indeterminacy, where the descriptive facts in conjunction with some more fundamental normative principles do not warrant a verdict either way. For example, if it is a fundamental moral principle that one ought to keep one's promises, but it is indeterminate whether Amy promised to ϕ , then it may as a consequence be indeterminate whether Amy ought to ϕ . But what about indeterminacy in what are the correct fundamental normative principles themselves? Here, I follow other expressivists (e.g., Blackburn, 1998: 313) in thinking that the assessment of any particular normative judgement can only be done by employing *other* normative judgements. Thus, when considering whether the facts warrant a particular fundamental normative principle, the question is whether that principle is warranted by the lights of (what I take to be) the *other* correct normative principles. Fundamental normative indeterminacy is thus also internal to normative discourse.

Finally, in saying that the facts of the matter do not warrant *a verdict one way or the other*, I mean that the facts neither warrant *judging that p* nor *judging that not-p*. So, in the Darryl case, the view is that the facts of the matter do not warrant the judgement that Darryl diverting his

²¹ Two important ways of understanding a “fundamental” moral disagreement are worth distinguishing here. One is that just introduced: a moral disagreement that is not grounded in any descriptive disagreement. The second is of a moral disagreement that cannot be resolved through further inquiry. The second notion is more demanding than the first, since reconciling disagreements about the descriptive facts is one way, but plausibly not the only way, in which we might resolve a moral disagreement through further inquiry. The more demanding notion will be important later.

attention for 30 seconds is wrong, nor the judgement that Darryl diverting his attention for 30 seconds is not wrong. This is consistent with thinking that the facts warrant having *some other* attitude towards p, such as rejecting it, suspending judgement about it, or adopting middling confidence towards it. The claim is thus compatible with a variety of views on the cognitive role of indeterminacy.²² Note also that saying that the facts of the matter do not warrant a verdict one way or the other is not to say that *you ought not to* form a judgement one way or the other, even if you know all the facts of the case. It merely means that, if you were to do so, no particular such judgement would be warranted by the facts of the case by the lights of the correct normative judgements. It is consistent with this that, in at least some such cases, you are allowed to make a judgement one way or the other – it is thus consistent with (though it does not entail) that there can be faultless disagreements in such cases (Wright, 1992) or that one must sometimes make an arbitrary judgement call (Williams, 2014a).

One worry about this way of characterising normative indeterminacy judgements is that it may seem to rule out epistemic views of normative indeterminacy: one way of thinking of such views is that the facts *do* warrant a verdict one way or the other, it is just that some of these facts are unknowable for ordinary inquirers like us. There are two possible responses to this worry. The claim characteristic of epistemicism is that we explain all the relevant phenomena surrounding “indeterminacy” using epistemic resources. This can either be given a reductivist construal – i.e., indeterminacy just is an epistemic phenomenon – or an eliminativist construal – i.e., there is no such thing as genuine indeterminacy, just particularly profound ignorance. Much relevant discussion either hedges or can be read either way.²³ The first response is thus to stick with our characterisation of normative indeterminacy judgements and embrace the eliminativist construal of epistemicism, such that, if the epistemicism turns out to be right in the normative domain, then properly speaking there is no such thing as genuine normative indeterminacy. The second response is to refine the account of normative indeterminacy judgements to the idea that the *knowable* descriptive facts of the matter do not warrant a verdict one way or the other, thus allowing that in cases of indeterminacy the unknowable descriptive facts might still warrant a verdict, given the correct normative principles. Which response should we go for? I think each response is defensible: each seems to give a plausible account of the relevant state of mind, and I’m not sure there’s much to choose between them – so I leave this as an open choice for the reader.

²² See Santorio & Williams (2022: 727, fn.1) for relevant citations.

²³ E.g., “According to proponents of the *epistemic* conception, by contrast, the Fregean imagery actually utterly mistakes the character of (what we take to be) vague concepts. There *is* no genuine indeterminacy, no region of borderline cases between the red and the non-red, the bald and the non-bald, the small and the large. In truth, these distinctions are – and must be – completely sharp. Vagueness is rather a matter of *ignorance*.” (Wright 1995: 133-4) The first sentence hedges via the paranthetical; the second and third sound eliminativist; the fourth sounds reductivist. (Thanks to Robbie Williams for helpful discussion of this point.)

(To my mind, this may well be a bookkeeping matter: it's unclear to me whether ordinary judgements of indeterminacy are sufficiently determinate to decide whether epistemicist indeterminacy is genuine indeterminacy. In particular, if normative indeterminacy judgements consist in thinking that the facts do not warrant a verdict one way or the other, it may be indeterminate whether "the facts" ranges over all the descriptive facts or only the knowable ones.)

Further qualifications or refinements may be in order, but for present purposes the above characterisation of what it is to think that a normative matter is indeterminate will suffice: it is to think that the descriptive facts do not warrant a verdict one way or the other. By the same token, to think that there *is* a determinate fact of the matter is to think that the facts *do* warrant a verdict one way or the other. Those who wish to quibble further (or replace the account wholesale) are invited to read what follows as a conditional proof of concept: I will show how, with an account of normative indeterminacy judgements in hand, the expressivist can earn the right to various views on the alethic status of indeterminate normative sentences.

3.2 *Stage two*

The second stage of the Expressivist Sidestep involves arguing that the relevant claims can be, not just coherently asserted by the expressivist, but also justified. Since on the above proposal the question of which normative matters are (in)determinate is internal to normative discourse, this involves engaging in first-order normative inquiry. Now, expressivists *qua* expressivists need not take a stand on first-order matters. But for the expressivist who wants, not merely to have the right to say that certain normative matters are (in)determinate, but also to exercise that right, the second stage of the project is essential.²⁴

Before we begin, three clarifications are in order. First, my goal here will not be to argue that any particular normative matter, such as the permissibility of Darryl diverting his attention for 30 seconds, is (in)determinate. Rather, my goal will be to motivate and articulate a general theory of – in the sense of necessary and sufficient conditions for – normative (in)determinacy. The distinction here is the familiar one between applied ethics and normative ethics, with the present project falling into the latter category. When applied, this theory will have implications for which particular matters are (in)determinate, but I will not be taking a stance on any particular cases here. Second, as a part of first-order normative theory, the following is of course not one I am suggesting that all expressivists are committed to. On the contrary, I suspect that some expressivists will want to resist it, for reasons I will discuss below; and I will highlight where the account can be developed differently. However, I should say that it's not obvious to me that

²⁴ It is quite common for quasi-realist expressivists to engage in the second stage of the project; indeed, Köhler (2021) reserves the name "quasi-realist" for those who do.

there is a plausible expressivist-friendly alternative in the offing, and I leave it as a standing challenge to my opponents to articulate one. And I also note that the account will be schematic at certain points, in a way that will allow for substantive disagreements among those who otherwise agree on the general framework (just as, e.g., different consequentialists may agree that one morally ought to maximise well-being, while substantively disagreeing about what constitutes well-being). Finally, my goal here is to present the main ideas and arguments in a reasonably accessible way. For those who want more details, a precise characterisation is provided in the Appendix.

