

<https://doi.org/10.21555/top.v740.3093>

Expressivists Beware—Moral Judgments Do Not Aim at a Deflationary Truth

Cuidado, expresivistas: los juicios morales no apuntan a una verdad deflacionaria

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Recibido: 29 - 02 - 2024.

Aceptado: 25 - 06 - 2024.

Publicado en línea: 30 - 09 - 2025.

Cómo citar este artículo: Valencia-Pacheco, R. (2026). Expressivists Beware—Moral Judgments Do Not Aim at a Deflationary Truth. *Tópicos, Revista de Filosofía*, 74, 45-64. <https://doi.org/10.21555/top.v740.3093>



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Abstract

Brown (2022) has recently argued that metaethical expressivists should adopt an interpretationist account of propositional attitudes. Expressivism has traditionally been the view that moral judgments are best understood as desire-like states with a primarily practical function of guiding and producing actions. Most problems for expressivists, however, come from the fact that moral judgments have many belief-like properties: being truth evaluable, epistemically evaluable, embeddable in complex truth-functional constructions, etc. By adopting Brown's proposal, expressivists would avoid several of these problems since they could claim that moral judgments are just beliefs but of a non-representational variety. In this article, I argue that, while promising, this view has a substantial problem. A crucial element of the rationalising interpretation is that beliefs are governed by a norm of aiming at truth. But contrary to what Brown suggests, deflationist accounts of truth cannot help expressivists explain why moral judgments are also subject to this norm.

Keywords: expressivism; interpretationism; deflationism; metaethics; moral beliefs; aiming at truth; propositional attitudes; non-representational belief; desire-like state; Brown.

Resumen

Brown (2022) ha argumentado recientemente que los expresivistas metaéticos deberían adoptar una concepción interpretacionista de las actitudes proposicionales. Tradicionalmente, el expresivismo ha sostenido que los juicios morales se entienden mejor como estados similares al deseo, con una función principalmente práctica de guiar y producir acciones. Sin embargo, la mayoría de los problemas para los expresivistas provienen de que los juicios morales tienen muchas propiedades similares a las creencias: son evaluables en cuanto a la verdad y epistémicamente, integrables a construcciones complejas veritativo-funcionales, etc. Si adoptasen la propuesta de Brown, los expresivistas evitarían varios de estos problemas, ya que podrían afirmar que los juicios morales son creencias, solo de un tipo no representacional. En este artículo sostengo que, aunque prometedora, esta postura tiene un problema sustancial. Un elemento crucial de la interpretación racionalizadora es que las creencias se rigen por la norma de apuntar a la verdad; sin embargo, contrario a lo que sugiere Brown, las explicaciones deflacionistas de la verdad no pueden ayudar a los expresivistas a dar cuenta de por qué los juicios morales también están sujetos a esta norma.

Palabras clave: expresivismo; interpretacionismo; deflacionismo; metaética; creencias morales; apuntar a la verdad; actitudes proposicionales; creencia no representacional; estado similar al deseo; Brown.

I. Expressivism, interpretationism, and the truth norm of belief¹

Moral judgments are the kind of mental states we have when we think, for example, that racial discrimination is morally wrong, that donating to charity is a good thing to do, that one ought to be honest, etc. According to traditional expressivism, these are best understood as desire-like states. One reason for this is that moral thought is said to be inherently practical and so directly linked with the production and guidance of intentional actions. Expressivists, appealing to what is known as a Humean account of the mind, argue that we only get the appropriate connection with intentional action via some desire-like state. Another reason is that thinking of moral judgments as beliefs with the primary function of representing things as having substantial normative properties not only would result in difficulties explaining the practical nature of moral thought but also incurs problematic metaphysical costs. Expressivism, then, is said to fit well within a naturalistic picture of the world and us.²

Critics of expressivism often point out that moral judgments have distinctive belief-like features. Like beliefs, moral judgments are truth evaluable. Thinking that it is true that racial discrimination is morally wrong does not seem like a category mistake. Moreover, we ordinarily talk about our moral judgments *as* beliefs, claiming things like “I *believe* that racial discrimination is wrong,” or embed beliefs and moral

¹ The material in this paper went through a few different iterations (see Valencia Pacheco, 2023). Thanks to Rach Cosker-Rowland, John Divers, Pekka Väyrynen, and Jack Woods for their valuable feedback at different stages. Special thanks to Daniel Elstein for the many illuminating conversations about deflationism and to Neil Sinclair for his comments, which encouraged me to address these issues in more depth. Lastly, thanks to Bart Smith-Johnson for his advice on the title and to two anonymous reviewers for this journal for their suggestions.

