The Failures of Mainstream Solutions to the Problem of Creeping Minimalism

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Abstract

Many meta-ethical theorists have proposed solutions to 'the problem of Creeping Minimalism', i.e., the problem that expressivism appears to lose its distinctiveness relative to realism when expressivists adopt minimalism. In this paper, I categorise potential solutions to the problem of Creeping Minimalism into three types: to reject minimalism outright, to accept minimalism in part, and to reinterpret expressivism within a global minimalist semantics. Mainstream solutions in the literature fall into the third category. I argue that those solutions fail for the same reason. That is, the semantics in which they reinterpret expressivism is not minimalist. Those solutions will collapse once we adopt a minimalist approach to essential notions, such as explanation, representation, and truth-making. My conclusion is thus that, so far, mainstream solutions to the problem of Creeping Minimalism by reinterpreting expressivism within a global minimalist semantics have failed, and it is unlikely that a successful solution of the same type will be forthcoming.

1 Introduction

In his (2004) 'Meta-Ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism', James Dreier introduced the problem of Creeping Minimalism (PCM) as being an apparent

'breakdown' between a variety of moral non-cognitivism – that is, modern expressivism – and moral realism.[1] In short, as Dreier describes it, PCM occurs when moral expressivists such as Simon Blackburn (1993) and Allan Gibbard (2003) adopt a minimalist account of notions such as truth and fact to vindicate moral language. Expressivism seems to lose its distinctiveness relative to moral realism in a global minimalist semantics in which minimalism about notions such as truth-aptness and belief is adopted. That is because once minimalism is adopted, expressivists can make almost all meta-ethical statements that realists make.

PCM has been widely discussed in recent meta-ethics literature. Of course, one may take a 'So what?' attitude and/or think it is not significant for expressivism to distinguish itself from realism.[2] Among those who believe the problem must be solved or at least explained away, potential responses can be categorised into three types based on their attitudes towards minimalism.

Type I responses are suggested by those who attempt to avoid the problem by rejecting minimalism altogether. Specifically, expressivists have at least three ways to do so. The first is to provide alternative solutions to expressivism that accommodate moral language, which are overall better than those provided by adopting minimalism.[3] The second is to provide some independent reasons to reject minimalism, sufficiently telling that expressivism would be worse off by accepting minimalism, even if it provides the best solution for expressivism to accommodate moral language. The third is to bite the bullet and maintain that expressivism and minimalism are incompatible, so expressivists must reject minimalism regardless of how well it serves expressivists.[4]

Type II responses are suggested by those who attempt to avoid the problem by adopting a partial acceptance of minimalism. That is, expressivists may avoid the problem by accepting minimalist concepts that facilitate accommodation, such as

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[1] Dreier 2004, p. 25.
[2] See, for example, Golub 2021, who claims that minimalism can be used as a tool to consolidate realism and expressivism.
[3] For example, a logic of attitude is a candidate for such approach, see Blackburn 1971, 1984.
[4] Such view can be bought from Boghossian 1990, Wright 1992, and Divers and Miller 1994, who have argued that minimalism about truth is incompatible with expressivism.

minimalism about truth, property, and facts, while rejecting those that blur the distinction between expressivism and realism, such as minimalism about truth-aptness, beliefs, and representation. Exactly at which halfway point to stop the trend of minimalism is often up to which notion is decided to be essential to the distinction by the expressivist.[5]

Type III responses are suggested by those who attempt to solve PCM by reinterpreting expressivism within a global minimalist semantics. It is suggested that expressivists should accept minimalism as a whole package and invoke further concepts to constitute a new demarcation between expressive and non-expressive discourses. Some representative examples of those concepts are the explanatory and non-explanatory roles of facts and beliefs in a discourse;[6] the representational and non-representational roles of beliefs in a discourse;[7] the inferential and practical roles of statements in a discourse;[8] and the different kinds of truth-makers for core statements in a discourse.[9] Mainstream attempts in the literature to solve the problem belong to type III.

In this paper, my focus is on type III solutions. I provide rejections to all the type III solutions above to show that none of them is satisfactory on account of not meeting two criteria at the same time: (a) being fully consistent with a global minimalist semantics and (b) saving the substantive discriminative power of expressivism between expressive and non-expressive discourses. Moreover, I show why it is systematically difficult for any type III solutions to meet (a) and (b) simultaneously. The conclusion I reach is that, so far, mainstream solutions to PCM that reinterpret expressivism within a global minimalist semantics fail. It is also unlikely that a successful solution of the same type will be forthcoming.

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[5] See, for example of type II responses, Blackburn 2007, Gibbard 2015, who claim that a substantive notion of representation is needed for a substantive demarcation of expressivism.
[6] Dreier 2004, 2018.
[7] Simpson 2018.
[8] Chrisman 2008.
[9] Asay 2013.

2 Success Criteria

Before discussing the specific theories, I shall briefly set the criteria for a successful solution. According to Christine Tiefensee, a natural thought would be that for any theory to be a successful type III solution to PCM, it must:

> (1) save the meta-ethical difference between moral expressivism and non-expressivism;

> (2) preserve the distinct features of those meta-ethical accounts within a global minimalist semantics in terms of the reinterpreted theories being acceptable to genuine moral expressivists or non-expressivists if they accept such a global minimalist semantics.[10]

Obviously, (1) seems important as it is what those solutions are up to; (2) also seems important because reinterpreting expressivism and realism within a global minimalist semantics should not misinterpret those theories. No matter how semantically different from ordinary expressivism and realism, the resulting interpretations should be acceptable to their genuine believers.

However, there are several concerns about the above criteria. Regarding (1), it would be more helpful for the type III solutions to save the discriminative power of expressivism between realist and anti-realist (expressivist) discourses than merely the meta-ethical difference between expressivism and realism, so that the essential purpose of expressivism as a meta-theory is preserved.[11] And the new interpretation of the discriminative power of expressivism needs to be non-trivial, i.e., not just about the different subject matters of those discourses.

Regarding (2), we need to preclude the scenario that the reinterpretation of either

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[10] Tiefensee 2016, p. 2439.
[11] The term 'anti-realist discourse' refer to the discourses, such as ethics, that are deemed substantively different from the paradigm 'realist' ones, such as physics, by the expressivists. In this paper, from the perspective of expressivism, the terms 'anti-realist discourse' and 'expressivist discourse' are used interchangeably.

expressivism or non-expressivism is necessarily false in a global minimalist semantics. In other words, the new interpretation must allow space for genuine disagreement between sincere moral expressivists and realists. However, (2) seems too weak to guarantee such space since it could be the case that some genuine expressivists refuse to accept a global minimalist semantics. And since they do not accept minimalist semantics in the first place, it would be trivial to say that if they accept such a semantics, they would count the reinterpreted expressivism as acceptable, which would deem (2) trivially satisfied. Another concern regarding (2) is that the reinterpretation of the demarcation between realist and anti-realist discourses within a global minimalist semantics may be acceptable to expressivists, but they would not regard it as a demarcation *from the perspective of expressivism*. Or, in other words, the reinterpretation within a global minimalist semantics might no longer appear to be expressivism.

And finally, but also most importantly, it should be added that the reinterpretation of expressivism must be consistent with a global minimalist semantics. All essential notions in the reinterpretation must be understood with their minimalist concepts. In this paper, I use the following definition of minimalism as a guideline for what counts as a minimalist concept:

> *Minimalist Concept* (MC): C is a minimalist concept of a thing, T, iff (1), C proposes minimal requirements for a thing to be identified as T; (2) C is extracted only from the common platitudes about T (or platitudinous use of the term 'T'), and C carries no *further* commitment, especially no 'metaphysically heavyweight' commitment; and (3), anything that is not mentioned as being essential for being T in C is denied as being essential for being T by C.

Hence, I propose a slightly different characterisation of the requirements for successful type III solutions:

> *Success Criteria* (SC): (SC1), be fully consistent with a minimalist semantics in which all concepts that play essential roles in distinguishing between expressive and non-expressive discourses must

be minimalist according to MC; (SC2), save the substantive discriminative power of expressivism between realist and anti-realist discourses; (SC3) a solution would be more preferable if it allows genuine disagreement between expressivists and non-expressivists, and such disagreement is relevant from the perspective of expressivism.