The theory of normative (in)determinacy I propose is as follows. For any normative p :

Determinacy It is determinately the case that p iff for any reasonable normative inquirer S , p is the only stable verdict on the matter that is in-principle accessible to S through normative inquiry.

Indeterminacy It is indeterminate whether p iff it is not determinately the case that p and it is not determinately the case that not- p .

It is standard to define indeterminacy in terms of determinacy as in *Indeterminacy*, so all the action is in *Determinacy*. Let's build up to *Determinacy* in stages.

To say that a normative matter is indeterminate, I've said, is to say that the descriptive facts of the case do not warrant a verdict way or the other, where what is "warranted" is understood in terms of what follows from the correct normative principles. This is what makes judgements of normative (in)determinacy internal to normative discourse. As a normative agent, I have views about what these correct normative principles are. But in many cases I am unsure. And even when I am quite sure, I am sufficiently humble to admit that I may be mistaken. This requires that I can make sense of there being correct normative principles that are distinct from what I currently take to be the correct normative principles. How can the expressivist make sense of this idea?

Among the normative judgements we can make are *higher-order* normative judgements: judgements about how one *ought* to go about making normative judgements, about what makes a normative outlook *better* or *worse*, etc. For example, many of us think it is better if we make normative judgements when informed of all the non-normative facts, are fully structurally rational, are unaffected by cognitive biases, and so on. Not many of us will have fully worked-out views in normative epistemology, of course, but that we make such higher-order normative judgements will be implicit in how we go about trying to answer normative questions and our practices of evaluating others' attempts to do so. As such, when we engage in normative inquiry, we will be guided by our higher-order normative judgements (this simply being an instance of the

observation that our behaviour is in general guided by our normative judgements). Such guidance is, sadly, far from perfect – most of us fail to live up to our own standards, at least some of the time. But for present purposes all we require is the observation that we can and plausibly do make higher-order normative judgements.

Someone who endorses higher-order norms can make changes to their normative outlook that are improvements by the lights of the higher-order norms they endorse. We will call such changes, *progressions*. A progression may not actually be an improvement. If you and I endorse similar higher-order norms, then I will likely consider a progression to your normative outlook to be an improvement; but if we endorse different higher-order norms, I may well consider a progression to your normative outlook to be a deterioration. The question of who is right is the question of which higher-order normative judgements are correct, and this is something we can disagree about, just as we can disagree about any substantive normative matter.

For the expressivist, I propose, to engage in normative inquiry is to try to figure out the answer to normative questions by making (what you consider to be) improvements to your normative outlook.²⁵ As I progress my normative outlook, I might come to change my mind about certain normative matters or to have opinions about things that I did not previously have opinions about. For example, suppose I have no idea who I ought to vote for in the upcoming election. However, were I to become more informed about the candidates' policies, I would think that I ought to vote for candidate X.

In this way, I can start to make sense of the idea that there are normative truths that I do not presently accept – and hence first-personal fallibility – in terms of those normative judgements that are accessible to me through normative inquiry.²⁶ Those judgements that I would make, were I to progress my normative outlook, may differ from and disagree with those I presently accept. But a judgement that is accessible to me in this way may itself be unstable through *further* progressions to my normative outlook. Suppose that, having become more informed about the candidates' policies, I think I should vote for candidate X, but only because my political opinions are incoherent. If I were to become more coherent, I would think that I should vote for candidate Y. And if after that I got better informed about the impact of the election on international affairs, I would think that I should vote for candidate Z. And so on. If a normative judgement that is accessible to me through normative inquiry is itself unstable in this way, it's hardly suitable for making sense of my fallibility.

²⁵ For this kind of proposal, see e.g. Blackburn (1996; 2009), Gibbard (1990: ch.8-13), and Lenman (2007; 2014).

²⁶ See, e.g., the citations in fn.10. Talk of judgements that are accessible "through normative inquiry" should be understood as judgements that result from *successfully* progressing to your normative outlook, rather than as a result of merely *trying* to do so. *Anything* might happen as a result of trying to do so – you might not pay attention to where you're walking, bump your head, and wake up thinking that genocide is morally good.

At a certain point, however, it may be that a particular judgement would, as a matter of fact, survive all further progressions to my normative outlook. We will call a normative judgement that meets this description, *stable*. (Note that a stable judgement is not one that I am incapable of giving up or one that I am unwilling to give up – it's one it would be impossible to lose *as a result of making changes that I consider to be improvements to my normative outlook*. Stable judgements are thus no symptom of stubbornness or close-mindedness. Nor are stable judgements a far-fetched idea. I am very confident, for example, that my judgement that it is morally wrong to torture puppies for fun is stable.)

We engage in normative inquiry to try to answer normative questions, like “Is it wrong to eat meat?” If engaging in normative inquiry consists in trying to make changes to your normative outlook that are improvements by your own lights, then ending up with a stable judgement on the matter is the best you can do. In this sense, the goal of normative inquiry, in the expressivist setting described, is to end up with stable normative judgements. As such, it is plausibly in terms of those *stable* judgements that are accessible to her through normative inquiry that the expressivist should make sense of her fallibility.²⁷ For example, how do I make sense of the idea that it might be that I ought to vote for candidate X, when I do not presently think that it is? Well, it might be that this the only stable judgement on the matter that is accessible to me through normative inquiry.

