

CHAPTER 8

MORAL REALISM,
QUASI REALISM,
AND SKEPTICISM

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A recognizable pattern marks the debates between realists and antirealists. Consider, in this regard, the debate between realists and antirealists regarding the external world. Realists about the external world claim that things such as mountains and fish exist in a robustly objective sense, according to which they do not owe their existence or nature to human cognitive activity. Antirealists about these things often respond by pointing out that if entities such as mountains and fish were to exist in this sense, then, for one or another reason, it would be impossible to gain epistemic access to them. According to the antirealists, realism engenders skepticism about the external world. Since skepticism of this sort is highly undesirable, antirealists counsel us to surrender realism in favor of an antirealist position regarding the external world, according to which it is possible to gain knowledge of such things as mountains and fish (or dissolves altogether the need to have knowledge of them).

This pattern of debate replicates itself in the moral domain. On the one hand, there are moral realists, who believe that moral facts exist in a full-blooded, objective sense.¹ Particularly, “robust” moral realists, who are my concern in this chapter, maintain not only that moral facts objectively exist, but also that they are not part of the natural world. As such, according to robust realists, moral facts fail to play any sort of causal explanatory roles. On the other hand, there are moral antirealists, who find robust moral realism fantastic, a relic of outmoded Platonist views in ethics. The antirealists present an epistemic challenge to robust realism which runs something like this:

Robust moral realists hold that there are moral facts and that these facts play no sort of causal explanatory role. But if this were true, it is difficult to see how we could secure “mental reference” to such facts—get them well enough in mind to form true thoughts about them. For what else other than causal relations of various kinds could explain our being able to gain epistemic access to these facts? Robust realists offer us no answer to this question—no story that explains how facts about what ought to be the case impinge upon our cognitive faculties so as to produce the corresponding states of knowledge. And it is difficult to imagine what type of story could be told. In light of this failure, it is best to conclude that there is no explanation available. On the further assumption that if we had epistemic access to moral facts, some explanation of this would be available, it follows that we have good reason to believe that we do not have access to moral facts. Arguably, however, moral beliefs display epistemic merits such as *being justified*, *being reliably formed*, and *being a case of knowledge* only if we can secure mental reference to moral facts. It follows that we have strong reason to believe that, were robust moral realism true, our moral beliefs would fail to display epistemic merits. Moral knowledge, were robust realism true, would be impossible.²

This argument, in my judgment, deserves a mixed verdict. On the one hand, the argument is not a decisive reason to reject robust realism. For suppose the worst case scenario were true of robust realism: realists of this sort have no informative account of how we gain epistemic access to moral facts. Even if this were true, the epistemic challenge depends on a controversial application of the inference schema “no relation we know of accounts for our being able to secure mental reference to moral facts” to “probably, there is no relation that accounts for our being able to secure mental reference to moral facts.” The present application of this inference schema is controversial because it is not apparent that we should expect to know of any relation that accounts for our being able to gain epistemic access to moral facts. For all we reasonably believe, it may be that even if there were noncausal relations that allow us to gain epistemic access to moral facts, we would be unable to say much that would be illuminating about them—the problem being that, given the inherent limitations of our epistemic faculties, these relations are “cognitively closed” to us. Unlike some philosophers, I am not inclined to dismiss this response to the epistemic challenge as “mystery mongering.” It may be that far less than we have supposed is amenable to genuine philosophical explanation.³

On the other hand, I think that the foregoing response to the epistemic challenge is one that should be accepted only as a last resort. After all, realists would like to say *something* illuminating about how we gain epistemic access to moral facts; complete silence on this issue is something that realists should like to avoid if they could. And, presumably, it would be desirable if we could model ethical knowledge on other fairly well-understood approaches, such as reliabilism. Yet the foregoing response appears to rule this out. Because of this, robust realism appears to be at a decided disadvantage in relation to its rivals. For if a rival view were to specify how we gain epistemic access to moral facts (or dissolve the need for an

explanation altogether), that view would be, in this respect, considerably preferable to realism.

Suppose, then, that we accept the mixed verdict: the epistemic challenge, while not decisive, counts against robust moral realism. How heavily it counts against robust realism, however, is a function of (among other things) how well other views account for moral knowledge. After all, if other rival views do no better on this score, then robust realists face no special problem regarding moral knowledge. So let us raise the question: when we compare robust realism with rival views, does it offer us a less satisfactory account of the character of moral knowledge than these other views?

In my estimation, an especially intriguing rival to robust realism is the broadly expressivist position that Simon Blackburn calls "moral quasi-realism."⁴ The reason this position seems intriguing to me is not simply that it shares extensive commitments with robust realism, such as the suspicion that ordinary moral thought cannot be understood as many moral naturalists believe. It is also because quasi realism promises to reap the benefits of moral realism at a fraction of the theoretical cost, for central to quasi realism is the claim that we can explain the realist-seeming appearances of ordinary moral thought and discourse, including attributions of moral knowledge, from an antirealist expressivist basis.⁵ The question I wish to put to quasi realism in this chapter is whether it offers us a more satisfactory account of moral knowledge than moral realism. Quasi realism's advocates, such as Simon Blackburn, claim that it does.⁶ I am going to argue, by contrast, that it does not.

As it turns out, however, arguing for this claim is fairly complicated, for quasi realism is not a unified position but admits of multiple variations. So, in what follows, I am going to set for myself three tasks. First, I am going to lay out a central reason why quasi realists believe that they can explain and justify the realist-seeming appearances of ordinary moral thought and discourse. Second, having done this, I will distinguish three different varieties of quasi realism, noting that they are not simply minor variants of one another. Third, I will argue that none of these positions does a more satisfactory job of explaining the acquisition of moral knowledge than does robust realism. To anticipate, my claim is that some varieties of quasi realism fail to comport with platitudes central to our ordinary understanding of knowledge, while others do so comport but fail to explain the acquisition of moral knowledge in a way that is more illuminating than robust realism.

If my overall assessment is correct, moral realists should take heart. For, presumably, if any type of moral realism were to have trouble accounting for moral knowledge, it would be robust moral realism. But if even robust moral realism does at least as well as one of its most important rivals in accounting for the acquisition of moral knowledge, this is good news for moral realists of all varieties.

1. MORAL QUASI REALISM

In his official description of the view, Blackburn writes that quasi realism is

the enterprise of explaining why our discourse has the shape it does, in particular by way of treating evaluative predicates like others. . . . It thus seeks to explain, and justify, the realistic-seeming nature of our talk of evaluations. . . . Technically, in the philosophy of language, it tries mainly to justify what I call the "propositional surface" of ethics, or the fact that we voice our reactions in very much the way in which we describe facts.⁷

Quasi realism, then, is an explanatory project. When applied to the moral domain, it instructs us to begin our theorizing by assuming the truth of expressivist antirealism, according to which moral thought and discourse function not to represent moral facts but to express attitudes, sentiments, degrees of confidence, action plans, or the like toward nonmoral reality. From this starting point, we "earn the right" to speak as realists and allow ourselves to talk of moral propositions, moral truth, and moral facts.⁸ But how, according to quasi realists, do we earn the right to speak this way?

