



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

A dilemma for moral fictionalism

Citation for published version:

Chrisman, M 2008, 'A dilemma for moral fictionalism', *Philosophical Books*, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 4-13.
https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0149.2008.454_2.x

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1111/j.1468-0149.2008.454_2.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0149.2008.454_2.x)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Philosophical Books

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Matthew Chrisman, 2008. Chrisman, M. (2008). A dilemma for moral fictionalism. *Philosophical Books*, 49(1), 4-13doi: [10.1111/j.1468-0149.2008.454_2.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0149.2008.454_2.x)

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



A DILEMMA FOR MORAL FICTIONALISM

Matthew Chrisman
University of Edinburgh

The most prominent anti-realist program in recent metaethics is the expressivist strategy of treating ethical claims as expressing not beliefs but noncognitive attitudes of some sort. Its popularity stems in part from the fact that, by construing ethical claims as expressing noncognitive attitudes rather than beliefs, one can reject a realist ontology of morality without rejecting moral discourse wholesale. For, if the function of ethical claims is to express noncognitive states in the project of coordinating feelings and actions in community rather than to express beliefs in the project of cognizing and describing the world, ethical discourse may be perfectly legitimate even though there is no area of reality that it describes. At least, that's what I take to be one of the principal theoretical aspirations of the expressivist strategy.

Kalderon's moral fictionalism is proposed as a metaethical position that has the same ontological advantages as expressivism but avoids its perceived problems. As he sees things, there are at least two distinct negative claims packed into the expressivist idea. First, *noncognitivism* is a view about the psychology of moral acceptance, or, more precisely, the view that "accepting a moral sentence wholly consists in attitudes other than belief in a moral proposition" (2005: 52). For instance, accepting that murder is wrong is not, according to noncognitivism, to *believe* that murder is wrong. So to say that murder is wrong is not to express the belief that murder is wrong. Importantly, however, this view is not to be confused with *nonfactualism*, which is a nonrepresentationalist view about the semantics of moral sentences, or, more precisely, the view that "the content of a moral sentence does not consist in any moral proposition expressed, for it expresses none" (2005: 52). For instance, some have thought that the sentence "Murder is wrong" does not express the proposition that murder is wrong, because it expresses no proposition at all.

To some philosophers working in metaethics, it has seemed that a commitment to noncognitivism forces a commitment to nonfactualism. Indeed, it may seem that it is precisely this connection that has fueled the attempt to develop an "expressivist semantics" for ethical sentences. However, Kalderon argues that it is wrong to see noncognitivism as forcing nonfactualism because there is the possibility of a *fictionalist* account of moral discourse. To put it baldly, the fictionalist is a factualist but not a cognitivist. That is, he holds that moral sentences express moral propositions, but the fictionalist also thinks that accepting a moral sentence does not consist in belief in a moral proposition. This means that one could consistently maintain, with the noncognitivists, that accepting a moral sentence consists in having attitudes other than belief in a moral proposition while rejecting, with the factualists, the idea that the content of a moral sentence does not consist in the moral proposition it expresses. This is, I take it, the core of Kalderon's moral fictionalism.

In my opinion, it is correct and dialectically important to keep issues about the psychology and pragmatics of our moral discourse clearly distinct from issues about the semantics of the sentences used in this discourse. Of course, these might be related, but considerations which bear on one or the other set of issues don't clearly carry over *mutatis mutandis* to the other issue. So I commend Kalderon for upholding the

distinction between thoughts, considered as mental states, and thoughts, considered as contents of mental states, and—what I see as more fundamental—the distinction between expression, considered as a relation between a linguistic act and a mental state, and expression considered as a relation between a linguistic item like a sentence and its content.¹

However, in light of that distinction, I want to pose a question which I think generates a dilemma for Kalderon and, more generally, for any moral fictionalist. The question is this: If ethical claims do not express beliefs in moral propositions, then what does the fictionalist think they express? It's clear that Kalderon thinks that ethical *sentences* express propositions, but the question, to put it more explicitly, is: what is the mental state conventionally conveyed by saying an ethical sentence? It seems to me that the following three general options are open to the fictionalist:

- (i) Ethical claims express the sorts of noncognitive attitudes that the noncognitivist claims to be constitutive of the acceptance of a moral sentence;
- (ii) Ethical claims express attitudes of pretending that something is morally good/bad/right/wrong;
- (iii) Ethical claims express beliefs that the/a moral fiction morally condemns/commends something.