But should I *only* consider those stable judgements that are accessible *to me*? Arguably not. There must be other perfectly reasonable starting points for normative inquiry besides my own present normative outlook. What if different stable judgements are accessible to you? Would it not be arbitrary and “smug” to privilege mine over yours? After all, your current normative outlook might be no worse than mine *by my own lights* (e.g., if you're just as well-informed, coherent, and so on as I am).²⁸ Which normative outlooks should I consider, then? There are two possible answers: (i) all of them; (ii) only some. If (ii), the question is: which? Fortunately, for present purposes, we do not need to settle these questions.²⁹ So, I will leave the matter open here. Instead, we will say that a normative outlook is *reasonable* just in case it is to be taken into account, while leaving open exactly which normative outlooks are reasonable in this sense. As advertised, this is one point on which the present account will be schematic: there is room for

²⁷ If you're happy appealing to idealisation – i.e., a version of my outlook that is *maximally* improved by my own lights – then the judgements of idealised-me will all be stable in this sense. In the present framework, this is just a special case of a wider phenomenon. This allows us to use stable judgements to do theoretical work to which others might put the notion of idealisation, but without having to make the contentious assumption that the progression process has an idealised end-point. Blackburn (1993: 22) anticipates this point. For similar ideas, consider Wright (1992) on *superassertibility*, Lynch (2009: ch.8) on *concordance*, and Horgan & Timmons (2015) on *I-stability*.

²⁸ This is the form that I think Egan's (2007) “smugness” objection should take – see Gamester (2022).

²⁹ See Gamester (2022: 466-468) for discussion.

substantive disagreement about which outlooks are reasonable among those who otherwise agree on the general framework.

For any particular normative question, like “Is it wrong to eat meat?”, there are then three salient possibilities: (a) there is *exactly one* stable verdict on the matter accessible to any reasonable normative outlook through normative inquiry; (b) there is *no* stable verdict on the matter that is so accessible; or (c) there is *more than one* stable verdict that is so accessible.³⁰ Let’s consider each of these in turn.

Consider (a). Suppose that the judgement that it is wrong to eat meat is the only stable verdict on the matter that it accessible to any reasonable normative outlook through normative inquiry. If so, then this is what any reasonable normative inquirer ought to think about the matter, by their own lights. In that case, I propose that eating meat is wrong, and determinately so.³¹ The alternative diagnosis is that eating meat is not wrong, despite the fact that our best attempts to determine whether or not it is so will lead us to think otherwise, that is, even though any reasonable inquirer ought by their own lights to think otherwise. It is hard to see what, in any particular case, could recommend this sceptical proposal over my own non-sceptical proposal.³²

Now consider (b): there is no stable verdict on the matter that is accessible to any reasonable normative outlook through normative inquiry. For any reasonable normative inquirer, this might be because, whenever you come to have an opinion on the matter, further progressions to your normative outlook would lead you to change your mind, and yet further progressions would lead you to change it again, and so on *ad infinitum*. Or – what seems more likely – it might be because, after a certain point, you will never come to have an opinion on the matter one way or the other, no matter how much you progress your normative outlook. Either way, the goal of normative inquiry – of coming to a stable answer to a normative question – is unachievable. In a clear sense, then, the matter is inquiry-resistant. As we have said, this is the hallmark of indeterminacy. I thus propose that, in such a case, the relevant matter is indeterminate. The alternative diagnosis is that there is a determinate fact of the matter, but that this is in an important sense inaccessible to any reasonable normative inquirer. Again, this is a sceptical possibility, and it is hard to see what could, in any particular case, recommend this sceptical proposal over my own non-sceptical proposal.

³⁰ See the Appendix, particularly Table 2, for a more thorough exposition of the possibilities.

³¹ Note that I am *not* saying that the fact this is the only stable judgement on the matter that is so accessible is *what makes it the case* that eating meat is wrong. For the expressivist, what makes it the case that eating meat is wrong is itself a first-order normative question, and I am endorsing no such claim here (though no doubt what makes eating meat wrong, when it is, is the pain it causes, the environmental impact of animal husbandry, and so on).

³² Another proposal is that it is indeterminate whether eating meat is wrong, despite the fact that any reasonable inquirer ought by their own lights to think that it is wrong. This seems in some sense slightly less sceptical, but is still hard to see what could recommend it.

Finally, consider (c): there is *more than one* stable verdict on the matter accessible to reasonable inquirers through normative inquiry. On the assumption that no reasonable normative inquirer will stably endorse a normative contradiction, this will be because there is one stable verdict that is accessible to one reasonable inquirer (say, me), while a stable contradictory verdict is accessible to another (say, you).³³ This is a case of intractable normative disagreement: disagreement that cannot be resolved, even in principle, through further normative inquiry. What to make of such a case? There seem to be three possibilities. One is that which answer is right is relative. I offer this as an option for those expressivists sympathetic to relativism, but since I don't have any truck with it myself, I'll set it aside here. The second possibility is that one of us has the (determinately) right answer, the other the (determinately) wrong one. The third is that it is indeterminate what the right answer is. The second option requires that we privilege one stable verdict over another. I might, for example, want to privilege the stable verdict that is accessible to me over the one that is accessible to you. But if this is not to be arbitrary and self-aggrandising, I must have some *principled* reason for maintaining this asymmetry; and to provide such a principled basis would be to argue that the relevant alternative outlook (namely, yours) is not reasonable, in the sense defined above. But we are assuming that your outlook *is* reasonable, in this sense. So, there seems to be no non-arbitrary way of privileging any one stable verdict over another. This seems to leave only the third option, which is to say that the matter is indeterminate.³⁴ This also has the advantage that we avoid the sceptical consequence that there is any determinately correct answer to any normative question that is in-principle inaccessible to a reasonable normative inquirer.

Taken together, this supports the theory of normative (in)determinacy given at the outset of this section: assuming *Indeterminacy*, my position on (a) gives us the right-to-left reading of *Determinacy*, while my position on (b) and (c) gives us the left-to-right reading. I don't pretend the case given above is iron-clad, however, and those who want to develop the account in different ways are encouraged to do so.

In particular, the theory has the result that no determinately correct answer to a normative question can be in-principle inaccessible through normative inquiry to a reasonable normative inquirer. This result may be unappealing for expressivists with particularly ambitious

³³ It's also possible that, for one particular individual, there are two possible series of progressions open to them, which would lead to contradictory but stable verdicts. The discussion in the text applies *mutatis mutandis* to such a case.

