

Expressivism, Anti-Archimedeanism and Supervenience

Abstract Metaethics is traditionally understood as a non-moral discipline that examines moral judgements from a standpoint outside of ethics. This orthodox understanding has recently come under pressure from anti-Archimedeanism, such as Ronald Dworkin and Matthew Kramer, who proclaim that rather than assessing morality from an external perspective, metaethical theses are themselves substantive moral claims. In this paper, I scrutinise this anti-Archimedean challenge as applied to the metaethical position of expressivism. More precisely, I examine the claim that expressivists do not *avoid* moral commitments when accounting for moral thought, but instead *presuppose* them; they do not look at ethics from the *outside*, but operate from *within* ethics. This paper defends the non-moral status of expressivism against anti-Archimedeanism by rejecting a new anti-Archimedean challenge which, on the basis of Hume's Law, aims to exploit expressivist explanations of supervenience in order to show that expressivism is a substantive moral position.

Keywords Expressivism • Minimalism • Anti-Archimedeanism • Supervenience • Metaethics

Introduction

'Expressivism ... is not a substantive theory of what's right and wrong, what's good and bad, and what makes it that way.' It attempts to see normative concepts 'from the outside' and examines moral 'judgments rather than making them and propounding them.' These quotes from Allan Gibbard (2003, pp. 185, 195, 95) succinctly encapsulate the way in which expressivists understand their own position, namely as a non-moral, metaethical account that studies moral discourse from an external perspective. This orthodox non-moral understanding of expressivism and metaethics more generally has recently come under pressure from anti-Archimedeanism who proclaim that metaethical accounts are themselves substantive moral positions (Dworkin 1996, 2011; Kramer 2009). In anti-Archimedean eyes, then, the quotes cited at the beginning of this paragraph are fundamentally misguided: Expressivists do not *avoid* moral commitments when accounting for moral thought, but instead *presuppose* them; they do not look at ethics from the *outside*, but operate from *within* ethics; they are not involved in *non-moral* debates about the vindication and debunking of moral practice, but are engaged in *moral* arguments.

So far, the anti-Archimedean case for the moral status of expressivism has been made in one of two ways. On the one hand, Dworkin (1996, 2011) discusses expressivism as a form of external scepticism, taking expressivism to hold that its allegedly second-order, external claims about morality in some sense give rise to scepticism about the specific status of moral judgements. On the other hand, Kramer (2009) maintains that expressivism is best interpreted as providing a moral justification of moral discourse, i.e. as explaining not why we engage in moral practice, but why it is good that we do so. In my view, both these anti-Archimedean advances fail because of their contestable understanding of expressivism. Let me give the briefest of indications as to why here. Despite refining his discussion

of expressivism in *Justice for Hedgehogs* (2011, pp. 62-63), Dworkin intimates that expressivists advocate inconsistent claims when holding in the ‘moral game’ that wrongness is not grounded in our own attitudes and feelings, whilst arguing ‘in the philosophy game’ that wrongness is only a matter of projection. Yet, expressivists make no such philosophical claim: In the ‘philosophy game’, expressivists propose a view on what we do when uttering moral judgements; they neither advance a position on what wrongness is, nor seek a translation of the respective moral judgement. What wrongness consists in remains solely confined to the moral domain and is not for expressivism to answer. Kramer, in turn, appears to assume that expressivism either belongs to an empirical discipline such as anthropology, or else is to be understood as a moral justification of moral discourse. He does not seriously envisage that expressivism could, and I believe should, be read as a philosophical, non-empirical position which develops a pragmatist account of moral language on the basis of conceptual-linguistic considerations about moral terms and their connection with motivation. Without giving this most plausible interpretation of expressivism its due heed, though, no anti-Archimedean case against it can succeed.

It might be thought that with Dworkin’s and Kramer’s arguments for the moral interpretation of expressivism being undermined, expressivists need not concern themselves with anti-Archimedeanism any further. But this would be wrong. As will be shown in this paper, it is expressivists themselves who unwittingly provide anti-Archimedeanism with new ammunition. More precisely, I will demonstrate that on the basis of certain expressivist theses, a new anti-Archimedean challenge can be contrived which aims to expose expressivism’s moral status precisely by granting the success of expressivist explanations. The linchpins of this new challenge consist in Hume’s Law and expressivist accounts of supervenience. As will become clear later, this new challenge is thorny. Nevertheless, I will argue that it can be overcome. I will proceed as follows. First, I will briefly clarify my understandings of expressivism and anti-Archimedeanism respectively. This will be followed by a detailed presentation of the new anti-Archimedean challenge. After dismissing some unsuccessful expressivist attempts to respond to this challenge, I will demonstrate that the anti-Archimedean advance ultimately falls short.

Why is it still important, then, that we engage with anti-Archimedeanism despite this renewed failure? Firstly, we need to know whether or not anti-Archimedeanism succeeds because if it did, significant consequences would follow. We need not go so far as Russ Shafer-Landau (2010, p. 479) who reports that he approached a state of panic when realising the implications of Dworkin’s theses. Still, if anti-Archimedeanism could be confirmed, fundamental scepticism about morality would no longer be possible as some moral values would always be presupposed. As such, metaethics could neither be vindicated nor debunked from the outside, and the thrust of many metaethical debates, for instance about causal efficacy and queerness, would have to undergo significant revision. Secondly, even if unsuccessful, engagement with anti-Archimedeanism offers fruitful insights into metaethical debate by forcing us to sharpen our understanding of metaethical positions, locating their limitations and explicating the structure of their arguments. This paper aims to make a first contribution towards such clarification.