Although a possible fictionalist might hold (iii), I think that view would be implausible for reasons Kalderon recognizes. If that's what moral acceptance is, it is wildly unclear why our moral views have any effect on how we live our lives. So my dilemma comes in forcing the choice between (i) and (ii). Which option a fictionalist would choose depends, I think, on how seriously he wants us to take the idea of *fiction* or *pretense* in interpreting his view. I'm not sure how seriously Kalderon does want us to take this idea, but I suspect that both taking it seriously and not taking it seriously are problematic. More specifically, I'll argue that if he chooses (i), his view collapses into a form of expressivism, though a form that has a lacuna which makes it of dubious value in the realism debate, but, if he chooses (ii), his view is phenomenologically implausible and morally dubious.

There are a variety of different fictionalist views in philosophy. To locate the precise sort of view Kalderon wants to endorse, some distinctions are in order.² All fictionalisms are views about an area of discourse, so different fictionalisms can be distinguished by their target—there are fictionalists about mathematical discourse, modal discourse, scientific discourse, ordinary-object discourse, and, of course moral discourse. For each of these, we can distinguish further between fictionalism about the use of the discourse and fictionalism about the meaning of claims in the discourse. Meaning-fictionalists make a

¹ See Kalderon (2005: 63-64), where he stipulates that he will use 'express' for the semantic relation and 'convey' for the pragmatic-psychological relation. Here Kalderon is recapitulating the distinction Sellars (1969) makes in a different context between what he calls the "action sense of express" and the "semantic sense of express". See Chrisman (forthcoming) for more discussion of this distinction and its relation to the history of expressivism; see Bar-On and Chrisman (in preparation) for more discussion of this distinction in connection to expressivist attempts to explain the putatively internal connection between ethical discourse and motivation.

² I take these from Elkund (2007), but I think they are relatively standard in the literature on fictionalism. Kalderon makes the distinction between hermeneutic and revolutionary fictionalism too. (2005: 136-141)

claim about the meaning of the relevant claims. For instance, a meaning-fictionalist about mathematical discourse would say something like “The meaning of ‘ $1+1=2$ ’ is that ‘in the fiction of mathematics $1+1=2$.’” Meaning fictionalism is usually a pretty dubious view, but it shouldn’t be confused with the view of the use-fictionalists, who make no specific positive claim about the meaning of the relevant claims (though they reject nonfactualism) but rather about their use. Within the category of use-fictionalism, we can distinguish between hermeneutic and revolutionary views. Hermeneutic use-fictionalists are making a claim about how best to understand the use of an existing discourse, whereas revolutionary use-fictionalists are making a claim about how we ought to change our use of the discourse. So, for example, a use-fictionalist about ordinary-object discourse might hold that our actual discourse about ordinary objects uses the relevant claims as fictions, which would be the hermeneutic view, or that we should use the relevant claims as fictions even if we currently do not, which would be the revolutionary view.

In light of these distinctions, Kalderon’s view is best read as a hermeneutic use-fictionalist view about moral discourse.³ So Kalderon thinks moral discourse *as it now stands* is best understood as being *used* as a fiction.

But what does it mean to use a discourse as a fiction? We have clear paradigms: when we tell a ghost story or recount the exploits of Sherlock Holmes, we clearly are not asserting things about real people doing real things; no, we are engaging in a sort of make-believe or pretense. It is controversial how exactly to interpret the use and meaning of the relevant sentences about ghosts and the clever detective; however, what seems rather clear in these cases is what I’ll call *the phenomenology of pretense* among ordinary speakers: In paradigmatically fictional cases, it seems to us as if we are operating under some pretense; often we can even articulate key features of the pretense or say what we are pretending to be true.