² For classic and representative examples of expressivism, see Blackburn (1993 & 1998) and Gibbard (2003). For an overview, see Chrisman (2011). The commitment of traditional versions of expressivism that moral judgments are desire-like is often labelled *non-cognitivism*. See Bedke (2016) for more on the relation between expressivism and non-cognitivism.

judgments in the same attributions of propositional attitudes: “She *believes* you did it and that doing these things is always wrong.”³

Recently, Brown (2022) has argued that expressivists could solve many of the problems they face by adopting a form of interpretationism about propositional attitudes. The following is a characterisation of the view:

Interpretationism: a subject *S* has mental state *M* iff the best rationalising interpretation of *S* would attribute them *M*.⁴

A rationalising interpretation is one that best characterises the agent as rational. Applied to beliefs, the central thesis would be:

Belief interpretationism: a subject *S* has the belief that *p* iff the best rationalising interpretation of *S* would attribute them the belief that *p*.⁵

Brown’s argument has two parts. One, the rationalising interpretation of beliefs does not fundamentally require notions like the representation of facts. Thus, two, the same rationalising interpretation should work for attributing beliefs and moral judgments, which means they are the same kind of mental state. The idea is then that the mental states we ordinarily refer to as “beliefs” are diverse; some are representational, while others, like moral judgments, are not. It makes sense then that moral judgments have many belief-like properties if they are, essentially, just beliefs. Still, the view is compatible with some of the main commitments of traditional

³ A further central thesis of expressivism is that moral claims get their meaning in virtue of the desire-like states they conventionally express. Most discussions of expressivism have centred on this semantic/metasemantic thesis. See Schroeder (2024) for a complete overview. Here, I set those issues aside to focus on the expressivist explanation of moral judgments.

⁴ According to Brown (2022, p. 3) interpretationism is an epistemology of propositional attitudes. Some traditional versions of the view characterize it as a *metaphysics* of propositional attitudes instead. See Lewis (1974) and Williams (2019). While I think the latter fits better with the needs of expressivists, I will remain neutral about this.

⁵ When I speak of content or use variables like *p* I am referring to propositions. But given our topic I will leave open whether they should also be given a deflationist treatment, as in Field (2001, p. 104), or would need a further substantial explanation, as in Horwich (1999, pp. 104-117).

expressivism. Since moral judgments are non-representational beliefs, expressivists do not have to posit the existence of normative facts and properties they represent. This is a central element of the view which distinguishes expressivism from moral realism.⁶ Thus, to keep the distinction between representational and non-representational beliefs meaningful, expressivists can offer alternative explanations of why moral judgments, as non-representational beliefs, are subject to the same norms that make up the rationalising explanation.⁷ A key example here is that, according to Brown (2022, p. 11), part of the rationalising interpretation for any belief is that they aim at the truth. But this is something that expressivists can easily accept if they endorse a form of deflationism about truth. Deflationists argue that truth is not a substantial property, so to say that p is true is nothing other and above saying that p . Thus, there seems to be, in principle, nothing substantial expressivists need to add to their view to make it compatible with the existence of a truth norm—this will be discussed in the next section.⁸

Brown is right in two respects. First, expressivists need a theory like interpretationism. It is crucial for expressivists that moral judgments are a very special kind of mental state with desire-like and belief-like properties. This is a substantial and surprising psychological thesis, so it makes sense that they need a plausible general account of mental states to back it up. However, expressivists have made little effort to connect their views with the broader literature.⁹ They often rely on controversial notions to individuate mental states, like direction of fit, which are

⁶ See Dreier (2018) for more on the distinction between realism and expressivism, and the best ways to draw it.