In large measure, we do so by "going deflationary." That is, quasi realists maintain that they, as antirealists, can also claim that moral judgments express moral propositions, that some such propositions are true, and that there are moral facts—so long as we understand these notions in a sufficiently deflationary sense. What deflationary sense is this? Elsewhere, I have suggested that the best way to find out is by taking a closer look at what I call the quasi realist's "deflationary package," which is a set of claims about moral propositional content, truth, and facthood that explicates these notions in a deflationary way.⁹ On this occasion, however, a brief description of the deflationary package will have to do. According to this brief description, the best way to understand the deflationary package is by reflecting for a moment on the concept of representation.

Suppose we assume that representation is a genuine, robust "aboutness" relation that holds between mental states (or their content) and objects. It is natural to ask: what is the link between propositional content, truth, and facts, on the one hand, and representation, on the other? Many philosophers believe that the connection is intimate. The propositional content of beliefs, these philosophers claim, is such that it purports to represent the world. Truth consists in a belief (or its content) accurately representing the world. And facts are what are represented by the content of true beliefs (or are identical therewith). Advocates of the deflationary package claim that these philosophers are mistaken. The concepts of propositional content, truth, and facthood, say deflationists, are much less substantive than many have supposed; none of them is conceptually tied to the notion of representation in the ways just noted.

More specifically, advocates of the deflationary package accept one of two deflationary positions. Some philosophers accept what I will call "radical" deflationism about a given domain. According to these philosophers, sentences in that domain express "nondescriptive" propositional contents. These contents, it is said, do not

purport to represent the world but rather play grammatical or logical roles very similar to those played by ordinary "descriptive" propositions, such as embedding in propositional attitude ascriptions (e.g., "I believe that *p*"). Accordingly, radical deflationists claim that, strictly speaking, nondescriptive propositional contents neither are true nor correspond to correlative facts in that domain. Nonetheless, radical deflationists maintain that we can say that these contents are true or correspond to the facts. But talk of this type is to be understood in a very minimalist fashion. For example, according to this view, to say "It is true that killing is wrong" is simply to repeat or endorse the (nondescriptive) proposition *that killing is wrong*.

Other philosophers, however, endorse what I will call "sober" deflationism about a given domain. Advocates of this view also hold that the sentences in that domain express nondescriptive contents, but unlike their radical cousins, they maintain that these contents can be true. Granted, sober deflationists maintain that there is little to say about the truth property: it neither plays any robust explanatory roles nor consists in a proposition's corresponding to a fact (or consists in any other "substantive" relation, for that matter). But still, according to sober deflationists, there is such a property—properties, according to this view, coming for free with the existence of well-behaved predicates. Since, however, there is a truth property, sober deflationists maintain that there are truths. And since there are truths, there are facts. To this it should be added that these facts are taken to be simply the "semantic shadows" of the true sentences of a given domain. They are not in any interesting sense truth-makers or what is represented by propositions.

The differences between the radical and sober deflationary packages are important. They imply that were quasi realists to accept the sober deflationary package, they would be committed to the existence of moral truths and facts, albeit of a nonsubstantive sort. By contrast, were quasi realists to accept the radical deflationary package, they would be committed to no such thing. So long as we accept some fairly widely held, broadly Quinean claims about quantification and existence, the fact that sober deflationary views quantify over moral facts (or properties) implies that sober and radical deflationary positions are not mere notional variants of one another—at least no more so than realists and nominalists about properties are stylistic variants of one another.¹⁰ So which version of the deflationary package do moral quasi realists accept? Are they better understood to be radical or sober deflationists with respect to the moral domain?

2. THE MANY FACES OF QUASI REALISM

Let me approach this question by assembling a series of passages in which quasi realists address how they understand the character of moral truth and facthood. I divide these passages (most of which are from Blackburn) into three groups.

Group 1:

To think that a moral proposition is true is to concur in an attitude to its subject. To say that a moral judgement is true is to repeat that judgement.

If I assert "That pleasure is worth having is a fact," that is no more than a fancy way of saying that pleasure is worth having. . . . The same goes for truth: "that peas are yucky is the truth" just means that peas are yucky.

Moral realism is the view that the truth of moral utterances is to consist in their correspondence with some fact or state of affairs. . . . Certainly there is a sense in which the quasi-realist is opposed to giving an ontological status to moral . . . facts.

[Quasirealism] is visibly anti-realist, for the explanations make no irreducible or essential appeal to the existence of moral "properties" or "facts"; they demand no "ontology" of morals.¹¹

Group 2:

The propositional surface of the discourse means that we have moral predicates, and where we have predicates, we ascend to properties.

Even if we sorted truth into TRUTH and truth . . . and decided that there was no moral TRUTH, this would only mean that you don't walk into rights and duties, or that they can't be cubic or solid or seen under a microscope.

Obviously there will be some differences between "ethical facts" and the others. The fact that there is a cannonball on the cushion explains why it is sagging in the middle. The fact that kindness is good explains no such thing.

Yes, I am an anti-realist; no, this does not mean that there are no facts of an ethical or normative kind. . . .

Quasi-realism . . . refuses to give ethical facts a typical explanatory role. This is already heralded when we turn our backs on ethical representation. A representation of something as *F* is typically explained by the fact that it is *F*. A representation *answers to* what is represented. I hold that ethical facts do not play this explanatory role.¹²

Group 3:

It seems that the quasi-realist inhabits a familiar but highly suspect philosophical world: one where we know what we mean by descriptive versus non-descriptive theories, by objectivity, or by realism versus anti-realism. Not only would many philosophers deny that we can make good sense of these oppositions, but quasi-realism itself can offer them support. For if, from the non-descriptive starting point, it is successful in capturing some propositional feature of our discourse, then that feature can no longer be used as a litmus test such that if we allow it we are realists and if we do not then we are expressivists. If it can do this for all proposed features, then there is no point at which our *use* of ethical language supports realism rather than expressivism (or vice versa); if that is so, it is tempting to conclude that the debate is unreal, since there is no methodology for conducting it.¹³

These passages strongly suggest that quasi realism comes in at least three different varieties. The first group of quotations indicates that quasi realists sometimes accept what I have called the "radical" deflationary package, according to which the truth term does not function as a genuine predicate and there are, strictly speaking, no moral facts. Because views of this sort embrace the radical deflationary package, I will call them "radical" versions of quasi realism. The second group of passages suggests, however, that in other cases quasi realists adopt what I have called the "sober" deflationary package, according to which there is a truth property and there are moral facts, albeit the nature of these entities is "nonsubstantial." (Note, for example, that the first quotation from this group articulates the same line of thought embraced by proponents of the sober deflationary view of truth: properties come for free with well-behaved predicates.) I will call positions of this kind "sober" versions of quasi realism. Finally, the quotation that makes up the third group suggests that quasi realists sometimes embrace a very radical, "quietest" position, according to which moral "realism" and "antirealism" are empty tags because there is no distinction to draw between these positions. If quietism is true, the mimicry in which quasi realists engage is so complete that there is no point at which we can say that realists are committed to a given set of claims while anti-realists are not; the alleged distinctions simply dissolve. Views of this variety I will call versions of "quietest" quasi realism.