(SC1) and (SC2) are essential for determining whether a type III solution is viable, and it would be preferable if it also satisfies (SC3). As we will see, none of the mainstream type III solutions satisfies both (SC1) and (SC2), even if we allow some violations of (SC3). In the following, I will demonstrate this by examining four representative instances of type III solutions mentioned in the introduction, namely the 'explanation' explanation, the representational explanation, inferentialism, and the truth-making theory.

3 The 'Explanation' Explanation

Dreier (2004) seeks to address PCM and preserve the demarcation through a new interpretation of expressivism.[12] His solution is a coalition of suggestions from O'Leary-Hawthorne and Price, Fine, and Gibbard.[13] The synthetic theory, or *the 'explanation' explanation* as Dreier calls it, focuses on in virtue of what it is true to say of someone that she has a certain kind of belief. That is, an account of what belief of a realist kind consists in appeals only to facts and properties in that realist discourse. In contrast, an account of what belief of an anti-realist (expressivist) kind consists in does not appeal to facts and properties of that anti-realist discourse. Moreover, expressivism also includes the claim that expressions in an anti-realist discourse have a special functional role that constitutes their being expressions in that discourse. Expressivism should be recognised as a meta-theory that demarcates anti-realist from realist discourses by the claim that to explain what it is to make a statement in an anti-realist discourse, we need not mention any properties special to that discourse.

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[12] Dreier 2004.
[13] O'Leary-Hawthorne and Price 1996; Fine 2001; Gibbard 2003.

For example, consider a statement where a moral statement is embedded in:

(A) John says that stealing is wrong.

If moral discourse is realist, then the explanation of what makes (A) true is supposed to be

(A*) (Realist) Its being the case that (A) consists in nothing more than that there is a relation of stating between John and the putative moral fact that stealing is wrong.

If moral discourse is anti-realist, then

(A*) (Anti-Realist) Its being the case that (A) consists in nothing more than that John expressed an (emotion-related) attitude towards stealing.

According to Dreier, the demarcation between realist and anti-realist discourses is thus preserved by what constitutively explains the meaning of essential terms in a discourse. If moral discourse is anti-realist, then although there are moral facts and properties in the minimal sense, moral judgements are not true *because of them*. In other words, moral facts and properties do not do any constitutive explanatory work.[14]

An immediate problem of the 'explanation' explanation, observed by Chrisman, is its failure to consider false moral beliefs.[15] According to the 'explanation' explanation, moral realists believe that what constitutes a moral belief is a relation between believers and moral facts. Chrisman argues that this cannot be true when moral beliefs are false. When a moral belief is false, there is no such moral fact whose relationship with the believer constitutes that belief. Hence, the demarcation drawn by the 'explanation' explanation can only apply to judgements in expressive discourses and

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[14] Dreier 2004, p, 40.
[15] Chrisman 2008.

true judgements in realist discourses.[16]

Chrisman argues that the only way to solve this problem is for the 'explanation' explanation to appeal to representation. Accordingly, the distinction between realist and anti-realist discourses is that beliefs in realist discourses are representational, while beliefs in anti-realist discourses are not. However, presupposing a substantive distinction between representational and non-representational mental states is inconsistent with minimalism about mental representation.[17] Chrisman suggests that this is surely a problem for the 'explanation' explanation approach since Dreier has already rejected using a substantive concept of representation to protect the discriminative power of expressivism, for the concept of representation is 'open to the imperialist aspirations of creeping minimalism'.[18]

A minimalist concept of semantic representation with MC as a conceptualisation guideline can be formed as such:

> *Minimalism about Semantical Representation*: R is a semantic representational relation between a sentence, S, and a putative fact, F, iff S has a declarative form and R_{SF} determines the appropriate and inappropriate conditions for asserting S.

And mental representation as such:

> *Minimalism about Mental Representation*: R is a mental representational relation between a mental state, M, of an agent, *a*, and a putative fact, F, iff R_{MF} determines a propositional attitude of *a*.

For example, the propositional attitude, 'John believes that stealing is wrong' (to be understood under the expressivist's interpretation), if it is true, is representational since it represents the fact that stealing is wrong; 'John believes not killing innocent

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[16] Chrisman 2008, p. 348.
[17] Ibid, p. 349.
[18] Ibid.

babies just for fun is obligatory', if it is false, is representational since it represents the putative fact that not killing innocent babies just for fun is obligatory. Within a global minimalist semantics, there is no such thing as a non-representational propositional attitude. Minimalism about representation thus trivialises the demarcation made by 'explanation', which appeals to a substantive concept of representation.

Beyond Chrisman's objection, another serious problem for the 'explanation' explanation approach is that it does not survive global minimalist semantics as it stands, particularly in minimalist accounts of explanation. A minimalist concept of explanation can be extracted from the common platitudes of the term. Since the notion of explanation is essential to many mainstream type III solutions, it should be carefully examined how a minimalist view of explanation should be formulated. In the following, I will conceptualise such a view by drawing on relevant platitudes and MC.

At first glance, some principles may appear to be common platitudes about explanation. Those include diachronicity, non-circularity and 'information asymmetry'. Diachronicity is the principle that in an explanatory relation, the explanans must happen before the explanandum. Non-circularity is the principle that in an explanatory relation, the explanandum cannot be the explanans of its explanans or further explanans in the explanatory chain. 'Information asymmetry' is the principle that in an explanatory relation, the explanans must contain information not completely implied by the explanandum. When examined carefully, those principles may be required for certain kinds of explanatory relations, but none is required in general. This is elaborated in the following.

Diachronicity seems to be a necessary condition of explanatory relations in many discourses where the explanatory relation is taken to be a causal relation: that is, the explanans must be either the maximally specific causal history or part of the causal history of the explanandum for there to be, respectively, a complete or partial explanatory relation. Discourses in which diachronicity is essential for some explanatory relations include chemistry, economics, and pharmacokinetics. However, in many other discourses, diachronicity is not a requirement for explanatory relations. Consider the following explanations: Alan is a bachelor because he is unmarried; the

chair is red because it is cardinal; my computer exists because of the existence and arrangement of all its proper parts. In these cases, the explanans and explanandum are obviously synchronic. One might think that none of the above is a 'genuine' explanation. However, this is just to say that the presumptively legitimate explanatory claims essential in metaphysics, logic, mathematics, and many everyday interlocutions are all false. Diachronicity is not how the explanatory relation is used in those mainstream discourses. This shows that while the principle of diachronicity may be necessary for a proposition to be explanatory in discourses such as pharmacology, it is not necessary in discourses such as ontology.

Non-circularity is widely accepted as a principle of explanatory relations. It is the denial that in a chain of explanation, one of the temporally latter parts could explain one of the temporally former parts. However, in radical cases of certain discourses, we sometimes take relations that violate this requirement as explanatory. One example is within metaphysics about time. It is widely believed that modern physics permits backward time travel. If that is true, then a causal loop is arguably possible. A causal loop is a phenomenon where, in a sequence of events, an event is among the causes of another event, which in turn is among the causes of the first-mentioned event. In a causal loop, every event can be seen as a cause of every other event, even a cause of itself, because every event is in the causal history of every event. If we take causal relation as explanatory, then non-circularity is violated in a discourse where a causal loop is possible.

Another example is from the flagpole scenario. On a sunny day, the flagpole casts a shadow on the ground. Using mathematical instruments, given the exact time, we can calculate both the length of the flagpole given the length of the shadow and the length of the shadow given the length of the flagpole. The question is whether the length of the flagpole on a sunny day explains the length of its shadow, or the length of its shadow explains the length of the flagpole. In this case, it seems plausible to argue that the outcome of the length of a flagpole is *mathematically* explained by the length of its shadow and the angle of the sunlight. At the same time, it also seems plausible to argue that the length of the flagpole optically explains the length of the shadow cast by a flagpole. If we take both relations as explanatory, the principle of non-circularity is violated. Again, this shows that a principle of explanatory relation is held in some

discourses and contexts but not others.