⁷ Some expressivists may want to argue that these need not be the same norms, since the two types of belief, representational and non-representational, may be subject to different norms. That option, however, is incompatible with the proposal of combining expressivism with interpretationism. If there is no meaningful distinction between mental states, then interpretationists would be suspicious of a meaningful distinction between the rationalising norms of the interpretation. Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this option.

⁸ A different suggestion that interpretationism may support or be compatible with expressivism can be found in Williams (2019, pp. 127-132). And a different argument that expressivists would want a truth norm for their accounts of moral judgments can be found in Sinclair (2006).

⁹ See Sinhababu (2017, pp. 194-197) for an objection in this vein.

widely rejected nowadays.¹⁰ Second, expressivists need the truth norm. Not only because it is central for them to adopt interpretationism but also because it would help them make sense of other central belief-like features of moral judgments, like their epistemic evaluability. In ordinary moral practice, we often think of our moral views as justified, rational, amounting to knowledge, etc. And, independently of interpretationism, it is extremely likely that what explains why moral and non-moral beliefs are epistemically evaluable in the way they are is that they aim at the truth.¹¹ However, the problem is that deflationism is unlikely to help expressivists explain why moral judgments are governed by a truth norm.¹²

Why do we need a truth norm for the rationalising explanation of beliefs? Here's one of the primary reasons Brown offers:

Inconsistency is explained as the same across normative, factual, and mixed contexts. Given our interpretationist theory of belief, how does this explanation go? [...] [T]o believe just is to believe as true, and believing inconsistent propositions necessarily results in believing a falsehood. If the theory of interpretation contains or entails some epistemic truth norm for believing only what is true, then inconsistent beliefs will violate this principle (2022, p. 11).

Rationalising interpretations need different epistemic norms to characterise an agent as rational. These are norms which include concepts like consistency, justification, warrant, etc. As Brown explains here, one if not the best way for interpretationists to explain why beliefs are subject to these norms is that they assume a more fundamental truth norm. This truth norm is likely something along the lines of:

¹⁰ See, for example, Gibbard (1992, pp. 108-109) and Blackburn (2005, p. 323) for endorsements of the distinction of direction of fit, and see Gregory (2012) for an argument against it.

¹¹ See Wedgwood (2002 & 2023, pp. 149-167) and McHugh and Whiting (2014) for examples of this kind of argument.

¹² To be sure, Brown is not the first to argue that deflationism specifically may help expressivists explain the truth norm for moral judgments. See, for example, Blackburn (2010).

B) A belief that p is correct iff p is true.

This norm is meant to help explain why beliefs, in general, stand in the right kind of relations of (in)consistency. Most likely, because from B) we can *derive* less fundamental epistemic norms, such as:

I) Believing that p and believing that *not* p necessarily means one of the beliefs is *incorrect*.

And, crucially, according to Brown, B) and I) are both things that expressivists can accept by endorsing a form of deflationism about truth. Recall that expressivists need an explanation of why non-representational beliefs are subject to the same truth norm as any belief, one that makes the distinction between representational and non-representational beliefs meaningful. The distinction is, after all, crucial to their commitments against positing moral facts and properties. Deflationism offers that explanation. Suppose expressivists opt for a non-deflationist account of truth, such as a correspondence theory. This means, roughly, that:

C) A belief that p is true iff it correctly represents a fact that p .

Given that facts are mentioned on the right-hand side of the biconditional, they are doing substantial explanatory work. Thus, when we apply this schema to moral beliefs, adopting a correspondence theory would result in positing moral facts. The same will be the case for our truth norms B) and I). By adopting interpretationism plus a correspondence theory of truth, expressivism would collapse into a form of realism. It is clear, then, why expressivists need an alternative account of truth, and deflationism is an attractive option.

