Expressivism and Constructivism[1]

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1.

According to the tables of contents of two important recent American anthologies of papers there is an important position in contemporary metaethics that is called *constructivism*: both Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard and Peter Railton's collection and Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo's devote entire sections to it. We Brits are less susceptible: check out Andrew Fisher and Simon Kirchin's recent anthology or Miller's *Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* and you won't even find it mentioned in the index.[2] So are we Brits missing something? What is this constructivism?

2.

The story – or the presently interesting bit – begins with Rawls' classic paper "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory" first published in 1980. There Rawls writes as follows:

> "To justify a Kantian conception within a democratic society is not merely to reason correctly from given premises, or even from publicly shared and mutually recognized premises. The real task is to discover and formulate the deeper bases of agreement which one hopes are embedded in common sense, or even to originate and fashion starting points for common understanding by expressing in a new form the convictions found in the historical tradition by connecting them with a wide range of people's considered convictions: those which stand up to critical reflection. …
>
> I should emphasize that what I have called the "real task" of justifying a conception of justice is not primarily an epistemological problem. The search for reasonable grounds for reaching agreement rooted in our conception of ourselves and in our relation to society replaces the search for moral truth interpreted as fixed by a prior and independent order of objects and relations, whether natural or divine, an order apart and distinct from how we conceive of ourselves. The task is to articulate a public conception of justice that all can live with who regard their person and their relation to society in a certain way. And though doing this may involve settling theoretical difficulties, the practical social task is primary. What justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent to and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realization that, given

[2] See Darwall, Gibbard and Railton 1997, Shafer-Landau and Cuneo 2007, Fisher and Kirchin 2006, Miller 2003.

our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us. We can find no better basic charter for our social world. Kantian constructivism holds that moral objectivity is to be understood in terms of a suitably constructed social point of view that all can accept. Apart from the procedure of constructing the principles of justice, there are no moral facts. Whether certain facts are to be recognized as reasons of right and justice, or how much they are to count, can be ascertained only from within the constructive procedure, that is, from the undertakings of rational agents of construction when suitably represented as free and equal moral persons."[3]

I find in myself a considerable measure of agreement with what Rawls says here, so perhaps I might be some kind of constructivist. But it would still be nice to be clearer about what that is. This will take us some distance from Rawls but we will return to him in the end.

3.

Consider sets of norms. In order to be metaphysically as unassuming as we can let's suppose that sets of norms are just sets of sentences in the imperative mood, so they are things of whose truth or falsity there can be no question. Though sets of norms are never true they are sometimes interesting. We could say that a set of norms is *J-interesting* if it captures the requirements of justice in such a way that if and only if you act in accordance with it you will act justly. And we could say that a set of norms is *M-interesting* if it captures the requirements of morality in this way. And we could say that it is *R-interesting* if it captures the requirements of rationality in this way.
       And now there may be interesting theories to me proposed of the form:

A set of norms is I-interesting iff it is N.

where "I-interesting" is a general place-holder where we might stick "J-interesting" or "M-interesting" or "R-interesting" or any of the other ways of being interesting that we might, on a given occasion, be interested in.

There are some quite familiar such theories. Thus many of you will have met:

Nonnat: A set of norms is M-interesting iff the irreducible nonnatural moral facts say it is.

Which is quite interesting. And many of you have also met:

Util: A set of norms is M-interesting iff it leads us to maximally promote the welfare of all impartially considered.

(Util is of course perfectly consistent with Nonnat. For someone might combine the metaethical claim that what moral rightness consists in is possessing the irreducible nonnatural property of moral rightness with the normative ethical claim that it is those actions that impartially promote welfare, and only those actions, that have this property. Equally someone who endorsed Util might mean thereby to express a form

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[3]Rawls 1999, pp. 306-7

of reductive naturalism which simply identifies the property of rightness with that of impartially promoting welfare. The latter view of course *would* conflict with Nonnat.)

Here are a few more:

ConstA: A set of norms is J-interesting iff it is congruent with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realization that, given our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us.

ConstA': A set of norms is J-interesting iff it would be agreed to by rational agents in the original position.

(Rawls, as I read him, believes both ConstA and ConstA', but takes A to be fundamental in that A' derives its warrant from the application of A.)

ConstB: A set of norms is M-interesting iff is it not possible for anyone to reasonably reject it as a basis for informed, unforced, general agreement.

ConstC: A set of norms is M-interesting iff it is possible for a rational agent to will it as a universal law.