Robust moral realism, I acknowledged earlier, faces some difficult questions about how we could acquire moral knowledge. In the next three sections, I want to raise the question whether any of the quasi-realist positions I have identified do better. However, let me say at the outset that I am not going to give equal attention to each of these views. Most of my attention will be focused on radical quasi-realism, since the main issues that I wish to consider emerge when we explore this view.¹⁴

3. RADICAL QUASI REALISM

The project in which I am engaged is to determine whether quasi realism offers us a more adequate account of moral knowledge than robust moral realism. The first version of quasi realism I wish to consider—what I have called "radical quasi realism"—attempts to formulate a more satisfactory account of moral knowledge by defending a recognizably antirealist position in ethics. According to radical quasi realists, moral judgments do not purport to represent moral reality, as they express nondescriptive moral propositional content.¹⁵ Moreover, although we may say such things as "It is true that murder is wrong," no such judgment involves the predication of a truth property, as the content of moral judgments does not admit of such a property. Finally, while we may make apparent reference

to moral facts, all such apparent reference is merely apparent, for there are, strictly speaking, no moral facts. (As quasi realists sometimes put the point, from the engaged, "internal" perspective, we speak of moral truths and facts. But from the disengaged, "external" perspective, there are no such truths or facts.)¹⁶ None of this, radical quasi realists maintain, should lead us to believe that ordinary moral thought and discourse are mistaken. As Blackburn emphasizes, there could be a mistake only if there were some type of mismatch between the content of ordinary moral judgments and moral reality. A mismatch of this sort, however, is precisely what quasi realism is designed to avoid, since, according to quasi realists, moral judgments are not even in the business of purporting to represent moral reality.¹⁷

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that we agree that radical quasi realism is positioned to capture many of the realist-seeming features of ordinary moral thought. Can radical quasi realism also capture the idea that we know moral truths?

There are passages indicating that quasi realists believe as much. Consider the following passage from Blackburn:

So the question for the expressivist is whether sometimes our situation in making evaluations is one in which we are reliably situated, and in which there is no chance that an improvement in our position would undermine the evaluation. And the answer to this question is that surely we sometimes are in such a position. Consider firstly a middle-size, clear-cut judgment: regardless of danger, at some cost, but successfully, alone among the spectators, Alaric jumped in to save the drowning Bertha; and I commend his action, judging that he behaved well. . . . Am I reliable? If Alaric had not behaved well I should not be going around thinking that he did. The close possible worlds in which he did not behave well are ones, presumably, in which Bertha was not in the water, or in which she was but he averted his eyes or slunk away, and if these things had happened I would not be thinking that he behaved well. Furthermore, there may be no chance that further acquaintance with the situation reverses my verdict: there are not hidden wrinkles waiting to turn up, proving that the whole thing was a publicity stunt or whatever. So I know that Alaric behaved well.¹⁸

Allan Gibbard, although more guarded about whether quasi realism can vindicate the claim that there is normative knowledge, develops an account similar to Blackburn's:

In effect, then, Hera's plans include judgments of what it takes to be a reliable judge of what to live for. Being reliable is a matter of being someone to rely on, and so thinking someone reliable amounts to planning to rely on which people. . . . Can we, then, sometimes know what to do? When we do, is this real knowledge; is it knowledge in the same sense as with natural features of our surroundings? Knowledge or quasi-knowledge—which it is I won't try saying. In crucial respects, though, plan-laden judgments can at least parallel the clearest and most literal cases of knowledge. Plan-laden judgments may be true, in a minimal sense, and they can be formed in a way to rely on. . . . If planning judgments to trust are still not fully cases of knowing, they share many features with full knowing. The parallels extend far.¹⁹

The strategy in both cases is as follows. Assume that moral judgments express nondescriptive moral propositional content.²⁰ Assume, furthermore, that there is a sense in which we can say that such content is true. Assume, finally, that the acceptance of such content can be reliably formed. In Blackburn's case, that means appealing to the idea that in a sufficiently wide range of close possible worlds, this content is true and one would also accept it (and, indeed, no further information would change this latter fact). In Gibbard's case, we appeal to the claim that decisions to act in a certain way—what he calls “plan-laden” judgments—can be reliable (or the people who make them can be reliable) in the sense that we can rely on them. The suggestion is that if we grant these assumptions, quasi realists can maintain that we have moral knowledge, as the latter is simply true, reliably formed moral belief (plus, perhaps, some condition to address Gettier-style considerations).

The passages I have just presented contain interesting proposals. But it seems to me that neither proposal is satisfactory; each omits something that is central to our ordinary (and philosophical) understanding of knowledge. For fundamental to our ordinary understanding of knowledge is what I will call the knowledge platitude:

The knowledge platitude: The concept “being a case of knowledge that *p*” properly applies to some mental state only if and because it (or its content) purports to represent that *p*.²¹

This platitude is arguably just one example of a large network of platitudes, each of which expresses the idea that epistemic concepts, including justification, warrant, reliability, and so forth, are intimately tied to the notion of representation. Put somewhat roughly, these platitudes tell us that we can properly apply epistemic merit concepts such as these to mental states only if the latter (or their contents) purport to represent or represent reality. The difficulty with both Blackburn's and Gibbard's proposals—at least if we read them as attempts to defend a radical quasi-realist position—is that they fall afoul of the knowledge platitude. Both, admittedly, offer an account of what it is for a normative judgment to be reliably formed. But neither offers an account of what it is for a normative judgment to be reliably formed in the *epistemic* sense, according to which reliability is intimately linked with accurate representation. It is this sense of reliability, however, that is at issue when we say that an agent's belief is reliably formed or is a case of knowledge.

Earlier I suggested that a helpful way to understand the deflationary project is to see it as one that endeavors to divorce concepts such as propositional content and truth from that of representation. But if the objection I am now pressing is on target, this divorce has undesirable consequences when we try to understand moral knowledge in a quasi-realist fashion. For suppose we assume that we have moral knowledge. And suppose we concede that robust realism has no explanatorily informative account about how we acquire such knowledge, since it offers no account of how we gain epistemic access to moral reality. Suppose, further-

more, we admit that this is a demerit of the view. Even if we concede all this, radical quasi realism does not look any better than robust realism. If radical quasi realism were true, it would also imply that we have no explanatorily informative account of how we acquire moral knowledge since, if we take the knowledge platitude seriously, it implies that we could not acquire such knowledge at all.