II. Deflationism

According to deflationism, truth is not a substantial property, so we do not need any problematic notions, like the correct representation of facts, to explain it; there is no particularly interesting explanation to be offered. Claiming that “it is true that racial discrimination is wrong” just amounts to claiming that “racial discrimination is wrong.” And so, explanations that truth, in this case, amounts to the correct representation of racial discrimination as having the property of wrongness are at best unnecessary and at worst misleading. This is why expressivism and

deflationism often go hand in hand. Even so, deflationism is a complex view and there are many ways to articulate it. Thus, it is worth being more precise to get some non-substantial problems out of the way.

We can capture the main points of agreement among deflationists with two commitments: a negative commitment that truth is not a substantial property capable of doing any explanatory work and a positive commitment that everything we need to know about the function of truth is contained in the schema:¹³

T) p is true iff p .

Given these two commitments, most deflationists argue that the function of our concept of truth in thought and speech is as a device for expressing what is already contained in T). For example, we can use it for *generalisation*: instead of claiming S said that p and p , S said that q and q , S said that r and r , and so on, we can just say that what S said is true. Or we can use truth for *endorsement*: instead of just saying p , we can express our endorsement of what is stated by saying that p is true. This is not to say that our ordinary use of the truth concept or predicate is unimportant or that deflationism is a form of scepticism. For example, it often matters very much that what we say and think is true or that we get true information from others. But what deflationists say about those cases is that what we care about has nothing to do with truth itself. For example, when I want to know whether it is true that I deposited the money in the right bank account, what matters is my reasons for thinking so, like my memories about it, the testimony of my partner who was with me at the time, and so on. Theorising about truth will not help with any of that. Everything we can say from the point of view of someone theorising about the nature of truth is something trivial like T).¹⁴

¹³ Lynch (2009, pp. 105-109), Horwich (2010, p. 13) and Armour-Garb *et al.* (2021) all include versions of these commitments. It may be controversial whether the first thesis should be about a property that cannot be used in explanations or a metaphysically fundamental property. I will stick to the former since, on the one hand, it is key for the versions of deflationism I will discuss in this section; on the other, admitting truth can be used in explanations seems closer to views rival to deflationism, like minimalism. See Wright (1992 & 2021) for the distinction.

¹⁴ To be sure, this emphasis on leaving our ordinary thought and speech about truth untouched is sometimes left out of the characterization of deflation-

One initial problem for applying deflationism to the present issue is that the view is often presented as an account of truth *ascriptions* or truth *conditions*, but what we are interested in is the norms that govern beliefs, like B). But this is not a substantial problem. Some deflationists like Paul Horwich (2010, pp. 75-77) argue that just like truth is merely a device of generalisation, it plays a similar role in *stating* the infinitely many norms captured by B). And so, we could easily reconstruct them without appealing to truth in any substantial way. We would have infinite instances of norms with the form:

B*) A belief that *p* is correct iff *p*.

And given that, again, truth is not a substantial property, nothing is stopping us from applying this schema to moral judgments:

M*) A moral judgment that *p* is correct iff *p*.

And so, expressivists have a deflationist way of recapturing the truth norm of beliefs, adopting interpretationism, and getting all its advantages. To be clear, like most deflationists would agree, that does not mean that the truth or the correctness of our moral judgments is unimportant. Instead, if we care about *which* of our moral judgments are true or *in virtue of what* they are true, those are more complex questions that require us to stop theorising about truth and engage in some substantial moral inquiry. Thus, just like for non-moral beliefs, adopting deflationism has no problematic sceptical consequences.

So far, so good. The problem is that for B*) to do the work required by interpretationism, it should help us explain less fundamental epistemic norms like I). This initially does not seem too problematic. After all, we can think of correct beliefs not as those that have a substantial property of truth but as those that satisfy conditions B*), that a belief that *p* is correct iff *p*, which does not include truth. Then, less fundamental epistemic norms can be the means to form correct beliefs for *each instance* of B*) —since we are not using truth for generalisation. For example, my belief that Trotsky died in Coyoacán is correct iff Trotsky died in Coyoacán, and epistemic norms like I), or other epistemic norms of justification, rationality, warrant, etc., stand for the good and bad means to form a

ism. However, see Shieh (2018) and Blackburn (2010) for why this should not be. Some, like Wright (2021), argue that this element unites different pragmatist accounts of truth like deflationism and minimalism.

correct belief in that matter. These norms would not support a belief that Trotsky died in Coyoacán when he did not, and so, are derivative of B*). We will have a similar story for each belief governed by less fundamental epistemic norms like I).

