

Minimalist Semantics in Meta-ethical Expressivism

James Dreier (2004) raises a puzzle about the relationship between meta-ethical Realism and Expressivism, which he calls the "Problem of Creeping Minimalism". The Problem, he says, seems to have the consequence that "those of us who feel confident that there *is* some difference between the two meta-ethical camps [i.e., Realism and Expressivism] should be concerned that we don't know how to say what that difference is".¹ Since such a result would be both interesting and counterintuitive, let us begin by stating the Creeping Minimalism worry as follows.

(CM) Expressivism can render itself indistinguishable from Realism in a way that makes it difficult to say what the difference between Expressivism and Realism is.²

What leads Dreier to worry about (CM)? The worry stems from the semantic project associated with Simon Blackburn's "quasi-realist" Expressivism which, according to Blackburn, allows an anti-realist meta-ethical theory to "mimic the intellectual practices supposedly definitive of realism"³ and to "[try] to earn, on the slender [i.e., anti-realist] basis, the features of moral language ... which tempt people to realism."⁴

The basis for these assertions is Blackburn's observation that, by adopting the appropriate theory about the meaning of the sentences that we traditionally associate with Realism (that is, sentences that seem to be inconsistent with Expressivism), Expressivists can also accept these sentences. I will call these claims about the meaning of Realist sentences that Expressivists

¹ Dreier (2004), p. 31, his italics.

² Dreier thinks that we can, ultimately, tell the difference between the two camps by thinking about differences in the explanatory role entities play in the two theories. See Dreier (2004), pp. 39-42. The point behind (CM) is that none of the traditional ways for saying what the difference is are available.

³ Blackburn (1980), p. 353.

⁴ Blackburn (1984), p. 171.

might make *minimalist semantic claims* about those sentences. Exactly how this project might be carried out is the subject of my discussion below. For now, what is important to note is that we have the resources to say what lies behind Dreier's (CM) worry: it is that there seems to be no limit to the minimalist claims the Expressivist might make--in which case, the Expressivist might be able to accept *all* of the sentences Realists can accept. And if there is no claim over which Realists and Expressivists disagree, then it is hard to see how we can say what the difference between the two views is.

Blackburn's description of his quasi-realist does not always suggest that he has this unlimited minimalist project in mind, and there certainly are places where Blackburn seems concerned only to claim that the quasi-realist will apply minimalist interpretations to a limited range of Realist sentences.⁵ On this limited project, Expressivists would make minimalist claims to be able to accept basic "object-level" sentences like 'it is true that telling lies is wrong' or 'it is a fact that giving to charity is good', and so be able to accept some, but not all, of the sentences we might have thought only Realists could accept. This project would leave the theoretical claims made by the Realist untouched. However, there is a much more ambitious project, which to my knowledge Blackburn never definitively ruled out, on which the both the Realist's object-level *and* theoretical claims would be given minimalist interpretations that allow Expressivists to accept them.⁶ This is the project which inspires Dreier's (CM) worry, since it is the project which, if successful, would allow Expressivists to use minimalist semantic claims to accept every sentence Realists can accept. Let us call a collection of minimalist claims that allows

⁵ See, for instance, Blackburn (1984), p. 171; also Blackburn (2007), pp. 160 – 1.

⁶ This seems to be the idea behind Blackburn (1980); see also Blackburn's "Modals and Morals" (1993), p. 58 fn. 5, where he glosses the (1980) paper as exploring the possibility of a "generalized quasi-realist move" which "allows even the use of a concept in explanatory roles, but still defends an anti-realist construction of it". Other authors, such as Wedgwood (2007), p. 39 seem to think of Blackburn's project as the more ambitious one.

Expressivists to do this a *global minimalist semantics*.

There are interesting philosophical consequences of the possibility of coupling Expressivism with a global minimalist semantics, beyond the fact that it leads to Dreier's (CM) worry. Blackburn, for instance, suggests the availability of such a semantic theory would automatically vindicate Expressivism. This is because (trivially) the Realist can have no disagreement with the Expressivist who accepts a global minimalist semantics, and since the Expressivist begins from a recognizably anti-realist perspective--she begins by speaking only about things an anti-realist is comfortable with, and then shows with the global minimalist semantics how every sentence the Realist wants to assert is consistent within the basic anti-realist picture--her view is more economical. The Realist then has a less economical way of getting the same results, and so has a less satisfactory theory than Expressivism coupled with a global minimalist semantics.⁷

Gideon Rosen, on the other hand, suggests that it is actually a bad result for Expressivism if it cannot distinguish itself from Realism. He says:

[A] fully worked-out quasi-realism looks less like antirealism and more like a sophisticated non-reductive realism. The view licenses the whole-hearted assertion of everything the realist has ever wanted to say about the objectivity and factuality of the domain at issue [...] At the end of the day we have rather a pair of equally legitimate representations of our thought in the area, with no clear basis for saying that either is more revelatory of its nature than the other.⁸

Since Rosen's idea seems to be that Expressivists would lose any grounds for favoring their view by going in for a global minimalist semantics, if he is right, they should then avoid the ambitious

⁷ See Blackburn (1980).

⁸ Rosen (1998), pp. 400-1.

semantic project.

If Expressivists can adopt a global minimalist semantics, not only would we have to settle whether Blackburn or Rosen (or neither) is right about the consequences for Expressivism, there is a further problem: to avoid Dreier's worry by stating the difference between Realism and Expressivism. The thesis (CM), as I have stated it, only says that it is *difficult* to say what the difference is. As we can now see, it would be difficult to state if Expressivists accept a global minimalist semantic theory because there would be no sentence we can use to say that its truth value is what Realists and Expressivists are disagreeing over. But this does not mean that there is no way whatsoever to state the difference between the views. And solutions to this puzzle has been attempted in the literature: Dreier claims that the views differ over the explanatory role played by different kinds of fact. Others have proposed different solution to this problem as well.⁹

To summarize, what we have seen about the Problem of Creeping Minimalism so far is that the Problem arises because of the possibility of coupling Expressivism with a global minimalist semantics, and that a global minimalist semantics (i) is a viable extension of the quasi-realist project which has not been ruled out, (ii) would potentially have significant philosophical consequences (although there is room for disagreement over what they would be), and (iii) would make stating the difference between Realism and Expressivism a challenging project that needs to be addressed.