³⁴ Type (c) scenarios may be unstable given this claim, in particular if we also assume that, if it is indeterminate whether *p*, then one ought not to think that *p* (or think that not-*p*). If type (c) cases suffice for indeterminacy, it follows from this assumption that any reasonable outlook that thinks that *p* (or that not-*p*) could improve by no longer thinking that *p* – in which case no reasonable normative inquirer can *stably* think that *p* (or that not-*p*) after all. There's no problem here: it just means that, under the given assumptions, we will have type (b) cases instead of type (c) cases.

quasi-realist ambitions. Certain quasi-realists may want to say *everything* realists say, even when this extends to the potentially unappealing (perhaps because scepticism-threatening) possibility that there may be determinately correct answers to normative questions that are in-principle inaccessible to us. I encourage those with such ambitions to develop an account they find more satisfactory. But let me sound some notes of caution. First, some argue that the existence of such inaccessible normative facts would be deeply problematic (e.g., Kramer 2009: ch.2). Second, as Graham Bex-Priestley (2018) argues, the expressivist should only want to ape the realist insofar as it is necessary to do so to vindicate ordinary normative discourse, and claims about in-principle inaccessible normative facts are no part of ordinary normative discourse.³⁵ Third, it is unclear how the expressivist can so much as make sense of the possibility that there are such inaccessible facts, as has been a prominent theme in the literature on expressivism and fallibility.³⁶ In sum, my worry is that this is an impossible task with an undesirable goal, and we would be better off leaving well alone. But you know, you do you.

Another potential worry: if intractable normative disagreements between reasonable normative outlooks are widespread, then the account may seem to proliferate normative indeterminacy to an unacceptable extent. I think this is a risk, but three points mitigate the concern.³⁷ First, it is far from obvious that the antecedent of this conditional is true. Second, some argue that the existence of widespread intractable normative disagreements between reasonable inquirers would already be problematic (e.g., Cosker-Rowland 2017). If that's right, then it's not obvious that postulating indeterminacy in such cases makes matters substantially worse. And third, we can always narrow the relevant range of intractable disagreements by narrowing the range of outlooks considered to be reasonable. We can thus take any good argument that the account over-generates indeterminacy in this way as an objection to the specific notion of reasonableness in play (i.e., that it is too broad), rather than the general account of indeterminacy.

4. Solving the problem

In §2, I developed a problem for the normative expressivist: to make sense of the idea that indeterminate normative sentences and determinate normative sentences differ in alethic status. In §3, I demonstrated how the expressivist can earn the right to say that some normative matters are determinate or indeterminate. We are thus entitled to say that there are determinate and indeterminate normative sentences. This by itself does not tell us anything about the *alethic* status

³⁵ These two points are further supported by the fact that even unknowable normative facts need not be inaccessible in the sense defined – see §4.4.

³⁶ See citations in fn.10.

³⁷ For more discussion, see Gamester (2022: 468-470).

of said sentences – but to do so, we need only endorse bridge principles linking (in)determinacy and truth. This section shows how we can recover a variety of different views on the alethic status of indeterminate normative sentences, and thus to solve the problem developed in §2, by endorsing a variety of different bridge principles.

4.1 *Indeterminate*

The obstacle for *Indeterminate* was that the expressivist would first need some way of making sense of normative indeterminacy, and standard epistemic, ontic, and semantic accounts use resources to which the expressivist does not seem to be entitled. But in §3 I argued that the expressivist ought to approach this question side-on: rather than asking *what it is* for a normative matter to be indeterminate, we ask what it is *to think that* such a matter is indeterminate; and I developed and defended a particular such proposal. Given a strong equivalence between the left- and right-hand sides of (T) and (F):

(T) '*p*' is true iff *p*.

(F) '*p*' is false iff not-*p*.

It follows that '*p*' is determinately true iff it is determinately the case that *p*, determinately false iff it is determinately not the case that *p*, and indeterminate in truth-value iff it is indeterminate whether *p*. Indeterminate sentences are thus indeterminate in truth-value, while determinate sentences have determinate truth-values.

While this route to *Indeterminate* goes via a deflationary reading of schemas (T) and (F), it is not *obvious* to me that the account of normative (in)determinacy given in §3.2 is ultimately compatible with deflationism about truth and falsity. This account, recall, gives substantive necessary and sufficient conditions under which a moral sentence is determinate or indeterminate, and so via (T) and (F) substantive necessary and sufficient conditions under which a moral sentence is (determinately) true or (determinately) false. The account is (roughly) in terms of whether there is a stable judgement on the matter in-principle accessible to reasonable inquirers – exactly the kind of substantive, non-representational theory of truth traditionally favoured by anti-realists (Künne, 2003: 20-32, 375-452).³⁸ But I do not want to get hung up on the question here: it turns on the murky issue of what exactly is essential to deflationism about truth, and answering that question is outside the scope of this paper (e.g. Eklund 2017).

³⁸ Even if this does commit us to a substantive account of moral truth, there is no question that it is one that is compatible with expressivism, since it only uses resources to which the expressivist is entitled.

I also note that, by appealing to a deflationary conception of properties and facts, the expressivist will also be entitled to an ontic conception of normative indeterminacy. On this approach, the appeal to indeterminacy in the world will not be doing the explanatory work when it comes to normative indeterminacy; nonetheless, this compatibility is desirable for those who would like to combine *Indeterminate* with onticism (e.g., Barnes & Williams, 2011).

4.2 *Gaps*

The obstacle to *Gaps* was that deflationism about truth and falsity is incompatible with truth-value gaps. The above framework allows for a more substantive account of moral truth that is compatible with expressivism while allowing for truth-value gaps: we say that '*p*' is true iff it is determinately the case that *p*; that '*p*' is false iff it is determinately the case that not-*p*; and '*p*' is neither true nor false iff it is indeterminate whether *p*. Indeterminate moral sentences are thus neither true nor false, while determinate moral sentences are either true or false.

Gaps is closely associated with supervaluationism. As we saw above (§2.6.3), traditional semantic explanations of vagueness associate vague terms with a range of precise candidate extensions. A sentence is "supertrue" iff it is true on all candidate extensions; "superfalse" iff it is false on all candidate extensions. The traditional supervaluationist identifies truth with supertruth and falsity with superfalsity, resulting in *Gaps*. The obstacle for the expressivist, we saw, is that she does not explain the meaning of a moral term like 'wrong' in terms of its extension, but in terms of the practical attitude it expresses. As such, she cannot help herself to the idea of there being multiple candidate extensions. But now we are in a position to make sense of this. The "clear cases" will be the determinate ones. The candidate extensions will be those that respect the clear cases while respecting penumbral connections (Fine 1975). With this in place, the expressivist can make sense of the traditional supervaluational framework. Again, it will not be the candidate extensions that are doing the explanatory work when it comes to normative indeterminacy, but nonetheless this compatibility is desirable for those attracted to traditional supervaluationism.