'Information asymmetry' might be considered a necessary condition of explanatory relations in discourses like natural science. This is because scientific explanations are often connected to natural laws, and, as generalisations, natural laws, as part of the explanans, normally contain more information than single events, which are often the explanandum. However, if understood this way, 'information asymmetry' is not required for an explanatory relation of deductive inference, especially in discourses like logic or mathematics. If we take logical arguments as expressing logical explanations, the explanans often contains no more information than the explanandum in a logical explanatory relation. For example, from a premise, A, and a premise, B, we conclude A & B. The truth of the explanandum A & B is explained by the truth of explanans A and the truth of explanans B. But arguably, the truth of A and the truth of B contain no more information than the information contained in the truth of A & B. That is, while the principle of 'information asymmetry' may be required for a physical explanation, it is not necessarily required for a logical explanation.

This is not to say that an explanation can be *uninformative* or *non-illuminating*, since a deductive inference can still be informative and illuminating in various discourses and contexts. The term 'information' here refers to what Rudolf Carnap calls 'semantic information', which is the information carried in a statement for an 'ideal' receiver, a receiver who has the perfect sense of logical and mathematical knowledge; by contrast, statements that express mathematical and logical truths may certainly contain large amounts of 'psychological information' for a person in a certain context.[19] When it is claimed that scientific explanations must exhibit information asymmetry, it is plausible to assume that the term 'information' refers to semantic information. And this is certainly not a requirement for a statement to be explanatory in many other discourses.

There seems to be a pattern here: a principle of explanatory relations that appears plausible in one discourse might not hold in another. In different discourses, we have

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[19] Carnap and Bar-Hillel 1954, p. 3. For a more detailed discussion of this view, see Barwise 1997.

different principles to account for whether an explanatory relation is legitimate in that discourse. Yet there seems to be no general principle regarding what should be counted as an explanation, except the mundane platitudes that an explanation needs to be 'informative', 'illuminating' and, of course, 'explanatory'.[20] Or, in other words, there might be perfectly recognised principles to decide whether a relation is of a certain kind of explanation – say, mathematical, scientific explanation, and so on – while there seem to be far fewer recognised principles to decide whether a relation is explanatory simpliciter.

In meta-discourses, we prefer to be neutral regarding terminologies that are variously conceptualised in different first-level discourses, so much so that the reasons for demarcation will not be completely ad hoc – for example, 'mathematical judgements cannot play any explanatory role because they are not part of the causal history of any event'. Hence, we need to conceptualise a neutral concept of explanation derived solely from relevant platitudes. I believe the closest candidate in the literature is van Fraassen's pragmatism of explanation.[21]

To be brief, the pragmatism of (scientific) explanation is the idea that explanation is simply an application of scientific theories that aims to provide descriptive information to answer a certain kind of why-question: the why-question in which a presumed fact is contrasted with alternatives. Explanation is therefore identified with answers to those why-questions. But if an explanation is an answer, it is evaluated by the questioner, who requests the information, since exactly what is requested varies across contexts. In more detail, according to van Fraassen, a why-question, Q, in the form of 'Why-P_k?', is identified by three factors: its *topic*, P_k; a *contrast-class*, X; and the respect-in-which a reason is requested: that is, what counts as explanatorily relevant, R. Hence,

Q: 'Why-P_k?' = <P_k, X, R>

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[20] And platitudes for an explanation to be good or better than its alternative, are those such as being clear, being simple, and so on.
[21] Van Fraassen 1980.

In the set $< P_k, X, R>$, the topic, P_k, is a proposition about which Q requests information. The truth of P_k is implied by the questioner asking for a reason for P_k. The contrast class, X, is a set that contains propositions including exactly P_k and all relevant alternatives to P_k: $X = \{P_1, \ldots, P_k, \ldots\}$. And Q implies that P_k is the only true proposition in X. The explanatory relevance indicator, R, determines what shall count as a possible explanatory factor. A proposition is called *relevant* to Q iff it bears relation R to the couple $< P_k, X>$. Both X and R are highly contextually dependent.[22]

Van Fraassen's pragmatic account aims to provide a logic of explanation for his constructivist empiricism of scientific discourses. Its focus is primarily on *scientific explanation*. Those searching for a neutral concept of explanation, one that is extracted only from general platitudes so that it admits explanations in the maximum range of discourses as explanatory, may think that there are various kinds of why-questions whose adequate answers also provide explanations. For example, adequate answers to the following kinds of why-questions can be considered explanatory: *contrast, challenge,* and *comprehension*.

Contrast why-questions are the kind considered in van Fraassen's logic of why-questions. A contrast why-question, 'Why-P_k?' is logically equivalent to a question 'Why-P_k, rather than $P_1, \ldots, P_n$?', where P_k and $P_1, \ldots, P_n$ are members of a contrast class, X. The questioner presupposes the truth of P_k, and the falsity of $P_1, \ldots, P_n$. A direct answer to a contrast why-question is often in the form of 'P_k in contrast with the rest of X because of A', where A favours P_k over other members of X. And one way to evaluate an answer to a contrast question is to see, besides whether A is true, whether A favours P_k to a great extent.

Challenge why-questions are those that request information to support the truth of a proposition. A challenge why-question, 'Why-P?', is logically equivalent to a question, 'Why is it true that P?' (and, of course, that is established and consistent with minimalism about truth). The questioner does not presuppose the truth of P, the falsity of not-P, or that there is at least one correct answer. A direct answer to a

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[22] Ibid., pp. 141–3.

challenge why-question is often in the form of an argument or proof, with P as its conclusion. But not every why-question with an answer in the form of an argument is a challenge why-question. The presuppositions of the why-question mainly determine the categorisation. One way to evaluate an answer to a challenge why-question is to see, in addition to whether the premises in the argument provided are true, whether that argument is valid, or whether the presumptive truth of its premises raises the probability of P to a great extent.

Comprehension why-questions request information to help understand or make sense of a proposition. A comprehension why-question, 'Why-P?' is logically equivalent to the question 'How did P happen?'. The questioner may presuppose the truth of P, but does not have to presuppose the falsity of any alternative to P, or identify the relevant classes of the alternatives to P, since they do not have to know what an alternative to P would be. A direct answer to a comprehension why-question is often in the form of a series of events with P as its end or a mechanism with P as its function. But not every why-question with an answer in the form of a series of events is a comprehension why-question. The categorisation, again, is mainly determined by the presuppositions of the why-question. One way to evaluate an answer to a comprehension why-question is to determine whether the events in the series are all true and whether this series of events helps the questioner understand or make sense of P.

All three kinds of why-questions request explanatory information, but their explanatorily relevant answers need not take a single form. According to the pragmatic account of explanation, the legitimacy of an answer to a why-question is not determined by the concept of why-question or explanation, but by the context in which the question is raised. Of course, there could be other kinds of why-questions, or even how-questions, whose adequate answers are explanatory.[23] As explanation is not limited to adequate answers to contrast why-questions, we may mildly modify van Fraassen's account and define the desired concept of explanation – one which is neutral to specific discourses and extracted only from the general platitudes – in the following way. Let us call it 'minimalism about explanation'.

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[23] See Bromberger 1966; Cross 1991.

Minimalism about Explanation: P is an explanation for an agent, *a*, in some contexts, C, of a proposition or a presumptive fact, Q, iff P is an adequate answer to the question 'Why Q?' for *a* in C.

According to the concept of explanation, there is no 'objective and fundamental explanation' to any proposition or presumptive fact. To evaluate whether an answer to a why-question is adequate and thus explanatory, we must include the consideration of the context and agent involved. Of course, there are various supplementary principles regarding whether a relation is 'X-explanatory' in an 'X-discourse'. Different criteria can be applied to adjudicate whether an explanation is good or bad across contexts and discourses. Such criteria may certainly include diachronicity, non-circularity and 'information asymmetry'.[24]

Now, the concerns of demarcation between realist and anti-realist discourses made by the 'explanation' explanation using the phrases 'consists in nothing but', 'in virtue of what it is true' and 'gives the most fundamental reason' comes down to one question: what is this kind of explanation wanted by 'explanation' explanation? If it means the unique explanation, then this concept is inconsistent with minimalism about explanation. And if it means a special sort of explanation, then it seems difficult to maintain a substantive demarcation based on this concept.