But all of this is predicated upon there being an option for Expressivists to adopt a global minimalist semantics in the first place. This paper challenges that assumption: I want to argue that there is no global minimalist semantic theory available to Expressivists; that is, there is no

⁹ See also Chrisman (2008).

way for them to consistently interpret all of the sentences Realists can accept, in order to make them consistent with Expressivism. This means that they cannot render their view indistinguishable from Realism in the way (CM) says they can. It also means that the debate between Blackburn and Rosen does not need to be resolved, and that other attempts to capture the difference between Expressivism and Realism are not necessary.

Before turning to my argument for this conclusion, I first want to note a complication in stating what a global minimalist semantic theory would look like, which has not yet been acknowledged. Earlier, I said that such a theory is a collection of semantic theses which allows Expressivists to be able to assign a suitable interpretation to every sentence a Realist can accept. However, this cannot be exactly correct, since we can easily see that there is no such semantic theory available to Expressivists. Consider a Realist who accepts the sentence 'all minimalist semantic theses are false'. For any sentence stating a minimalist semantic claim that Expressivists need to make in order to accept a Realist sentence, then this hypothetical Realist accepts the negation of that sentence. Clearly Expressivists cannot mimic our Realist in this case: Expressivists need to accept some minimalist semantic claims in order to capture the Realist's sentences stating substantive claims, such as 'it is true that telling lies is wrong'. The Expressivist can only accept the first if she accepts some sentence that says that 'it is true that telling lies is wrong' means what M means (where M is the Expressivist's minimalist interpretation of 'it is true that telling lies is wrong'--see section I for more details). But the Realist we are considering will reject the sentence ' 'it is true that telling lies is wrong' means what M means', since she rejects all minimalist semantic theses! A dilemma then arises: Expressivists must either fail to agree over the sentences stating the substantive claims, or they must fail to agree with the Realist over sentences about what those substantive claims mean.

But this just shows that we need to be more careful in saying what a global minimalist semantic theory would be. (CM) says that a consequence of a global minimalist semantic theory is that it is difficult to say what the difference between Realism and Expressivism is. The fact that Realists and Expressivists must disagree over the sentence 'all minimalist semantic theses are false' does not show that it is not difficult to say what the difference is, since all this tells us is that Realists can reject a particular claim about the meaning of some words which Expressivists must accept. Plausibly, this difference does not constitute the difference between Expressivism and Realism; it is not a deep difference between the views. It is only a difference in what claims about meaning the views are committed to, and it would be surprising if the real difference between Realism and Expressivism lies in this kind of purely semantic difference.

(CM) should be construed as only requiring that Expressivists have available a collection of minimalist semantic theses that allows them to accept all of the Realist's substantive, non-semantic claims. It doesn't have to allow them to accept sentences like 'all minimalist semantic theses are false'. So from here on, I will understand a global minimalist semantic theory to be one which allows Expressivists to accept all of the substantive claims a Realist can make. Such a theory would still give us reason to share a non-trivial version of Dreier's original worry: we could say, "those of us who are confident that there is some *interesting, non-semantic* difference between the two meta-ethical camps should be concerned that we don't know how to say what that difference is".

I want to argue, then, that (CM) is false because even on the revised understanding, Expressivists don't have a global minimalist semantic theory available to them; they have to disagree with Realists over the truth value of sentences that make a deep or substantive claims. I will make this point by arguing that Expressivism, coupled with any set of minimalist semantic

claims, is inconsistent with some set of sentences Realists can accept. In most cases, the following set of sentences is sufficient to illustrate the point (for an agent Ted, and an English indicative moral sentence *S*):

- (1) If Ted believes that *S*, then Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*.
- (2) Necessarily, if Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*, then there is something which is such that Ted stands in the belief-relation to it.
- (3) The proposition that *S* is a mind-independent entity.
- (4) The proposition that *S* is a non-linguistic entity.

(1)-(4) are claims that Expressivists must be able to accept, if (CM) is true: they are not sentences like 'all minimalist semantic theses are false'. To see this, consider what we can say, if Expressivists should reject them. If they reject (1), for instance, we can say "Realists can hold that if Ted believes that *S*, then Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*, while Expressivists are committed to holding that Ted never stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*". Similarly, if they reject (3), we can say "Realists can hold that If Ted believes that *S*, then Ted stands in the belief-relation to a mind-independent entity, whereas Expressivists are committed to holding that Ted never stands in the belief-relation to a mind-independent entity". These claims seem to capture substantive differences about how the world is according to Expressivism and Realism, if they are true; they are not solely about differences in the purely semantic commitments of the views. Hence, I take it that if it can be shown that (1)-(4) are jointly inconsistent with Expressivism, we will have a decisive reason for thinking that (CM) is false.

The first section of this paper attempts to outline a general program for making

minimalist semantic claims, by investigating how Expressivists might go minimalist in a simple case: for sentences containing 'true'. Sections II through IV then apply this general strategy in order to make specific minimalist claims about (1)-(4); in particular, I present a natural way for Expressivists to be able to accept (1) and (2). I show, however, that this commits Expressivists to the meaning of the parts of the sentences making up (1) and (2), and that this commits them to rejecting either (3) or (4). By the end of section IV, we will have the main case that (1)-(4) are jointly inconsistent with Expressivism. Sections V and VI outline and reject separate proposals Expressivists could take that might be thought to avoid this result. I then close with section VII, where I show that my argument is general--in other words, the case against the possibility of a global minimalist semantic theory does not depend on idiosyncratic features of the sentences (1)-(4) I discuss here, but can be made using any number of examples.

While I will be arguing that (CM) is false because (1)-(4) are jointly inconsistent with Expressivism, it is also important to be clear about what I am not arguing for. First, I am not arguing that Expressivism *simpliciter* is false: I am only arguing that Expressivism cannot be coupled with a global minimalist semantic theory. Second, I will not have argued that all of the claims made by Blackburn's "quasi-realist" are false. The project might be understood to be smaller in scope, aiming only to accept a limited class of Realist-sounding sentences that have previously been thought to be inconsistent with Expressivism (for instance, sentences like 'it is true that telling lies is wrong', but perhaps not (1)). I have nothing to say about this more limited project. Nonetheless, I think that my result is significant, as it shows that the quasi-realist project is necessarily constrained in ways that its proponents have not clearly acknowledged. It also shows that the debates over the consequences of adopting a global minimalist semantic theory (e.g., the disagreement between Blackburn and Rosen) do not arise, and it shows that the

attempts to solve the Problem of Creeping Minimalism by saying what the difference between Realism and Expressivism is, even when Expressivists adopt a global minimalist semantic theory, are unneeded.