Expressivism, Anti-Archimedeanism and Their Hidden Link

Expressivism, as championed by Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard, belongs to the wider family of pragmatist approaches. As such, it is best understood as a thesis about the function of moral language. More precisely, expressivists argue that we employ moral language because it allows us to do certain things – it allows us to discuss, question, hypothesise and reflect about our decisions and choices; it

enables us to co-ordinate our lives and deliberate about how to act.¹ Serving this practical need is not just one function amongst many. Rather, it is primary in being the function which explains why beings like us use moral concepts in the first place. This linguistic-pragmatist thesis is usually accompanied by a complementary psychological claim about the mental states expressed by moral judgements. Maintaining the thrust of the linguistic-pragmatist thesis, these are identified as practical stances with a direct impact on action, such as standing attitudes, states of norm-acceptance, plan-laden judgements, endorsements, and the like.

Anti-Archimedean, such as Ronald Dworkin and Matthew Kramer, propound the thesis that there are no Archimedean standpoints from which to develop metaethical theories that are independent from the first-order moral verdicts that they aim to investigate.² There are various ways in which to substantiate this claim. Here, I will concentrate only on two. Most importantly for my purposes, both are founded on considerations which are strongly supported by expressivists.

The first is a specific test that anti-Archimedean provide in order to assess the moral or non-moral nature of metaethical positions. This ‘Moral Doctrine Test’, as I will call it, declares that a metaethical position counts as internal with regard to moral discourse, or as a moral doctrine, if it is inconsistent with at least one substantive, first-order moral view; otherwise, it classifies as external or non-moral.³ This test is closely related to Hume’s Law, of which expressivists are ardent supporters and to which I will come back shortly. The general idea behind this test, though, is relatively simple: If a thesis that aspires to non-moral status is inconsistent with at least one substantive moral verdict, then it must itself be based on moral grounds although it may not employ any paradigmatically moral predicates. For, in which other way could a thesis possibly be inconsistent with a moral view, if not by taking up a moral standpoint itself?

The second way to support anti-Archimedeanism is based on a specific theory of truth: minimalism.⁴ Minimalists declare that the key to truth is found in the equivalence between calling a statement true and asserting this very statement. Rather than referring to a mysterious, metaphysically heavy-weight property, the truth-predicate functions as a handy device that allows us to talk about statements and not just about the world. As is well known, expressivists increasingly try to exploit this minimalist conception of truth to their advantage, sensing a great opportunity to account for talk about moral truths and facts without accruing any metaphysical costs that could possibly compromise their expressivist approach.⁵ Yet, it has gone almost totally unnoticed that minimalism also serves as a strong catalyst for anti-Archimedeanism. This becomes clearest when we look at Blackburn’s (1998, pp. 78, 296) illustration of minimalism’s metaphysically lightweight nature in the form of Ramsey’s ladder:

Because of ... minimalism we can have for free what look[s] like a ladder of philosophical ascent: ‘*p*’, ‘it is true that *p*’, ‘it is really and truly a fact that *p*’ ..., for none of these terms, in

¹ Compare Blackburn (1993, 1998, 2006) and Gibbard (2003). I will predominantly draw on Blackburn’s work in this paper.

² Compare Dworkin (1996, 2011), Kramer (2009) and Ripstein (2007). My understanding of anti-Archimedeanism more closely follows Kramer’s position.

³ Compare Kramer (2009, p. 6). This test obviously presupposes agreement on what counts as a substantive, first-order moral view. Instead of attempting to give a definition of ‘moral’ here, I appeal to paradigm cases of substantive moral judgements which explicitly attribute thin or thick moral predicates to acts, characters or states of affairs.

⁴ Contrary to Kramer, who fully embraces minimalism, Dworkin (2011, p. 173) maintains that minimalism is ‘correct, but wholly unhelpful’. Without arguing this point here, I believe that Dworkin’s reservations about minimalism are misplaced and will, therefore, assume that the adoption of minimalism is highly advantageous for anti-Archimedeanism. See also Kramer (2013).

⁵ This holds particularly true of Blackburn’s (1998, 2010) work. Gibbard is more reserved about the adoption of minimalism.

Ramsey's view, marks an addition to the original judgement. You can as easily make the last judgement as the first – Ramsey's ladder is lying on the ground, horizontal. ... From its top there is no different philosophical view than from the bottom, and the view in each case is just, *p*.

The significance of Ramsey's ladder's horizontal positioning for anti-Archimedeanism is evident. If calling the statement *S* true or describing it as depicting a fact boils down to asserting this very statement *S*, then talk about truths and facts cannot transcend the realm to which *S* belongs. Applied to ethics, this means that calling it a fact that slavery is wrong, say, simply provides an alternative expression of the substantive *moral* judgement that slavery is wrong. Much to the joy of anti-Archimedeanism, then, minimalism implies that theses about moral truths and facts, despite sounding like external, starkly metaphysical positions, are internal, moral claims. Consequently, it is not only expressivists who greatly benefit from minimalism about truth, but also anti-Archimedeanism: Expressivists gain because minimalism arguably makes it easier for them to account for talk about moral truths and facts, whilst anti-Archimedeanism profit because minimalism acts as a strong driver for the anti-Archimedean position.

Both ways to back anti-Archimedeanism, then, are motivated by considerations with which expressivists concur. I will assume, therefore, that Hume's Law and minimalism about truth constitute common ground between anti-Archimedeanism and expressivists.

The Anti-Archimedean Challenge

I mentioned above that so far anti-Archimedean arguments failed because of their deficient understanding of expressivism. In contrast, the anti-Archimedean challenge which will be developed next does not rely on any interpretation of expressivism to which expressivists could possibly take exception. Rather, it aims to expose expressivism's moral status precisely by granting the success of expressivist explanations. It does so by centring on expressivist accounts of supervenience and runs as follows:

- (P₁) If expressivism entails moral claims, then expressivism is a moral position.
- (P₂) The supervenience thesis is a moral claim.
- (P₃) Expressivism entails the supervenience thesis.
- (C₁) Hence, expressivism is a moral position.

Let us look more closely at each of these premises.