In light of this, here is a flatfooted phenomenological worry about moral fictionalism: It just doesn’t seem to me that I am operating under some pretense when I make a moral claim, and, more generally, I doubt that ordinary speakers have the phenomenology of pretense when it comes to moral discourse. To be sure, we sometimes begin moral claims with something like “Morally speaking...”, but this seems rather different from “In a land far far away....” Moreover, there seems to be a diagnosable reason for this: morality is an important institution for cooperating and living together; if morality was actually taken to be a sort of pretense by its practitioners, it may very well lose its effectiveness for this function. Of course, sometimes we do engage in elaborate pretense that has some social function. For some of us, certain religious practices may be like this. At the communion table, we “drink the blood of Christ” or we “ask for God’s forgiveness”—even though we don’t actually believe that the blood of Christ is in the cup or that there is a personal God who can forgive. However, in these cases the

³ He’s admirably clear on this point. He writes, “If the difficulties facing expressivist nonfactualism are indeed intractable, then an adequate noncognitivism requires the development of a *semantically uncontroversial* moral fictionalism”(2005: 146, emphasis added), which, in addition to the fact that he never proposes an analysis of moral propositions, I take to be evidence that he is offering a use-view rather than a meaning-view. And, in connection with one of his primary arguments for noncognitivism, he writes, “Since the argument proceeds from a conceptual claim about the norms that actually govern moral acceptance, the resulting moral fictionalism is a hermeneutic moral fictionalism”(2005: 136), which is incontrovertible evidence that he is proposing a hermeneutic view.

phenomenology of pretense is strong, and were there to be a high incentive to disengage from the pretense, we would do so immediately. Morality doesn’t seem like that.

Kalderon might respond to this worry in two basic ways, which line up with the choice between options (i) and (ii) mentioned above. The first response is to argue that moral discourse is merely *similar* to fictional discourse in that it deploys propositional sentences but it doesn’t use them to express beliefs in the relevant propositions. Perhaps the phenomenology of pretense breaks down when it comes to moral discourse, but hermeneutic use-fictionalism as a philosophical thesis is the view that an area of discourse is *like* fiction in that the relevant sentences express propositions but their use is not to express beliefs in the correlated propositions. As such, fictionalism is a viable option for a wider class of discourse than those where we expect some phenomenology of pretense. For instance, mathematical discourse and possible-worlds discourse may lack the phenomenology of pretense, yet that doesn’t mean hermeneutic use-fictionalism is obviously the wrong view to take of them—quite reputable philosophers have done so. The second response is for Kalderon to insist—the phenomenology of pretense notwithstanding—that he is serious when he says that moral discourse is fictional. He could go on to argue that ordinary speakers are highly fallible about the correct interpretation of what they are doing with a discourse. The suggestion would be that, even though it may not seem that we are pretending when we make moral claims, the most cogent and satisfying philosophical interpretation of moral discourse treats our claims as expressions not of beliefs but of attitudes of pretense.

Based on his discussion of quasi-assertion, where he discusses fictionalist accounts of other areas of discourse advanced by philosophers such as Field, Yablo, and Rosen, I strongly suspect Kalderon is inclined towards the first sort of response. And it’s surely right that philosophical positions going under the label “fictionalism” have been developed for a number of areas of discourse that don’t plausibly involve the phenomenology of pretense. So perhaps Kalderon deserves the label as much as Field (about mathematics), Yablo (about mathematics), Rosen (about possible-worlds), etc. do. But I wonder whether, in absence of the phenomenology of pretense, *fiction* is the best metaphor for developing and arguing for these views. Why not say simply that although the relevant *sentences* express propositions and so could, in principle be used to describe the world, the best account of what we are doing with these sentences is not describing the world but something else? The something else doesn’t have to be assimilated to fiction or pretense, in order to avoid the crude intuitionist idea that we’re expressing beliefs about some *sui generis* moral reality or the crude emotivist idea that we’re merely evincing our attitudes. In addition to “making up a story” Wittgenstein’s famous list (1953: §23) includes “giving orders...speculating about an event...guessing riddles...making a joke...asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.” All of these things can be done with ordinary indicative statements, which shows that there’s no reason to think that describing, emoting, and pretending are the only options.