But say that we need to explain how I) applies to the belief that there is a computer in front of me. We have a similar story in that we determine its correctness conditions without truth by a different instance of B*), and then I) is derivative of this instance of the norm. But what would the norms governing the belief about Trotsky have in common with the norms governing this belief about my computer? It cannot be that they are instances of the same epistemic norms because they all concern truth since that would mean using truth in a substantial explanatory way. Moreover, deflationists would be in trouble if they need to deny these are instances of the same norm since epistemic evaluations can be *comparative*. For example, I can be more justified in believing that my computer is in front of me than in believing that Trotsky died in Coyoacán—perhaps because of the weight of the evidence for each. And the explanation cannot be that they share the same *structure* either. Consider, for example, a norm according to which forming inconsistent beliefs would be *morally* incorrect, perhaps because it leads us to be morally arbitrary. Presumably, that norm has the same *structure* as I), but *substantially*, it would be a different norm—it picks a distinct sense of incorrectness.

Perhaps deflationists could draw a general bridge principle between B*) and I):

P) One can only aim to have a correct belief that *p* by aiming to have overall consistent beliefs.

However, this would only show the problem more clearly. Expressivists need to derive epistemic norms from the more fundamental norm of belief. Given deflationism, they also need to deny that there is a single more fundamental norm, and instead there are infinitely many norms like B*). In that case, we are left with no explanation of what unifies the correctness at issue for all epistemic norms because there is nothing general like truth that makes all these beliefs correct; we must proceed on a case-by-case basis. The generalisation in P), then, is misleading, because we have no good general way of making sense of the correctness at issue. Thus, the problem at its core is that epistemic

norms seem unified in a way that requires explanation,¹⁵ but given the commitments of expressivists adopting deflationism this explanation should 1) not appeal to truth in any substantial way and 2) be compatible with the fact that epistemic norms are derivable from the truth norm of belief. This *is* a substantial problem.

Deflationists may find other ways to unify epistemic norms without using truth. Perhaps they can say that what unifies different instances of B*) is not truth but the kind of mental state they apply to. In our example, both norms are epistemic because they both apply to *beliefs*. And there is some precedent in the literature of views that follow this path of reducing epistemic norms to what is distinctive about belief. We can call the property of beliefs that helps explain the rest of epistemic norms *epistemic evaluability*.¹⁶ This may be the way to go for deflationists. However, this is precisely the kind of view that *expressivists* cannot appeal to if they want to adopt interpretationism. After all, they need deflationism to show that moral judgments are regulated by the same norms that make up the rationalising interpretation of beliefs. Thus, if they argue that we can derive the same epistemic norms from different instances of B*) because in both cases we are dealing with beliefs, they would be trapped in a tight explanatory circle. Deflationism, at least by itself, will not give expressivists a good explanation of the truth norm needed for their interpretationism.¹⁷

¹⁵ Of course, one could be a deflationist about epistemic norms and deny that there is a substantial property that unifies them, like Dogramaci (2013). However, that view is compatible with my argument here, given that I am not assuming that it is a property that does the explanation. Moreover, Dogramaci's view does not seem compatible with deflationism about *truth*. For him, what does the explanation is a *function* all epistemic norms share of obtaining and transmitting true information within a community. Truth is central for that explanation.

¹⁶ As McHugh and Whiting (2014, p. 707) point out, this seems to be Ernst Sosa's view. However, Sosa has a significantly more sophisticated account of belief than the one I have been assuming here. For him, believing is a complex activity that involves norms of competence and success. For more on this, see Sosa (2015); see also Shah (2006) and Alston (2005, pp. 37-38) from which I am adapting the concept of epistemic evaluability.

