Disquotationalism, Truth and Justification: The Pragmatist's Wrong Turn[1]

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I   Introduction

A view of truth that gained prominence among early logical positivists, what A.J. Ayer called the 'redundancy theory of truth,' has had a renaissance over the last few decades.[2] The fundamental thought behind this theory is that the truth predicate is a device of disquotation. Redundancy, or disquotationalism, is seen by its advocates as providing a definitive answer to the perennial question 'what is the nature of truth?' The answer, says the disquotationalist, is to reject the idea that truth has some underlying nature. The terms true and false, as Ayer put it, connote nothing (Ayer, 1936/1946, 88). They do not correspond or refer to some elusive ingredient of reality. Truth, he argued, must be deflated from its exalted metaphysical status — but the notion should not be dispensed with altogether. Disquotationalists like Ayer think that the truth predi-

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2   A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover 1936/1946).

cate has an essential role to play in logic. Indeed, disquotationalism, in its purest form, sees the sole function of the truth predicate as fulfilling this logical need, that is, as a device that aids generalization by permitting infinite conjunction and disjunction.[3] Its two most prominent contemporary defenders, Hartry Field and Paul Horwich, are both advocates of this form of disquotationalism.[4] Although they disagree on certain details over the proper shape disquotationalism should take, for both Field and Horwich 'truth' can be entirely captured by the triviality of (some version of) the equivalence schema: 'p' is true if and only if p.

Disquotationalism is Cheryl Misak's main target in her 'Deflating Truth: Pragmatism vs. Minimalism.'[5] Misak puts forth a pragmatist theory of truth that is deflationary in spirit but goes beyond the triviality of the equivalence schema (hereafter ES). Her argument in favor of her Peircean view of truth has two key premises. First, she argues that a pragmatist theory of truth can preserve the anti-metaphysical insights of disquotationalism. Second, she notes that since, for the disquotationalist, truth is entirely captured by the ES and the ES holds across the board for all declarative sentences, disquotationalism lacks the tools to discriminate between different sorts of declarative sentences in various realms of discourse.[6] Consequently, she argues, the disquotationalist

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3 There are, as Horwich notes, other logical uses for the truth predicate, e.g. wanting to affirm that a sentence is true but not knowing what exactly it is that sentence says (Paul Horwich, *Truth* [London: Blackwell 1990], 2-3).

4 In this paper I shall follow Misak and use the term 'disquotationalism' (instead of the more trendy 'deflationism') to refer to the view that the truth predicate exists only for the sake of this logical need, and that all we can say about truth is captured by the equivalence schema. This idea is in line with what Horwich calls his 'minimalist conception' of truth, 'i.e. the thesis that our theory of truth should contain nothing more than instances of the equivalence schema' (Horwich, 1990, 8). Field agrees with this thesis but (somewhat confusingly) he uses the term 'pure disquotationalism' to distinguish a version of disquotationalism wherein the truth predicate is restricted to sentences that one understands, so to avoid typical problems regarding sameness of meaning. See Hartry Field, 'Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse,' *The Philosophical Review* **103** (1994): 405-8, and Hartry Field, 'Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content,' *Mind* **103** (1994b): 249-52.

5 Cheryl Misak, 'Deflating Truth: Pragmatism vs. Minimalism,' *The Monist*, **81**,3 (1998): 407-25. As a secondary target, Misak also contrasts her pragmatism with Crispin Wright's pluralism about truth; Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1992). Both Wright and the disquotationalist remain a concern for Misak in her *Truth, Politics, Morality: Pragmatism and Deliberation* (London: Routledge 2000), 56-73.

6 There is a disagreement between Field and Horwich over whether instances of the ES offer an account of truth for propositions or for sentences. Horwich develops his

cannot make sense of what seem like very sensible debates, e.g. debates about whether moral judgments 'aspire to truth,' and is thus forced into a kind of quietism about these debates (Misak, 1998, 420). The pragmatist, on the other hand, in moving beyond the triviality of the ES, gains the resources to participate in these debates. Since in one crucial respect the pragmatist does no worse than the disquotationalist and in another one the pragmatist does one better, Misak concludes that pragmatism offers the superior account of truth.