On the one hand, according to minimalism about explanation, there is no such thing as a unique explanation of any proposition. Adequate answers to a why-question about the truth of a proposition vary from context to context and from the perspective of one agent to another. And there could be various sets of virtues in various discourses to

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[24] It is intentional that this concept of explanation allows both explanans and explanandum in an explanatory relation to be false. That is because a minimalist concept of T is meant to contain minimal general requirements for a thing to be identified as T and is thus maximally inclusive. As long as in legitimate discourses false propositions are sometimes explained, or a proposition is explained by something that is false, then those cases should not be excluded by a minimalist concept of explanation. Here is an example. A family dog, Pop, died. The parents told their child that the dog had gone to an animal retirement home. The child asks, 'why doesn't Pop want to come visit us anymore?' And her mother replies, 'because Pop is happy in her new home'. Both explanans and explanandum in this conversation are false, yet the relation is still explanatory, as the answer is an adequate answer to the why-question for the child.

count an explanation as good or bad. But in any sense, adequate answers to a why-question regarding the truth of propositional attitude reports such as (A) must be multiple, as there is more than one angle from which to seek illuminating answers about (A) for different agents in different contexts. It thus makes little sense to appeal to the concept of unique explanation in a global minimalist semantics.

On the other hand, if the explanation wanted by 'explanation' explanation theory is just a special sort of explanation, then it does not seem to be able to maintain a substantive demarcation. That is because, according to minimalism about explanation, in anti-realist discourses, statements can be explained by reference to their essential features, whereas in realist discourses, they can be explained by reference to something else.

According to the 'explanation' explanation, in an anti-realist discourse, the truth of core statements cannot be explained by reference to the essential properties and facts in that discourse on the most fundamental level. But as we have seen, within a global minimalist context, it is often even plausible to say, 'It is the case that a statement, p, consists in nothing but that p is true'; 'p is true in virtue of it being a fact that p'; 'the truth of p is explained by the fact that it is the case that p'. In those cases, the putative truth of the relevant proposition is certainly explained by reference to the essential properties and facts about that proposition.

And, of course, Fine and Gibbard do not merely want to say that the moral discourse is anti-realist because statements about moral beliefs can be explained by statements that do not appeal to moral properties. As Dreier points out, statements like 'John states that the moon is a quarter a million miles away' can also be explained by 'John shows his faith in scientific authority'.[25] Similarly, in some contexts, (A) can even be explained by 'John performed a speech act of the sort reported in (A)'.
The response of the 'explanation' explanation theorists is thus that the special kind of explanation they want to fill in (A*) is the 'fundamental explanation' of (A). The question then is: why is an explanation, say, 'That John states that stealing is wrong is

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[25] Drier 2004, p. 38.

true because John expressed his shame-related attitude toward stealing' more fundamental than, say, 'That John states that stealing is wrong is true because John expressed his belief of wrongness about stealing', or even, 'That John states that stealing is wrong is true because John indeed performs a speech act'?

If we adopt a minimalist account of explanation, it is clear that both count as explanatory. And if we bring in some criteria that adjudicate whether an explanation is good or bad, it is hard to say the former explanation is obviously 'better' than the latter (for example, the former may seem to provide more information, while the latter may seem to be more relevant). The only reason for the former to be more fundamental seems to be that the first explanation can be reduced to a psychological statement, then (we hope) to a neuro-scientific statement, and then (we hope) to a physical statement. But that is to say that an explanation is fundamental if it can be reduced to a physical statement. If that is true, then almost *every* discourse, except physics, will be deemed anti-realist,[26] assuming we can always find a way to give an explanation that is or can be reduced to a physical statement in that discourse without using the essential properties and facts of that discourse, and then claim that *that* explanation is the most fundamental. But that does not seem adequate and substantive discriminative power for any viable meta-theory, not least expressivism, since we have assigned fundamentality to physical statements for at least ad hoc reasons and then claimed that physical discourse is the only realist discourse.

Finally, could it make sense that the 'explanation' explanation requires a *complete* explanation? It does not seem plausible, either. If that is the case, then it is not even possible to fill in the blank of a sentence like (A*) since the expressivist cannot merely fill in the blank with an attitude of John. They also need a complete causal story of (A), among other things, and so does the realist.

But if 'consists in nothing but' only requires a partial explanation, then the following claim must be plausible:

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[26] Although this view might be compatible with some contemporary forms of naturalism (aka scientism), its advocates need to provide independent reasons for believing so.

(A*) (Realists) Its being the case that John said that stealing is wrong 'consists in nothing but' (partially because) that John expressed an (emotion-related/disapproval/etc.) attitude towards stealing, among other things.

(A*) (Expressivists) Its being the case that John said that stealing is wrong 'consists in nothing but' (partially because) that there is a relation of 'stating' between John and the fact that stealing is wrong, among other things.

Such results certainly undermine the demarcation that the theory of 'explanation' explanation attempts to make between realist and anti-realist discourses.

A rejoinder is that, even if a minimalist concept of explanation is adopted, the demarcation of the 'explanation' explanation may still hold. Specifically, this rejoinder suggests that in the context of meta-ethics, the only adequate answers to questions like 'in virtue of what is (A) true?' must be *meta-ethically explanatory*, and the 'explanation' explanation theory only demands that these answers are *meta-semantic*. In short, a semantic theory assigns semantic values to linguistic elements (words, sentences, etc.) in a discourse, whereas a meta-semantic theory explains why linguistic elements possess their specific semantic values in a discourse. Accordingly, original expressivism is a semantic theory that assigns psychological semantic values to linguistic elements in ethics, whereas neo-expressivism, such as quasi-realism, explains *why* linguistic elements in ethics possess the same semantic values as those in realist discourses for psychological reasons.

This rejoinder should be addressed by answering two questions. The first is: does meta-ethical discourse require a certain kind of answer to questions like 'In virtue of what is (A) true?' My answer to this question is that it is at least not obvious that only a certain kind of answer is adequate to meta-ethical questions. Meta-discourses, including meta-ethics, are disciplines that examine the nature of other discourses, such as ethics. A question like 'In virtue of what is (A) true?' could be answered from different perspectives when it is asked in a meta-discourse. For example, the adequate

answer could be neuro-scientific in a context where the questioner wants to know some neuro-scientific factors of having a moral discussion, such as 'it is the case that John said that stealing is wrong because of certain underlying brain processes of John involved in moral cognition, decision-making, and language production that contribute to the expression of his moral statement that stealing is wrong'. Such a neuro-scientific explanation, although not necessarily involving a meta-ethical theory per se, seems to be an explanation in a discussion about the nature of moral discourse. It is thus unclear exactly what is included in or excluded from a meta-ethical discourse.

The second question is: even if meta-discourse does require the discussion to be limited to a certain category, is meta-semantic explanation the only kind to be called explanation in meta-discourses? My answer to this question is certainly no, because if that were the case, the discussion of meta-ethics would be limited to a very narrow range. That is, for any why-questions about the nature of moral statements and complex statements where moral claims are embedded, meta-semantic explanations are the only explanations to give. I doubt if this is even a result the 'explanation' explanation theorists would want, after all, in that case, complex statements such as 'Why is it the case that if John believes that stealing is wrong, and he does not want to do anything wrong, then John does not want to steal' only have a meta-semantic explanation. That seems an implausible and unrealistic characterisation of meta-ethics, since meta-ethical discussions should, at a minimum, include logical, meta-philosophical, psychological, neuroscientific, semantic, and meta-semantic explanations of the relevant why-questions.

It then seems plausible to maintain that, within a global minimalist semantics at least, meta-ethical discourse does not require a particular kind of explanation of the truth of embedded moral statements, and even if meta-ethical explanation is restricted, its range should not be limited to meta-semantic explanation.

To summarise, the 'explanation' explanation fails to meet SC because it either cannot provide enough discriminative power within a global minimalist semantics, or adopts non-minimalist concepts such as 'unique explanation'. This dilemma is very similar to the one faced by expressivists who adopt minimalism in the first place. An obvious

reason for this similarity is that the discriminative power of the 'explanation' explanation also hinges on substantive concepts, such as unique or fundamental explanation, just as the discriminative power of expressivism hinges on substantive concepts, such as truth-aptness and belief.