¹⁷ Other arguments that deflationism cannot explain the epistemic roles of truth adequately can be found in Wright (1992) and Lynch (2009, pp. 105-114). For a different argument against using deflationism for the expressivist project

III. Truth-aptness

Some expressivists are likely to respond that the results of the discussion so far are unsurprising. Deflationism has many limitations. For example, it cannot help expressivists explain why moral judgments, being non-representational states, are apt for truth ascriptions, unlike other non-primarily representational states like thirst, a headache, or even ordinary desires. Thus, as most expressivists accept nowadays, if they want to adopt a form of deflationism, they need to supplement it with a substantial account of truth aptness or truth evaluability (I will use these terms interchangeably). As Blackburn (1993, p. 7) explains, expressivists who like deflationism want a thin theory of truth combined with a thick theory of judgment.¹⁸ For our present issue, the notions of truth evaluability and epistemic evaluability seem to be closely connected. Thus, perhaps the key to solving the problem is that deflationism is indeed all expressivists need to capture the norm that governs moral and non-moral beliefs, but if we need a further explanation of what unifies the epistemic norms we derive from it, the response is that they all apply to truth-evaluable states.¹⁹

One aspect of this response is on the right track. For interpretationists, the norms composing a rationalising interpretation are meant to illuminate the nature of the mental states they ascribe. Thus, if we want an explanation of the truth norm, it is better to look into the nature of the state in question and not appeal to notions that, by the deflationist lights, are not substantial and so not meant to be illuminating. And truth evaluability, as it is usually understood, is a substantial property of moral judgments. However, I still do not think this is enough to solve the problem. Even among expressivists who agree that they

of earning the right to epistemic notions (although in the case of fallibility) see Gamester (2022, p. 5).

¹⁸ The classic statement of this argument for the necessity of truth evaluability can be found in Dreier (1996). See also Schroeder (2018) for an overview of the discussion.

¹⁹ That aiming at truth requires truth evaluability is suggested by Sinclair (2006, p. 256). Brown (2022, p. 11) cites Sinclair as the basis for his proposal, so perhaps this is a fairer interpretation of what he had in mind by appealing to deflationism. Thanks to Neil Sinclair for suggesting this alternative.

need a further sense of truth evaluability, there is no agreement on what that explanation could be.²⁰ The idea then cannot be that they know which property or properties determine truth evaluability, and those also determine epistemic evaluability. The best strategy is to proceed negatively: denying that there are examples of states that are truth-evaluable and not epistemically evaluable. That way, explaining epistemic evaluability would at least not represent an *additional* problem for expressivists. But even this negative strategy is unlikely to work. As Beddor (2019, p. 9) explains, states like imaginings and suppositions seem truth-evaluable but not epistemically evaluable. The conditions for truth and epistemic evaluability then must be different at least in some central respect. Expressivists then have two remaining options: argue that contrary to appearances, these states are not truth evaluable (at least not in the same sense as moral judgments and beliefs are) or that, contrary to appearances, they are epistemically evaluable. In the remainder of the paper, I will explain why these options are unlikely to work either.

One way in which beliefs and imaginings can be said to be truth-evaluable is that they are both propositional and representational attitudes. I can both imagine and believe that I can walk forty kilometres without stopping, and these would have the same proposition as content, a proposition which can be true or false. However, expressivists can argue that the belief and the imagining interact differently with the truth of the proposition, so they are not truth-evaluable in the same way. It is, for example, easy to think that both the belief and not just the proposition in the example are true. But it is harder to think of the imagining *itself*, not just the proposition in its content, as true. The problem with that response is that imaginings are diverse, and it is difficult to make a general case that we never think of imaginings themselves as true. For example, cases of imaginative immersion where the distinction between the truth of individual imaginings and their contents gets blurred. Consider an immersion case in which I imagine an object in front of me and imagine that I raise my hand to reach it while actually raising my hand with that intention. The second imagining, and not just its content, seems true. This is why several plausible views