In cases such as mathematics or possible worlds, it’s doubtful that “expressing a noncognitive attitude” is the best description of the use of the relevant sentences. But what about moral discourse? Interestingly Kalderon basically endorses what I see as the core expressivist thought that the point of ethical discourse is the expression of something other than beliefs in the project of coordinating feelings and actions in community. He writes, “In uttering a moral sentence that he understands, a competent speaker conveys the relevant affect and implicitly demands that others come to respond affectively in the relevant manner”(2005: 148). He approvingly cites MacIntyre’s idea

that “...even if the meaning of [moral] sentences were quite other than emotive theorists supposed, it might be plausibly claimed...that in using such sentences to say whatever they mean, the agent was in fact doing nothing other than expressing his feelings or attitudes and attempting to influence the feelings and attitudes of others (1982: 14, cited at Kalderon (2005: 115)). And, when considering Gibbard’s norm-expressivist theory, Kalderon writes, “A normative fictionalist might even agree with Gibbard’s explanation of normative acceptance and utterance as a biologically adaptive solution to a coordination problem”(2005: 117). So why doesn’t his view just count as a version of expressivism?

One reason might be that he thinks the state of accepting a moral sentence, although noncognitive in whole, involves cognitive elements. It’s a sort of amalgam. He writes, “...moral acceptance, according to the form of moral fictionalism argued for here, is a mixed case, involving as it does an amalgam of cognitive and noncognitive attitudes”(Ibid.: 129). However, this puts him in partnership with rather than in opposition to two recent expressivity views. Gibbard has encouraged a norm-expressivist account of judgments of rationality, which treats them as an amalgam of cognitive and noncognitive elements. He writes, “Thinking X rational...is a combination of a normative state and a state of factual belief. It is accepting a system N of norms such that one believes the subject to be in circumstances for which N permits X”(1990: 91). And Ridge has argued for an ecumenical expressivist view, according to which moral claims “express both a speaker’s attitude in favor of actions in general insofar as they have a certain property (whatever property guides the speaker’s approval of actions quite generally) and a belief which makes anaphoric reference to that property”(2006: 313). So it cannot be the mere fact that Kalderon thinks the states expressed by moral claims are an amalgam including cognitive elements that makes him an anti-expressivist.

I suspect the deeper reason Kalderon disavows expressivism has to do with his definition of expressivism. He defines it as the view that “the content of a moral sentence wholly consists in the noncognitive attitudes conveyed by its utterance”(2005: 53). This is an idiosyncratic definition. To be sure, Ayer does say “...we may define the meaning of the various ethical words in terms both of the different feelings that they are ordinarily taken to express, and also the different responses which they are calculated to provoke”(1946: 108). However, this is, as far as I know, as close as any expressivist gets to saying that the *content* of a moral sentence wholly *consists* in the noncognitive attitudes conveyed by its utterance. And Blackburn, the arch quasi-realist expressivist, seems to undermine Kalderon’s definition when he writes, “I believe [Moore] was absolutely correct about the content of the moral proposition. It is what it is, and not another thing”(1998: 86). In fact, it seems to me that the most charitable interpretation of Ayer (especially given his explanation of what he meant by “meaning” in the preface to his 1946) is in the vein of Gibbard who writes, “The expressivist’s strategy is to change the question. Don’t ask directly how to define ‘good’, for no correct definition can break out of...a circle of ought-like terms...Instead of seeking a straight definition, expressivists propose, seek a characterization of a different form. Ask what *states of mind* ethical statements *express*”(2003: 6).