(Not every reading of ConstC is necessarily constructivist but Christine Korsgaard's is, as is Rawls' own.[4])

What might make these, at least under certain constructions, forms of constructivism?

I think at least four things need emphasizing at the outset, though they are not all evident from the formulaic summaries just aired. The first is that it seems to be characteristic of constructivist versions of our general formula that we find normative concepts, rational, reasonable, etc, on the right hand side of the biconditional.[5] So constructivism always contrasts with reductionist views such as the more metaethically ambitious reading of Util.

The second feature that distinguishes constructivist views in normative philosophy is that N, the thing on the right hand side, is intended to specify some procedure we can in principle follow or some criterion we can in principle apply. It thus disallows any possibility that moral rightness might consist in something mysterious and epistemically inaccessible and remote to us. As Confucius is said to have rather sensibly proposed, If the Way were remote from humanity, it would not be the Way.[6]

The third feature is that the order of determination[7] is, for typical constructivists, intended to be read from right to left. N, the right hand side, is not intended to pick out some feature of interesting things of the appropriate sort that tracks their appropriate interestingness where the latter is conceived as constituted prior to and independently of the procedure or criterion picked out by N.

A fourth distinctive feature of constuctivism is evident from the sentence with which Rawls follows his statement of ConstA in the long quote I started with: "And

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[4] Korsgaard 1996, 2009, Rawls 2000.
[5] Pace Ridge, this volume, section 1.
[6] *Chung-Yung* (*Doctrine of the Mean*), 13
[7] See Wright, 1992, appendix to chapter 3.

though doing this may involve settling theoretical difficulties, the practical social task is primary." Constructivism takes the task to which moral and/or other normative inquiry is addressed to be fundamentally practical as opposed to theoretical. In fixing what principles of reason or morality to accept, we are trying to address some distinctively practical problem that we face. We are not, in anything at all like the way scientists are, trying to find stuff out.

The term "constructivism " is a slippery one with considerable variation in how various moral philosophers characterize and understand it. But in the light of the foregoing, I think the following is roughly accurate in capturing what is shared by the main recent writers to represent themselves as some kind of constructivist and successfully delineates a more or less distinctive family of positions.

> *Constructivist views understand correct normative views of the relevant kind (political, ethical, normative) as those which are the upshot of some procedure or criterion, where (a) that procedure or criterion is one followable or applicable by human beings where (b) that procedure or criterion is itself characterized in normative terms invoking ideals of e.g. rationality or reasonableness and (c) applying the procedure or criterion is taken as determining or constitutive of that correctness rather than as tracking a correctness conceived as prior and independent to it and (d) where the rationale for our taking an interest in whatever the procedure or criterion in question delivers is conceived of as speaking to distinctively practical as opposed to theoretical concerns.[8]*

4.

A particularly interesting recent version of constructivism is articulated in Sharon Street's recent paper "Constructivism About Reasons". Street defends what she calls *metaethical constructivism* which she defines thus:

> According to metaethical constructivism, the fact that X is a reason to Y for agent A is constituted by the fact that the judgement that X is a reason to Y (for A) withstands scrutiny from the standpoint of A's other judgements about reasons.[9]

This looks open to an obvious worry. It certainly satisfies the constraint I placed on counting a view as constructivist that N, the procedure or criterion invoked in order to elucidate the normative concept that is our target for elucidation, should itself be a normative concept. But surely, it might be thought, the normative property on the left hand side had better not be the very same normative concept as we are

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[8] Enoch 2009, p. 331 insists on the further specification that constructivist views must appeal to an *ineliminable* procedure. He means by this that "[t]he normative status of the consequence here arguably depends on actually going through the procedure, not just on it being the result of some hypothetical procedure." But it seems rather questionable to characterize a position in such a way that none of its best known defenders turn out to hold it and Enoch's characterization surely has just this consequence.

[9] Street 2008, p. 223.

seeking an elucidation of. Otherwise surely our theory is circular and explains nothing.

The worry can be tamed as Street makes plain. According to metaethical constructivism a certain class of judgments, we might say, are each, in isolation, answerable to a process of scrutiny in the light of the other judgements in the class. That is not necessarily a vicious circularity but seems rather defensible as a benign holism of the sort standardly taken on in preferring a coherentist to a more foundationalist account of normative epistemology. Normative inquiry, on this account, works much as Neurathian boat repair does. So thinks Street and so do many, including myself.