Hume's Law (P₁)

The first premise is a direct corollary of Hume's Law. To elaborate, Hume's Law holds that there is a gap between *is* and *ought* in that the logical entailment of a normative conclusion from a set of premises presupposes that at least one of these premises is normative. It follows that if we could deduce moral judgements directly from metaethical positions, then such positions would themselves be moral. To illustrate, take the following example:

- (P₄) φ -ing is morally wrong iff our society agreed to refrain from φ -ing.
- (P₅) Our society agreed to refrain from φ -ing.
- (C₂) Hence, φ -ing is morally wrong.

Since (C₂) is undoubtedly a moral statement and (P₅) clearly a non-moral premise, Hume tells us that (P₄), stating a very basic version of a social contract theory, must be a moral premise because otherwise, (C₂) could not validly be deduced from (P₄) and (P₅).

Similarly, if anti-Archimedean could show that at least one moral conclusion follows from expressivism, expressivism would be exposed as a moral doctrine. Since both anti-Archimedean and expressivists endorse Hume's Law, I will assume that (P₁) holds.⁶

The Moral Interpretation of Supervenience (P₂)

According to the supervenience thesis, the moral status of an object can change, or the moral status of two objects can differ, only if the object changes, or the two objects differ, in non-moral respects. Supervenience is usually regarded either as a conceptual thesis – the preferred interpretation of expressivists – or as an austere metaphysical thesis – the reading usually associated with a certain brand of moral realists. However, anti-Archimedean maintain that the supervenience thesis is *moral*.⁷ There are two main arguments for this interpretation.

The first, somewhat ironically, is provided by Blackburn himself.⁸ When discussing supervenience, Blackburn (1993, p. 133) introduces the so-called limitation thesis which declares that 'there is necessarily a boundary to the kind of [subvening non-moral] properties that [any moral property] can depend on', identifying purely spatio-temporal characteristics as one possible example of non-moral properties which can never feature in the subvenient base. This limitation thesis is supposed to protect the supervenience claim from vacuity;⁹ yet, it also risks playing straight into anti-Archimedean's hands. To elaborate, the limitation thesis posits that any meaningful supervenience thesis presupposes that certain non-moral features, such as spatio-temporal properties, are in and of themselves necessarily morally irrelevant – no moral property can ever depend on them. Consequently, on grounds of the limitation thesis, the supervenience thesis rules out moral verdicts such as (M) which base moral evaluations on pure spatial or temporal coordinates:

- (M) Eating meat on 5 May 2013 is morally wrong simply because of the date of consumption.

Since the supervenience thesis is thus inconsistent with the substantive moral judgement (M), application of the Moral Doctrine Test yields that the supervenience thesis is moral.¹⁰

The second argument for the moral status of supervenience draws heavily on minimalism about truth and is most accessible when the supervenience thesis is read as the claim that the *truth-value* of

⁶ See Dreier (2002, pp. 244-248) for an argument against the useful employment of Hume's Law in this context.

⁷ This moral classification does not rule out that the supervenience thesis is also conceptual (see Kramer 2009, p. 304, fn.1).

⁸ 'Ironically', because Blackburn wants to contrast the supervenience thesis as a conceptual constraint with substantive moral truths. I will return to his conceptual approach when discussing possible expressivist responses to the anti-Archimedean challenge.

⁹ I will return to further reasons for the limitation thesis when appealing to the practical function of moral vocabulary within my solution to the anti-Archimedean challenge.

¹⁰ Kramer (2009) also presents cases of asceticism and caprice as arguments for (P₂). Yet, I believe that neither argument succeeds, since the former can be interpreted as pertaining to existential commitments which do not conflict with supervenience (see Gibbard 1990: 168), whereas reference to caprice can be dropped by expressivists without greater loss. Concentrating on the case of the moral (ir)relevance of spatio-temporal properties and minimalism's alleged impact on the status of supervenience has, therefore, the best chance to support (P₂).

an object's moral evaluation cannot change unless the truth-value of at least one description of this object changes. For instance, the truth-value of 'John is generous' cannot change from 'true' to 'false' unless the truth-value of the description 'John often treats his friends to a drink', say, changes from 'true' to 'false'. As explained above, though, minimalism reveals that truth-ascriptions to moral claims are themselves moral. Hence, since the supervenience thesis pertains to moral truths and since minimalism entails that statements about moral truths are moral, minimalism arguably supports the anti-Archimedean claim that supervenience is a moral thesis.

Expressivist Explanations of Supervenience (P₃)

Although expressivists develop a number of slightly different accounts of supervenience, they all focus on the function of moral practice and are based on the thesis that 'moralizing is an activity that cannot proceed successfully without recognition of the supervenience constraint' (Blackburn 1993, p. 144). For the sake of simplicity, I take Blackburn's (1984, p. 186) considerations on supervenience as a foil, which can be reconstructed in the following schematic and expanded form:

- (P₆) Moral judgements are expressions of endorsements. They serve the specific practical function of allowing us to discuss, reflect and co-ordinate our decisions and lives.
- (P₇) This function can be fulfilled only if our patterns of endorsements are reliable and predictable. This is established either by endorsing two non-morally indiscernible actions φ -ing and π -ing, or by rejecting both. The function cannot be fulfilled if we endorse φ -ing, but not π -ing or vice versa.
- (C₃) Hence, *qua* participants in this practice, we are necessarily¹¹ committed to forming our endorsements in such a way as to endorse both φ -ing and π -ing, or to reject both φ -ing and π -ing, if φ -ing and π -ing do not differ in their non-moral features.
- (P₈) Roughly, endorsing an action is judging this action to be permitted; rejecting an action is judging it to be forbidden.
- (C₄) Hence, *qua* participants in this practice, we are necessarily committed to judging that both φ -ing and π -ing are permitted, or that both φ -ing and π -ing are forbidden, if φ -ing and π -ing do not differ in their non-moral features.
- (P₉) There is no difference between being necessarily committed to attributing the same moral status to φ -ing and π -ing and its being true that φ -ing and π -ing must share the same moral status if φ -ing and π -ing are non-morally indistinguishable.
- (C₅) Hence, it is true that φ -ing and π -ing share the same moral status, if φ -ing and π -ing are non-morally indistinguishable.