This is a result with which quasi realists would not be happy. As I emphasized earlier, quasi realism is an attempt not to revise but to *vindicate* our ordinary views about morality, and ordinary morality chafes at the idea that moral knowledge is impossible. That said, I believe that there are several responses to the foregoing objection that lie close at hand. According to one response, the present objection to quasi realism works only if we take representation to be a robust “aboutness” relation between mind (or its content) and world. But, it might be said, we need not assume this. After all, there is nothing that prohibits quasi realists from adding another component to the deflationary package by deflating representation itself. For example, Blackburn writes that quasi realists can be deflationists about representation too, so long as they appropriate what he calls “Ramsey's ladder”:

Because of the minimalism [i.e., deflationism] we can have for free what looks like a ladder of philosophical ascent: “*p*,” “it is true that *p*,” “it is really and truly a fact that *p*.” . . . None of these terms . . . marks an addition to the original judgment. . . . *p* is true means that *p*. . . . “represents the facts” means no more than: “is true.”²²

Call the thesis that expressions such as “*p*,” “it is true that *p*,” “it is a fact that *p*,” and “‘*p*’ represents the facts” are identical in meaning the “equivalence thesis.” Blackburn's contention is that since the equivalence thesis is true, quasi realists should have no difficulty being deflationists about representation. If this is right, however, radical quasi realists no less than realists can honor the knowledge platitude. They too can say that moral belief purports to represent the facts.

I have two concerns about this response. On the one hand, I believe that the equivalence thesis is false. On the other hand, it seems to me that even if it were true, radical quasi realism would not offer us an account of moral knowledge that is more satisfactory than robust realism.

Let us begin with the first concern. The equivalence thesis is an ambitious claim about meaning equivalences. It also seems to me suspect in several ways. In the first place, it appears as if the sentences that it says are identical in meaning are not. After all, on the face of it, to say that something is a fact and to say that it represents the facts is to say two very different things. Moreover, as stated, the equivalence thesis proves difficult to evaluate. According to the thesis, the sentences “It is true that murder is wrong” and “‘Murder is wrong’ is true” are supposed to mean the same thing. Arguably, however, the second sentence commits us to the claim that sentences are truth evaluable, while the first does not. (The first sentence, for example, is compatible with a view according to which “true” functions as an adverb that modifies only beliefs.) Given that the equivalence thesis

fails to tell us how to interpret sentences such as these, how are we to determine whether they mean the same thing?

Those who are skeptical of the equivalence thesis, such as I, would like to have a method for testing whether the thesis is true. Although I doubt that there is such a test, there is, I believe, a test by which we can determine whether claims about truth, facthood, and representation are *not* identical in meaning. The test is this: formulate schemata with regard to truth, facthood, and representation of the same logical form. Then see whether their substitution instances are at least logically equivalent.²³ If their substitution instances are not logically equivalent, then we have excellent reason to believe that the equivalence thesis should be rejected. Let us refer to this strategy as "the schema test."

The best way to apply the schema test, in my judgment, is to start with three basic truth schemata to which philosophers appeal when elucidating the notion of truth. We then model schemata for facthood and representation on these three schemata types. I claim that when we do this, we find that their substitution instances are not logically equivalent and, hence, not identical in meaning. Admittedly, this approach has the demerit of not being exhaustive in character; there are truth schemata other than the ones I consider. Still, I think that our survey offers strong reasons for rejecting the equivalence thesis.

Consider, first, schema (Tp), which is a schema for propositional truth. Were we to formulate schemata concerning facthood and representation modeled on (Tp), we would have the following trio of statement schemata:

(Tp) The proposition that *p* is true iff *p*.

(Ep) The proposition that *p* is a fact iff *p*.

(Rp) The proposition that *p* represents the fact that *p* iff *p*.

Taken at face value, these schemata are not acceptable to radical quasi realists. The basic problem is that if radical deflationism were true, then we should be able to delete "is true" without loss of meaning from any substitution instance of (Tp). But a sentence such as

The proposition that murder is wrong iff murder is wrong

does not make any sense. Schema (Tp) has the wrong sort of logical form for the purposes of radical deflationism.

Consider, then, the second type of truth schema to which discussions of truth often appeal, which is the so-called disquotational truth schema. Were we to formulate a trio of schemata regarding truth, facthood, and representation along disquotational lines, we would have the following:

(Td) "*p*" is true iff *p*.

(Fd) "*p*" is a fact iff *p*.

(Rd) "*p*" represents the fact that *p* iff *p*.

The primary difference between schemata (Td) and (Tp) is that the former takes not propositions but sentence tokens to be truth-bearers.²⁴ This maneuver has advantages for radical quasi realists. For one thing, it looks as if we can eliminate "is true" from substitution instances of (Td) without loss of meaning.²⁵ Moreover, it is plausible to hold that substitution instances of (Td) and (Rd) are logically equivalent. But if appealing to sentences rather than propositions has theoretical advantages, it also has serious disadvantages. Consider a substitution instance of (Fd) such as the following:

"Murder is wrong" is a fact iff murder is wrong.

This claim does not have much to recommend it. There is no use of the term "fact" of which I am aware according to which linguistic items such as sentence tokens are identical with facts. They are simply not of the right ontological category. (We would find it very odd, I think, if someone were to maintain that the wrongness of murder resides, say, in a concatenation of chalkmarks.) Something similar is not true of sentences, however. According to many analyses, they are (or at least many of them are) plausibly viewed as being identical with truths. If so, we have good reason to believe that substitution instances of (Td) and (Fd) are not logically equivalent.

Let us turn now to the third type of schema invoked in discussions of truth, which is the so-called bearerless truth schema. Were we to formulate schemata regarding truth, facthood, and representation that employ the bearerless approach, we would have the following three statement schemata:

(T) It is true that *p* iff *p*.

(F) It is a fact that *p* iff *p*.

(R) It represents the fact that *p* iff *p*.

As it turns out, there are two different ways to interpret these schemata. According to the first approach, the phrases "it is true that" and "it is a fact that" function as sentential operators. This approach will also be attractive to radical quasi realists, as these sentential operators can be eliminated from any sentence in which they embed without loss of meaning. Still, according to this reading, it is not very plausible to hold that substitution instances of (R) are logically equivalent to substitution instances of (T) and (F). After all, a substitution instance of (R) such as

It represents the fact that murder is wrong iff murder is wrong

makes no more sense than

The proposition that murder is wrong iff murder is wrong.