Really the idea is just the familiar idea of reflective equilibrium but with an enhanced alleged significance. As Street writes: "In metaethical constructivism,… the fact that a normative judgement withstands scrutiny in reflective equilibrium is understood to be not only of epistemological significance but also of constitutive significance; in other words: this fact is understood to be not only an *indication* that the normative judgement is correct, but what it *is* for that judgement to be correct."[10]

But now that we have beefed up the ambitions of reflective equilibrium, a new worry about circularity arises. If what we are trying to do is give an account of what it is to be a reason, does the invocation of *judgements about* reasons in our account itself simply show that we have failed to shed any noncircular light on this? For we already need to know what a reason is to know what judgements about reasons are. Just as we must already know what fish are in order to know what judgements about fish are.

Where fish are concerned, Street would, I am confident, agree with this. Where reasons are concerned she does not. Her theory she tells us is distinctive in the way it "reduces facts about reasons to facts about what we judge or take to be reasons, with the latter understood in a way that is prior to and independent of the former." This, she says, retains the attractions of naturalism – judging something to be a reason is after all just a mental state of a certain distinctive kind – while avoiding an unappealing kind of naturalistic reductionism.[11]

At which point the reader is liable to think, *Hullo, this sounds a bit fami*liar. For there are other people out there who seek to tame the mysteries of metaethics by first characterizing certain mental states of normative commitment or endorsement, the states, we might say, that normative utterances express, and then explaining what is conveyed by normative judgements in the light of this characterization. And these people too claim to have pulled off the attractive double act of avoiding an implausible naturalistic reductionism while avoiding metaphysical and epistemological mystification by saying nothing not consistent with a broadly naturalistic metaphysics. And these people are of course people like Simon Blackburn, Allan Gibbard and myself.[12] These people are expressivists. Street is not. Rather she takes the distinctive character of normative judgement, of the state of mind of having something strike one as counting in favour of something to be primitive not open to further explanation.[13]

That won't satisfy expressivists who will want to press the following question.[14] Can't you at least tell us whether this primitive state of mind is a belief, a

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[10] Ibid., pp. 238-9.

[11] For both the quoted passage and the point about reductionism, see ibid., p. 242.

[12] Gibbard 1990, 2003; Blackburn 1998; Lenman 2007, 2010.

[13] Street 2008, esp. pp. 239-242.

[14] Cf. Ridge, this volume, who develops a similar point.

desire or something else? Does the judgement that something is a reason involve some distinctively cognitive orientation towards that thing? In which case we surely want a metaethical theory to tell us *what* we are believing about something when we believe it to be a reason. And until it does we surely haven't really made any metaethical progress at all.[15] But if the state in question is fundamentally noncognitive in character then the dialectical pressure to give in and go expressivist seems irresistible.

Street see this problem and seeks to address it. Normative judgements, she says, clearly differ from both beliefs and desires. They clearly differ from beliefs in that they have a necessary connection to motivation that beliefs as such lack. So far so familiar. And they differ from desires because, she says, while the normative judgement that I have a reason to X constitutively involves judging that I have a reason to Y where Y is some necessary means to Xing, desires as such have no such constitutive involvement. There are two problems with the latter claim. First it is not so obviously correct. It might be argued, and has recently been energetically argued by Stephen Finlay, that desire does indeed constitutively involve desire to take the necessary means to its object.[16] Secondly and less controversially, nobody ever said, normative judgements and desires were the same thing. The expressivist claim is that normative judgements are a *distinctive subspecies* of desire, broadly understood. And the very thing that makes that distinctive subspecies distinctive may well be some constitutive feature its members, as such, must have that is not shared by the wider species as a whole.

Street's view, I suggest, is attractive but unstable. It is highly natural to recast it in expressivist terms. Doing so might yield something like the following:

> REASON: To think a consideration C a reason in favour of someone's φ-ing is to favour that consideration guiding deliberation and action in furtherance of concerns, desires and aims to which it speaks in virtue of it and they being able to withstand scrutiny in the light of other reasons.

This is still an attractive view but it is no longer a view in competition with expressivism.

5.