4 The Representational Explanation

The next type III response to consider is the theory of representational explanation, developed by Matthew Simpson from the 'explanation' explanation.[27] Instead of distinguishing expressivism from realism about moral discourse, he suggests that we should distinguish expressivism from representationalism. According to Simpson, expressivism and representationalism are distinguished by whether the fact that someone is making a judgement in a discourse is to be explained by the speaker as representing the world or by doing something else. Of course, trivially, a speaker always represents some putative moral facts in her moral statements and beliefs. Still, it is not always the case that the representations play an explanatory role in the truth of those beliefs and statements.[28]

Accordingly, from the perspective of expressivism, the difference between realist and anti-realist discourses is that in a realist discourse, the explanation of the fact that someone is making a judgement in a discourse is that the speaker is representing the world. In contrast, in an anti-realist discourse, the explanation of such facts is something else. For example, if asked to explain the fact that John makes a Judgement 'Stealing is wrong', realists about moral discourse will answer that the fact should be explained properly by the fact that John represents the world with the statement 'Stealing is wrong'. On the opposite side, moral expressivists will answer, the fact that John makes a Judgement 'Stealing is wrong', if it is true, should not be explained by a representational relation but by things like 'the speaker expresses his hatred towards thieving'. Thus, the distinction between representational and expressive discourses is that a representational relation explains the fact of a speaker making a

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[27] Simpson 2018.
[28] Ibid., pp. 517-518.

Judgement in a representational discourse, whereas the explanation of the same fact in an expressive discourse cannot be a representational relation.[29]

According to Dreier, an obvious problem for the representational explanation is that the demarcation is between discourses that adopt minimalist and substantive concepts, rather than between realist and anti-realist discourses, at least from the perspective of expressivism.[30] If a minimalist concept of representation forbids representational relations and properties from carrying explanatory weight, then the representational explanation counterintuitively counts discourses about anything that adopt minimalist concepts of truth and representation as anti-realist. That is certainly not the kind of demarcation line we are looking for – or not, at least, the kind that expressivists want to draw.

One response Simpson may give is that a minimalist concept of representation does not forbid representational relations and properties from carrying explanatory weight, at least not according to MC. Hence, it is possible to reinterpret the demarcation between expressive and non-expressive discourses based on whether representation relations play an explanatory role. However, although the discriminative power of representational explanation may not fall prey to *minimalism about representation*, it does not survive a global minimalist semantics. I will show why this is so very shortly.

The second problem Dreier raises is that it is difficult to deem any discourse realist under the representational explanation.[31] For example, if, in a discourse, some Judgement is 'properly' explained by some causal relation, but not a representational relation, then that discourse would be counterintuitively counted as anti-realist. A mundane example of such a discourse is chemistry. For instance, the fact that Linda believes that an explosion happened in Mr Black's experiment of hydrogen burning is explained (partially) by the causal relation between the fact that Mr Black forgot to test the purity of the hydrogen before he ignited the gas, and the fact that an explosion

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Dreier 2018, p. 539.
[31] Ibid.

happened in Mr Black's experiment of hydrogen burning. Such an explanation is both a proper explanation within an arguably realist discourse and unrelated to the relation of mental representation. Even if we focus on the explanation of the mental states, it can still be explained properly by a causal relation between the fact that Linda was at the scene when Mr Black's flask exploded and the fact that Linda believes that an explosion happened in Mr Black's experiment of hydrogen burning.

This problem runs deeper and is similar to the second problem in Dreier's own 'explanation' explanation. That is, the representational explanation theory may survive minimalism about representation, but it does not survive minimalism about explanation. Simpson thinks that realists about a discourse would maintain that we should explain the fact of a speaker making judgements in terms of the representational relation between the speaker and the world. However, this normative distinction collapses under minimalism about explanation. That is because the representational story is not the only adequate explanation that moral realists can offer, and the non-representational story is not the only adequate explanation that moral anti-realists can offer. This is the case even when restrictions, such as 'the most fundamental', 'metaphysically heavyweight', and 'carve nature at the joints', are added to the term 'explanation'.

Within a global minimalist semantics, a moral realist will allow that the fact that John truthfully believes/judges 'stealing is wrong' is partly because everybody hates thieves (if it is true), if this is an appropriate answer to the question 'Why does John believe stealing is wrong?' for some agent at some time in some context. An example is a context in which there is convergence that a behaviour is morally wrong in a community if everyone in the community hates that behaviour, and the questioned agent knows that the questioner believes that stealing is wrong, without knowing that everyone in her community hates stealing. In such a context, it would be appropriate for the questioned to answer, 'John truthfully believes that stealing is wrong because everyone hates thieves', even if the discourse is in fact non-expressive.

Similarly, expressivists will allow that the fact that John judges 'stealing is wrong', partly because John represents the world with the Judgement, if this is an appropriate answer for some agent at some time in some context, although this is not the only

explanation they can give. An example is a context in which the questioner is taught by the questioned about the representational relation between facts, agents presenting those facts, and their Judgements/beliefs, and the questioner becomes confused by the example involving moral Judgements. In such a context, it would be appropriate for the questioned to answer, 'John believes that stealing is wrong because John represents the world with that Judgement', even if the discourse is in fact expressive. Within a global minimalist semantics, there is no way for either the realist or the anti-realist to deem the other side's explanation as not explanatory.

The discriminative power of the representational explanation theory hinges on a substantive concept of explanation. That means it violates (SC2), since, in a global minimalist semantics, where minimalism about explanation is adopted, the demarcation between realist and anti-realist discourses drawn by representational explanation theory does not hold. If expressivists adopt a substantive concept of explanation to sustain the demarcation, the theory is inconsistent with a global minimalist semantics, and thus violates (SC1). The representational explanation theory, hence, does not provide a satisfactory solution to PCM.

5 Inferentialism

Another type III solution to examine is inferentialism, provided by Chrisman. Chrisman's idea is that the inferential role of moral judgements is essential for distinguishing moral realism from expressivism.[32] The theory is based on the inferentialist account of the meaning of statements. According to this account, to make a statement is neither to take on an ontological commitment about the existence of some facts, nor to express some mental state. Rather, to make a statement is to take on an inferential commitment, which is a normative stance involving the practice of providing reasons for that statement when challenged.[33] Realism and expressivism thus differ in their accounts of the kinds of meaning of essential sentences in those

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[32] Chrisman 2008, 2011.
[33] Chrisman 2011, p. 115.

discourses, and the meaning of a sentence is constituted by its inferential role, which consists in two things: first, what circumstance licenses asserting the sentence; second, what further assertions and actions are licensed by asserting the sentence.

Chrisman argues that realists hold that moral statements/arguments play a role in theoretical reasoning: their premises provide 'evidential support' for their conclusions, which, if true, constitute theoretical knowledge about the world, and that these premises license inferences to those beliefs. Comparatively, expressivists think that moral statements/arguments play a role in practical reasoning, whose premises provide practical support for their conclusion, which, if true, constitute practical knowledge about the world and license inferences to actions.[34] In other words, Chrisman's reinterpretation of expressivism is that expressivism demarcates realist and anti-realist discourses based on the different inferential functions of core statements in a discourse. From the perspective of expressivism, realist discourses are those whose essential statements are licensed by theoretical reasons, and they further license theoretical statements and beliefs, whereas anti-realist discourses are those whose essential statements are licensed by practical reasons, and they further license practical statements and actions.

One obvious problem of inferentialism, as observed by Dreier, is that the distinction between practical and theoretical inferences of statements has no special relation to expressivism.[35] In other words, the new interpretation does not fully comply with (SC3). Dreier's complaint is reasonable since the inferentialist account rejects the claim that the role of making a statement in a discourse is determined by what is expressed by that statement, which seems essential to any expressivist theory. For the sake of the argument, let us suppose that this problem can be ignored if our purpose here is to find a plausible meta-theory that is somehow like expressivism, and its discriminative power is not undermined in a global minimalist semantics. However, even so, inferentialism still does not provide a satisfactory solution.

According to inferentialism, the essential distinction between realist and anti-realist

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[34] Chrisman 2008, pp. 349–54.
[35] Dreier 2018, p. 537.

discourses is that, in an anti-realist discourse, true statements do not constitute theoretical knowledge of the world, since they are conclusions of practical reasoning. Tiefensee argues that, given a triad of minimalisms about truth, fact and the world, this distinction collapses:

Minimalism about Truth: p is true iff p.

Minimalism about Facts: f is a fact iff f.

Minimalism about the World: w is the world iff w is the totality of truths.