(P₆)-(P₈) capture key assumptions of expressivism. (P₉), in turn, needs more explaining. For, is it not possible that the supervenience thesis could be false although we are necessarily committed to it? The reason why expressivists cannot allow any such gap between necessary practical commitments and truth is found precisely in their specific expressivist approach.¹² According to expressivists, the supervenience thesis expresses our practical commitment to a certain endorsement pattern in propositional

¹¹ The nature of the necessity under discussion here will be clarified later in this article.

¹² In this section, I rely heavily on Gibbard (2003, pp. 92-98): 'We end up, then, with a strong result: anyone who thinks and plans is thereby committed to the supervenience of being [permitted] on [non-moral] fact. I myself am a thinker and planner, and so are you. I therefore invite you to join me in accepting and asserting something to which we are both committed: being [permitted] supervenes on [non-moral] fact. This is an invitation, if I'm right, that you cannot consistently reject. ... There's no question whether the Claim of [Supervenience] is true apart from the question of whether to live in accord with it – and no possible way to live fails to satisfy it.'

form; it is the pattern's 'propositional reflection' (Blackburn 1993, p. 125). Accordingly, if expressivists are right to claim that we are necessarily committed to a certain endorsement pattern which is expressed by the supervenience thesis, there is no question as to whether or not the supervenience thesis is true other than the question of whether or not to regulate endorsements expressed within moral practice as envisaged by it. And here, expressivists tell us that there is no way of violating the endorsement pattern, yet to remain within moral practice. As a result, no gap can be found between the necessary commitment to a certain endorsement pattern on the one hand and the truth of the supervenience thesis on the other. (C₅) follows – the supervenience thesis is entailed by expressivist premises.

Accordingly, whilst expressivist explanations of supervenience have previously been intended to give expressivism the edge over realism, in the present debate they provide the final piece to complete the anti-Archimedean challenge. If it is true that Hume's Law holds and that the supervenience thesis is a moral claim, then expressivist accounts of supervenience leave us no choice but to conclude that at least one of the expressivist premises (P₆)-(P₉) must be moral.

How *Not* to Respond to the Anti-Archimedean Challenge

Since the anti-Archimedean argument is logically valid, expressivists must attack one of its premises in order to repel this challenge. In light of their support for Hume's Law, it is clear that (P₁) would not be their natural target, which leaves (P₂) – pertaining to the moral status of the supervenience thesis – and (P₃) – the expressivist account of supervenience. I will first examine and dismiss three unsuccessful expressivist responses to the anti-Archimedean challenge before showing how I believe that this challenge can be overcome.

Attacking (P₃) by Modifying the Expressivist Account of Supervenience

Assuming for now that expressivists accept the moral interpretation of the supervenience thesis as stated in (P₂), it might be thought that they could still meet the anti-Archimedean challenge by demonstrating that expressivism, contrary to (P₃), does not entail this moral truth. This could be done in one of two ways. Firstly, expressivists could employ a strategy that is well-known from their general treatment of first-order moral judgements, which stresses the difference between questions about the nature of moral judgements on the one hand and questions pertaining to their truth and truth-makers on the other. Whilst expressivism responds to the former by analysing moral judgements in terms of their practical role, it makes no attempt whatsoever to reply to the latter: these are further, moral questions which are not expressivism's to answer (Blackburn 1998, p. 255, 1993, pp. 125-126). Consequently, it might be thought that expressivists could avail themselves of the same move with regard to the supervenience thesis in order to show that although expressivism provides an account of supervenience, it is, contrary to anti-Archimedean claims, not committed to this thesis' truth. Secondly, building on this strategy, expressivists could argue that expressivism merely explains our *belief* in supervenience, where this belief is an innocuous, non-moral phenomenon.¹³ Since in this case, expressivism would simply account for a non-moral fact, rather than entail the truth of a moral claim, the anti-Archimedean challenge would again evaporate.

¹³ If Gibbard's plan-based model is taken as the reference point for expressivism, a further move could be to transform the entailment of supervenience in such a way as to establish, not that being *permitted*, say, supervenes on the non-moral, but that being *p-permitted* supervenes on the non-moral, where *p-permitted* is a non-normative concept that means 'permitted relative to a given plan' (Gibbard 2003, p. 89).

However, both responses fail. The reasons why have been given when discussing (P₉). There, I explained that one cannot coherently accept expressivism and yet maintain that the moral does not supervene on the non-moral: Given our necessary practical commitment to the supervenience thesis, there is no space for the additional qualm of whether or not the moral *really* supervenes on the non-moral. As a result, expressivists can neither declare that they merely account for our belief in the supervenience thesis, nor stay non-committal on this thesis' truth.¹⁴

It is just as well, then, that expressivists have no intention of pursuing this line of response. When discussing realist attempts to explain supervenience, Blackburn (1993, p. 122), for instance, insists that the moral realist does 'not explain supervenience at all: [he] merely [puts] conditions upon what can be *believed* to be the truth, not upon what *is* the truth. Our belief, he is saying, has to be consistent across naturalistic similarities – but this is no explanation of why, on his theory, the truth has to be'.¹⁵ Accordingly, the implied claim is that, in contrast to moral realism, expressivism can explain the *truth* of the supervenience thesis and not just our *belief* in this thesis. Consequently, expressivists neither could nor would want to limit the reach of their accounts so as to stop at unproblematic non-moral conclusions or stay non-committal on the truth of the supervenience thesis. (P₃) stands firm.

Attacking (P₂) by Rejecting the Limitation Thesis

This brings (P₂), and thus the moral interpretation of the supervenience thesis, back into view. The limitation thesis was introduced above as the first main argument for (P₂). Accordingly, it might be thought that if expressivists could abolish the limitation thesis, they would severely undermine (P₂) and thus be a significant step closer to escaping the anti-Archimedean challenge. After all, the supervenience thesis, understood as the general claim that there cannot be any moral change unless there is at least one non-moral change, does not logically entail the limitation thesis, nor rule out the possibility that moral properties could depend on spatio-temporal properties. Hence, expressivists could simply revert to the general, unlimited version of the supervenience thesis which does not exclude any properties from the subvenient base and thus stop the anti-Archimedean challenge in its tracks.