4.3 *Degrees*

The obstacle to *Degrees* was that deflationism about truth collapses talk of the degree of truth of a sentence like '*φ*-ing is wrong' to talk of the degree to which *φ*-ing is wrong. Again, the above framework allows us to offer a more substantive account of moral truth that avoids this collapse. I think the most promising way to do this is as follows. Recall from the previous subsection that the expressivist is now able to make sense of there being multiple candidate

extensions for a moral term like ‘wrong’. We can then identify a sentence’s degree of truth with the proportion of candidate extensions on which it is true: a sentence is true to degree d iff it is true on $d\%$ of candidate extensions.³⁹ Since all candidate extensions respect clear cases, determinate normative sentences will be fully true or fully false. Since candidate extensions disagree on borderline cases, indeterminate normative sentences will have an intermediate degree of truth.

4.4 *Unknowable*

Epistemicists maintain that there is a fact of the matter about exactly how many microseconds it is permissible for Darryl to divert his attention. Thus every sentence of the form ‘It is permissible for Darryl to divert his attention for n seconds’ is either true or false. But we cannot know where the cut-off lies. The obstacle for expressivism, we saw, was that it is not obvious that the expressivist can make sense of unknowable moral truths, particularly given how she makes sense of her own fallibility. At first pass, this obstacle seems unmoved: the account of (in)determinacy given in §3.2 says that it is determinately the case that p iff that is the only stable judgement on the matter that is in-principle accessible to reasonable inquirers. And, as noted there, while expressivists as such are not committed to this account of (in)determinacy, it is not obvious how the expressivist could make sense of there being normative facts that are completely inaccessible to us. How, then, can this framework allow for normative truths that are unknowable?

We can do this by taking up a suggestion made in §3.1, which requires drawing a distinction between a stable judgement being in-principle *accessible* and the relevant matter being *knowable*. Here is one way we might go about this. First, suppose that there are unknowable *non-normative* facts. There seems to be no block to the expressivist here. For example, the normative expressivist might be an epistemicist about non-normative indeterminacy. Second, let’s suppose (what seems plausible) that one of the higher-order norms any reasonable normative outlook will endorse concerns being more *informed* about non-normative matters. Third, suppose that, other things being equal, it is sufficient for one outlook to be more informed about non-normative matters than another that it contains more true beliefs (rather than knowledge) about non-normative matters. Since one can have true beliefs about unknowable matters, it follows that one normative outlook can be better than another by the lights of any reasonable normative outlook in virtue of having more true beliefs about unknowable non-normative matters. Fourth, suppose that, for any normative matter, there is a single stable judgement on the matter accessible through normative inquiry – this gets us the desired

³⁹ This is what Williams (2014b) calls “degree supervenience”.

bivalence. And, finally, suppose that, for certain normative matters, the relevant stable judgement *only exists among those outlooks that have true beliefs about unknowable non-normative matters*. It would seem to follow that, while the relevant stable judgement is in-principle accessible via improvement to your normative outlook, it is nonetheless *unknowable*, since it will always be based on true beliefs that do not amount to knowledge.⁴⁰

If all this holds, we can modify the account of indeterminacy given in §3.2. Rather than saying that a normative matter is indeterminate if there is no stable judgement on the matter in-principle accessible through normative inquiry, we say that it is indeterminate if the relevant stable judgement only exists among those normative outlooks that have true beliefs about unknowable non-normative matters. Indeterminate sentences will thus have unknowable truth-values, while determinate sentences will have knowable truth-values.

That's the best I can do here. But the account does not seem particularly appealing to me, for the simple reason that it seems that there can be normative indeterminacy in cases where there is no relevant non-normative ignorance. Consider the Darryl case. The relevant non-normative features of the case could be described as fully and precisely as you like, I see no reason to think this will eliminate the normative indeterminacy too. (This is, of course, perfectly compatible with the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral.) But the above account cannot make sense of normative indeterminacy in the absence of unknowable non-normative facts. For this reason, *Unknowable* seems like the least appealing option for expressivists.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that moral vagueness, and normative indeterminacy more broadly, poses a problem for expressivists and proposed a solution to this problem. The proposal makes sense of normative indeterminacy in terms of inquiry-resistance, and uses this framework to make sense of the idea that determinate and indeterminate normative sentences differ in alethic status. Until now, expressivists have paid little attention to moral vagueness. We can now see that this has been a significant oversight. How the expressivist makes sense of moral vagueness may have significant implications for the wider development of the theory. This is clearest with regards to truth: most of the options described above (*Gaps* and *Degrees*, perhaps also *Indeterminate*) require

⁴⁰ Here's a similar proposal, compatible with the idea that being more informed requires having more *knowledge*. When epistemicists say that the answer in a borderline case is unknowable, they need not mean that is in-principle unknowable to any possible being, including superbeings and gods. Rather, the idea is that it lies beyond the ordinary capacities of human beings (Williams, 1994: 212; Hawthorne, 2022: 216). Granting this about non-normative indeterminacy, it follows that there may be some normative outlooks that are only accessible to superbeings. We can then modify the proposal in the text such that the relevant stable judgement only exists in these humanly-inaccessible normative outlooks. The relevant normative matters will thus be unknowable to humans, even if knowable to superbeings.

jettisoning deflationism in favour of something more akin to a traditional anti-realist conception of moral truth.

There remains much more to explore in relation to the connection between expressivism and moral vagueness. This paper is but the opening salvo. Moral vagueness is an unruly child – at some point expressivists must stop diverting their attention.

References

- Abasnezhad, A. (2023). Moral realism and semantic accounts of moral vagueness. *Inquiry*. **66**(3), pp.381-393. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2019.1570866>
- Baima, N. (2014). The problem of ethical vagueness for expressivism. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. **17**(4), pp.593-605. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10677-014-9493-0>
- Barnes, E. & Williams, J.R.G. (2011). A theory of metaphysical indeterminacy. In: K. Bennett & D. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Oxford studies in metaphysics, volume 6* (pp.103-148). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199603039.003.0003>
- Beddor, B. (2020). Fallibility for expressivists. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. **98**(4), pp.763-777. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2019.1699586>
- Bex-Priestley, G. (2018). Error and the limits of quasi-realism. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. **25**(5), pp.1051-1063. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10677-018-9945-z>
- Bex-Priestley, G. & Gamester, W. (2023). [Forthcoming]. Sidestepping the Frege-Geach problem. *The Philosophical Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqad039>
- Blackburn, S. (1984). *Spreading the word: groundings in the philosophy of language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Blackburn, S. (1993). *Essays in quasi-realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195080414.001.0001>
- Blackburn, S. (1996). Securing the notes: moral epistemology for the quasi-realist. In: W. Sinnott-Armstrong & M. Timmons (Eds.), *Moral knowledge? New readings in moral epistemology* (pp.82-100). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blackburn, S. (1998). *Ruling passions: a theory of practical reasoning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198247852.001.0001>
- Blackburn, S. (2009). Truth and *a priori* possibility: Egan's charge against quasi-realism. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. **87**(2), pp.201-213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400802362182>
- Bykvist, K. & Olson, J. (2009). Expressivism and moral certitude. **59**(235), pp.202-215. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9213.2008.580.x>