I. The general minimalist strategy: minimalism about 'true'

To show that a global minimalist semantics is not available to Expressivists, we need first to see how Expressivists can go about making minimalist semantic claims. To do this, I will consider a basic case: moral sentences containing 'true'. Then, we can make some observations about the general features of this simple minimalist claim in order to make similar claims for the Realist sentences (1) and (2).

If (CM) is true, Expressivists do need a minimalist reading for sentences containing 'true'. Realists can accept that there are moral truths. Since, according to Expressivism, moral sentences express non-cognitive states of mind, it is not clear that 'true' properly applies to them, and so they need a theory about what 'true' means, which predicts that the word applies to some moral sentences. The schema (MT) seems to give Expressivists the minimalist semantic claim they are looking for in this case (where '*p*' can be replaced any English indicative sentence).

(MT) 'it is true that *p*' means whatever '*p*' means.

(MT) tells us that the sentence that is not obviously consistent with Expressivism--'it is true that *p*' in cases where '*p*' is a moral sentence--really means nothing more than a sentence that clearly is consistent with Expressivism--that is, the sentence '*p*'. We can call the sentence we need a minimalist reading for (in this case, 'it is true that *p*') the *target sentence*. And we can call the second sentence, which gives the meaning of the target sentence, the *equivalence sentence*

(here, '*p*').

To be clear, Expressivists can apply (MT) by reasoning as follows. Suppose they accept the moral sentence 'telling lies is wrong' (any other moral sentence can be substituted here, without loss of generality). This is our equivalence sentence; and it is consistent with Expressivism; the basic idea behind Expressivism as a meta-ethical theory is an idea about what it is to accept this kind of first-order atomic moral sentences. Then, they can apply (MT), yielding the semantic claim that 'it is true that telling lies is wrong' means whatever 'telling lies is wrong' means. But if 'telling lies is wrong' is consistent with Expressivism, and 'it is true that telling lies is wrong' means the same (by (MT)), it cannot be inconsistent with their view, since two sentences that are synonymous cannot differ in what they are consistent with. (For short: *synonymy preserves consistency*). So 'it is true that telling lies is wrong' is consistent with Expressivism.

This approach generalizes. What we want, for any target sentence that Realists accept but is not obviously consistent with Expressivism, is to find an equivalence sentence Expressivists already accept, and to claim that the target sentence means whatever the equivalence sentence means. Of course, there are limits on what the equivalence sentence can be here--it must, for instance, share the same modal profile as the target sentence. (This is because we need to claim that the target sentence means the same as the equivalence sentence, and it must turn out that if '*a*' and '*b*' mean the same, then '*a* iff *b*' is necessary.)

Now that we have a general method for developing minimalist readings, we want to return to assessing (CM). If it is true, we should be able to develop, as part of a global minimalist semantic theory, minimalist readings for (1) and (2).

II. Minimalism about (1)

Matters are a bit more complicated here, since (1) is a conditional, composed out of the atomic sentences 'Ted believes that *S*' and 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*'. And both sentences are not obviously consistent with Expressivism. So really, there are three tasks here: to give a minimalist reading of the antecedent, give a minimalist reading of the consequent, and then to show that these readings have the following feature: *whenever* the first is true, then the second is also true.

I will focus only on the second task, which will turn out to be most important for our purposes here. Note, however, that (CM) requires that Expressivists can solve the others too, but I will make the assumption that they can do this, without going into the details. So our task here is that of giving a suitable interpretation of the consequent of (1), 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*'. Since we are using minimalism about truth as a template, this our target sentence. We need to find an equivalence sentence for it, which Expressivists already accept, and which is a plausible candidate for the meaning of the target sentence. Then we can make a minimalist claim analogous to (MT), and reason with it to show that Expressivists can accept the target sentence.

The equivalence sentence I will use here is 'Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by '*S*''. Given the Expressivist's theory, it is a natural suggestion, although there are some problems with the choice which I won't go into here.¹⁰ Nothing essential to the main argument

¹⁰ Note that the indexical 'actually' is necessary for the interpretation of the equivalence sentence to be correct--if John possibly believes that murder is wrong, it is because there is a possible world *w* in which John is in the mental state that 'murder is wrong' expresses here, in the actual world. It does not matter what the words 'murder is wrong' mean in *w*. But 'actually' is also problematic: if John possibly believes that Sally believes that murder is wrong, then at some possible world *w**, John believes that Sally is in the mental state actually expressed by 'murder is wrong.' But then John must have a belief, at *w**, about *our* world (the world which actually obtains, which might be distinct

hangs on these problems for this choice of an equivalence sentence. And, in section VII, I give an argument for why we could have chosen a different interpretation, and, with a few minimal differences, the same argument would still go through.

With this equivalence sentence for the consequent of (1), we can do just what we did for 'true': we make a minimalist semantic claim, analogous to (MT). This is (MB).

(MB) 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*' means whatever 'Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by '*S*' ' means.

(MB) works just like (MT) did. We wanted to know whether Expressivists could accept the target sentence, the consequent of (1). But, if they accept (MB), then they can reason as follows: 'Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by '*S*' ' is consistent with Expressivism. (MB) says that 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*' means the same thing. So, since synonymy preserves consistency, 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*' is consistent with Expressivism.

Expressivists can use minimalism to accept the consequent of (1) in this way. Given the assumptions we granted at the beginning of this section--that Expressivists can give the same kind of minimalist interpretation for the antecedent, 'Ted believes that *S*', and that this interpretation will guarantee that whenever the antecedent of (1) is true, the consequent is also--(MB) guarantees that Expressivists can accept (1).

III. Minimalism about (2), plus some consequences

from *w**) in order to have, *in w**, a belief about Sally's mental state. Surely this is not right, but we will let that pass here. For more on 'actually'-rigidification, see Soames (2002) pp, 39 - 50; for an Expressivist solution to this problem, see Schroeder (2008), ch. 11. Thanks also to Scott Soames for discussion here.

What we have done so far is show how Expressivists can make minimalist semantic claims that they can use to accept (1) without inconsistency. This is just as things should be, if (CM) is true. But, as we noted above, (2) is also a sentence Realists can accept. So Expressivists should be able to accept it, also.

In order to do this, we have to make claims about the structure or syntax of the interpretation Expressivists have offered for the consequent of (1). This is the move that I will argue commits Expressivists not only to the meaning of sentences that the Realist accepts, but also to the meaning of the parts of those sentences. And this fact will play an important role in showing that Expressivists who accept (1) and (2) must reject (3) or (4).