And an inferentialist account of knowledge:

Inferentialist Knowledge: taking someone to be a knower, one attributes a commitment, attributes entitlement to that commitment, and acknowledges that commitment to the same content oneself.[36]

According to Tiefensee, for an arbitrary proposition p in any discourse, acknowledging one's commitment to p is just stating that p is true, and stating that p is true is just asserting that p; the world is just the totality of facts, including facts about p in the given discourse, which is just the sum of the true propositions in that discourse. Since true statements are part of the totality of theoretical knowledge about the world, commitments in that discourse play a theoretical role in reaching theoretical knowledge.[37] In that sense, if p is true, there is no way to reject the claim that every success theorist discourse is realist since a true statement in that discourse licenses theoretical knowledge because every true statement can be at least part of the 'theoretical knowledge pursuit'.

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[36] Tiefensee 2016, p. 2443. Notice that the inferential concept of knowledge adopted by Tiefensee here is not necessarily minimalism about knowledge, according to which to know something is simply to believe something that is true. With that concept of knowledge, it is even simpler to see how an inferentialist reinterpretation of expressivism is trivialized in a minimalist semantics.

[37] Ibid.

Moreover, it is unclear whether statements in a realist discourse provide practical reasons. According to Tiefensee, a proper understanding of inferentialism regarding practical commitments does not tie statements to psychological motivations for action, but to justifications and reasons for action.[38] If that's the case, then it is hard to deny that uttering true statements in *any* discourse involves *some* practical commitments, since, according to the inferentialist account of the meaning of statements, to make a statement is to take a normative stance involving the actions of providing reasons for that statement when challenged. In that sense, every discourse is anti-realist. Given a global minimalist semantics, the demarcation of inferentialism collapses.

The reason inferentialism fails to meet SC is very similar to those considered above: whether it is a reinterpretation of expressivism or not, its discriminative power is incompatible with a global minimalist semantics.

6 The Truth-Making Theory

The last type III solution I will consider in detail is Asay's truth-making theory, an ambitious attempt to characterise the demarcation for expressivism and various meta-ethical theories.[39] According to Asay, the essential feature that demarcates realist and anti-realist discourses, from the perspective of various meta-theories, is the truth-making relation between truth and relevant reality within those discourses.[40]

For a discourse to be realist, it must exhibit three features:

> (1) There are truths presented by some core statements in that discourse;

> (2) Truth-makers of those truths are a mind-independent reality that is essential to that discourse (for example, moral reality to moral discourse,

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[38] Ibid, p. 2444.
[39] Asay 2013.
[40] Ibid., p. 221-2.

mathematical reality to mathematics, and so on);

(3) The truth-making relation between those truths and reality is itself mind-independent.[41]

A discourse is thus deemed anti-realist if it lacks one or more of these features. For example, there is no truth presented by core statements in a non-cognitive or error theoretic discourse. Or, there are truths, but the truth-makers of those truths are not mind-independent in a subjective discourse. Also, there are truths, and their truth-makers are mind-independent realities that are essential to the discourse, but the truth-making relation between truths and reality is merely a relation of projection of the agent in a projectivist discourse. Asay further argues that although minimalism trivialises (1), it does not trivialise (2) and (3), as those features involve heavyweight metaphysical commitments. And since minimalism only trivialises truth, demarcations made by meta-theories centred on truth-making and relations between truth-bearers and truth-makers do not fall prey to creeping minimalism.[42]

Within this framework, the demarcation between realist and expressivist discourses, from the perspective of reinterpreted expressivism, is that in a realist discourse, statements are true in virtue of the existence of mind-independent reality that is essential to the discourse, and the truth-making relation is mind-independent; by contrast, in an expressivist discourse, statements are true in virtue of reality that are not essential to the discourse (say, psychological reality to moral discourse), and the truth-making relation is mind-dependent.

An obvious question for the truth-making theory is what does 'x is true in virtue of y' or 'y makes x true' really mean in a global minimalist semantics? Asay uses the expressions to indicate that y is the truth-making reality of x and assumes that this makes the truth-making relation metaphysically heavyweight.

Yet the platitudinous use of 'in virtue of x is y true' and 'x makes y true', beyond any

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[41] Ibid, p. 230.
[42] Ibid.

theoretical conceptualisation, is simply that *y* is an explanation of *x* – say, for example, the way Fine, Gibbard and Dreier use the term. However, if the truth-making relation is nothing more than an explanatory relation in a global minimalist semantics, such as:

> *Minimalism about Truth-Making 1*: *p* makes *q* true iff *p*, *q*, and *p* explains *q*,

then by minimalism about explanation,

> *Minimalism about Truth-Making 1*: *p* makes *q* true iff *p*, *q*, and *p* is an adequate answer to 'Why-*q*?' for some agent in some context.

In that sense, (2) and (3) mean that there are mind-independent adequate answers to truths in a discourse, and those answers hold a mind-independent relation to the truth in question. And that can certainly be the case for any mainstream discourse, including ethics.

For example, it would be plausible to say that 'stealing is wrong' is true in virtue of the mind-independent reality that the behaviour of stealing instantiates the moral property wrongness. And that 'John believes that stealing is wrong' is true in virtue of the reality that there is a doxastic mental relation between John and the fact that stealing is wrong. Such reality is mind-independent and essential to ethical discourse. Moreover, the relation between the truth-makers and truth-bearers in those cases is also mind-independent. Hence, (2) and (3) do not seem to provide substantive discriminative power in a global minimalist semantics. The discriminative power provided by truth-making theory is thus trivial.

Asay certainly would not want that. So, he must argue either that explanation is not subject to minimalism or that the truth-making relation is more than just an explanatory relation. Given that Asay thinks accepting minimalism halfway at any point is an unsatisfactorily ad hoc move, a substantive notion of explanation is unavailable, so he must think the latter. But what would a truth-making relation that is more than explanatory look like in a global minimalist semantics? Another way to

conceptualise a minimalist truth-making relation is to think that truth is made true *only* by some corresponding fact. That is,

> *Minimalism about Truth-Making 2*: *p* is made true by the fact that *p*.

By minimalism about facts,

> *Minimalism about Facts*: *p* is a fact iff *p*.

We have

> *Minimalism about Truth-Making 2**: *p* is made true by *p*.

But that minimalist concept of truth-making does not provide the substantive discriminative power required by the truth-making theory either.

The only notion left to carry the metaphysically heavyweight stock required by the discriminative power of (2) and (3) seems to be mind-independent reality. However, those notions under minimalist semantics are incapable of carrying the stock. Within a global minimalist semantics, the notion 'reality' can be defined as part of the world:

> *Minimalism about Reality*: R is reality iff R is part of the world.

Given minimalism about the world,

> *Minimalism about Reality*: R is reality iff R is part of the totality of truths.

Given minimalism about truth,

> *Minimalism about Reality*: R is reality iff R.

Adding mind-independence to it:

> *Minimalism about Mind-Independent Reality*: R is mind-independent reality

iff mind-independently, R.

The minimalist notions of mind-independent reality and the mind-independent truth and truth-making relation do not seem to prevent an expressivist about ethics from maintaining that, among other things, 'stealing is wrong' is made true by the mind-independent and relevant reality that, minimally, the behaviour stealing instantiates the moral property wrongness. And 'John believes that stealing is wrong' is made true by the mind-independent and relevant reality that there is a doxastic mental relation between John and the fact that stealing is wrong in the minimal sense. In both cases, the truth-making relation between truths and the mind-independent reality is also mind-independent. The demarcation is still trivial within a global minimalist semantics.

The central problem of Asay's reinterpretation, I believe, is that minimalism about truth, among other minimalist views, is taken to be merely semantic and epistemic, and silent on metaphysical issues. Asay argues that the truth-making reinterpretation is substantive within global minimalist semantics, because minimalism is only semantic, and the discriminative power it ascribes to meta-ethical theories is primarily metaphysical. In other words, minimalism is taken to have no metaphysical implication. In 'The Best Thing about the Deflationary Theory of Truth', Asay argues that the best thing about minimalism about truth is that it allows us to demarcate between philosophical issues of truth and philosophical issues of truth-making.[43] He argues that minimalism about truth is silent with respect to truth-making, not antithetical to it; the difference between a substantive and a minimalist theory of truth is only whether it provides a unified explanation of truth.