- Constantinescu, C. (2014). Moral vagueness: a dilemma for non-naturalism. In: R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford studies in metaethics, volume 9* (pp.152-185). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198709299.003.0007>
- Cosker-Rowland, R. (2017). The significance of significant fundamental moral disagreement. *Nous*. **51**(4), pp.802-831. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12170>
- Dreier, J. (2015). Explaining the quasi-real. In: R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford studies in metaethics, volume 10* (pp.273-298). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198738695.003.0011>
- Dougherty, T. (2014). Vague value. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. **89**(2), pp.352-372. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12026>
- Dworkin, R. (2011). *Justice for hedgehogs*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4159/9780674059337>
- Egan, A. (2007). Quasi-realism and fundamental moral error. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. **85**(2), pp.205-219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400701342988>
- Eklund, M. (2017). What is deflationism about truth? *Synthese*. **198**(2), pp.631-645. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11229-017-1557-y>
- Fine, K. (1975). Vagueness, truth and logic. *Synthese*. **30**(3-4), pp.265-300. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF00485047>
- Gamester, W. (2022). Fallibility without facts. *Ergo an Open Access Journal of Philosophy*. **8**(40), pp.444-473. <https://doi.org/10.3998/ergo.2241>
- Gibbard, A. (1990). *Wise choices, apt feelings: a theory of normative judgement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198249856.001.0001>
- Gibbard, A. (2003). *Thinking how to live*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4159/9780674037588>
- Gibbard, A. (2012). *Meaning and normativity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199646074.001.0001>
- Goldstein, S. (2016). A preface paradox for intention. *Philosophers' Imprint*. **16**(14), pp.1-20.
- Greenough, P. (2010). Deflationism and truth value gaps. In: C. Wright & N. Pedersen (Eds.), *New waves in truth*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp.115-125. http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230296992_8
- Haack, S. (1980). Is truth flat or bumpy? In: D. Mellor (Ed.), *Prospects for pragmatism* (pp.1-20). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hare, R. (1952). *The language of morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0198810776.001.0001>
- Hawthorne, J. (2022). Moral vagueness and epistemicism. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*. **23**(2), pp.214-247. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26556/jesp.v23i2.1602>

- Henderson, J. (2021). Truth and gradability. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*. **50**(4), pp.755-779.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10992-020-09584-3>
- Horgan, T. & Timmons, M. (1991). New wave moral realism meets moral twin earth. *Journal of Philosophical Research*. **16**(1), pp.447-465. http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/jpr_1991_19
- Horgan, T. & Timmons, M. (2015). Modest quasi-realism and the problem of deep moral error. In: R. Johnson & M. Smith (Eds.), *Passions and projections: themes from the philosophy of Simon Blackburn* (pp.190-209). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198723172.003.0011>
- Hyde, D. (1997). From heaps and gaps to heaps of gluts. *Mind*. **106**(424), pp.641-660.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/mind/106.424.641>
- Keefe, R. (2000). *Theories of vagueness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Köhler, S. (2015). What is the problem with fundamental moral error? *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. **93**(1), pp.161-165. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2014.928736>
- Köhler, S. (2021). How to have your quasi-cake and quasi-eat it too. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. **51**(3), pp.204-220. <https://doi.org/10.1017/can.2021.14>
- Kramer, M. (2009). *Moral realism as a moral doctrine*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781444310641>
- Künne, W. (2003). *Conceptions of truth*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0199241317.001.0001>
- Lenman, J. (2007). What is moral inquiry? *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. **81**(1), pp.63-81.
- Lenman, J. (2014). Gibbardian humility: moral fallibility and moral smugness. *Journal of Value Inquiry*. **48**(2), pp.235-245. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10790-014-9420-6>
- Lewis, D. (2004). Letters to Beall and Priest. In: G. Priest, J.C. Beall & B. Armour-Garb (Eds.), *The law of non-contradiction: new philosophical essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.176-177. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199265176.003.0011>
- Lynch, M. (2009). *Truth as one and many*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199218738.003.0005>
- McGee, V. & McLaughlin, B. (1995). Distinctions without a difference. *Southern Journal of Philosophy*. **33**(S1), pp.203-251. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1995.tb00771.x>
- Pravato, G. (2022). Indeterminacy and normativity. *Erkenntnis*. **87**(5), pp.2119-2141.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10670-020-00293-6>
- Ridge, M. (2014). *Impassioned belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199682669.003.0004>

- Ridge, M. (2015). I might be fundamentally mistaken. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*. **9**(3), pp.1-22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26556/jesp.v9i3.92>
- Santorio, P. & Williams, J.R.G. (2022). Indeterminacy and triviality. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. **100**(4), pp.727-742. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1936092>
- Schiffer, S. (2002). Moral realism and indeterminacy. *Noûs*. **36**(s1), pp.286-304. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-0068.36.s1.10>
- Schoenfield, M. (2016). Moral vagueness is ontic vagueness. *Ethics*. **126**(2), pp.257-282. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/683541>
- Shafer-Landau, R. (1994). Ethical disagreement, ethical objectivism and moral indeterminacy. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. **54**(2), pp.331-344. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2108492>
- Shafer-Landau, R. (1995). Vagueness, borderline cases and moral realism. *American Philosophical Quarterly*. **32**(1), pp.83-96.
- Sinclair, N. (2021). *Practical expressivism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198866107.001.0001>
- Smith, M. (2002). Evaluation, uncertainty and motivation. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. **5**(3), pp.305-320. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606977.018>
- Smith, N. (2008). *Vagueness and degrees of truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199233007.001.0001>
- Sorensen, R. (1990). Vagueness implies cognitivism. *American Philosophical Quarterly*. **27**(1), pp.1-14.
- Sorensen, R. (2022). Vagueness. In: E. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy (winter 2022 edition)*. URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/vagueness/>.
- Sud, R. (2019). Moral vagueness as semantic vagueness. *Ethics*. **129**(4), pp.684-705. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/702976>
- Wedgwood, R. (2018). There is no moral vagueness. *PEA Soup*. [Online]. Available from: <https://peasoup.deptcpanel.princeton.edu/2018/10/there-is-no-moral-vagueness/>
- Williams, J.R.G. (2014a). Decision-making under indeterminacy. *Philosophers' Imprint*. **14**(4), pp.1-34. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0014.004>
- Williams, J.R.G. (2014b). Nonclassical minds and indeterminate survival. *Philosophical Review*. **123**(4), pp.379-428. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2749710>
- Williams, J.R.G. (2017). Indeterminate oughts. *Ethics*. **127**(3), pp.645-673. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/690071>
- Williamson, T. (1994). *Vagueness*. London: Routledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203014264>