Still further concerns for a view such Street's are aired by some other contributors to this volume. Thus Scanlon urges that the idea of reflective equilibrium could never itself be the basis of a constructivist account of reasons generally. The process of seeking reflective equilibrium about a subject matter cannot itself supply the basis for a constructivist account of that subject matter because the process of following the procedure specified in a constructivist account cannot itself require "repeated judgements about the domain in question." That a judgement to the effect that something is a reason for me is among my judgements in reflective equilibrium means that the thing in question is indeed a reason for me only if the judgements I make along the way to that equilibrium are themselves sound. But that fact cannot, without circularity, furnish the basis for a constructivist account of what such soundness consists in. So while Scanlon thinks the method of reflective equilibrium is

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[16] Finlay 2008.

our best method for ascertaining what reasons we have, he thinks it cannot furnish us with a constructivist account of what a reason is.[17]

      This is a powerful objection. But something not unlike Street's view might perhaps avoid its force. Consider:

> RED: x is red iff x's appearing red survives the scrutiny of some appropriate normative discipline.

This discipline might include appraising the stability of x's red appearance by checking it against x's earlier and later appearances, appraising its commonality by comparing notes with others about how x appears, checking that x's appearance is not distorted by peculiarities or deficiencies in the lighting conditions or in the observer's visual faculties etc.. Here we might think of things like x's appearing red as raw input states, not so much judgements as experiences distinguished by a particular phenomenal character. It is only through the application of disciplined scrutiny that they somehow solidify into judgements. There might be a version of Street's constructivism that sought to escape Scanlon's objection by similarly taking normative judgements, qua inputs into reflective scrutiny, what Michael Ridge in his contribution to this volume calls "primitive normative judgements", as raw feelings of this sort.

      But, as Ridge's own discussion of this possibility makes clear, this is not a promising view. He makes a number of objections of which I here note two. First, I would concur with his observation that "it is not all that phenomenologically plausible that there is any "pure" feeling of normativity." Second, as Ridge again rightly observes: "it is hard to see how to as much as make sense of the idea that dispositions to have such feelings might be seen as being structured into a "web of judgments" in any sense. That metaphor is apt only when we have something that looks much more like a genuine judgment which might bear conceptual and epistemic relations to other judgments." The normative discipline is to take the form of pressure towards coherence, there will be no way for it to get to work at all on pure raw contentless experiences.[18]

      Far more promising to conceive our normative judgements as desires, broadly understood. If we did this only for such judgements conceived as inputs, only for primitive normative judgements, we would end up, as Ridge notes, with a familiar form of subjectivism. But if we so regard all normative judgements, primitive or otherwise, we will get something like the form of expressivism articulated in REASON. Here the solidification into judgement imposed by normative discipline can be understood in terms of ways in which the applicability of norms of stability, of commonality, of coherence and consistency to what are, in the first analysis, passions in our souls, end up, if the quasi-realist project in metaethics can be made to succeed, intelligibly construed also, in the final analysis, as truth-apt judgements capable of at least some forms of objectivity.[19]

      A still further concern about circularity is raised by Ridge when he is discussing the possibility of understanding primitive normative judgements as sharing a direction of fit with belief. In which case, like myself above, he is keen to be told what content these are supposed to have. The content of a given such judgement, he

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[17] Scanlon, this volume.

[18] All quotations from Ridge, this volume.

[19] See Gibbard 1990, part III.

observes, better not be just that it withstands scrutiny from the standpoint of other normative judgements or the account will be circular. Street herself has briefly aired the possibility that we might understand primitive normative judgements as referring to sui generis normative properties. This, she recognizes, would commit her to an error theory about primitive normative judgements[20] and Ridge is surely right to judge that there would be little prospect of containing our scepticism to this level. If the raw materials are rotten so, inevitably, will be whatever we can make from them.[21] Once again, an expressivist turn, taking the raw materials as desires, tames the problem nicely.

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Among constructivism's most energetic critics are Nadeem Hussain and Nishi Shah, notably in their 2006 paper, "Misunderstanding Metaethics". Here Hussain and Shah focus on the version of constructivism defended by Christine Korsgaard. Their principle objection to Korsgaard is that she seems to suppose her constructivism is a metaethical view offering a genuine alternative to such familiar metaethical positions as nonreductive realism or expressivism. Thus consider Korsgaard's transcendental argument in *Sources of Normativity* that seeks to show us that we are rationally required to value our humanity.[22] Here Hussain and Shah protest, justly I think, that this doesn't really add up to a distinctive position in metaethics until we have been told what the devil this *valuing* is supposed to be. Is valuing my humanity a matter of *believing* something about it? If so, exactly *what* are we supposed to be believing when we value our humanity? Or it is some other kind of psychological orientation towards humanity, something perhaps like love? Whatever the answer, as long as it is missing, they deny that Korsgaard is in the business of metaethics at all.[23]

My own account as sketched here is not vulnerable to this charge. By marrying a form of constructivism to a form of expressivism I give an account that speaks to the semantic and metaphysical concerns of metaethics: on my expressivist account, normative judgements are taken to be a distinctive subspecies of desires. But that is not to say the constructivism bit is otiose and itself does no metaethical work. For the account of reason given by REASON helps us, I hope, to see part *at least of what is distinctive* about the distinctive subspecies. What does it tell us?