Both sentences are grammatically malformed. The problem with the first sentence is that unlike the phrase "it is true that," the expression "it represents the fact that" is not a sentential operator of any sort. Nor, as far as I can see, does any

modification of this phrase function as a sentential operator. That is why we cannot simply preface a noun phrase such as "that murder is wrong" with it and thereby construct a well-formed sentence.

The second way to read the trio of schemata just formulated is to hold that the phrase "it is true that" functions not as a sentential operator but as a "prosentence." According to advocates of this approach, a prosentence is very much like a pronoun inasmuch as its function is to make anaphoric reference to a noun phrase in a sentence in which it embeds (or some other sentence). If this view is correct, instances of these schemata should be read as follows:

(T*) *P*. That is true iff *p*.

(F*) *P*. That is a fact iff *p*.

(R*) *P*. That represents the fact that *p* iff *p*.

Like the bearerless approach to truth, there is reason for radical quasi realists to find the prosentential view attractive. Substitution instances of (T*) and (R*) appear, after all, to be logically equivalent. However, the problem with the prosentential approach, at least in the present context, is that substitution instances of (F*) and (R*) such as

Murder is wrong. That is a fact iff murder is wrong

and

Murder is wrong. That represents the fact that murder is wrong iff murder is wrong

are not logically equivalent. The first claim appears to be about facts, while the second is not about facts themselves but about what represents them—facts not being the sort of thing that purport to represent themselves.

To sum up, radical quasi realists embrace the equivalence thesis since doing so appears to allow them to honor the knowledge platitude. I have suggested that the way to evaluate this thesis is by applying what I have called the "schema test." If what I have claimed is correct, when we apply this test, we find that sentences that quasi realists claim are identical in meaning are not even logically equivalent, let alone identical in meaning. And this, I have argued, gives us strong reason to believe that the equivalence thesis is false.

Suppose for the sake of argument, however, that further investigation were to reveal that the equivalence thesis can be defended satisfactorily. The second concern I want to raise is that even if this were true, radical quasi realism does not furnish a satisfactory account of why certain beliefs satisfy the knowledge platitude.

The knowledge platitude says that we can properly apply the concept "being a case of knowledge that *p*" to a mental state only if its content purports to represent the fact that *p*. According to a natural reading of this platitude, the concept "being a case of knowledge" properly applies to a mental state only if its content

has the property *being such as to purport to represent the fact that p*. This reading, however, is not one that radical quasi realists can accept since, according to their view, moral propositional content is nondescriptive. Yet the knowledge platitude is supposed to be a platitude. So, one suspects that there has to be a reading of the platitude that is acceptable to radical quasi realists. What would it be?

Allan Gibbard has stressed recently that much of what philosophers want to say by making apparent reference to properties can be said equally well by making reference to concepts.²⁶ If so, realists and quasi realists can agree on the following:

The concept "being a case of knowledge that *p*" properly applies to some mental state *M* only if and because the concept "being such as to purport to represent *p*" properly applies to its content.

Once we state the platitude in this fashion, however, we can distinguish two ways of reading it.

According to what I will call the "restrictive" reading of the knowledge platitude, concepts are paired with correlative properties: the concept "F-ness" properly applies to a thing only if it is the type of entity that can display the correlative property *being F*. If this view is right, it is appropriate to think of the content of a mental state as being representative only if that content is the sort of thing that can display the correlative property *being such as to purport to represent the facts*. According to what I will term the "expansive" reading, however, concepts need not be paired with correlative properties, since some concepts are nondescriptive. If this view is true, a nondescriptive concept "F-ness" can properly "pertain" to a thing even when that thing is not the sort of entity that can display the correlative property *being F*. According to this position, it is appropriate to think of the content of a mental state as representative even if that content is not the sort of thing that can display the correlative property *being such as to purport to represent the facts*.

Moral realists accept the restrictive reading of the knowledge platitude. Radical quasi realists do not, opting instead for the expansive reading. Their reasons for doing so are clear: if the expansive reading can be maintained, then they too can claim that moral knowledge satisfies the knowledge platitude. Are quasi realists right about this?

Yes, but not for the right reasons. Consider the fact that we hold that there is a difference between knowledge and mere belief. Some beliefs, we assume, are such that it is appropriate to think of them as being cases of knowledge, while others are not. We assume this, presumably, because we think that some beliefs enjoy features that qualify them as being cases of knowledge that other beliefs fail to enjoy. We appear, then, to assume that something like the following principle is true:

For any propositional content *p* of some mental state *M*, there must be some feature (or set of features) of *p* that renders it appropriate to apply the concept "being a case of knowledge that *p*" to *M* rather than the concept "being a case of mere belief."

Advocates of what I have called the "restrictive" reading of the knowledge platitude hold that they can identify the relevant features. Central among those features that render it appropriate to think of a belief as a case of knowledge is this: that its content accurately represents reality (or that we have strong grounds for believing that it does). There does seem to be something right about this response. Any attempt to identify what distinguishes knowledge from mere belief must appeal to the claim that, necessarily, beliefs that are cases of knowledge accurately represent reality, while mere beliefs do not, of necessity, accurately represent reality. If we follow the trajectory of our discussion thus far, radical quasi realists will also offer an answer along these lines but will translate apparent reference to properties into reference to concepts. If pressed on the issue of why it is appropriate to think of a mental state as a case not of mere belief but of knowledge, the quasi-realist answer should be: because it is proper to apply the concept "being such as to accurately represent reality" to that mental state but not others.

The problem with this reply, in my judgment, is this: we want an explanation of why it is appropriate to apply the concept "being a case of knowledge" to some moral beliefs but not others. Radical quasi realists offer an explanation, but of the wrong sort. Recall what it is, according to the radical deflationary view, to say that some nondescriptive content represents the facts: it is merely to endorse or repeat that content. Surely, however, the fact that it is appropriate to endorse or repeat a particular propositional content is not what *explains* why it is appropriate to think of it as a case of knowledge rather than mere belief. Even if it were true that all and only those propositional contents that it is proper to endorse or repeat are such that they are properly thought of as being cases of knowledge—and I see no reason to believe this—this would shed no light on why it would be appropriate to think of them as being cases of knowledge. And although I suppose that there might be some further property (or set of properties) that explains why all and only those propositional contents that it is proper to endorse or repeat are such that they are properly thought of as being cases of knowledge, I do not know what this property could be. (At least, I do not know what it could be unless it were a property such as *being correct* or *accurately representing reality*, which are properties that nondescriptive contents do not display.) If this is true, it may be that radical quasi realism offers an account of knowledge that satisfies the knowledge platitude. But to the question "Why is it appropriate to think of a given nondescriptive content as a case not of mere belief but of knowledge?" it fails to offer a satisfactory reply.