I disagree, and in what follows I argue that there are some serious problems with Misak's pragmatist theory of truth. To start with, as she sets it up, it is unmotivated; the problem it is meant to resolve, i.e. how to make sense of disciplined discourse in the moral realm, is simply not a concern for the disquotationalist. The argument that a deflated notion of truth cannot capture our justificatory practices has no purchase with someone who has no such aspirations for the truth predicate and gets off the ground only if we have in mind a more robust notion of truth than the disquotationalist need allow. So while Misak is right that the disquotationalist, restricted as she is to the ES, has trouble 'engaging in the long-standing debate over whether statements about what is just or unjust, odious or acceptable, are such that they are either true or false, as opposed to up to the standards of some local discourse or other' (Misak, 1998, 420), she is wrong to think that this is a problem for disquotationalism. That is not to say that these live debates are not perfectly good ones, of course they are, but they are not debates about *truth*. And this leads to the real problem with Misak's pragmatist theory of truth — not that it is unmotivated (although it is), but that she uses truth to explicate moral debates. Misak goes from the perfectly good notion that when we disagree over moral matters we are put in a position to defend our claims to the misguided view that the level of justification required in moral debates is best accounted for by using an inflated notion of truth. When it comes to moral judgments the demand for a high standard of justification is better explicated, I argue, in terms of the degree of accountability we demand of others and ourselves in the moral realm in virtue of the subject matter at hand. At the end of the day, justification has little to do with truth.

disquotationalism for propositions, but Field is wary of proposition talk, which is at least partly why he restricts talk of disquotational truth to sentences which one understands; see n. 4 above and also see Hartry Field, 'Critical Notice: Paul Horwich's *Truth*,' *Philosophy of Science* **59** (1992): 321-30.

II   Truth Aptness

A way into understanding Misak's criticism of the disquotationalist is to look at how they each deal with the issue of truth aptness. Both will agree that for a sentence to be either true or false that sentence has to be, in the first place, a candidate for truth, or truth apt. And both agree that moral judgments are truth apt. But what qualifies a sentence for truth aptness for the pragmatist is different than the conditions stipulated by the disquotationalist, and in both cases the criteria are directly informed by their (divergent) understandings of the truth predicate and its main role in inquiry.

For the disquotationalist, truth is entirely captured by the ES. The idea lurking behind the ES is that to say that '*p*' is true is just to assert *p*. To say, in other words, that 'snow is white' is true is just to assert that snow is white. Thus when we are dealing with a single sentence there will be no need to invoke the truth predicate; we can affirm the sentence just by uttering it. However, the truth predicate becomes necessary when we want to affirm an infinite, or even a large finite number of sentences. As Quine, an early advocate of disquotationalism, put the matter, 'if we want to affirm some infinite lot of sentences that we can demarcate only by talking about the sentences, then the truth predicate has its use.'[7] Since, for the disquotationalist, the truth predicate functions solely as a device for generalization, any sentence that displays assertoric content and is thus susceptible to all the overt syntactic trappings of assertion, e.g. negation, hypothesis, and inference, will be a candidate for truth. For the disquotationalist, then, all (non-paradoxical) declarative sentences are possible instances of the ES, hence all (non-paradoxical) declarative sentences are truth apt.[8]

This is where Misak's criticism against disquotationalism takes root. She points out, quite rightly, that the disquotationalist cannot distinguish between various *types* of declarative sentences. But, as Misak is aware, this is something that a permissive disquotationalist will concede.[9] Even Horwich (who is not so permissive) grants that the ES applies to different kinds of propositions, both normative and descriptive:

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7 W.V.O. Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, (Prentice Hall, 1970), 12.

8 As Horwich points out, if the ES is relied on indiscriminately, as disquotationalism demands, the infamous 'liar' paradox will result, hence, he claims, 'permissible instantiations of the equivalence schema are restricted in some way so as to avoid paradoxical results' (Horwich, 1990, 41).