It will be helpful to have some abbreviations on hand. Recall (MB), which we used to show that Expressivists can accept the consequent of (1). The first sentence in (MB), our target sentence, was the analysis of belief-ascriptions available to the Realist. I will call it (RB).

(RB) Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*.

The second sentence was the Expressivist interpretation (or equivalence sentence) for (RB), which I will call (EB).

(EB) Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by '*S*'.

To see what minimalist claims Expressivists need to make about (2), consider what Realists can say about it: it is *necessary*, for the following reason. The antecedent, which is (RB), has a structure with a two-place predicate and two arguments. Schematically, it is of the form *aRb*. (2) is necessary, then, because its consequent is logically entailed by its antecedent; the consequent is exactly the same as (RB), except that we have quantified into its second argument

place. Schematically, it is of the form $\exists x: aRx$.

To be more explicit, the Realist can divide (RB) into what I will call its *argument structure*, which shows where the predicates and arguments are in (RB). Call the argument structure of (RB) *RAS* (for *Realist argument structure*).

RAS:	2-place predicate	Argument 1	Argument 2
	stands in the belief-relation to	Ted	the proposition that <i>S</i>

Thus, we can see that the consequent of (2) is just the antecedent, with Argument 2 replaced by a bound variable. Since this is an instance of a logically valid inference, (2) is necessarily true.

So Realists can say that (2) is necessary because of the logical relationship between its antecedent and its consequent. But Expressivists have offered us an interpretation of the antecedent of (2). They should then be able to explain why, on the basis of their interpretation of its antecedent, (2) is a necessary truth in the same way. In other words, they should give to the consequent an interpretation that is a logical consequence of the interpretation they gave to the antecedent. But in order to do this, we have to know what the argument structure of the interpretation is.

The interpretation we assigned to the antecedent of (2) was (EB), but, as it turns out, there are two options for dividing (EB) into an argument structure in order to come up with an interpretation of the consequent which provides a suitable explanation of the necessity of (2). I will discuss the first way to give an argument structure for (EB), and draw out the consequences that follow from doing things this way. Then (in the next section), I will return to the other way Expressivists can assign (EB) an argument structure, and show why going this way has similar

consequences. To summarize: the reason why we are concerned with the structure of (EB), is that we want to give a minimalist interpretation of (2) that explains its logical features. But in order to do this, we need to know what the predicate and arguments in (EB) are.

Here is the first way we could assign an argument structure to (EB). We could say that the two-place predicate in (EB) is 'is in', and that 'Ted' and 'the mental state actually expressed by 'S'' are the arguments. Then, EAS.1 represents the argument structure for (EB).

EAS.1: 2-place predicate	Argument 1	Argument 2
is in	Ted	the mental state actually expressed by 'S'

If EAS.1 represents the argument structure for (EB), then we know how to give the right minimalist interpretation of the consequent of (2), our new target sentence. Since the consequent of (2) just is (RB), with its second argument replaced by a bound variable, and we already know what (RB) means--it means what (EB) means, according to (MB)--then the only minimalist interpretation of (2) that can explain why it is necessarily true is one on which we interpret its consequent to mean what (EB) means, with its second argument replaced by a bound variable.¹¹ That is, in order to accept (2), Expressivists who accept that EAS.1 gives the argument structure of (EB) must accept the minimalist claim (MC.1).

(MC.1) 'There is something which is such that Ted stands in the belief-relation to it' means whatever 'there is something which is such that Ted is in it' means.

This allows Expressivists to accept (2). First, they can accept the antecedent, because it

¹¹ For a challenge to the assumption that this is the only way to explain the necessity of (2), see Section V.

means what (EB) means (according to (MB)). Then, it follows from (EB) that something is such that Ted is in it (from logic and EAS.1), so they can accept the sentence 'there is something which is such that Ted is in it'. But (MC.1) tells us that the consequent of (2) means the same as this sentence, and so not only is it consistent with Expressivism (since synonymy preserves consistency), but Expressivists can also derive it from (RB), using only claims about meaning ((MB) and (MC.1)), syntax (EAS.1), and logic. So Expressivists can accept that the consequent of (2) is a necessary consequence of (RB). Thus, they can explain why the conditional holds necessarily, and can accept (2).

So far, this is good for (CM): we have been able to do what a global minimalist semantics requires, namely, to show that there are minimalist interpretations on which (1) and (2) are consistent with Realism. But the steps we have taken so far imply that some other sentences, which Realists can accept, are not consistent with Expressivism. Once I make the case for this, I will go back and show that we get a similar result, even if we assume a different argument structure for (EB).

The central claim of this argument is that Expressivists who go in for these minimalist claims to accept (1) and (2) are committed to the parts of EAS.1 giving the meaning of the corresponding parts of RAS. This is an intuitive idea--after all, we already needed to accept that the sentence composed out of the parts of EAS.1 (that is, (EB)), gives the meaning of the sentence composed out of the parts of RAS (that is, (RB)). Since we have also had to assume that they have the same structure, it seems a small step to the conclusion that the parts do mean the same, and so that the arguments in RAS mean what the arguments in EAS.1 mean. Even though this is intuitive, I will provide an argument here for the claim that, if Expressivists accept (MB) and (MC.1), which were used to accept (1) and (2), then they are committed to the claim that 'the

proposition that S' (the second argument in RAS) means whatever 'the mental state actually expressed by S' ' (the second argument in EAS.1) means. It follows from this that Expressivists must reject (3).

To make this argument more transparent, I will borrow a piece of notation from semanticists, called "meaning brackets." How to read them is straightforward: ' $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket$ ' reads 'the meaning of α ,' for any expression α . And ' $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket = \llbracket \beta \rrbracket$ ' reads ' α and β mean the same,' for any expressions α and β . So it isn't strictly necessary that we use the notation here; it would be straightforward to translate everything into ordinary English. But I will use the brackets, since they make the central features of the argument more transparent.

Expressivists needed to accept (MB) in order to accept (1). In our brackets-notation, they accept P1.

P1. $\llbracket \text{Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that } S \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by } S' \rrbracket$.

Expressivists also needed to accept (MC.1) in order to accept (2) (assuming, as we are throughout this section, that EAS.1 gives the argument structure of (EB)). Given this assumption, we also have P2, which just is (MC.1) in brackets-notation (and with the quantifiers written formally).

P2. $\llbracket \exists x: \text{Ted stands in the belief-relation to } x \rrbracket = \llbracket \exists y: \text{Ted is in } y \rrbracket$.