Is an answer to the question, “What states of mind do ethical statements express?” the same as an answer to the question, “What constitutes the content of ethical sentences?” It certainly needn’t be. To see this, consider an expressivist view in another area of philosophical debate. Those concerned with the possibility of distinctively secure and apparently groundless knowledge of our own mental states sometimes wonder about the content and use of avowals—i.e. first-person present-tense claims about one’s own mental states. For instance, when I say, “I want some more coffee”, I ostensibly make a

claim about my desire for more coffee. Although this is a claim about a contingent matter of fact not based on observation or inference, it usually doesn’t make sense to ask me for my reasons for thinking it true. In this sense avowals are thought to exhibit distinctive security. Some—Wittgenstein (1953), Ginet (1969), and, more recently and subtly, Bar-On (2004)—have tried to explain this phenomenon with an expressivist account of avowals. This account claims (roughly) that avowals express not (or at least not in the first instance) self-ascriptive beliefs about one’s own mental states but rather the very state avowed. So, for instance, my avowal “I want some more coffee” would, on this view, be thought to express my desire for more coffee, rather than my belief that I want some more coffee. However—and this is what is crucial here—this account of what avowals express is *not* an account of what constitutes the content of the relevant sentences used to avow. It would be wildly implausible as an account of the content of the sentences. For avowals deploy the indexical ‘I’, whose content is fixed in context. This means that, in a particular context, the semantic content of the sentence “I want some more coffee” is the same as that of the sentence “Chrisman wants some more coffee”—or, as we typically say, they express the same proposition. However, what’s important to the avowal expressivist is that their *use* is quite different.

So merely making the expressivist move of changing the question from “How do we define these terms or what constitutes the content of these sentences?” to “What state of mind does one express when one uses sentences containing these terms?” does not yet commit one to thinking that an answer to the latter question constitutes an answer to the former question. Indeed, if we modeled an expressivist view of ethical claims on the expressivist view of avowals, we’d get a view of moral discourse very similar in its semantics and pragmatics to Kalderon’s view, were he to choose (i) in my dilemma above.⁴ For under this choice, Kalderon agrees with the expressivist that one who uses ethical sentences expresses a noncognitive state. What he disagrees with is the nonfictionalist suggestion that the content of ethical sentences is somehow nonpropositional. But the ethical expressivist who modeled her position on avowal expressivism wouldn’t disagree. So why isn’t Kalderon’s view just a version of, rather than a competitor to, expressivism?

One possible response to my argument thus far would be for Kalderon to insist that his view—whatever we want to label it—is importantly different from expressivist views currently on offer. And the difference is that, although he agrees with noncognitivism, he aims to provide a “semantically uncontroversial”(2005: 146) representationalist account of the meaning of ethical sentences in place of the semantically controversial nonrepresentationalist accounts typically provided by expressivists. The idea is that, insofar as they are nonfactualists, expressivists’ have illicitly mixed the psychological and pragmatic issue of what mental state ethical claims convey with the semantic issue of what proposition ethical sentences express.⁵

⁴ I call this view *ethical neo-expressivism* because it is modeled on Bar-On’s (2004) neo-expressivist view of avowals. In Chrisman and Bar-On (ms), we articulate ethical neo-expressivism and argue that it has distinctive advantages with respect to internalist intuitions. However, we explicitly deny that it is a view of the semantics of ethical discourse.

⁵ Indeed, this seems to be the core of what Kalderon terms the “pragmatic fallacy”. It’s not clear to me, however, that Kalderon is right to call this a *fallacy*, since at least one of the major approaches to semantics (the Lockean/Gricean tradition) tries to explain the semantic issue of what proposition a sentence expresses *in terms of* the pragmatic issue of what typical utterances of the sentence conventionally convey. (Granted, though, there is a venerable tradition in

Although I agreed at the beginning that it's important to keep these issues distinct, I think it's a mistake to think we can keep them completely separated in the metaethical debate. To see this, notice a difference between Kalderon's fictionalist view and the avowal expressivist view mentioned above. We've already seen that these views are very similar in their semantics and pragmatics, but they differ in their metaphysics. An avowal expressivist like Bar-On (2004) holds that the self-ascriptive sentences used to avow are mostly true, and, when true, they are true in virtue of correctly representing the mental facts. By contrast, Kalderon holds that the moral sentences used to express noncognitive states of moral acceptance are systematically false because there are no moral facts for them to correctly represent.