9 I owe the handy expression 'permissive disquotationalist' to one of the reviewers of this paper.

every type of proposition — every possible object of belief, assertion, conjecture, and so on — will be a candidate for truth, for the device of generalization is no less useful when the propositions in question are normative than when they are naturalistic.[10]

For Misak, however, there is an important difference between those declarative sentences that are apt for truth, and those that are 'good or likely' candidates for truth, and, she argues, a theory of truth ought to be able to capture this difference (Misak, 1998, 421). For Misak, to be a likely candidate for truth a sentence has to *both* aim at truth and be subject to a disciplined discourse (Misak, 1998, 420). On her view, if a discourse is disciplined enough then judgments within that discourse have objective status. The marks of a disciplined discourse include, for instance, when we argue about whether this judgment or that judgment gets things right; when we distinguish between thinking that we are right and actually being right; and when we employ 'rational persuasion' to convince others of our beliefs (Misak, 1998, 421-422). On Misak's view, the fact that moral discourse displays this kind of discipline is a mark of its objectivity which, in turn, suggests that moral judgments are not just truth apt but that they are also likely candidates for truth. But what exactly does this entail?

III   Pragmatist Truth

Misak's pragmatist theory of truth owes a good deal to C.S. Peirce.[11] The central insight of Misak's Peircean pragmatist is that truth is the aim of inquiry, such that a true belief is the best that inquiry could do.[12] This idea gets elaborated in two interconnected theses. For one, the pragmatist argues that because truth is what we are after in inquiry, the best way to understand truth will be to look at it in the context of inquiry and

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10 Paul Horwich, 'Gibbard's Theory of Norms,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* **22** (1994), 73. This view is in stark contrast with at least one form non-cognitivism, i.e. emotivism. The emotivist could agree with Horwich, for instance, that all sentences which have assertoric content are truth apt but argue that normative sentences are merely expressions of desire, hence devoid of assertoric content despite their overt syntactical features. For this kind of response to Horwich see Michael Smith, 'Why Expressivists about Value should Love Minimalism about Truth,' *Analysis* **54**.1 (1994): 1-12.

11 See Misak, 1998, for a bibliography of her Peirce sources.

12 Misak nicely distinguishes her refined Peircean notion of 'truth as the aim of inquiry' from Peirce's clunkier one throughout her (2000), particularly 2-5 and 49-63.

examine the links it has with our experiences and practices. The pragmatist, like the disquotationalist, thinks that there is an important relationship between saying that '*p*' is true and asserting *p*. What signals the pragmatist's departure from disquotationalism is that she wants to say something about what truth *is*, and thinks that in order to say something (anything) about what truth is, we have to pursue this relationship and elucidate the connections between truth and the practices of assertion, justification and verification. According to Misak, 'Linkages with notions that we have workaday dealings with are the one and only way to get a grasp on the idea of truth' (Misak, 1998, 412). Getting hold of the connections between truth and these other earthly notions is, for the pragmatist, the best way to deflate truth.

A second thesis drawn from the idea that truth is the aim of inquiry concerns the *status* of true beliefs, namely that a true belief is one upon which inquiry could not improve. According to the pragmatist beliefs must be tested against experience and, in principle, any belief could be overturned in the face of recalcitrant experience. But a true belief is durable; it withstands doubt and never fails to fit with our experiences. As Misak put it: 'were we to forever achieve all of our local aims in inquiry, were we to get a belief which would be as good as it could be, that would be a true belief' (Misak, 1998, 410). For Misak's pragmatist, then, a true belief is one that would be believed if inquiry were to be pursued as far as it could fruitfully go.

IV   Equivalence Schema (ES) and Bivalence

These two theses point to the key feature of Misak's theory of truth, specifically the marriage of truth and justification. For both Misak and the disquotationalist, there is an important connection between asserting that '*p*' is true and asserting *p*. The disquotationalist thinks we can stop there, but Misak's pragmatist argues that there is more that is demanded of us when we assert that '*p*' is true, namely, a justification of *p*. This wedding of justification and truth is what allows Misak to build a *theory* of truth. She claims that to assert *p*, or to assert that '*p*' is true, is to put oneself in a position to defend *p*, 'to arguing that I am, and others are, warranted in asserting and believing it' (Misak, 1998, 419).[13] But to tie