Our third premise is a consequence of P2: since the quantifiers in P2 mean the same, it should follow that when they are removed from the sentences in P2, the resulting formulas mean

the same. (The fact that the variables in P2 are different doesn't mean that the quantifiers make different *semantic* contributions.) That is, P3 should hold.

$$P3. \llbracket \text{Ted stands in the belief-relation to } x \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{Ted is in } y \rrbracket .$$

But now we should notice that, if we take P3 and substitute the expressions 'the proposition that *S*' and 'the mental state actually expressed by '*S*' ' for the free variables '*x*' and '*y*', respectively, in the formulas in P3, then we obtain the sentences in P1. The sentences in P1 are synonymous. So we know that these expressions are such that, when they are substituted into synonymous formulas (the formulas in P3), they give us synonymous sentences (the sentences in P1). But on (almost) any compositional semantic theory, these expressions must themselves be synonymous.¹² That is, we have:

$$C. \llbracket \text{the proposition that } S \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{the mental state actually expressed by '}' S ' \rrbracket .$$

This is a claim about the meaning of a part of (RB) which Expressivists are committed to, if they go in for minimalist readings of (1) and (2). And if Expressivists are committed to this, then they are also committed to rejecting (3). C says that the expressions 'the proposition that *S*' and 'the mental state actually expressed by '*S*' ' mean the same. It follows that the sentence (3) means the same as (3*).

¹² There are some semantic theories for which this point does not hold. For consider a theory on which the semantic content of a sentence *S* is the set of possible worlds in which *S* is true. On such a theory, it would be true that the formulas '*x* is human' and '*y* is human' are synonymous. Substituting the names 'Bob' and 'Bill' for the free variables in the formulas results in 'Bob is human' and 'Bill is human,' which (on the assumption that Bob and Bill both exist) express necessary truths. Hence the semantic content of each is the set of all possible worlds, and so the sentences are synonymous. But it does not follow that 'Bob' and 'Bill' are synonymous. But this result depends on an implausible feature of the semantic content of sentences, that all necessarily true sentences are synonymous, and so there are good reasons to be skeptical of this conclusion. Thanks to Scott Soames for helpful discussion on this point.

(3) The proposition that *S* is a mind-independent entity.

(3*) The mental state actually expressed by '*S*' is a mind-independent entity.

But we know what (3*) means, and Realists can, and likely will, hold that it is false.¹³ If (3) means the same as (3*), then they should reject (3) as well. Hence, Expressivists who accept (MB) and (MC.1) to provide minimalist readings of (1) and (2) are committed to rejecting some Realist claim, namely (3). So this can't be the way to accept (1) and (2), if it is true that a global minimalist semantics is available to Expressivists, as (CM) requires.¹⁴

IV. Another way to minimalism about (2), plus some consequences

But we have not shown that (CM) is false yet. Expressivists do not need to assume that (EB) has the argument structure given by EAS.1. And if they reject that EAS.1 gives the correct argument structure for (EB), then since the premise P2 relies on the assumption that EAS.1 does give the argument structure for (EB), they are not committed to line of reasoning which entails

¹³It should also be noted here that, strictly speaking, some Realist could, for independent reasons, reject (3). This would not threaten the conclusion that, since Expressivists must reject (3), their view is inconsistent with Realism, even if we consider only the deviant version of Realism which also rejects (3). This is because the deviant Realist could still, without changing her view on fundamental meta-ethical issues, accept (3). She has chosen to reject (3), but this result is not entailed by her meta-ethical theory; the result must be a consequence of a theory she accepts about some other domain. Expressivists cannot say the same thing. This is sufficient for a difference between the views. An analogue of this point applies to the conclusion of the next section. See also section VI.

¹⁴ It has been suggested to me by an anonymous referee that the Expressivist might be committed to accepting that (3*) and (3) are synonymous, yet not be committed to denying (3), for the following reason: she might hold that the expression 'the mental state actually expressed by '*S*'' in (3*) refers to a mental state *type*, in which case it is plausible to suppose that its referent is both non-linguistic and mind-independent. Thus the Expressivist is committed to the synonymy between (3) and (3*), but is not committed to denying either.

I think that the Expressivist could make this move and avoid being committed to denying (3). But there will be other Realist sentences she must reject in virtue of the fact that she accepts (C), construed in this way. For instance, take (RB), and substitute for 'the proposition that *S*' the expression 'the mental state actually expressed by '*S*'''. According to (C), (RB) is synonymous with this new expression, so the sentence 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the mental state actually expressed by '*S*'' is a sentence the Expressivist is committed to accepting, since it is synonymous with (RB). But this is a sentence the Realist likely will deny: she might hold that the only things agents stand in the belief-relation to are not mental states, or mental state types.

that (3) and (3*) mean the same thing.

This section is concerned with the status of (CM) if we do reject the assumption that (EB) has the argument structure given by EAS.1. It will turn out that making this move will not require that Expressivists reject (3). But it will require that Expressivists reject (4). The argument for why this is so has exactly the same structure as before, although the content of our premises must be slightly different. But the general idea is the same: by going in for minimalist readings of (1) and (2), Expressivists are committed to claims about the meaning of parts of those sentences, and this commits them to rejecting other sentences Realists can accept.

If we reject that EAS.1 gives the correct argument structure for (EB), we still need to give an adequate interpretation of our target sentence (2). We can do this, because there is another way to divide (EB) into a two-place predicate and two arguments. This alternative argument structure takes 'is in the mental state actually expressed by' as its two-place predicate, and 'S' as its second argument. (The first argument is 'Ted,' as before.) Hence, we could have EAS.2 as the argument structure for (EB).

EAS.2:	2-place predicate	Argument 1	Argument 2
	is in the mental state actually expressed by	Ted	'S'

Now that we have a different argument structure, the strategy for coming up with an equivalence sentence for the consequent of (2) must be applied differently than before. What we want is for the minimalist interpretation of (RB) to explain why (2) is necessarily true; and we can do this only if the consequent of (2) means whatever (EB), with its second argument replaced by a bound variable, means. But now, according to EAS.2, the second argument of (EB)

is 'S'--and so the minimalist claim that satisfies these requirements is (MC.2) instead of (MC.1).

(MC.2) 'There is something which is such that Ted stands in the belief-relation to it' means whatever 'there is something which is such that Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by it' means.

The reason why (MC.2) allows Expressivists to accept (2) is exactly the same as before--they can reason from the antecedent of (2) to the consequent of (2) using only claims about meaning, syntax and logic--so I will not repeat the details here.

But if Expressivists accept (MC.2), we can give an argument with exactly the same structure as before, which shows that they are also committed to specific claims about the meanings of the parts of (RB). First, they are still committed to (MB), because it is needed to show that (1) is consistent with Expressivism. In our meaning-brackets notation, this means that we still have P1.