Now, arguably, the avowal expressivist has a very compelling argument for the positive metaphysical component of her view. To view avowals as expressing the mental state avowed one has to believe that such states exist to be expressed; and if such states exist, there is no problem with thinking that sentences such as "I want some more coffee" are true just in case I actually do have a desire for some more coffee.⁶ Because of this, I think it is fair to say that the avowal expressivist's semantics, pragmatics, and metaphysics all hang together in a cogent way.

Does Kalderon have a similarly compelling argument for the negative metaphysical component of his view? In the book, he argues (ch. 1) for the noncognitivist view that the acceptance of an ethical sentence is not a belief but rather a noncognitive state; and he argues (ch. 2) for the factualist view that ethical sentences express propositions that represent their putative subject matter. And he argues (ch. 3) that commitment to noncognitivism doesn't require commitment to nonfactualism because fictionalism is a possible alternative. And he argues (ch. 4) that the aim of moral inquiry is not truth but transformation. What he doesn't ever argue is that fictionalism is the *only* possible view that commits to noncognitivism and yet rejects nonfactualism. However, as expressivism about avowals reveals, thinking a claim expresses a noncognitive state doesn't require or even necessarily suggest anti-realism about the relevant subject matter. So, if fictionalism doesn't require anti-realism, then Kalderon owes us an independent argument for anti-realism; the arguments for noncognitivism, even if completely compelling, won't themselves settle the metaphysical issue.⁷

But if moral fictionalism is, in essence, the combination of noncognitivism and factualism, and this combination is neutral on the metaphysics of morals, then why should we think of the fictionalist position as a view that has the same ontological advantages as expressivism yet avoids its perceived problems? I don't think it should be thought of like that unless there is an argument linking the noncognitivist view of the mental states expressed by ethical claims to anti-realism. Of course, most expressivists have long thought that the way to do this is to combine noncognitivism with a nonfactualist or nonrepresentationalist semantics. The idea is that because ethical sentences are used to express noncognitive states we shouldn't give the content of these sentences in terms of propositions which represent the world but rather as something like "counters in our transactions with our values, just as a piece of money is a counter in

metaethics of labeling as a fallacy the very endorsement of a core component of one's opponents' views!)

⁶ This argument is made in more detail in Bar-On (2004: 338-240).

⁷ Indeed, at one point Kalderon explicitly admits this, writing, "...moral fictionalism is consistent with the existence of moral facts. A competent speaker's accepting a moral sentence might consist in a noncognitive attitude, but this is nonetheless perfectly consistent with the existence of moral facts" (2005: 157).

our financial transactions" (Blackburn 1998: 50). But maybe such nonfactualism isn't the only way to achieve anti-realism.⁸ Indeed, the comparison to fiction implicit in the label *fictionalism* suggests another way. If the mental state expressed by making a certain claim is a state of pretending that p, then it'd be clear that although p is the sort of thing that could truly represent the world, one who makes this claim isn't committed to the existence of the corresponding fact. This would be a cogent way to connect a fictionalist account of the psychology, pragmatics, and semantics of these claims to the metaphysics. However, it represents, in effect, a change from option (i) in my dilemma to option (ii). Although Kalderon didn't intend to go this way, it looks as if he may be forced to in order to underwrite his anti-realism. So let me turn now to why I think (ii) is problematic.