I think what it tells us is a bit complicated. REASON looks, to echo Street, like a highly formal, far from substantive, account of normativity. Which is sort of right. But REASON is *a bit* substantive and here's why. REASON takes normative judgements as a species of desire that is constitutively responsible to some standard of coherence in the light of other normative judgements. And normative judgements like that plausibly must be governed by some sort of very weak norm of what we might call *the unification of agency*. I stress the sort of thing I mean by this is very modest,

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[20] Street 2008, p. 241, note 55.

[21] Ridge, this volume. Dorsey, this volume, develops a similar proposal while seeking to avoid error theory by divorcing semantic content from truth in normative contexts. But his view still finishes by taking normative truth to be a matter of coherence among judgements that speak of nothing real. Perhaps it might make sense to characterize normative truth in this way but it is puzzling why, so characterized, we should take much interest in it.

[22] Korsgaard 1996.

[23] Hussain and Shah 2006. see esp. p. 274.

not a philosophical hat from which I propose suddenly to pull the categorical imperative. (I would never do that to my fellow Humeans.) It's simply a matter of how Neurathian boat repair works. We fix *this* bit of the boat buoyed up by the bits we fixed yesterday and last week. And this is possible, at least at the normative end of the analogy, only if we have some trust in and accord some authority to those other bits. Without some degree of normative community between myself now and at earlier times, without a degree of diachronic normative stability between my deliberating reflective self now and at earlier times, I doubt that normative thinking, as opposed to a much simpler kind of practical thought – *Jimmy want fish, Jimmy grab fish* – would get off the ground at all.[24]

Normative thought is deeply concerned with such unification. The form of constructivism I'm defending takes seriously the idea that we should see normative questions as addressed to distinctively practical as opposed to theoretical problems. The fundamental practical problem to which normative thought is addressed is that of *conflict*. I have many many desires and often they pull me in conflicting directions. The way I, like all human beings, solve this problem, is by reflection, by reflecting critically on my desires and seeking to distil from the chaos of brute first order desires a far less chaotic body of desires I reflectively endorse and so stand ready wholeheartedly to promote to the status of intentions or plans. The idea is that this body of reflectively sanctioned desires can, if I do my normative thinking right, be made to cohere, as the chaotic mass of raw wants from which it emerges does not cohere. (That is why Gary Watson's famous question – What's so special about second order desires? – is not in fact so hard to answer. [25])[26]

In order then to be in the game of normative thought at all, I need to be in the business of seeking to unify my agency. And as well as unification playing some such *de jure* role in my thought, my playing the game at all also requires at least a minimal level of *de facto* unification, in particular, as I just urged, some minimal degree of diachronic stability of normative response and judgement. But here I stress again all this is *very* minimal. The unity of agency required to count as a maker of normative judgements at all is fantastically modest. So modest that, to all practical intents and purposes, it is highly appropriate to think of REASON, following Street as a formal rather than substantive constructivist account of reasons. So we are a long way from Rawls – with whom we began - and a long way from Scanlon. A long way from those philosophers rich and impressive accounts of the workings of moral or political justification.

7.

But not *such* a long way. Take a look at this:

MORALITY: To call a consideration C a moral reason in favour of someone's φ-ing is to favour that consideration guiding our deliberation and action in furtherance of concerns, desires and aims to which it speaks in virtue of the

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[24] Cf. Gibbard 1990, chapter 9. See also Lenman 2011.
[25] See Watson 1975. And cf. Bratman 2004.
[26] This paragraph recapitulates thoughts aired in Lenman 2007, section III. Cf, Lenman 2009.

fact that we might all, insofar as we are reasonable, agree in endorsing it and them as able to withstand scrutiny in the light of our other reasons.[27]

Here *my* reasons have become *our* reasons. I like REASON as a theory of reasons and I rather like MORALITY as a theory of moral reasons. MORALITY embodies, among other things, a particular view of moral epistemology that regards moral inquiry as the pursuit of the kinds of normative commonalities needed to make life together as a well-functioning moral community possible for us, a view that puts what we can justify *to others* at central stage.