P1. $\llbracket \text{Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that } S \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by 'S'} \rrbracket$.

But since we no longer have (MC.1), we don't have P2 as a premise. Instead, we have the analogous P2*, which is (MC.2), written in the meaning-brackets notation.

P2*. $\llbracket \exists x: \text{Ted stands in the belief-relation to } x \rrbracket = \llbracket \exists y: \text{Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by } y \rrbracket$.

P2* implies P3* for the same reason that P2 implies P3: because the quantifiers in the sentences in P2* don't differ in meaning, removing them from sentences which are synonymous

should give us synonymous formulas.

P3*. $\llbracket \text{Ted stands in the belief-relation to } x \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{Ted is in the mental state actually expressed by } y \rrbracket$.

But now notice how P1 is related to P3*: if we substitute 'the proposition that S ' and ' S ', respectively, for the free variables in P3*, we get P1. So we know that substituting these expressions into synonymous formulas gives us synonymous sentences. These expressions themselves should be synonymous. That is, we have C*, which is a claim about the meaning of a part of (RB).

C*. $\llbracket \text{the proposition that } S \rrbracket = \llbracket 'S' \rrbracket$.

So Expressivists who accept (MB) and (MC.2) to accept (1) and (2) are committed to C*. This does not commit them to rejecting (3). But, it does commit them to the following: since we already know what ' S ' means--it picks out a sentence--then C* entails that 'the proposition that S ' must do the same. Then, Expressivists are committed to holding that (4) is synonymous with (4*), which Realists can reject.

(4) The proposition that S is a non-linguistic entity.

(4*) ' S ' is a non-linguistic entity.

This completes my argument that Expressivists who go in for minimalist interpretations of (1) and (2) must reject (3) or (4). Since a global minimalist semantics would require that Expressivists can accept all of these sentences, I think that this shows that no global minimalist semantics is available to Expressivists, and the issues associated with (CM), which I outlined in

the first section, do not arise. The next two sections consider two apparent strategies for avoiding this conclusion. I first consider a proposal about the semantics of quantifiers that appears to show a way around my argument. The section after that considers a way to develop the Problem of Creeping Minimalism without following the basic minimalist strategy. I then close by saying why I take my main argument to be successful, and why similar arguments should be available to show that sets of sentences other than (1)-(4) are inconsistent with Expressivism coupled with a minimalist semantics.

V. The disjunctive quantifier: a way around?

We might consider what I will call the *disjunctive* reading of the quantifier: that English expressions involving an existential quantifier, which take the form 'there is something which is such that ... it ...', mean the same as a long disjunction, with one disjunct for each term in our language. In other words, if our language contained the terms, '*a*,' '*b*,' '*c*,'... the sentence ' $\exists x: Fx$ ' would by definition be equivalent to the disjunction ' $Fa \vee Fb \vee Fc \dots$ '. If the disjunctive reading is correct, then it seems that Expressivists can accept (2) without going in for either of (MC.1) or (MC.2), the claims about meaning of the consequent of (2) which are crucial to the arguments of the previous two sections. Here is why.

Stated more precisely, the disjunctive reading of the existential quantifier is the following:

D1. Any sentence containing an existential quantifier, ' $\exists x \dots x \dots$ ' means the same as ' $\dots a_1 \dots \vee \dots a_2 \dots \vee \dots a_3 \dots$ ', and so on, for each term a_i in our language.

Next, since our goal is to show how we can use D1 to accept (2), we apply this definition to the consequent of (2), which contains an existential quantifier. This gives us D2.

D2. 'there is something such that Ted stands in the belief-relation to it' means the same as 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to $a_1 \vee$ Ted stands in the belief-relation to $a_2 \vee \dots$ ' and so on, for each term a_i in our language.

Now, if we allow that 'the proposition that S ' is a term in our language, then we know that one of the disjuncts in D2 is 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that S '--that is, we can be more specific about what the content D2 is by writing D2*.

D2*. 'there is something such that Ted stands in the belief-relation to it' means the same as 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that $S \vee$ Ted stands in the belief-relation to $a_1 \vee$ Ted stands in the belief-relation to $a_2 \vee \dots$ ' and so on, for each term a_i in our language.

Last, D3 is an independent (and extremely plausible) claim as it is an instance of the logical truth that any sentence entails a disjunction with that sentence as one of its disjuncts:

D3. 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that S ' entails 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to $a_1 \vee$ Ted stands in the belief-relation to $a_2 \vee \dots \vee$ Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that $S \vee \dots$ ' and so on, for each term a_i in our language.

D2* tells us what the second sentence in D3 means. So we can substitute the sentences D2* says mean the same into D3, which yields the claim that 'Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that S ' entails 'there is something such that Ted stands in the belief-relation to it'. It then seems that Expressivists can accept (2), with no claims about the meaning of the parts required!

But this argument is mistaken, even if we assume the disjunctive reading as the proper

semantics for the existential quantifier. In order to make the transition from D2 to D2*, we needed to make the assumption that 'the proposition that *S*' is a term in our language: if we don't make this assumption, then we don't know that D2 contains the disjunct containing 'the proposition that *S*', as D2* claims it does. But this is not a legitimate assumption for the Expressivist to make: they have not shown that the expression 'the proposition that *S*' is a term. They could do this by taking an expression which Expressivists can already accept as designating something (which is what a term does) and telling us that 'the proposition that *S*' means the same as that expression. But at this point, they haven't done this--they have only shown us that they can accept the *sentence* (RB) which contains 'the proposition that *S*'. According to the Realist's theory the expression 'the proposition that *S*' in (RB) is a term, but it doesn't follow from this that on the Expressivist's theory, the same expression in (RB) is a term. Expressivists need to say what it means first. In Dreier's language, they must first "earn the right" to use the expression (or, at least, the right to use it as a term).¹⁵

The two Expressivist proposals considered in sections III and IV tell us that 'the proposition that *S*' is a term because they tell us what it means. It means whatever 'the mental state actually expressed by '*S*' (in the first case), or '*S*' means (in the second). Since we already know that Expressivists can accept these expressions are terms, each proposal entails that 'the proposition that *S*' is also a term. By accepting proposals with these commitments, Expressivists can legitimately claim that 'the proposition that *S*' is a term. But accepting them also commits Expressivists to rejecting either (3) or (4).