Consider the plausibility of such a view can start from the opposite direction. Suppose we believe in a substantive theory about truth, say, the correspondence theory, i.e., a statement, S, is true iff it corresponds to some facts. Suppose, further, that we believe that S is true. We are asked, 'What makes S true?' or 'In virtue of what is S true?' Intuitive answers are 'The fact (whatever S corresponds to) makes S true', and 'S is

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[43] Asay 2021.

true in virtue of the fact (whatever S corresponds to)'. These answers are metaphysically heavyweight because the correspondence theory of truth is supposed to be a substantive theory, and such a theory about truth appeals to a substantive concept of fact, which involves ontological commitments. This aligns with Asay's truth-making theory, according to which truth-making is a metaphysical relation.

In effect, 'truth-maker' is generally associated with the correspondence theory as a substitutive term for facts, realities, states of affairs, events, things, properties, and so on, when one wants the metaphysical commitments and to stay neutral between the variations of the correspondence theory. The reason for their intimacy, as I see it, is that the correspondence theory is metaphysical: the presumption of the existence of at least one substantive truth-maker for every true statement. It is worth noticing that a correspondence relation is not *identical* to a truth-making relation since correspondence is supposed to be a *symmetric* relation, while truth-making is usually taken for granted to be an *asymmetric* relation.[44] Even so, it remains plausible to maintain that the correspondence theory of truth has metaphysical implications and is not merely semantic or epistemic.

By contrast, minimalism about truth is, by definition, a denial of any substantive theory of truth. Is minimalism about truth silent on the metaphysical implications of substantive theories of truth? Or does minimalism deny all the metaphysical implications of substantive theories of truth? According to MC, it must be the latter. To begin with, the metaphysical implications of a substantive theory of truth derive from the metaphysically heavyweight nature of the essential concepts, such as fact and reality. Once the metaphysical heavyweight substances of those essential concepts are 'sucked out' by minimalism, there is nothing left to preserve the metaphysical implications. Moreover, according to MC, minimalism about truth, and other minimalisms for that matter, is not a theory that merely affirms concepts that are extracted only from platitudes but denies any attachment that is not extracted from platitudes. Finally, this is reflected in the minimalist view that truth is not an intermediary between cognitive agency and the world; rather, it is part of the world

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[44] David 2009.

itself, and the collection of truths constitutes the actual world. Hence, there is no such thing as a metaphysically heavyweight separate truth-maker beyond truth. Minimalism is thus not merely a semantic view; it has significant metaphysical implications. And those implications play a significant role in trivialising the demarcation between realist and anti-realist discourses made by the truth-making reinterpretation.

Truth-making is a trivial relation in a global minimalist semantics. When asked 'What makes a proposition, p, true?', a minimalist answer could be, as per minimalism about truth-making 1, 'p is true because of q (an adequate answer to 'Why-p?' in this context)', or, as per minimalism about truth-making 2, 'the reality/fact that p is true makes it true'. In virtue of what is it true that there is a cup on the table? In a global minimalist semantics, it is adequate to say, 'That there is a cup on the table is true in virtue of the physical reality that there is a cup on the table'. What makes the statement that 'Stealing is wrong' true? In a global minimalist semantics, it is adequate to say, 'That it is the fact that stealing is wrong that makes the proposition 'stealing is wrong' true.' This is not to say that minimalists need to preclude any answer that invokes better explanations (more informative, illuminating, and so on) about the truth of a statement. For example, a minimalist may offer a physical explanation for the truth of 'there is a cup on the table' by providing more information about the arrangement and intermolecular forces of the cup's and the table's molecules. They may also offer a psychological explanation for the truth of 'stealing is wrong' by providing more information about the evolutionary benefits of treating stealing as morally wrong and about their internalisations. However, those explanations have nothing to do with metaphysically heavyweight truth-making and therefore have nothing to do with the demarcation between discourses provided by truth-making reinterpretation.

To conclude: on the one hand, if truth-making and 'in virtue of what it is true' mean nothing but an explanation of the truth, as per Minimalism about Truth-Making 1, then the demarcation made by truth-making theory differs little from that made by Dreier and Fine's explanation theory, and thus is trivialised by minimalism about explanation. Or, if the truth-making relation means a restricted explanation relation, as per Minimalism about Truth-Making 2, then it is plausible to say that true moral

statements are made true by the relevant moral reality or facts. The demarcation is thus trivialised by minimalism about reality, the world and fact.

In either case, the demarcation between realist and anti-realist discourses made by truth-making theory is trivial within a global minimalist semantics and thus violates (SC2). On the other hand, if the truth-making relation is more than a minimalist explanatory relation and involves substantive concepts and heavyweight metaphysical commitments, then the theory violates (SC1). Hence, the truth-making theory does not provide a satisfactory solution to PCM.

7 The Pessimistic Conclusion

Before I get to the pessimistic conclusion of this paper, I want to mention Simpson's interesting suggestion for saving the demarcation between representational and non-representational discourses from its incompatibility with a global minimalist semantics. Simpson's representational explanation theory faces the challenge that, if expressivists have only a minimal concept of representation at hand, they will be unable to distinguish their view from representationalism. In response, Simpson suggests that expressivists, even if they have already accepted a global minimalist semantics, can *understand* theories that adopt substantive concepts such as representation (e.g., causal tracking) and, therefore, distinguish their view from its rivals based on their understanding of those substantive concepts.[45]

What is interesting about this suggestion is that it offers a way out for all the other solutions criticised in this paper. In the same spirit, Dreier could say,

> Expressivism can be distinguished from realism within global
> minimalist semantics because minimalists can understand a substantive
> concept of explanation and distinguish expressivism from realism on
> the basis of that understanding.

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[45] Simpson 2018, p. 527.

And Chrisman can say,

> Expressivism can be distinguished from realism within a global
> minimalist semantics because minimalists can understand substantive
> concepts of fact, the world, and theoretical knowledge, and distinguish
> expressivism from realism on the basis of these understandings.

And Asay can say,

> Expressivism can be distinguished from realism within a global
> minimalist semantics because minimalists can understand substantive
> concepts of truth and truth-making and distinguish expressivism from
> realism on the basis of these concepts.

We can see how this will play out. Better still, if this line of reasoning holds, we need not seek a solution to PCM, as there will be no such problem in the first place. That is because, although expressivism and realism are indistinguishable within a global minimalist semantics, the distinction remains, since expressivists can understand the substantive concepts of essential notions such as truth, truth-aptness and beliefs, and therefore distinguish their view from realism on that basis.

But the question is, with this 'solution' in hand, why do expressivists bother introducing all those attempts anyway? The third condition of MC helps see the problem here: any feature beyond those included in the minimalist concept is excluded from it. In other words, to accept a minimalist concept is not merely to understand it but to regard it as the *only* correct concept. Of course, a minimalist expressivist can understand substantive concepts of truth, facts, properties, and so on. However, she must first deny that any distinction made between her theory and realism hinges on those substantive concepts, for it violates the very commitments of a global minimalist semantics in the first place. This may sound mundane when stated

clearly, but many seem to forget it when it comes to their own solutions to the PCM.[46]

Moreover, this problem can be avoided if a new framework for examining the demarcation problem of meta-theories is adopted in the relevant discussions: that is, to understand PCM as the problem in which expressivism loses its power to discriminate between realist (non-expressive) and anti-realist (expressive) discourses when expressivists accept minimalisms. In that sense, even though an expressivist who fully adopts a global minimalist semantics can understand substantive theories about essential concepts, she will not think that those substantive theories can preserve the demarcation between realist and anti-realist discourses, for obviously, they are rejected in the first place. A lesson to learn here is that, to meet (SC1), a successful type III solution must be consistent with a global semantics that captures only the relevant essential concepts in the minimalist sense.