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13 Here Misak explicitly draws on Brandom's idea that propositionally contentful beliefs come bundled with a complex hybrid of commitments and entitlements; Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons (An Introduction to Inferentialism)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2000), ch. 1.

together truth with our everyday practices of inquiry should not, she argues, prohibit us from incorporating the ES, since both approaches share the same underlying sentiment, namely that '*p*' is true if and only if *p*. As she states,

> we must be careful not to slide from a perfectly good thought about the mysteriousness of essences to the thought that there can be no general characteristic of true sentences or no quality which all truths have in common, or even typically. (Misak, 1998, 411)

But while Misak wants to include the ES in her pragmatic account of truth she cannot, as even she concedes, incorporate it on a wholesale basis. After all, for the pragmatist a true belief is one that would be believed if inquiry were to be pursued as far as it could fruitfully go. This is a salient feature of Misak's pragmatic account of truth and it carries the potential for unpalatable consequences. For if inquiry were pursued as far as it could fruitfully go, and some belief *which is apt for truth* is *not* settled upon, then the pragmatist will be forced to admit a failure of the law of bivalence, i.e. that for every *p*, '*p* is true or *p* is false.' No one, pragmatist included, wants to jettison this. Yet the pragmatist, who links truth with evidence, has to admit that for those questions which inquiry does not decide upon, bivalence fails.

The connection between bivalence and the ES is an intimate one. The ES demands unrestricted application of bivalence for all sentences that are truth apt. If bivalence fails of a sentence, then clearly so will the ES, for we cannot invoke the ES of a sentence that is neither true nor false. Again, the potential failure of the law of bivalence and the corresponding restrictions placed on the ES is not a particularly happy result for the pragmatist — or for the disquotationalist, who is admittedly in a similar bind. But rather than attempting to preserve bivalence,[14] Misak opts instead to focus on the Peircean idea that bivalence is a necessary assumption of inquiry, such that if we did not think that for some *p*, '*p* is true or *p* is false,' it would make no sense to inquire about *p*. So while

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14 As Misak notes, this route is taken by Nicholas Jardine in his *Fortunes of Inquiry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1986). Jardine suggests that in cases where bivalence seems to fail, for example with questions about the remote past, we should rely on what he calls 'counterfactual bravado' — a counterfactual thought experiment relying on time travel. Then, inquirers could go back to the remote past and get determinate answers for these sorts of questions. Misak notes the irony of this move coming from the pragmatist, whose aim is to connect truth up to inquiry, since the counterfactual bravado effectively divorces truth from inquiry. See Cheryl Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991), 142-59.

she is prepared to admit the failure of bivalence, should inquiry demand, Misak argues that nevertheless bivalence must be a regulative assumption of inquiry. As she puts it,

> We must, for any given question, assume that there would be an upshot to our investigations, that it would emerge either that *p* is true or that it is false. Otherwise, we simply could not explain inquiry into the issue. Such an assumption is one which we have to make in order to make sense of our practices of deliberation, investigation, and belief (Misak, 1998, 415).

For Misak's Peircean pragmatist, then, even if there may be cases where bivalence does not hold, it nevertheless plays a key role in inquiry as a kind of conceptual linchpin, without which the sorts of acts that come bundled up with inquiry would not make any sense. Consequently, the ES, like bivalence, will be a regulative assumption of inquiry; specifically, it will be applicable to those sentences for which bivalence holds, and it will fail in the same cases that bivalence fails.