To summarize: the disjunctive reading by itself does not allow Expressivists to accept (2). They can make additional claims about meaning which, together with the disjunctive reading,

¹⁵ See Dreier (1996), pp. 47-8 for a related discussion.

entail that (2) is consistent with Expressivism. But these additional claims have been shown to be inconsistent with other claims Realists accept in sections III and IV.

VI. The metaphysical strategy: a different way around?

There is a different way around which might seem promising. Consider an Expressivist who gives an account of what propositions *are*; that is, she articulates a theory about what propositions have for constituents, and how propositions are assigned to English sentences. One simple account available to the Expressivist is the following: the proposition a sentence *S* expresses is the set of sentences synonymous with *S*.¹⁶ Since Expressivists can accept that some sentences are synonymous with each other, they can accept that every sentence expresses a proposition, if this is what propositions are. Such Expressivist might add an account of what it is to stand in the belief-relation to propositions, which holds that someone counts as standing in the belief-relation to a proposition just in case she sincerely and competently accepts a sentence that is a member of that proposition.

Such an Expressivist would have an easy way to explain why (1) and (2) are consistent with Expressivism: they are true just in case Ted accepts the sentence '*S*', and it is consistent with Expressivism that Ted accepts '*S*'. So, if propositions are construed in this way, then it is consistent with Expressivism that Ted stands in the belief-relation to the proposition that *S*. Whether the particular theory is plausible in other respects is not important for our purposes. What does matter is that it does not obviously entail the denial of any of (1)-(4), and it does so without making any claims about what these sentences mean.

¹⁶ Both the general idea and illustrative example were suggested to me by an anonymous referee for *Philosophical Studies*.

In some respects this proposal is very different from Blackburn's original project, which generates the Creeping Minimalism worry by making claims about meaning. Instead, it makes two metaphysical claims: one about the nature of propositions, and one about the nature of the belief-relation. Expressivists might be able to accept the sentences a Realist accepts by making these kinds of claims, even though they are not Blackburn-style claims about meaning, and so it threatens to generate the Problem of Creeping Minimalism. Let us say that proposals of this kind follow the *metaphysical strategy*.

There is precedent for pursuing this type of program in the literature. A more sophisticated version of the metaphysical strategy is carried out in Schroeder (2008), although not with the aim of generating the Problem of Creeping Minimalism. In the theory Schroeder develops, propositions are identified with pairs of properties that an agent might have. And to believe a proposition is to have the right kind of non-cognitive attitude toward each of the properties in the proposition.¹⁷ At a first pass, the metaphysical strategy does seem to be a more promising approach to developing an Expressivist theory that can accept Realist sentences. But if it is possible to follow the strategy to the point where all of the Realist's sentences turned out to be consistent with Expressivism, this would not constitute a vindication of Blackburn's minimalist project. All this would show is that there is a distinct way to achieve the same result.

Even though the success of the metaphysical strategy would not directly threaten the main thesis of this paper--that a certain kind of semantic theory is unavailable to Expressivists--it is worth noting one general reason for thinking that the metaphysical strategy will not in the end be successful. I requires making one assumption, which I will not argue for here: that there are

¹⁷See Schroeder (2008) ch. 7, especially pp. 89-100. For example, the proposition that lying is wrong is the pair of the property of blaming for lying, twice over (other propositions are non-redundant property-pairs in the theory, but are otherwise similar). All there is to standing in the belief-relation to this proposition is bearing the FOR-attitude toward each property in the pair.

some constraints on what theory of propositions any Expressivist theory of this kind can accept. Just like the basic minimalist strategy, the metaphysical strategy must be developed by starting with the basic resources of Expressivism. Not every theory of propositions can be stated by appealing to only these basic resources. Some theories can: the theory Schroeder develops uses only non-moral terms designating action-types and relations one can bear to them, and the example we used at the beginning of this section to illustrate the metaphysical strategy, on which propositions are sets of sentences, appeals to only sentences and synonymy-relations.

Let us say that a theory of propositions is *Expressivist-friendly* just in case for any sentence *S*, the theory gives an account of the proposition associated with *S* by appealing to only the basic resources of Expressivism, using only non-moral language to describe it. These two theories are Expressivist-friendly. And, I am assuming here, it is a constraint on any version of Expressivism which follows the metaphysical strategy that whatever theory of propositions it adopts must be Expressivist-friendly.

Given this constraint on how the metaphysical strategy can be developed, when the Expressivist goes in for a theory of propositions, she will accept a theory that a Realist will likely deny--Realists will likely not accept Expressivist-friendly theories of propositions, since there are other theories of propositions which are not Expressivist-friendly and are much more natural for Realists to accept.¹⁸ So most Realists will be able to state a very specific way in which an

¹⁸For example, a standard Russellian theory on which propositions are structured complexes with objects, properties and logical operations for constituents will not be Expressivist-friendly. Why this is so is an interesting question, since, by following the basic minimalist strategy, Expressivists might be able to accept some sentences about moral properties, such as the sentence 'x has the property *goodness*', on the grounds that they can accept that 'x is good' plus a minimalist semantics for the former sentence in terms of the latter. But this does not entail that they can have an account of what propositions which have goodness as a constituent are. This because the minimalist claim about moral properties allows them to accept sentences with the expression 'the property goodness' that are equivalent to sentences which *predicate* goodness of something, such as the sentence 'x is good'. Minimalism about the property goodness is really minimalism about *having* the property goodness. But a sentence about a proposition with the property goodness as a constituent is not equivalent to any sentence that predicates goodness of anything. The minimalist reading of sentences about moral properties actually does not capture all the uses of moral property-

Expressivist theory developed with the metaphysical strategy is inconsistent with their view.

But of course a Realist could accept an Expressivist-friendly theory of propositions. She might have independent reasons for rejecting every non-Expressivist-friendly. In this case, she will not be able to point to a specific claim about the nature of propositions that she accepts, and the Expressivist is committed to rejecting. However, these Realists can still say how their view differs from Expressivism, because the Expressivist is committed to accepting some theory that is Expressivist-friendly, while the Realist is not. As a Realist, it is very natural to accept a non-Expressivist-friendly theory, and she could have accepted one without changing her view about any fundamental issues in meta-ethics. And this is all that is needed to avoid (CM): a claim which is consistent with the Realist's view, but not the Expressivist's.