In addition to the four attempts to preserve the discriminative power of expressivism discussed in this paper, other recent attempts in the literature fall into type III. For example, Simpson (2020) argues that the difference between realist and anti-realist discourses from the perspective of expressivism lies in whether the subject matter of the discourse is mentioned in explaining the content of true statements within that discourse.[47] That is, a moral realist will mention the subject matter of morality, including moral properties, facts, and so on, to explain moral content and moral statements, whereas a moral anti-realist will not mention the subject matter of morality in their explanations. Dunaway (2016) suggests that the difference between realist and anti-realist discourses, from the perspective of expressivism, lies in whether the core properties of a discourse are *elite* properties.[48] In other words, to say that a discourse is realist, from the perspective of expressivism, is to say that the core properties, such as 'wrongness' in moral discourse, are elite properties, whereas to say that a discourse is anti-realist is to say that the core properties are not elite. The term 'elite property' refers to what Lewis calls 'perfect natural property' – which is just

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[46] Another way to articulate this problem is to see minimalism as monist theories, while the theory Simpson suggests seems to require a pluralistic understanding of the related notions. See Akhlaghi 2023, p. 330.
[47] Simpson 2020, p. 758.
[48] Dunaway 2016, p. 245.

another term for properties that 'carve nature at the joints' and are not 'doing merely cookie-cutting'.[49]

Let us set aside a general objection, as Dreier raises against Chrisman's inferentialism, that the demarcations those reinterpretations of expressivism made between expressive and non-expressive discourses seem to have nothing to do with expressivism, i.e., they violate (SC3). And let us treat Simpson's theory of subject matters and Dunaway's theory of elite properties as meta-theories that demarcate realist and anti-realist discourses *from their own perspectives*. But even in that case, it seems obvious that the demarcations they draw are incompatible with a global minimalist semantics. Specifically, the demarcation made by Simpson's theory of subject matter is incompatible with minimalism about explanation, insofar as the meta-theory requires that for something to be an explanation, it needs more than just adequate answers to why-questions. And certainly, the requirement of 'mentioning the subject matter of discourse' is not a platitude about the explanation.

Similarly, the demarcation proposed by Dunaway's theory of elite property is incompatible with minimalism, since there is no way to maintain a substantive concept of elite property within a global minimalist semantics. The notion of elite property requires a property to 'carve nature at its joints'. If the term 'carve nature at its joints' is to be understood in a minimalist sense, then for a property to 'carve nature at its joints' means nothing more than to 'attribute a certain property to some entities', as per:

> *Minimalism about 'Carving Nature at Its Joints' (Elite/Natural Properties)*: Φ carves nature at its joints iff Φa attributes the property Φ to a.

In that sense, essential properties in all mainstream discourses seem to 'carve nature at its joints' and thus are elite properties. If the term is to be understood substantively, it cannot be established with merely minimalist concepts.

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[49] For another similar type III response, see Baker 2020.

The theories of subject matter and elite property fail to meet (SC1) for the same reasons as the solutions to PCM discussed in detail in the previous sections. Some of those solutions are incompatible with specific minimalist concepts – say, minimalism about explanation and representation – and others are unsustainable or even inconceivable within a global minimalist semantics.

Let me establish the pessimistic conclusion of this paper. It has been suggested by many theorists that responses to PCM of one or another sub-category of type III cannot succeed. Tiefensee suggests that various kinds of inferentialism are not capable of satisfying both (SC2) and (SC3);[50] Golub suggests that any reinterpretation of expressivism that is centred with representation is either incompatible with a global minimalist semantics or do not provide a substantive demarcation;[51] and Taylor suggests that any reinterpretation of expressivism that is centred with notions such as reference, meaning, or representation fails to rescue the discriminative power of expressivism.[52]

Given my examination of type III solutions, my pessimistic conclusion is thus more general: it is extremely difficult, even hopeless, to protect the discriminative power of expressivism by reinterpreting it as centring on a substantive concept of any essential notion – whether it be an explanation and representation in theories of 'explanation' explanation and representational explanation, theoretical knowledge and the world in inferentialism, truth-maker and truth-making relation in the truth-making theory, or elite property in the theory of elite property. The pessimistic conclusion stands because the two major criteria in SC cannot be met at the same time if the following claims are true:

> (a) Moral expressivism aims to reveal a profound difference between moral discourse and realist discourses.

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[50] Tiefensee 2016
[51] Golub 2017, 2021.
[52] Taylor 2020.

(b) That profound difference is related to what moral statements express.

(c) The semantics adopted in everyday practice in moral discourse is, by and large, the same as the semantics adopted in everyday practice in presumably realist discourses.

(d) Expressivists tend to accept a global minimalist semantics to accommodate those practices.

(e) Minimalist concepts must be extracted only from everyday practices.

(f) All reinterpretations of expressivism are centred on some substantive concepts to maintain the discriminative power of expressivism.

(g) All substantive concepts essential to the discriminative power of the reinterpretations of expressivism are incompatible with a global minimalist semantics.

And in fact, all of the above claims are likely true. (a), (b) and (d) are widely accepted by moral expressivists; (c) is a very plausible assumption to make; (e) is a condition of the definition of minimalist concepts, MC. Both (f) and (g) are generalisations supported by examinations of all the attempts at reinterpreting expressivism considered or mentioned in this paper.

The key point is that, whatever further notions we centre the demarcation on, their concept in the meta-theory must be consistent with the platitudinous use of those notions and with the semantics adopted in a realist-like discourse, such as moral discourse. That undermines the discriminative power of any reinterpretations of expressivism that attempt to distinguish discourses based on different concepts of those notions. Hence, these reinterpretations face the same problems that expressivism originally faced. If discourses are to be demarcated by their subject matters, and the platitudinous semantics adopted in discourses about different subject matters are the same, then the demarcation is either trivialised by or inconsistent with a global minimalist semantics.

To put this more precisely, if we adopt a minimalist semantics, the difference between mainstream discourses cannot lie in the way people use language when discussing different subject matters, because there is no different way of using language. There is only one way: the minimalist (platitudinous) way. Since there is no difference, the language is realist. Hence, attempts to distinguish discourses by appealing to the different ways in which some terms are used – such as the theory of 'explanation' explanation, the theory of representational explanation, and the truth-making theory – must fail; and attempts to distinguish discourses by appealing to the different ways in which statements function in a discourse – such as inferentialism – must also fail. Are there other ways to save the demarcation? I truly doubt that.

At the end of the paper, let me illustrate the conclusion in the following table about how exactly some type III solutions are denied in a global minimalist semantics:

Moral platitudes to be 'accommodated' by expressivists	Relevant minimalism to help the accommodation	Moral meta-theories that are literally denied by the platitudes
It is true that stealing is wrong.	Minimalism about Truth	Denial of moral non-cognitivism and error theory
The proposition that stealing is wrong can be either true or false.	Minimalisms about Truth-Aptness and Proposition	Denial of moral non-cognitivism
Stealing instantiates the property of moral wrongness.	Minimalism about Property	Denial of the item anti-realism about moral properties
It is a fact that stealing is wrong.	Minimalism about Facts	Denial of the item anti-realism about moral facts
John believes that stealing is wrong.	Minimalism about Belief	Denial of the item anti-realism about moral

		beliefs
John knows that stealing is wrong.	Minimalism about Knowledge	Denial of the item anti-realism about moral knowledge
The fact that stealing is wrong explains that it is John's knowledge that stealing is wrong.	Minimalism about Explanation	Denial of the theory of 'explanation' explanation
John's belief that stealing is wrong represents the putative fact that stealing is wrong.	Minimalism about Representation	Denial of the theory of representation and representational explanation
The truth of John's claim that 'no one should steal' consists in the fact that stealing is wrong.	Minimalism about Truth-Making	Denial of the theory of truth-making
I know that it is a fact that stealing is wrong. Therefore, I theoretically infer that it is a fact that *something* is wrong.	Minimalism about Facts, World, and Theoretical Knowledge	Denial of inferentialism
Whether something is wrong is determined by its very nature.	Minimalism about Natural (Elite) Property	Denial of 'elite' property
……		

Strictly speaking, the type III 'solutions' considered in this paper are, intentionally or unintentionally, disguised type II solutions. That is because their acceptance of minimalism is, in fact, halfway – it stops at the notions essential to their own reinterpretation of expressivism. Moreover, as Dreier complains, many type III solutions seem to make demarcations unrelated to expressivism per se.[53] By contrast, all considered theories appear sufficiently self-contained to be independent meta-theories. And it goes without saying that, if examined separately, those meta-theories face the same problem as expressivism: their demarcations between realist and anti-realist discourses are trivial within a global minimalist semantics. This means that

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[53] Dreier 2018.

other meta-theories, within or without meta-ethics, might face similar problems as PCM.

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