V   Against Pure Disquotationalism

We now have a good picture of Misak's Peircean theory of truth. She reinflates truth, but not in a bad, i.e. metaphysical way, and in going beyond the ES she is able to use this notion to capture the complexity of moral debates. Thus, as she claims, we are given a means of discriminating moral debates from debates about 'the objective tastiness of recognizably edible foodstuffs' (Misak, 1998, 416). Statements here may be also declarative and hence truth apt, but they are not likely candidates for truth since they do not bear the marks of a disciplined discourse (at least not when us regular folk are doing the debating; I'll say more about this shortly). Moral judgments, on the other hand, do bear said marks and this, in turn, offers us a way of seeing them as 'objective.' Thus, by reinflating truth Misak can claim to capture the kinds of distinctions and assumptions that are built into the practice of moral deliberation: distinguishing between thinking that we are right and being right, thinking that we can improve our judgments and criticizing the arguments of others. Note that these are distinctions that the disquotationalist cannot capture, *at least not via the concept of truth,* and this brings us to the heart of the problem with Misak's argument. Her imperative that the disquotationalist *ought* to be able to account for our assertoric practices via the notion of truth fails to have purchase with someone who embraces a deflated notion of truth. To object to the disquotationalist on this ground would be reasonable only if the disquotationalist allowed for a more robust theory of truth than she does. Misak might be right that the

disquotationalist must adopt a kind of quietism about moral inquiry — at least when it comes to truth.[15] But again, this can hardly be a criticism of someone who thinks that there is nothing *more* — or *less* — to truth than the ES.

For any disquotationalist who is suitably permissive about truth-aptness, moral judgments will be truth apt. Since moral judgments display the same syntactic features as other kinds of declarative sentences they are equally prone to generalization and other logical uses, which is just to say that for any moral claim the ES holds for it or its negation. And this is all that the disquotationalist *wants* to say about the truth of any particular moral claim. By her own admission, then, the disquotationalist cannot distinguish moral judgments on the basis of their aptness for truth. For both Field and Horwich, for instance, truth is entirely captured by (some version of) the ES: '*p*' is true if and only if *p*. Of course, the disquotationalist recognizes that normative sentences are in some respects different than descriptive sentences. For Horwich, however, this fact has little bearing on his minimalism about truth, and he makes no attempt to alter it such that it accommodates this difference.[16] Field, on the other hand, does want his version of disquotationalism to reflect this difference. But even in this case, since truth is entirely captured by the ES, the difference must be something *internal* to the ES.[17]

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15 As one reviewer of this paper rightly pointed out, one could be a disquotationalist about truth but continue to argue about other aspects of moral inquiry, e.g. whether or not there are moral properties.

16 This claim might appear to conflict with a passage in Horwich's *Truth* where he suggests that the emotivist can depict the 'unusual' nature of ethical propositions by supposing that 'the meaning of ''X is good'' is sometimes given by the rule that a person is in a position to assert it when he is aware that he values X (which is *not* to say that ''X is good'' means ''I value X'')' (Horwich, 1990, 88). Horwich's parenthetical comment here suggests that, at least in his view, this analysis of moral judgments does not collapse into a kind of subjectivism. But then what is he claiming? It might be that he is offering an explanation of the *origin* of moral beliefs, i.e. that they spring from our propositional attitudes. This interpretation is corroborated by another passage of Horwich's, where he claims that 'Just as ''x is white'' is the standard expression of a belief that stems from a certain experience, so ''x is rational'' is the standard expression of a belief that stems from certain pro-attitudes' (Horwich, 1994, 75). If this is right, then this passage does not conflict with his minimalism about truth, since the origin of a moral belief need not have any bearing on its truth conditions, any more than the origin of a belief about snow being white has bearing on the truth conditions of 'snow is white.'

17 Field argues that moral judgments incorporate an implicit reference to a relativized set of norms, and he suggests that we make this implicit relativization explicit within particular instantiations of the ES. In this way, the disquotationalist can capture

Misak is thus right to claim that the disquotationalist does not have the resources to distinguish moral judgments from other sorts of declarative sentences, at least in terms of their truth-aptness. But given their open concession on the matter, why would Misak suppose that this a *problem* for disquotationalism? The answer here is that she thinks that this is a distinction that a theory of truth *should* capture. And her pragmatist truth is designed to do just this, in virtue of the links it draws between truth and the practices of inquiry. To say that moral judgments are candidates for truth is not, for her Peircean pragmatist, to say enough; what is really important is the role moral judgments play in inquiry and what follows from this, i.e. our corresponding set of entitlements and commitments. But to go this far is to stack the cards against the disquotationalist, who has no such aspirations for the predicate 'true.' And in the absence of such a goal, the disquotationalist is under no burden to capture the different kinds of uses we have for different kinds of declarative sentences. Misak's imperative thus fails to resonate here.