It is important to note here that if this response is correct, it does not require making any more concessions than what we had to make, in order to show in sections II-IV that the minimalist strategy cannot succeed. Just as Realists could accept an Expressivist-friendly theory of propositions, Realists could also reject that propositions are mind-independent or non-linguistic (see note 13). That is, in principle, they could reject the sentences (3) or (4). But this concession does not amount to an admission that Blackburn's minimalist strategy could succeed after all. There is still a substantive difference between Realism and Expressivism, even when we consider the deviant Realist who rejects (3) or (4): it is very natural for a Realist to accept these sentences, and nothing in her meta-ethical theory itself commits her to rejecting them. She could with consistency change her view about (3) or (4) to the orthodox position and leave her meta-ethical views unchanged. The same is not true of the Expressivist. So, if the metaphysical strategy is committed to some Expressivist-friendly theory of propositions, it fails to generate the

terms.

Creeping Minimalism worry for the same reason the original minimalist strategy failed.

VII. The general lesson

To close, I want to make clear what I take to be the basic reason why my central argument in sections II-IV is successful. The reason is that when Expressivists accept a minimalist semantic claim about a Realist sentence--for instance, a claim about what (RB) means--they take on commitments that the Realist doesn't take on when she accepts the sentence. One way of thinking about the argument in the previous sections is to think of it as showing that by going in for a minimalist claim about (RB), Expressivists *transfer* the commitments of (EB) to the Realist sentence they claim it provides an interpretation of. That is, since one of the commitments of (EB) is that its second argument refers to a mental state (or a sentence), one commitment of their minimalist semantic claim about (RB) is that the second argument of (RB) also refers to a mental state (or a sentence). But Realists don't have the same commitments over (RB); they can accept it without also accepting that its second argument refers to a mental state (or a sentence).

Thinking about the argument in this way indicates that, even though what the argument from sections II-IV shows that Expressivists cannot say everything Realists will say about what propositions are, the problem for the Expressivist is much more general than this. That Expressivists are committed to saying things about the expression 'the proposition that *S*' which Realists aren't committed to is just an instance of a more general phenomenon: that by going in for minimalist claims about meaning, Expressivists take on lots of commitments that Realists don't share.

We can see that they are committed to lots of things that aren't about propositions by considering another part of the sentence (RB). We saw that (RB) also contains a two-place

predicate, 'stands in the belief-relation to'. Just as Expressivists were committed to saying things about the second argument of (RB) that Realists aren't committed to saying, they are also committed to more things about the two-place predicate in (RB) than Realists are. Consider the first way of dividing (EB) into an argument structure (an analogous point can be made about the second way of dividing it into an argument structure): just as Expressivists were committed to accepting that (RB)'s second argument 'the proposition that S ' means the same as (EB)'s second argument, 'the mental state actually expressed by ' S ''', this also commits them to accepting that (RB)'s two-place predicate, 'stands in the belief-relation to', means the same as (EB)'s two-place predicate, 'is in'.¹⁹

But then Expressivists are committed saying things about the relation 'stands in the belief-relation to' picks out that Realists aren't committed to saying. For instance, Realists might hold that the 'stands in the belief-relation to' relation is one agents can never bear towards certain kinds of entities, such the mental state of being in pain. But Expressivists have committed themselves to rejecting this: since 'is in' picks out a relation that does hold between agents and the mental state of being in pain, and they are committed to holding that 'stands in the belief-relation to' picks out the same relation, they are committed to holding that 'stands in the belief-relation to' picks out the same relation that holds between agents and the mental state of being in pain. Since this also forces us to reject (CM), we can then see that the question of whether it is true doesn't simply amount to the question of whether Expressivists can capture the Realist's talk

¹⁹ The details of the argument for why this is so is the same as before. We first need to note that the second-order sentence ' $\exists R$: Ted R 's the proposition that S ' (which reads 'Ted is somehow related to the proposition that S ') is also a necessary consequence of (RB). Expressivists can capture this necessary consequence of (RB) by holding that the second-order sentence means the same as ' $\exists R$: Ted R 's the mental state actually expressed by ' S '' (which reads 'Ted is somehow related to the mental state actually expressed by ' S '''). Then, there are claims exactly parallel to P1 and P2, differing only in that they involve the predicate 'stands in the belief-relation to' instead of the term 'the proposition that S '. The argument that the predicate means what 'is in' means is structurally identical to the argument we gave that 'the proposition that S ' means what 'the mental state actually expressed by ' S '' means.

about propositions.

This should give an idea of why my argument is general, and what the recipe for cooking up sets of sentences that are jointly inconsistent with Expressivism is. First, we find some sentence that (CM) requires Expressivists to go minimalist about--a target sentence. Second, we look at an option Expressivists have for giving its equivalence sentence (that is, a sentence which is both modally equivalent to the sentence the Realist can accept and obviously consistent with Expressivism). Finally, we find the commitments that the equivalence sentence carries. Expressivists are committed to holding that the target sentence carries the same commitments, if they accept the minimalist semantic claim that the two sentences mean the same. So by making minimalist claims about meaning, Expressivists are committed to the target sentence having some very specific features: whatever features the equivalence sentences has.²⁰ But Realists won't have to find all the same commitments in the target sentence, since they don't have a theory which requires that they say anything interesting at all about what the target sentence means. The sentence stating the negation of these commitments only the Expressivist takes on will then be a sentence that the Realist can accept, but not the Expressivist.

The metaphysical strategy fails for the same kind of reason. In pursuing it as a way to accept (RB), Expressivists must take on some commitment about the nature of propositions and the belief-relation, and this is a commitment that Realists will likely reject. The only difference is, the metaphysical strategy takes on these commitments transparently, whereas Blackburn's original minimalist strategy is not so transparent about the commitments it takes on--we needed an argument to show that the view had commitments about propositions the Realist doesn't share.

²⁰ Something stronger can be said: by making minimalist claims about meaning, Expressivists are committed to the parts of the target sentence having whatever features the corresponding parts of the equivalence sentence have. Realists, of course, will not be committed to the parts of the target sentence having all of the same features.

In the end, either approach fails to vindicate (CM) because, in order to accept some Realist sentence, it takes on commitments that are inconsistent with other Realist sentences. Either approach amounts to smoothing out a bump in the carpet, only to have it pop up elsewhere.^{21,22}

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²¹ The metaphor is found in Schroeder (2005).

²² Special thanks go to Mark Schroeder for invaluable comments and discussion about this paper. Thanks also to Scott Soames, Steve Finley, David Manley, Daniel Fogal and an anonymous referee for *Philosophical Studies* for comments on earlier drafts, and audiences at the 2008 British Society for Ethical Theory conference at the University of Edinburgh, the 2007 11th Annual Southern California Philosophy Conference, and the 2008 Western Canadian Philosophical Association conference for further helpful comments and discussion.

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