Let me summarize what I have argued in this section. Any adequate account of moral knowledge, I have claimed, must satisfy the knowledge platitude. At first glance, radical quasi realism does not offer an account of moral knowledge that satisfies this platitude, since it denies that moral beliefs purport to represent moral reality. There seems, however, to be no reason that radical quasi realists could not defend a deflationary account of representation itself—one according to which expressions such as "*p*" represents the facts" are identical in meaning with expressions such as "it is true that *p*." I raised two objections to this response. First,

I claimed that the purported meaning equivalences fail to hold. And, second, I argued that even if they do hold, radical quasi realism does not offer an adequate account of why some beliefs satisfy the knowledge platitude while others do not.

To this, let me add a final comment. Earlier I said that there are several radical quasi-realist responses to the charge that their view fails to satisfy the knowledge platitude. I spent most of this section exploring a response that appeals to a radical deflationary account of representation. In closing, let me note that there is another response, according to which radical quasi realists can simply agree that their view fails to satisfy the knowledge platitude but deny that this is as problematic as I have claimed. The reason there is no problem, it might be maintained, is that radical quasi realism is an effort to account not for moral knowledge but for what is going on when we *think* that something is a case of moral knowledge or *ascribe* such knowledge to someone—an account, it should be added, that does not commit ordinary moral agents to moral beliefs that are systematically mistaken. According to this understanding of radical quasi realism, it is neither here nor there whether their view fails to satisfy the knowledge platitude.

I myself doubt that this response evades the objection I have pressed. But even if it does, let me make the following point. We have seen that the knowledge platitude can be stated in such a way that it merely offers conditions for the proper application of epistemic concepts. If what I have argued is correct, in the event that radical quasi realists maintain that moral thought does not purport to represent moral reality, it falls afoul of the knowledge platitude thus understood. It would be a conceptual mistake to apply an epistemic concept such as "being a case of knowledge" to a moral judgment if the content of that judgment does not even purport to represent moral reality.²⁷

4. SOBER QUASI REALISM

An explanatory strategy binds together the various versions of quasi realism. This strategy, recall, is one in which we begin our theorizing about the moral domain by assuming that moral judgments do not endeavor to describe or represent moral reality. From this starting point, we explain how it is that nondescriptive attitudes could nonetheless mimic descriptive ones to such an extent that it is appropriate to say of them that they express moral propositions, that they are true, that they represent moral reality, and so on. Radical quasi realists, we have seen, pursue this explanatory project only to a certain point. While radical quasi realists maintain that it is appropriate to say such things, they maintain that saying these things does not commit us either to the existence of moral facts or to beliefs whose content purports to represent them. Sober quasi realists, by contrast, are willing to take the explanatory project a step further. According to their view, quasi realists should

maintain not only that we can say that there are moral truths and facts, but also, strictly and literally speaking, that there *are* such facts and truths—this latter claim being simply an implication of the claim that entities such as moral properties “come for free” with well-behaved moral predicates.

Sober quasi realists, then, hold that there are moral facts. In this sense, their view is a close cousin to realism. Nonetheless, sober quasi realists think of these facts rather differently than realists do. As realists think of them, moral facts play at least one of the following explanatory roles: they are what make the content of our beliefs true or what are represented by this content. (Granted, if one is a correspondence theorist about truth, these two roles coincide.) Sober deflationists, by contrast, deny that moral facts play these roles. To return to a passage from Blackburn I quoted earlier: “Quasi-realism . . . refuses to give ethical facts a typical explanatory role. This is already heralded when we turn our backs on ethical representation. A representation of something as F is typically explained by the fact that it is F. A representation *answers to* what is represented. I hold that ethical facts do not play this explanatory role” (Blackburn, 1999, 216). To which we might add that if sober deflationism is true, not only do moral facts not play this role, they fail to play *any* sort of robust explanatory role.

I think that we should acknowledge that sober quasi realism is more plausible than its radical counterpart, if only because it is not committed to the equivalence thesis. But does it offer us a more satisfactory account of the character of moral knowledge than realism? I hold that it does not. My reason for holding this is that sober quasi realism is subject to the following dilemma.

Suppose that sober quasi realists were to accept the sober deflationary package with its relatively robust account of propositional content, truth, and facthood. Suppose, furthermore, we were to interpret the passage just quoted from Blackburn in such a way that it says that there is no sense in which the content of moral judgments purports to represent moral reality—this denial being what distinguishes quasi-realist from realist positions. If we assume these things, then sober quasi realism’s account of moral knowledge falls afoul of the knowledge platitude. That is, if sober quasi realism were true, it would imply that moral knowledge is impossible because there would be no sense in which the content of moral belief purports to represent (let alone succeeds in representing) a correlative state of affairs. However, if knowledge of this sort is impossible, then sober quasi realism does not offer us a more attractive account of moral knowledge than robust realism. In fact, the sober quasi realist’s view looks considerably less attractive than the position defended by robust realists. Robust realists may be saddled with philosophical mysteries, such as how we gain epistemic access to moral facts. But their view (at least if what I said earlier about the limitations of the epistemic challenge is true) does not yield a version of skepticism according to which moral knowledge is unattainable.

There is, however, an alternative to this first option available to sober quasi realists, which is to read the passage from Blackburn in such a way that it implies not that moral facts cannot be represented, but only that they cannot be repre-

sented in any substantive sense of “represent.” Suppose, then, we were to read the passage quoted from Blackburn in this way. Suppose, furthermore, that sober quasi realists were to expand their version of the deflationary package so that it includes a deflationary account of representation. If our understanding of sober quasi realism has been on the mark, its understanding of representation mirrors its understanding of truth: to the question “Is there a representation relation such that moral beliefs can be among its relata?” sober quasi realists would answer yes. There is, strictly and literally speaking, such a relation. To the further question “Does this relation have a nature that can be unpacked by philosophical or scientific analysis?” sober quasi realists would answer no. If sober quasi realists are correct, the representation relation is not a causal relation, a teleofunctional relation, a *sui generis* “aboutness” relation, or anything of that sort. To use Paul Horwich’s words, representation is a “relation [that] has no underlying nature.”²⁸ That there is a representation relation is merely a consequence of a view according to which properties and relations come for free with well-behaved predicates such as “represents” and “refers.” But, according to deflationists, there is nothing to say about these properties and relations beyond the fact that they are the semantic values of predicates that play certain grammatical or logical roles.