On the other hand, if the disquotationalist were committed to the idea that inquiry, in particular our practices of justification, were hooked intimately to truth, were telling with respect to truth, then it would be a failure on her part that her notion of truth was not able to explain the nuances of a particular area of inquiry where justification is sometimes hard to come by. But it is clear that the disquotationalist has no such commitments — she does not even have a 'theory' of truth at all. For her, there is nothing to the truth predicate but its generalizing use in logic. Her 'theory' is nothing more than an infinite chain of instances of the ES. For the disquotationalist, *this is all that there is to truth*. To ask her for more is akin to asking an atheist to explain why God allows for so much evil in our world. The pragmatist, on the other hand, because she hooks up truth to experiential evidence, does need an explanation about which sorts of sentences are more or less recalcitrant to experience, and why. But only if we suppose that the disquotationalist also has this robust notion of truth in play will Misak's criticism find a real target.

Although Misak never puts it quite this way, one gets the feeling that she would like to bring the disquotationalist and the pragmatist closer together. She certainly sees them as having a common link, namely the ES. But her criticism against disquotationalism shows that despite this similarity, her pragmatist and the disquotationalist are miles apart on the issue of truth. The ES, for Misak's pragmatist, is merely a starting

what is peculiar about moral judgments without going beyond the ES: fully factual utterances will be *straightforwardly* true or false, whereas moral utterances will be true or false only *relative to a set of norms*. See Field, 1994, 427-43.

point for getting to the real issues about truth; of utmost importance are the various experiences of inquiry, and it is through these experiences that we learn what truth *is*. For the disquotationalist, the ES tells us everything we need to know about truth. It is misleading to suggest, as Misak does, that this is a difference of 'philosophical temperament' (Misak, 1998, 411). What we have, rather, is two very different understandings of the truth predicate.

VI   Truth, Justification, and Accountability

My main aim thus far has been to show that Misak's argument against disquotationalism is misguided. I now want to take this one step further and argue that this is systemic of a more serious problem with her pragmatist theory of truth, namely her attempt to explicate justification in terms of truth.[18] On the one hand, it seems both right and uncontroversial to say that some kinds of beliefs that we hold and claims that we make are more difficult to justify than others, and certainly moral beliefs and judgments fall into this camp. More generally, normative statements are not verified as easily or even in the same way as descriptive ones, and this is at least one important difference between these two kinds of declarative statements. Thus, it may well be one thing to say that 'this paper is white' is true and quite another thing to say that 'poking fun at people is cruel' is true — at the very least, the former statement is easier to defend than the latter one. But on the other hand, we might well wonder why Misak's pragmatist supposes that this difference has to do with the nature of truth, or that reinflating truth is the best way to capture it. While there might be more certainty about this paper being white than there is over whether poking fun is a form of cruelty, I think that we would do better to account for this difference by pointing to differences in the subject matter, namely cruelty and paper, instead of by pointing to the nature of truth.

Misak is correct that moral debates are disciplined in the way that she suggests and as such they are live, i.e. perfectly good debates. And she is right that moral judgments are subject to justification and defeat, and that hand in hand with our practices of justification comes a Brandomite complex hybrid of entitlements and commitments. But we do not need to bring truth into the picture to get a good characterization of what is going on here. As I hinted above, we can make better sense of our

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18   This remains one of the key features of Misak's pragmatism in her (2000).

assertoric practices and of how standards vary from discourse to discourse by exploring the subject matter of the discourse in question. So, for example, if the subject matter in question is one that a community of people is deeply invested in, then we can expect a kind of disciplined discourse surrounding it, as standards will inevitably rise to give shape to the debates. If, however, our statements about the subject matter in question are easily verified, well then those standards will be easily met and debates will quiet. In general, then, it is the subject matter of a discourse that dictates the level of discipline in that discourse. More specifically, the level of discipline will be proportionate to two factors, both relative to communities and the people that make them up: the degree of agreement over the subject matter, and the degree of interest in it. Admittedly this is an imprecise calculus, but it gives us at least some way of characterizing, indeed explaining, why different discourses come packaged with different standards of evaluation. This view tells us that how much we agree over and care about a subject — and not some elusive property, i.e. truth — is what dictates how much justification we demand for our claims about that subject. So, for example, debates about middle-sized objects have clear parameters, but we do not require a lot justification for our claims about chairs and tables since the level of agreement generated by our claims about these objects is generally high. Moral debates also have clear parameters, since we care a good deal about moral issues, but because disagreement here is widespread we demand a good deal of justification for our moral claims.