²⁰ Some candidates are a form of discipline and syntax (Lenman, 2003) and being the kind of thing that can enter relations of agreement and disagreement (Gibbard, 2003, pp. 65-75), but these are controversial. See Dreier (2009).

classify beliefs and imaginings as part of the same spectrum of mental states.²¹ Moreover, even if expressivists want to deny this continuity thesis, some of the best ways to mark a difference between imaginings and beliefs assume the account they are looking for. For example, Shah and Velleman (2005) argue that the best way to distinguish them is that beliefs, but not imaginings, aim at the truth.²² But truth evaluability was supposed to help expressivists explain the truth norm, not the other way around. Truth evaluability is extremely difficult to pin down, so there may be a different way to distinguish the truth evaluability of beliefs and imaginings. However, from where we stand, it is hard for expressivists to build a case on that hypothesis.

On the other hand, expressivists could argue that imaginings and suppositions are epistemically evaluable. And there is a sense in which this is true. For example, many authors claim that imaginings are essential in getting modal knowledge and in our counterfactual reasoning.²³ And it seems we apply epistemic norms to our imaginings when we engage with complex fiction.²⁴ But even if these cases give us a general sense of epistemic evaluability, expressivists need *the same* norms to govern belief and moral judgments. This is the sense of epistemic evaluability that is presumed to be necessarily linked to truth evaluability. And this is not the sense we get from the examples. Consider I). Inconsistent imaginings are only problematic when engaging in fiction given further non-epistemic assumptions about the fiction in question,²⁵ and considering inconsistent propositions seems crucial for many of the uses we give to suppositions.

A related option could be that, given how closely related these states seem, perhaps imaginings and suppositions need an extra element *not* to be epistemically evaluable (or not epistemically evaluable in the same way as beliefs). It is fundamental for the three states to have contents that represent things as being a certain way, and imaginings and suppositions

²¹ See Schellenberg (2013) for an example and Liao and Gendler (2019, § 2.1) for an overview. There are similar difficulties in distinguishing the truth of suppositions and their contents. See, for example, Elstein and Williams (2014).

²² See Sinhababu (2013) for other options.

²³ For an overview of this discussion, see Kung (2016).

²⁴ See Gilmore (2020, pp. 134-154).

²⁵ This is typically explained by a norm of quarantining, distinctive of imaginings and pretence. See Gendler (2008).

need an extra element that enables us to use this representational capacity in a non-epistemic way. Of course, of all the three options we have considered, this is likely to be the most controversial. Still, it may find some support in views about the advantageous evolutionary purpose of our responses to hypothetical scenarios as derivative of the advantages of our responses to actual scenarios.²⁶ In that way, if moral judgments are already close to any of these states, proving they are *not* epistemically evaluable would be more challenging.

There are two things to consider in response. First, the property that makes imaginings and suppositions similar to beliefs in this respect cannot just be that they are all attitudes with propositions as contents. After all, there are well-known and plausible views according to which the contents of ordinary desires are also propositions.²⁷ But it seems hard to accept that ordinary desires can be epistemically evaluable, and it is just an extra element that blocks that feature. Second, as things stand, the best explanation of what imaginings and suppositions share with beliefs will likely appeal to a further representational capacity. In that case, expressivists would be in trouble since they want to argue that moral judgments are epistemically evaluable like all these states but are also non-representational. Thus, the problematic substantial properties that expressivists got rid of by adopting deflationism would come back in their explanation of truth evaluability. This is a conclusion that expressivists should resist.

IV. Conclusion

The move from a characterisation of expressivism as claiming that moral judgments are categorically not beliefs to a broader conception of belief is, I think, a step in the right direction. And appealing to substantial and plausible views on the nature of propositional attitudes, like interpretationism, is also the best option for expressivists taking this route. Still, to capture some of the most central elements of these views, like the truth norm of beliefs, expressivists need to rethink the tools they bring on board or come up with new ones. In particular, deflationism, even supplemented with a sense of truth aptness, is unlikely to help the expressivist cause.

²⁶ See, for example, Sterelny (2003, p. 11).

²⁷ See Sinhababu (2015) for an example and a defence of that view.

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