According to what I have called the “epistemic challenge,” robust realism is problematic because it has nothing illuminating to say about how moral beliefs could represent moral facts. Since moral facts are not causally efficacious, the worry is, we are in the dark about how we could gain epistemic access to them. I have conceded that this is a legitimate concern to raise about robust realism. But if it is a legitimate concern to raise about robust realism, it is also a legitimate concern to raise about sober quasi realism. Sober quasi realists, after all, do not deny that moral knowledge consists in a moral belief’s representing moral reality—so long as we understand the representation relation in a deflationary manner. But they do deny that moral facts are causally efficacious. And they do deny that there is anything illuminating to say about how we represent moral reality. In their view, there is nothing illuminating to say about the representation relation. In these respects, sober quasi realism is very similar to robust realism, with this exception: it is in principle possible that robust realists could say more that is genuinely informative about the representation relation operative in moral thought than they often do. For example, it is in principle possible for robust realists to make the case that the (robust) representation relation operative in moral thought is no different from other fairly well-understood (robust) representation relations operative in other nonmoral domains. In this respect, robust realism differs from sober quasi realism. For if what I have claimed is true, sober quasi realists accept an explanatory embargo on notions such as representation, which stipulates that there is nothing informative to say about that in virtue of which moral claims represent reality. Robust realists, if I am right, do not face an embargo of this kind, and that, arguably, is to their advantage.

That is one concern. Here is another. In the previous section, I said that it is a truism that if some beliefs are cases of knowledge, then they enjoy features that

qualify them as such—features that other beliefs fail to enjoy. Among these features, I further claimed, is that beliefs that count as cases of knowledge necessarily represent reality, while mere beliefs do not. Radical quasi realism, I argued earlier, has a difficult time explaining why it makes sense to apply the concept “being a case of knowledge” to some moral beliefs but not to others. Recall that the argument went as follows: one feature that qualifies a belief as a case of knowledge is that it is proper to apply the concept “being such as to accurately represent the facts” to it. But, according to radical deflationists, to apply this concept to a moral belief is simply to endorse or repeat the content of that belief. And it is difficult to see why a belief’s being such that it is appropriate to endorse or repeat its content should explain why it is appropriate to think of it as being a case of knowledge rather than mere belief.

I suggest that we can raise a similar concern about sober quasi realism. Let us agree that for sober quasi realists it is appropriate to apply the concept “being a case of knowledge” to some moral beliefs. Let us further agree that it is appropriate to apply this concept only when and because it is appropriate to apply the concept “being such as to represent accurately the relevant moral facts” to those same beliefs. However, if sober deflationary views are true, it is appropriate to apply this latter concept not because the contents of moral beliefs bear any sort of “aboutness” relation to moral facts but rather for the same reason we apply the concept “being true” to some beliefs: to thereby make linguistic maneuvers of certain kinds, such as generalizations. For example, suppose I wished to attest to Smith’s reliability about some subject matter *X*. I might reel off a long list of claims that Smith makes about *X*, such as “Smith said *p* and *p*,” “Smith said *q* and *q*,” and so on. Or, to make things easy, I might simply say, “Everything that Smith says about *X* represents the facts.” According to sober deflationists, the phrase “represents the facts” allows us to make this generalizing maneuver in a very economical way.

Call a concept that plays a generalizing function of this variety a “generalizing concept.” Now, in certain cases when we use representation concepts, such as when we say that a singular proposition represents the facts, these concepts do not play a generalizing function. Whatever else its merits, then, sober quasi realism does not offer a *general* account of how representation concepts work.²⁹ But suppose that in ordinary moral discourse, representation concepts function as generalizing concepts much of the time. Then we are left with the following puzzle: it is appropriate to apply the concept “being a case of knowledge” (and not simply “being a case of mere belief”) to some moral judgment only if and because it is appropriate to apply the concept “being such as to represent the relevant moral facts” to its content. But, according to sober deflationism, to apply the concept “being such as to represent the relevant moral facts” is simply to apply a generalizing concept of a certain kind. But why should the fact that it is appropriate to apply a generalizing concept of this kind to the propositional content of a mental state explain why it is appropriate to think of that mental state as a case of knowledge rather than a mere belief? As best I can tell, this is a question that does not have a

satisfactory answer. The fact that representation concepts play a generalizing role seems to have nothing to do with why it is appropriate to think that a mental state to whose content we apply such a concept counts as a case of knowledge rather than mere belief. If this is right, our conclusion regarding sober quasi realism mirrors our conclusion regarding radical quasi realism: the sober quasi-realist account of moral knowledge may satisfy the knowledge platitude, but the reasons that are offered for believing this are of the wrong sort.

My aim in this section has been to see whether sober quasi realism offers us an account of moral knowledge that is more satisfactory than radical quasi realism. I have claimed that it does not. To recapitulate, I have claimed, first, that sober quasi realists offer an account of how we represent moral reality that is no more informative than that of robust realists. This, I have said, is an implication of “going deflationary” about representation. Second, I have argued that sober quasi realists do not offer a satisfactory explanation of why it is appropriate to apply epistemic concepts of certain kinds, such as “being a case of knowledge,” to mental states if they are representational in a merely deflationary sense.³⁰

5. QUIETEST QUASI REALISM

Robust moral realists, I have conceded, may have to swallow philosophical mysteries, such as how we gain epistemic access to moral reality. Quasi realism, I have suggested, is alluring because it promises to do better than this. If quasi realists are right, we can dispel the mystery surrounding moral knowledge. My argument in the last two sections has been that the quasi-realist promise remains unfulfilled. Provided we accept certain platitudes about knowledge and representation, quasi realism does not offer us a more adequate account of moral knowledge than robust realism. And this, I suggested, is good news for moral realists of all sorts.

Quietist quasi realism—the third and final version of quasi realism I wish to consider—does not claim that it can better account for certain puzzling phenomena in the moral domain. Rather, it claims something much more radical: that the quasi realist’s ability to mimic various realist-sounding claims simply dissolves any distinctions we might have thought to exist between realism and quasi realism in the first place. The success of the quasi-realist project, according to quietest quasi realists, is not the vindication of expressivist antirealism but the destruction of the moral realist/antirealist debate. The apparent debate, to return to a passage from Blackburn quoted earlier, “is unreal, since there is no methodology for conducting it” (Blackburn, 1993a, 4).

In his recent book *Truth: A Guide*, Blackburn gives a fuller indication of why he thinks that quasi realism threatens to deconstruct the debate between moral realists and antirealists. For any area of discourse, says Blackburn, realists have a story to

tell about what it is to be a realist with respect to that area of discourse. The story goes like this:

(Story) The commitments in question are capable of strict and literal truth; they describe the world; they answer to or represent (independent) facts of a particular kind; there is a way in which the world is that makes them true or false. These facts are discovered, not created, and they have their own "ontological" and "meta-physical" natures, about which reflection can inform us.