It is sometimes asked to what is moral theorizing responsible in the way scientific theorizing is to empirical observation. The question is hard and the standard answer, intuition, is of course notorious in its feebleness unless we can find a lot more to say. I like this rather different answer. *My* moral theorizing is responsible to, well, to *you*, provided only you are willing to engage with me in reasonable ways. And likewise to everyone else with whom I share a social world and seek to live in some kind of normative community, including my own later selves. Intuitions are important here all right but they're not best understood as beliefs about some independent order of moral facts. Rather they are a sort of desires. I have a strong intuition that torture is wrong. I really do, but the best way of understanding what that means is just that I am deeply unwilling to accept as a set of moral norms governing the society where I live any such set that permits torture.[28] If you want to live in moral community with me, you have to deal with that fact. It sits there on the table of our codeliberations and there it stays till you are able to persuade me to remove it. This pursuit of normative agreement takes many forms, from the relatively rough and tumble, messy business we call *politics* to the, at least in aspiration, more careful and rigorous business that we call *moral philosophy*. It's a difficult business and one that can go badly wrong. When it goes badly wrong we shouldn't see that as a case of failing to find something out we needed to discover but as a distinctively political catastrophe where our urgent aim of arriving at a shared set of moral understandings we are all willing to live with has failed.[29]

Contrast this picture of moral epistemology with a more robustly realist alternative, naturalist or otherwise, according to which the relevant enterprise is simply one of finding stuff out. On that rival Platonist view, moral epistemology is, much as you might expect, a distinctive part of metaethics. But on my account, that isn't so. On my account, moral epistemology is, to a great extent, not part of metaethics at all. Thus when I say my moral theorizing is responsible to you and to others, I am not engaged in metaethics but simply moralizing though I believe I am moralizing well. On this account, moral epistemology turns out to be, in Mackie's terms[30], an almost wholly first-order enterprise, one about which, at the level of second-order metaethical theorizing, there is really precious little to say.

That is very much in the spirit of the expressivist project. Back in the 1980s, Blackburn, famously, took on one of the great challenges for an expressivist metaethics, the challenge of explaining how, on an expressivist account, morality could be mind-independent, and tamed it by effectively taking it away from

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[27] Who is included in "we" here is of course a large question but I do not address it here.
[28] Cf. Lenman 2007.
[29] Cf. Lenman 2010, section, 2.
[30] Mackie 1977, p. 16.

metaethics altogether. The mind-independence of moral value, he urged, is a matter of regular first order normative ethical theory. A virtuous normative sensibility is one that takes the answers to normative questions as responsible to facts that are, at least usually and for the most part, not facts about that sensibility itself. If I thought the wrongness of torture depended on me and could be undercut simply by my changing my mind about it, that would be a disastrously bad way for me to think about torture.[31]

Another challenge for expressivism is to tell a credible story about moral epistemology. I think the kind of first-order moral constructivism articulated by Rawls and others suggests a beautifully credible way to answer to this question. But that answer is part of normative ethics and is moralized through and through. So the appearance of normative concepts on the right hand side of MORALITY is no objection to it. Nor is moral constructivism the only available answer. Instead of joining with you in the search for moral understandings we can all accept, I might propose that others simply defer to my superior wisdom, offering, if need be, to secure your deference by coercive means. There are extraordinarily good moral reasons to reject that understanding in favour of its constructivist alterative but expressivism as a metaethical theory says nothing against it. The reasons in question are substantive moral reasons, not part of metaethics. At a strictly positive level, as opposed to the business of criticizing rival accounts, the right story for an expressivist metaethics, *as such*, to tell about moral epistemology is: no story at all.

Constructivism, if MORALITY is a form of constructivism. is a story about how moral justification is possible without reference to what Rawls calls: "the search for moral truth interpreted as fixed by a prior and independent order of objects and relations, whether natural or divine, an order apart and distinct from how we conceive of ourselves". As such it coheres beautifully with the anti-realist moral metaphysics we expressivists like. It offers us a credible and attractive story to tell about how moral epistemology might work. This story, like Blackburn's story of mind-independence, is itself no part of metaethics even though, again like that other story, it addresses a challenge that arises within metaethics. So expressivists need constructivism. Expressivism, in turn, offers answers to questions about how the actions and utterances in which we make and express judgements about reason and values make good philosophical sense, questions which, as Hussain and Shah have urged and as we saw ourselves discussing Street, constructivism, as such, offers little help. So constructivists need expressivism.[32]

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[31] Blackburn 1984, pp. 217-220.
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