- Wright, C. (1992). *Truth and objectivity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4159/9780674045385>
- Wright, C. (1995). The epistemic conception of vagueness. *Southern Journal of Philosophy*.
 33(S1), pp.133-160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1995.tb00767.x>

Appendix

The following develops a more detailed and precise version of the account of normative (in)determinacy developed in §3.2.

First, we precisely characterise those normative outlooks that are accessible to you through normative inquiry, i.e., by progressing your normative outlook. For present purposes, we can think of a normative outlook as a set of judgements, including both first-order and higher-order normative judgements. We first define the notion of one normative outlook being better than another by the lights of a third. Using variables ' x ', ' y ', and ' z ' to range over normative outlooks:

- x is better than y by the lights of z iff_{def} it follows from the non-normative facts and the higher-order norms in z that x is better than y .

Higher-order normative judgements are themselves normative judgements, so are not immune to revision through normative inquiry (since such a change might be an improvement by the lights of the *other* higher-order norms you endorse). But at any one time, you will be trying to improve your normative outlook by the lights of the higher-order normative judgements you endorse at that time. We can capture this by recursively defining the notion of accessibility:

- x is accessible from y iff_{def} (i) x is better than y by y 's lights or (ii) there exists some normative outlook z such that x is better than z by z 's lights and z is accessible from y .

The recursive clause (ii) guarantees that accessibility is transitive. We then define a normative outlook's accessibility set:

- y is in x 's accessibility set iff_{def} $y = x$ or y is accessible from x .

More intuitively put: your accessibility set is your present normative outlook plus every normative outlook you could end up with by progressing your normative outlook.

Next up, we characterise what can happen to a particular normative judgement through normative inquiry. To that end, the following definitions will be useful. Using variable ' p ' to range over normative judgements:

- x is a stable-point for p iff_{def} p is a member of every normative outlook in x 's accessibility set.
- x is a resistance-point for p iff_{def} there is no stable-point for p in x 's accessibility set.

The definition of a resistance-point guarantees that, for any normative outlook x and normative judgement p , there will be a stable-point for p or a resistance-point for p (or both) in x 's accessibility set. We can thus classify accessibility sets in terms of what kinds of point they contain. Using capital-letter variable ' X ' to range over sets of normative outlooks:

- X favours p iff_{def} there exists at least one stable-point for p in X and no resistance-point for p in X .
- X disfavors p iff_{def} there exists at least one resistance-point for p in X and no stable-point for p in X .

We can then let W be the superset composed of the accessibility sets of the reasonable normative outlooks:

- x is a member of W iff_{def} there exists a reasonable normative outlook y such that x is in y 's accessibility set.

Which normative judgements are favoured or disfavoured by W gives us a more precise way of thinking about which stable normative judgements are accessible to a reasonable normative outlook through normative inquiry. In particular, focusing on a particular normative judgement p and its contradictory judgement $\sim p$, we have nine possibilities, represented in Table 2.

I will suppose that no outlook accessible from a reasonable normative outlook is a stable-point for both a normative judgement p and its contradictory judgement $\sim p$. This is plausible, given that we are assuming that there are no normative truth-value gluts (§2.7). As such, contradictory judgements are inconsistent, and it is plausible that any reasonable normative

outlook will value consistency.⁴¹ This rules out three possibilities, represented by the grey cells in Table 2, leaving us with just six.

		S.P. for p	R.P. for p	S.P. for p	R.P. for p	S.P. for p	R.P. for p
		No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
S.P. for $\sim p$	No	(A): W disfavors p and disfavors $\sim p$.		(B): W favors p and disfavors $\sim p$.		(C): W disfavors $\sim p$.	
R.P. for $\sim p$	Yes						
S.P. for $\sim p$	Yes	(D): W favors $\sim p$ and disfavors p .		W favors p and favors $\sim p$.		W favors $\sim p$.	
R.P. for $\sim p$	No						
S.P. for $\sim p$	Yes	(E): W disfavors p .		W favors p .		(F): No favoritism or disfavoritism.	
R.P. for $\sim p$	Yes						

Table 2

The remaining six possibilities are represented diagrammatically in Figure 1. In each case, the bold external box represents W , the bottom circle represents an arbitrary reasonable normative outlook, and the arrows the accessibility relation. The bold circles represent the stable-points and resistance-points in W : a ' p ' or ' $\sim p$ ' in the bold circle means it is a stable-point for p or $\sim p$ respectively; nothing in the bold circle means it is a resistance-point for p and for $\sim p$. The internal boxes represent the disjoint accessibility sets of the stable- and resistance-points represented. There are two ways scenario (F) might be realised, hence the two diagrams.⁴²

The discussion in §§3.1-3.2 covers four of these possibilities: in scenario (A), no stable judgement on the matter accessible via normative inquiry, so this is a clear case of inquiry-resistance; scenarios (B) and (D) are not cases of inquiry-resistance; and scenario (F) covers cases of intractable disagreement. As discussed earlier, it is controversial what the expressivist should say about these cases. I will consider such cases sufficient for indeterminacy, but if one prefers not to, then the proposal below – particularly principle (4) – can be modified.

⁴¹ This doesn't quite make it *impossible* for a reasonable normative outlook to be a stable-point for inconsistent judgements: the improvement of eliminating the inconsistency might always be outweighed by competing deteriorations by the lights of its *other* higher-order norms. This seems unlikely, however.

⁴² Diagrams (C), (E), and (F) all suggest that there is a normative outlook in W from which the stable- and resistance-points are accessible. This need not be the case. But I find including the bottom circle makes the diagrams easier to interpret.