Above I suggested that it's simply phenomenologically implausible to think of morality as a fiction. One response to this is to say that phenomenology doesn't matter and 'fictional' here is used as a sort of technical term to mean that the relevant class of sentences express propositions though the ordinary use of these sentences is not to convey a belief in these propositions. I've argued that, on the most natural alternative construal of what moral sentences are used to convey, this move collapses moral fictionalism into a form of expressivism, and one that isn't very useful in the metaethical debate about realism. Another response to the phenomenological worry is to say that the phenomenology just gets it wrong in this case. Perhaps we cannot tell phenomenologically between using moral discourse as a sort of pretense and using it more realistically. If so, although it seems to us like we are believing the propositions expressed by our moral sentences, actually we are just pretending that they are true.

To respond to the phenomenological worry in this way is to treat the mental state expressed by ethical claims as a state of pretending that thus-and-so is true. This is clearly not what the expressivist wants to say, so it would avoid collapse into expressivism; moreover, it would give Kalderon some resources to argue from his noncognitivist view of moral acceptance to anti-realism. The rough idea would be to claim that it's constitutive of pretending that p that one is committed to there not really being a fact that p (or at least not committed there being a fact that p). But this raises an important question: is it plausible that we could mistake pretending that, e.g., torture is wrong with believing that torture is wrong?

It is certainly true that ordinary speakers cannot be expected to distinguish between subtly different modes of using a discourse. And perhaps this fictionalist move works against the phenomenological worry in the mathematical case or the possible-worlds case. But, unlike those cases, the phenomenology in the moral case seems to be backed up by a plausible account of the social role and functioning of moral discourse. For it actually seems as if moral discourse would lose its effectiveness were we to agree that it is a pretense. After all, part of why people (including philosophers!) do what they agree is right and don't do what they agree is wrong, even when there are really high incentives to do otherwise, is that they think morality is not just a pretense or make-believe. Adopting option (ii) in the dilemma would require explaining this away.

Because of this, I think that attributing the lack of a phenomenology of pretense to a failure to distinguish between pretending and believing morality is implausible. It does gross injustice to the phenomenology of ethical discourse, a phenomenology that seems to be backed up by the actual functioning of ethical discourse. If, as I have

⁸ In Chrisman (forthcoming), I explore an inferentialist alternative that explains the content of ethical claims as a distinctively practical sort of inferentially articulated commitment.

suggested, ethical discourse would cease to have the good effects that it does, were we to come to view it as a pretense (as some of us view the ontologically extravagant parts of religious discourse), fictionalism—where the idea of a fiction is taken quite seriously—is not only phenomenologically implausible but morally dubious. This is why I think option (ii) is problematic. And since option (i) collapsed Kalderon's view into a version of expressivism lacking the characteristic ontological advantage of that view, I think either way he goes on the question of what mental state is expressed by ethical claims is problematic.⁹

WORKS CITED

- Ayer, A. J. (1936/1946) *Language, Truth and Logic*, London: V. Gollancz Ltd.
- Bar-On, Dorit (2004) *Speaking My Mind: Expression and Self-Knowledge*, Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.
- Bar-On, Dorit and Matthew Chrisman (ms) "Ethical Neo-Expressivism".
- Blackburn, Simon (1998) *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning*, Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press.
- Chrisman, Matthew (forthcoming) "Expressivism, Inferentialism, and Saving the Debate", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Eklund, Matti (2007) "Fictionalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Summer 2007: URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2007/entries/fictionalism/>.
- Gibbard, Allan (1990) *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Gibbard, Allan (2003) *Thinking How to Live*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Ginet, Carl (1968) "How Words Mean Kinds of Sensations", *The Philosophical Review* 77: 3-24.
- Kalderon, Mark (2005) *Moral Fictionalism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair (1981) *After Virtue*, South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press.
- Ridge, Michael (2006) "Ecumenical Expressivism: Finessing Frege", *Ethics*.
- Sellars, Wilfrid (1969) "Language as Thought and as Communication", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 29: 506-527.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig and Anscombe, G. E. M. (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: B. Blackwell.

⁹ Thanks to Dorit Bar-On, Ana Barandalla, David Levy, Michael Ridge, and the participants of the St. Andrews Meta-Ethics Workshop in May 2007 for helpful comments on previous versions of this material.