Yet, although expressivists are free to pursue this train of thought, they would be ill-advised to do so. Kramer, rehearsing and amplifying Blackburn's own justification of the limitation thesis, explains why. Referring to a formulation of the supervenience thesis which proclaims that it is conceptually impossible to suppose that if two things are identical in every other germane respect, one is better than the other, he (2009, p. 340) emphasises that the

insertion of 'germane' is crucial, for – as Blackburn well knows – any ostensibly two things that are identical in *every* other respect, including for example their spatial and temporal locations (if any), are not really two distinct things at all. In regard to any single thing at any particular time, it is indeed a matter of logic that that thing at that time is not better than itself or worse than itself or different from itself in any way. ... If a thesis about supervenience were elaborated with reference to numerically identical things [which the abolition of the limitation theory would allow], its truth would be straightforwardly logical and thus trivial ... In fact, however, such a thesis is never so trivially elaborated in philosophical discussions of the topic. No one is interested in affirming the tautological proposition that any thing at any particular time cannot be different from itself at that time, or that a change in any

¹⁴ Consequently, the parallel to the expressivist treatment of other first-order moral judgements breaks down. Whilst it might be granted that expressivism can stay silent on the question of whether or not a moral judgement such as 'Helping children flourish is good' is true, it is committed to the truth of the supervenience thesis.

¹⁵ Similarly, Gibbard (2003, p. 93) states that the thesis of supervenience 'must not be confused with the claim ... that being *p*-[permitted] supervenes on [non-moral] properties. The claim of supervenience is plan-laden, whereas the other claim, that being *p*-[permitted] supervenes on [non-moral] properties, is not'.

aspect of something cannot occur without a change in that very same thing. Whenever the supervenience of some property on another is probed, the situations that partake of the relevant properties are always sufficiently distinct to avert triviality.

Accordingly, the limitation thesis should not be regarded as a logical entailment of the supervenience thesis, but rather as an independent specification thereof which is required so as to save the supervenience thesis from vacuity. Blackburn (1993, p. 132) appreciates this need explicitly, indicating that the general, unlimited formulation of the supervenience thesis cannot capture ‘all that was meant by supervenience’. Others, such as Gibbard (2003, p. 90), acknowledge it only indirectly when adopting a definition of the supervenience thesis which embeds the limitation thesis implicitly by referring to *two distinct* acts in *two possible* situations. On pain of triviality, then, abandoning the limitation thesis is not a live option in response to the anti-Archimedean challenge.

Attacking (P₂) by Rejecting the Moral Status of (M)

The suitably limited supervenience thesis, then, remains inconsistent with statements such as (M):

(M) Eating meat on 5 May 2013 is morally wrong simply because of the date of consumption.

However, mere inconsistency does not as yet back up the moral status of the supervenience thesis. For this to be the case, a further condition must be fulfilled: (M) must be a moral judgement. Only inconsistency with a moral judgement entails, on the basis of the Moral Doctrine Test, that the supervenience thesis is moral. Accordingly, if expressivists could show that contrary to anti-Archimedean claims, (M) does *not* qualify as a moral judgement, it could no longer be invoked within the Moral Doctrine Test in support of the anti-Archimedean challenge.

Arguments to the effect that judgements such as (M) be excluded from the class of moral statements can draw on other well-known discussions about the supervenience thesis, starting with the obvious observation that a judgement qualifies as moral only if it falls within the framework of moral reasoning. Yet, as expressivists never tire of pointing out, it is the supervenience thesis that delimits this very framework. More precisely, according to expressivists, supervenience is not any old claim about moral discourse; rather, it is a *regulatory principle*, or *meta-rule*, or *presupposition*, in the sense that it *demarcates the framework* within which moral reasoning takes place. Blackburn (1993, p. 136) phrases this in terms of competence with moral vocabulary: ‘To deny [the supervenience claim] would be to exhibit a conceptual confusion: a failure to grasp the nature of the relevant vocabulary or to follow out immediate implications of that grasp. ... [Denial of the supervenience thesis] would be constitutive of lack of competence with the vocabulary’. I have implicitly hinted at this conceptual quality when spelling out the expressivist account of supervenience, implying that the supervenience thesis cannot be coherently rejected. Consequently, since the supervenience thesis delimits the framework of moral reasoning, this entails that a judgement counts as moral only if it observes the supervenience constraint. By definition, then, there cannot be a judgement that qualifies as moral, yet is inconsistent with the supervenience constraint. Hence, judgements such as (M) – call them ‘shmoral’ judgements – which operate outside of the supervenience constraint by holding spatio-temporal properties to be morally relevant, cannot intelligibly be understood as moral. Whatever someone does who is so conceptually confused as to assert such a shmoral claim, she does *not* set forth a moral judgement. As a result, the Moral Doctrine Test falls silent. The anti-Archimedean support for the moral interpretation of the supervenience thesis, and thus (P₂), breaks down.

This conceptual ‘argument from unintelligibility’ shifts focus from the moral or non-moral classification of the supervenience thesis to the moral or non-moral status of specific verdicts such as (M),

maintaining that (M) does not classify as a moral claim. Notice here that the Moral Doctrine Test can do nothing to contest or confirm expressivists' non-moral classification of the verdicts in question. For, although the Moral Doctrine Test tells us that *if* a verdict such as (M) is moral, then supervenience is also a moral thesis by virtue of its inconsistency with this verdict, it does not determine whether or not (M) is indeed moral. Hence, the Moral Doctrine Test does nothing to arbitrate between the expressivist, non-moral classification of this verdict and its anti-Archimedean, moral classification.