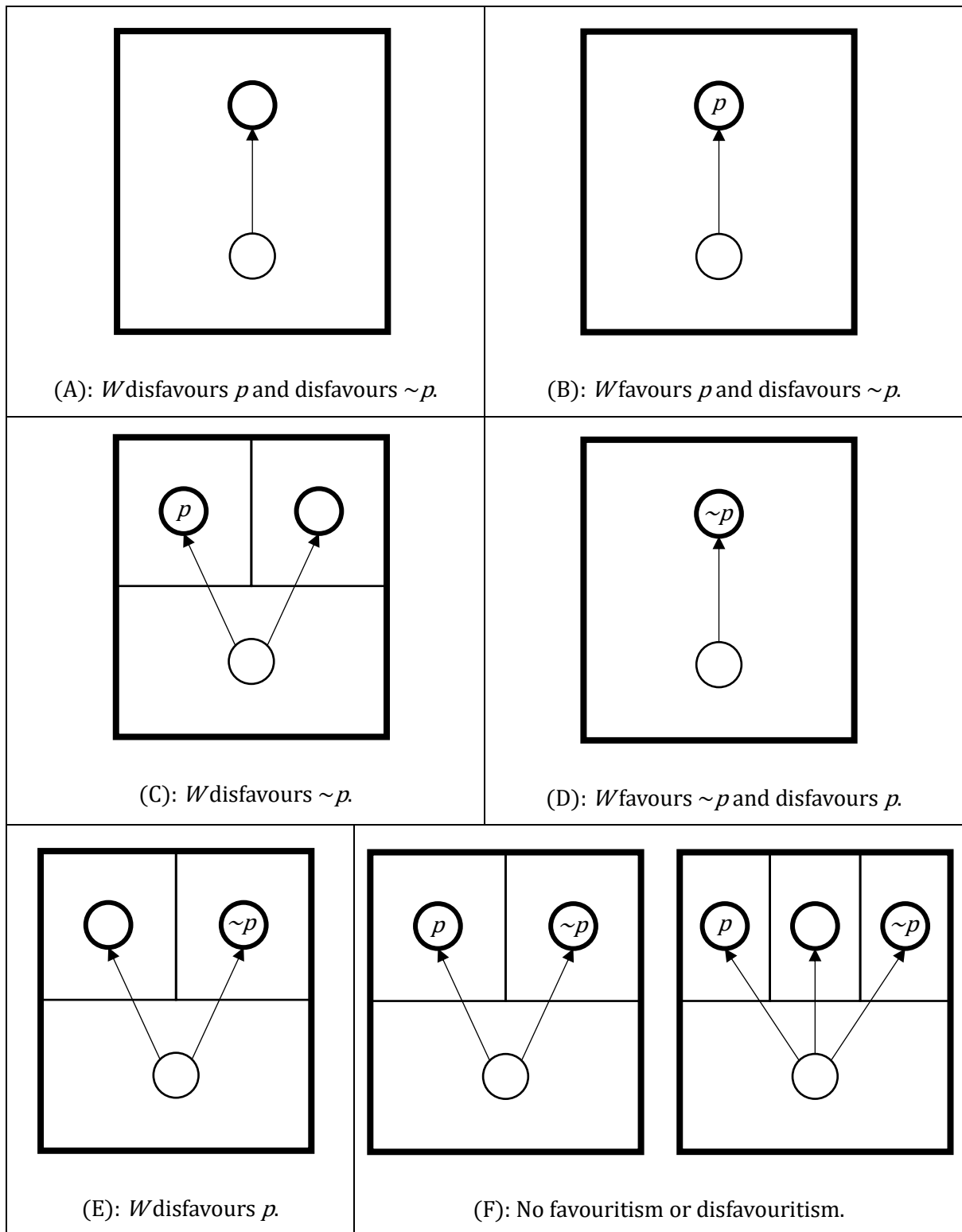


Figure 1

That leaves (C) and (E). In these cases, there is an interesting asymmetry between p and $\sim p$. In (E), for example, W disfavors p , while neither favouring nor disfavouring $\sim p$. This correlates with an asymmetry we find in cases of *higher-order indeterminacy* (Gamester 2022: 459). In the Darryl case, there are quantities of seconds between 1 and 300, such as 30 or 31 seconds, such that it is borderline whether it is permissible for Darryl to divert his attention for

that long. But where does this zone of indeterminacy begin? The line between the clearly-permissible and the borderline-permissible seems no easier to locate than the line between the permissible and the impermissible. This plausibly gives rise to borderline cases of borderline cases. Suppose we decide that 20 seconds is one such borderline borderline case: it is neither clearly clearly-permissible nor clearly borderline-permissible for Darryl to divert his attention for 20 seconds. Now, if it were clearly *im*permissible for Darryl to divert his attention for 20 seconds, then this would clearly not be a borderline case, and we're assuming that that is not clear. So, it is not clearly impermissible for Darryl to divert his attention for 20 seconds. There is therefore an asymmetry between the judgement that Darryl diverting his attention for 20 seconds is permissible and the judgement that it is impermissible: the latter is not clearly correct, whereas it is borderline whether the former is clearly correct. I therefore propose that the expressivist uses (C) and (E) to capture higher-order indeterminacy.⁴³

We are thus led to the following six principles: two sufficient conditions for determinacy, two sufficient conditions for indeterminacy, and two sufficient conditions for higher-order indeterminacy:⁴⁴

- (1) If W favours p and disfavors $\sim p$, then it is determinately the case that p .
- (2) If W favours $\sim p$ and disfavors p , then it is determinately the case that not- p .
- (3) If W disfavors p and disfavors $\sim p$, then it is indeterminate whether p .
- (4) If W neither favours nor disfavors p and neither favours nor disfavors $\sim p$, then it is indeterminate whether p .
- (5) If W disfavors p and neither favours nor disfavors $\sim p$, then it is indeterminate whether it is indeterminate whether not- p .
- (6) If W disfavors $\sim p$ and neither favours nor disfavors p , then it is indeterminate whether it is indeterminate whether p .

⁴³ This accounts for second-order indeterminacy. It is possible to accommodate higher orders of indeterminacy in this framework, by appealing to indeterminacy regarding some of our working primitives – particularly, concerning which normative outlooks are reasonable and whether one outlook is better than another by the lights of a third – resulting in indeterminacy in which normative judgements W favours or disfavors. Space prevents me from going into detail here.

⁴⁴ Higher-order indeterminacy prevents us from turning these into necessary and sufficient conditions, since one cannot conclude from the fact that it is indeterminate whether it is indeterminate whether p that it is not determinately the case that p .