Blackburn maintains that realists must add a further clause to this story. In particular, realists must stipulate that:

(Meta Story) The terms of Story themselves mark out *the* substantive philosophical position, or theory about the area; they are the terms in which to define the best view of it. There are bad people out there who oppose Story, but they are wrong.³¹

It is crucial, according to Blackburn, to add this further comment on the original Story because "the words of Story might come very cheaply—so cheaply that anybody who voices commitments in the area can say them. They might represent no second-order theoretical stance, but simply be available as a high-flown way of expressing ordinary commitment within the area."³² In other words, the words of Story can be given a quasi-realist construal. According to the quasi-realist construal of Story, what appear to be second-order theoretical claims about some area of discourse are really expressions of first-order attitudes *within* that area of discourse that carry no commitment to realism. That quasi-realist construals of this kind are available should, Blackburn reminds us, be obvious. We need only remember the lesson taught us by Ramsey's ladder, which is that "*p*" and "it is true that *p* . . . mean . . . the same thing."³³ So, although realists may believe that they are articulating a discernible position when they say "according to our view, *p* really represents the facts," they are not. "Ramsey's ladder," as Blackburn puts it, "raises you nowhere."³⁴ If this is right, quietest quasi realists believe, we have powerful reason to maintain that moral realists do not mark out a distinctive theory about the moral domain. Since nothing that realists say carves out a discernible position, we simply have no grip on what it is that is supposed to distinguish realist views from their rivals.

There is a great deal to say about quietest quasi realism. For present purposes, I will restrict myself to the following observation: if Blackburn is correct, quietest quasi realism is tempting because expressions such as "*p*," "it is true that *p*," "it is a fact that *p*," and "*p* represents the facts" are identical in meaning. I labeled this claim about meaning equivalence "the equivalence thesis." Quietest quasi realists maintain that the equivalence thesis is true. But if our earlier discussion is on the mark, we have excellent reason to believe that this thesis is not true. In fact, it looks pretty clearly false. However, if it is false, then it is not a reason for accepting quietest quasi realism. Admittedly, this is to cast doubt on only one reason to accept quietest quasi realism. But, to my knowledge, it is the only reason that quasi realists offer for accepting quietism. If so, it seems that there is little reason to believe that the debate between moral realists and their rivals will disappear.³⁵

NOTES

1. For an account of what the objectivity in question amounts to, see Cuneo (2007), chap. 1, and Enoch (2007). I borrow the term "robust realism" from Enoch. Enoch (forthcoming), Shafer-Landau (2003), and Parfit (forthcoming) offer defenses of robust moral realism.
2. See Oddie (2005), 26, for a statement of a similar argument. Oddie, let me add, is a moral realist.
3. McGinn (1993) defends an approach of this variety.
4. Blackburn (1984, chaps. 5 and 6; 1993a, 1998), Gibbard (2003), Horgan and Timmons (2000), and Timmons (1999) all develop variants of quasi realism.
5. See Gibbard (2003), 20 and 191.
6. See Blackburn (1993a), 7 and chap. 2, (1993b), and (1996).
7. Blackburn (1984), 180, and (1996), 83–84. See also Blackburn (1993a), 4.
8. The phrase is Blackburn's. See Blackburn (1993a), 186, and Wright (1992), 149.
9. See Cuneo (2007), chap. 6.
10. Despite what some quasi realists and commentators seem to claim. See Dreier (2004), 26, and Blackburn (1998), 75.
11. The passages are from Blackburn (1993a), 129; (2002), 128; Gibbard (2003), 18; and Blackburn (1993a), 111 and 175, respectively.
12. The passages are from Blackburn (1996), 92; (1998), 319; (1998), 80; and (1999), 216, respectively.
13. The passage is from Blackburn (1993a), 4.
14. In Cuneo (2007, chap. 6), I consider what I here call "sober" quasi realism in more detail.
15. See Blackburn (1996), 83, for example.
16. See, for example, Blackburn (1993a), chap. 9, and Timmons (1999), chap. 4.
17. Blackburn (1993a), 56.
18. Blackburn (1996), 88.
19. Gibbard (2003), 233, 235.
20. Gibbard's view is presented as an account not of the content of moral judgments but of the content of normative judgments about what, on the whole, one ought to do. Still, Gibbard indicates that he takes his basic approach to transfer to the moral arena. See Gibbard (2003), 8.
21. Three points: First, I assume that the contents of the mental states in question are predicative in character (i.e., of the form *there is some x that is F*). Second, I shall use expressions of the form "being *F*" to stand for concepts. By using this convention, I do not mean to suggest that concepts are linguistic entities. Third, unless the context indicates otherwise, when I use the term "represents," I mean "accurately represents."
22. Blackburn (1998), 78, 79, and (1999), 214.
23. I assume that the same noun phrase will be substituted for the schematic letter "*p*" in each schema.
24. For the argument that according to the disquotational view, it is not sentence types but tokens that are truth bearers, see David (1994), chap. 2, as well as Alston (1996), chap. 1, and Soames (1997).
25. Although I believe that here appearances deceive. See David (1994), chap. 2.
26. See Gibbard (2003), chap. 2.

27. See Cuneo (2007), chap. 5. Some philosophers, such as Chrisman (forthcoming), suggest that there is a sharp difference between theoretical knowledge, which is representational, on the one hand, and practical knowledge, which is not, on the other. Moral knowledge, it is suggested, is not theoretical in character but practical in nature; it is knowledge of how to act. If this view of moral knowledge were correct, one might believe that the knowledge platitude does not govern our understanding of moral knowledge because moral knowledge is not descriptive. I do not have the space to consider this view here. But it seems to me that reflection on the character of games such as baseball reveals the distinction to be overly sharp. Knowledge of how to play baseball is both theoretical and practical; it is knowledge of the relevant norms or rules that govern participation in the game.

28. Horwich (1998a), 123.

29. How, then, do representation concepts work, according to sober quasi realists, when they are applied to singular propositions? Presumably, they work the same way that radical quasi realists believe they work all the time. If this is right, sober quasi realism is subject to the second concern I raised about radical quasi realism.

30. Here is an objection that might be raised: "Your objection supposes that deflationists are in the business of offering explanations of how we acquire moral knowledge. But this is illegitimate. Deflationary views are not in the explanation-giving business. They are designed to vindicate the possibility of moral knowledge without having to explain how moral beliefs represent moral reality." My short reply is this: First, the second objection I raised concerns only why it is appropriate to apply epistemic *concepts* of certain kinds. This, however, is not something that deflationists say resists explanation. Second, the objection I have raised supposes not that deflationary views must explain how we acquire knowledge, but only that their views about knowledge acquisition are assessable from an explanatory point of view. That is, it assumes only that it is legitimate to ask whether deflationism honors well-entrenched assumptions about knowledge, whether it coheres well with the answers we give to "In virtue of what do we know *p*?" questions in other domains, and so forth.

31. Blackburn (2005), 117 and 118.

32. *Ibid.*, 120.

33. *Ibid.*, 121, 70.

34. *Ibid.*, 121.

35. Megan Berglund, Marian David, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, David Enoch, Bill FitzPatrick, John Greco, Brad Majors, Christian Miller, Russ Shafer-Landau, and audiences at the University of British Columbia and the University of Vermont offered helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. I express to them my thanks.

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