It is clear, though, that anti-Archimedean would not be particularly impressed with this argument based on definitional fiat, and I think rightly so. After all, the statement (M) does not appear to be an instance of an unintelligible use of language, as some form gibberish would be. Indeed, it can be argued that only our ability to understand this judgement as a *moral* verdict can explain our incomprehension about why anyone would hold such a preposterous view in the first place. Applying Hare's (1989, p. 192) reflections to the present case:

If a man said that [eating meat on 5 May is morally wrong because of the date of consumption], I should *understand* what he was saying, and might even, if he said [morally wrong] understand that it was a moral judgement; indeed if I did not understand it in this way, there might be no occasion for my surprise. The surprise is occasioned by an inability to understand, not what the view is, but why anybody should think that.

In Kramer's (2009, p. 343) words, then, 'someone who adverts to spatial or temporal coordinates in themselves as morally decisive elements of a situation ... is not putting forward a self-contradictory thesis. Instead, he or she is putting forward an asininely benighted thesis ... which is reproachable on grounds of substantive morality rather than of logic.' The attempt to meet the anti-Archimedean challenge on conceptual grounds by denying the moral status of (M) should, therefore, be rejected.

How to Respond to the anti-Archimedean Challenge

Although these three responses fail, they still draw attention to how expressivists should proceed so as to meet the anti-Archimedean challenge. Firstly, expressivists should stand by the claim that expressivism entails the truth of the supervenience thesis, yet insist that this truth is not moral.¹⁶ Secondly, they should hold on to the limitation thesis so as to avoid vacuity. Thirdly, they should accept the moral status of judgements such as (M). If expressivists could show that the anti-Archimedean challenge collapses even if this much is granted, their reply to anti-Archimedean would be remarkably strong. The following response fulfils all three criteria by adopting a two-pronged approach, rejecting minimalism's impact on the status of the supervenience thesis on the one hand and limiting the applicability of the Moral Doctrine Test on the other.

Defusing Minimalism's Involvement

Besides the limitation thesis, the second main argument for the moral interpretation of supervenience presented above was based on minimalism about truth. Minimalism, I explained, serves as a strong driving force behind anti-Archimedeanism by exposing statements about moral truths and facts as substantive moral verdicts. Since the supervenience thesis pertains to possible changes in moral truths, it seemed that minimalism also implies that supervenience is a moral claim.

Yet, despite strong initial appearances to the contrary, minimalism does *not* entail that supervenience is a moral thesis. To see why, let us start with a specific instance of the supervenience thesis:

¹⁶ Whether or not supervenience is a normative, albeit non-moral, thesis is a further question which I will not address here.

(S*) Necessarily, if Hannibal is evil because he harms children, then (*ceteris paribus*) Jack, who also harms children, is evil, too.

Looking at the two judgements featuring within (S*) – ‘Hannibal is evil because he harms children’ and ‘Jack, who also harms children, is evil, too’ – we are clearly confronted with substantive moral judgements. Accordingly, minimalism tells us that statements which ascribe truth to these judgements are also moral verdicts. Crucially, though, this does *not* entail that the overall inference (S*) must also be moral. The following example illustrates why:

(H) If Humphrey is a bachelor, then Humphrey is unmarried.

‘Humphrey is a bachelor’ and ‘Humphrey is unmarried’ are clearly empirical statements which, if true, state empirical truths. However, this does not imply that the truth of (H) is also empirical. Rather, it is clear that (H) is conceptually true. Returning to the case of supervenience, this shows that although supervenience pertains to moral judgements, the truth of which must, as minimalism teaches us, be moral, minimalism holds no sway over the question of how the truth of (S*) should be interpreted. This is a further, independent question which minimalism cannot answer.

This leads to a second reason why minimalism as such does not support a moral interpretation of the supervenience thesis: Although minimalism declares that truth-ascriptions to moral judgements are moral, it does *not* give us any indication as to what counts as a moral judgement. *If* the statement ‘Helping children flourish is good’ is moral, then minimalism tells us that ‘It is true that helping children flourish is good’ is also a moral judgement. Similarly, *if* the claim ‘No moral differences without non-moral differences’ is moral, then minimalism advises us that ‘It is true that there cannot be any moral differences unless there are non-moral differences’ is also a moral judgement. However, minimalism does not tell us whether or not these antecedents hold. Rather, it is totally blind to the content and nature of those claims to which the truth-predicate is applied and thus needs to be supplemented with independent criteria as to how different statements and corresponding truths are to be categorised.

Hence, although it seems as if minimalism entails that supervenience is a moral claim, this first impression is false. Expressivists’ adoption of minimalism does not force them to accept that the supervenience thesis is moral. As a first interim result, then, we can conclude that minimalism and the non-moral status of supervenience are compatible.

Limiting the Applicability of the Moral Doctrine Test

The present response seeks to refute (P₂), and thus the moral status of supervenience, *without* having to deny that verdicts such as (M) are moral. This can be achieved, I suggest, by limiting the cases to which the Moral Doctrine Test can usefully be applied. To gain purchase on this strategy, it is most instructive to develop it in close parallel to expressivists’ stance on the contest between judgement-internalism and judgement-externalism. Examining the internalism-externalism debate may seem like an extravagant detour, but this impression is false. For, once we understand fully how it can be argued that internalists win the war even if externalists win individual battles,¹⁷ we have found a blueprint for the solution of the anti-Archimedean challenge – or so I will argue.

A Parallel: Judgement-Internalism

Expressivists are champions of judgement-internalism, holding that there is a tight link between sincerely entertaining a moral judgement and the disposition to act in accordance with the content of this

¹⁷ This is, of course, Blackburn’s (1998, p. 61) dictum.

judgement. This internalist position is normally attacked on grounds of the alleged existence of so-called ‘amoralists’, in whom this link is said to be either reversed or altogether absent. Accordingly, certain expressivists have modified their account so as to allow that in some individuals, this link can become ‘unhinged’. These unhinged persons – Blackburn quotes Milton’s Satan, Kramer discusses Shakespeare’s Iago – exactly reverse the proclaimed connection between moral judgement and motivation by being strongly attracted to thwarting what is good *exactly because* it is good and seeking what is bad *exactly because* it is bad. Yet, cases such as these, Blackburn (1998, pp. 61, 63) explains further,

are necessarily parasitic, and what they are parasitic upon is a background connection between ethics and motivation. They are cases in which things are out of joint, but the fact of a joint being out presupposes a normal or typical state in which it is not out ... [I]n principle an individual may love the bad without ever having loved the good, provided enough social context, in which motivations are aligned with the good, is provided.

The impossibility involved here is supposed to be conceptual. Kramer (2009, p. 280) spells out this idea further:

[O]nly against a general background of moral judgments appropriately connected to moral motivations does anyone like Iago have opportunities to arrive at moral judgments that are not so connected. In the absence of such a background, Iago would not be presented with the moral concepts by reference to which he pursues evil as such.

Accordingly, the aim of judgement-internalists must be to establish that the proper alignment between moral judgement and motivation is conceptually prior to the parasitic case in the sense that Iago could not even *formulate* his own wicked stance unless he operates against a backcloth in which goodness and motivations are properly aligned. This objective can be best achieved by returning to expressivism’s linguistic-pragmatist thesis about the function of moral vocabulary. More precisely, expressivists should argue that we understand the employment of moral language by determining its function, which is to answer our need to deliberate about how to act. This function can be fulfilled only if a specific alignment between moral judgement and motivation holds. For, if moral judgements had no direct bearing on our choices and motivations, our need to deliberate about decisions and actions would not be addressed and the employment of moral concepts would remain obscure.¹⁸ As a result, the proper alignment between judgement and motivation is conceptually necessary in that the employment of moral language becomes intelligible only if this motivational link holds.

Yet, if this is true, then we can conceive of Iago as making moral judgements despite reversing or severing the link between moral verdict and motivation only against a background in which moral judgement and motivation are properly aligned. This is because the moral concepts used by Iago enter and acquire their place in the intricate web of language and action only in light of their practical function and bond to motivation – lose the practical function of moral judgements and their motivational alignment, and you lose your grip on Iago’s moral statements. As a consequence, any scenario which imagines a reversed or altogether absent link between moral judgement and motivation conceptually presupposes a background in which moral judgement and motivation are correctly aligned. This is why the link between moral judgement and motivation is conceptually necessary; this is why externalists may win individual battles by showing that there are cases of amoralists, but internalists will win the war by showing that moral judgement and motivation are necessarily aligned.

¹⁸ For more details, see Gibbard (2003, pp. 11-17).

Two important features of this expressivist approach to Iago-style cases need emphasising. Firstly, this conceptual argument does not assume that Iago's judgements are non-moral, nor that he is conceptually confused. If Iago's judgements were dismissed on grounds of conceptual confusion, there would be no reason anyway for Blackburn to cater for cases such as Iago's by admitting that the link between moral judgement and motivation can become unhinged. Secondly and most importantly, this conceptual argument also implies that the attempt to decide the internalist-externalist contest on grounds of Iago-style cases falls short. Although it is generally a sound strategy to refute a thesis by finding counter-examples to it, this strategy cannot usefully be applied to the present case because the alleged counter-example of Iago conceptually *presupposes* judgement-internalism. Asking whether or not Iago violates internalist assumptions is, therefore, the wrong question to ask if we want to find out whether or not to adopt judgement-internalism. Iago's example cannot function as the deciding case in the internalist-externalist contest.

Rebutting the anti-Archimedean Challenge

Returning to our overall discussion, I suggest that expressivists apply exactly the same strategy to the case of supervenience in order to repel the anti-Archimedean challenge. That is, they should argue that the anti-Archimedean strategy of appealing to verdicts such as (M) in order to establish (P₂) is misconceived because these verdicts conceptually presuppose the suitably limited supervenience thesis. How could this be done? It is exactly the expressivist account of supervenience presented above that provides the answer. That is, expressivists should argue that the supervenience thesis is conceptually necessary because the moral concepts used in moral verdicts enter language in light of their practical function. Yet, as Blackburn (1993, p. 144) reminded us, this function can be fulfilled only if supervenience obtains: 'moralizing is an activity that cannot proceed successfully without recognition of the supervenience constraint'. For, if supervenience did not hold, moral judgements would be totally unfit to guide our actions. If judgements were to state, for instance, that of two non-morally indistinguishable actions φ -ing and π -ing, one is right whereas the other is wrong, they could do nothing to guide us in our approach to a third, equally non-morally indiscernible action. Hence, the supervenience thesis is conceptually necessary for the employment of moral language in that moral concepts enter and acquire their place in the intricate web of language and action only in light of their practical function, the fulfilment of which presupposes the supervenience constraint. Lose the practical function of moral language and the supervenience constraint, and you lose your grip on moral statements.

This also applies, of course, to moral judgements such as (M). Adapting Kramer's elucidations about Iago to the present case, we can see that only against the general background of the supervenience constraint does anyone have opportunities to arrive at moral judgments like (M). In the absence of such a background, we would not even be presented with the moral concepts that feature in (M). Accordingly, just as Iago's case is necessarily parasitic upon a background in which moral judgement and motivation are properly aligned, verdicts such as (M) are necessarily parasitic upon a background in which supervenience holds.

Again, two points are worth stressing. Firstly, the present response does not deny that judgements such as (M) are moral, nor that they are based on severe conceptual failure. By refraining from employing the argument from unintelligibility, it thus avoids the stalemate between expressivists and anti-Archimedean challenge falls short in turning to verdicts such as (M) so as to establish the moral status of supervenience on grounds of inconsistencies between moral statements and the supervenience thesis. Although it is generally a sound strategy to employ the Moral Doctrine Test and draw on inconsistencies between a moral verdict X and a thesis T to expose T 's moral status, this test cannot be applied to judgements such as (M) because these judgements conceptually *presuppose* supervenience.

Claims such as (M), therefore, cannot function as the deciders in the expressivists-anti-Archimedean contest: They can neither show that the supervenience thesis is false, nor that it is moral.

At this point, two worries might arise. Firstly, it might be criticised that this response simply dodges the question. After all, it states neither that verdicts such as (M) are consistent with the supervenience thesis, nor that they are inconsistent with it. Yet, as I hope to have shown, the question of whether (M) is consistent or inconsistent with the supervenience thesis is the wrong question to ask – verdicts such as (M) can tell us nothing about the truth or falsity of the supervenience thesis nor about its moral or non-moral status because they conceptually presuppose supervenience – so expressivists should not feel under pressure to answer it. Secondly, it might be thought that this response to the anti-Archimedean challenge undermines the Moral Doctrine Test and, since I have briefly mentioned that the Moral Doctrine Test is closely related to Hume’s Law, thus worryingly undercuts Hume’s Law. However, this concern rests on a misunderstanding. This response does not undermine the Moral Doctrine Test and Hume’s Law, nor reject them by confronting them with counterexamples. What it does, though, is to limit their applicability in the following way: The Moral Doctrine Test can be applied to two theses *X* and *T* only if *X* does not conceptually depend on *T*, where ‘conceptual dependence’ pertains to the conceptual-linguistic presuppositions of the respective *X*-vocabulary as a whole.¹⁹ Does this limitation of applicability represent a significant shift in our understanding of the Moral Doctrine Test and Hume’s Law? I do not think so. Rather, this limitation should be seen in line with refinements of Hume’s Law such as those following Prior’s counterexamples, which suggest that Hume’s Law should be read as stating that no non-vacuous *ought* can follow from *is*.²⁰ That is, instead of amounting to a departure from Hume’s Law, this limitation accounts for the possibility that verdicts belonging to a certain practice can become considerably detached from their conceptual presuppositions – be it with regard to Iago who becomes ‘unhinged’ from the proper link between moral judgement and motivation, or with regard to specific moral judgements that become ‘unhinged’ from the supervenience constraint. Hence, if I am right to argue that all moral verdicts are conceptually-linguistically dependent on the supervenience thesis, the Moral Doctrine Test cannot be employed to show that supervenience is a moral claim.

Consequently, anti-Archimedean can rely neither on minimalism nor on moral judgements such as (M) to support (P₂). Hence, the two strongest anti-Archimedean arguments for the moral status of the supervenience thesis are rebutted. As a result, with the rejection of (P₂), the inference from expressivist explanations of supervenience to the moral status of expressivism is stopped. The anti-Archimedean challenge collapses.²¹

¹⁹ Specifying the particular kind of conceptual dependence is necessary because there might be other conceptual relations which belong to the moral realm. For instance, verdicts about equality and liberty may be conceptually interlinked, yet they should fall within the ambit of the Moral Doctrine Test. The Moral Doctrine Test is barred from application only if the conceptual dependence is one pertaining to the framework principles of moral discourse.

²⁰ For instance, see Pigden (1991, pp. 421-431).

²¹ Matthew Kramer has suggested in private correspondence that my considerations do not so much show that the anti-Archimedean challenge to expressivism collapses, but that there is no genuine conflict between anti-Archimedeanism and expressivism. In response to my argument, he now holds that expressivists and anti-Archimedean aim to account for different phenomena of supervenience, with the former giving a philosophical account of supervenience as a relation between judgements about moral properties and judgements about non-moral properties, and the latter providing a moral account of supervenience as a relationship between moral and non-moral properties. It is beyond the scope of this paper to respond to Kramer’s argument in full, so let me just make a brief comment on the impact of my argument here. On the one hand, it could be doubted that the difference in supervenience relations that Kramer seeks to draw can be upheld when minimalism is assumed. If such doubts were to materialise, Kramer’s position would have to be rejected and the conclusions reached in this paper would stand unchanged. On the other hand, Kramer might be right in that the suggested distinction can be

References

- Blackburn, Simon. 1984. *Spreading the word. Groundings in the philosophy of language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Blackburn, Simon. 1993. *Essays in quasi-realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blackburn, Simon. 1998. *Ruling passions. A theory of practical reasoning*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Blackburn, Simon. 2006. Antirealist expressivism and quasi-realism. In *The Oxford handbook of ethical theory*, ed. David Copp, 146-162. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blackburn, Simon. 2010. Truth, beauty and goodness. In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics (vol. 5)*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, 295-314. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dreier, James. 2002. Meta-ethics and normative commitment. *Philosophical Issues*, 12, 241-263.
- Dworkin, Ronald. 1996. Objectivity and truth: you'd better believe it. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 25, 87-139.
- Dworkin, Ronald. 2011. *Justice for hedgehogs*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press.
- Gibbard, Allan. 1990. *Wise choices, apt feelings. A theory of normative judgment*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gibbard, Allan. 2003. *Thinking how to live*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Hare, Richard M. 1989. *Essays in ethical theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kramer, Matthew. 2009. *Moral realism as a moral doctrine*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kramer, Matthew. 2013. Working on the inside: Ronald Dworkin's moral philosophy. *Analysis*, 73, 118-129.
- Pigden, Charles. 1991. Naturalism. In *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer, 421-431. Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edition.
- Ripstein, Arthur. 2007. Introduction: anti-Archimedeanism. In *Ronald Dworkin*, ed. Arthur Ripstein, 1-21. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ. 2010. The possibility of metaethics. *Boston University Law Review*, 90, 479-496. Available at <http://www.bu.edu/law/central/jd/organizations/journals/bulr/documents/SHAFFER-LANDAU.pdf>.

maintained. In this case, his new position would entail an important limitation in the scope of anti-Archimedeanism as anti-Archimedeanism would now agree that there can be non-moral – i.e. Archimedean – accounts of supervenience and moral discourse more generally. Either way, then, the considerations presented in this paper have significant consequences for our understanding and assessment of anti-Archimedeanism.