   This idea that justification can be explicated in terms of the subject matter of the discourse in question needs more filling out. After all, the pragmatist might well press, *why* is it that our claims about certain subjects command greater agreement than others? The moral non-cognitivist might use this fact to bolster her case, but Misak's pragmatist has something else in mind. She wants to know why, in only *certain* cases where there is widespread disagreement, do we nevertheless aim at getting things right?[19] The answer here is straightforward: it has nothing to do with the truth of the claims in question and everything to do with making ourselves *accountable* to one another. The fact that moral judgments are subject to justification and defeat — the rigor of moral debate — is a sign of our desire to take responsibility for our claims and the various entitlements that follow from them, and our expectation that others do the same. If I am going to claim that active euthanasia is

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19   Since moral non-cognitivism is not my concern here my answers to these questions will be restricted to the pragmatist's worries (likely to the frustration of the non-cognitivist).

morally permissible then I had better be ready to stand behind this claim, to defend it using whatever arsenal I have. In other words, this kind of accountability takes on greater significance when, as is the case in the moral realm, our judgments have a potentially serious impact on one other, and when the facts in question can be hard to verify. If we want to be able to account for the fact that people have heated debates over the convictions of their moral judgments and that our assertoric practices show that we aim to get things right in moral discourse, we only need to look at what is *at stake* in debates in the moral realm. And the answer here is more mundane than Pierce's 'truth at the end of inquiry.' We can make perfectly good sense of our assertoric practices without that notion, for what is at stake here is, simply, how we ought to act towards other, and what the right thing to do is. This is not meant to be fatuous. Moral debates are *about* how we ought to best live our lives and how we ought to treat others along the way. Moral discourse is indeed marked by a kind of discipline that is usually absent in the case of disagreements about 'edible foodstuffs,' as Misak notes. My suggestion here is that if we are concerned with explicating this difference then the best place to look is to the subject matter itself. In fact, a closer look at the case of 'edible foodstuffs' will help to prove this point.

When it comes to which is better, vanilla ice cream versus chocolate, tempers seldom flare. Generally, we do not think we need to be accountable to others for our judgments about the relative superiority of ice cream flavors. We are not usually at risk of hurting others or ourselves over matters of taste, nor do we seem to care much about one anothers' ice cream preferences. Consequently, we do not typically demand robust justification for our normative claims about 'edible foodstuffs.' But an important exception to this is found in the kitchens of professional chefs. Here we have a case of individuals who are deeply invested in their subject matter, i.e. 'edible foodstuffs,' and whose judgments about their subject matter, like moral claims, are difficult to verify. Accordingly, the standards here are high and debates rage on. This will be evident to anyone who has spent time watching cooking television shows, in particular those kinds of shows where one chef competes against another in front of a panel of judges comprised of food critics and other specialists. For this group of experts there are certain culinary lines that ought not to be crossed, at least not without good reason, whether the issue is the merits of French versus American uncultured crème butter or the acceptability of making pesto in a blender instead of using a mortar and pestle. On 'The Artisan,' for instance, a website devoted to the fine art of Italian cooking, there is an absolute tirade on the egregiousness of the trend towards thin crust pizza, which ends with this remark:

> Some may wonder why we are so adamant about this topic. The reasons are simple. We believe in helping our visitors understand that there is a correct way to make Italian food and an incorrect way. This Faux Pas is a perfect example of an incorrect way to make a very simple dish.[20]

Indeed, the discourse of fine cooking is one that displays all the marks of discipline outlined by Misak: professional chefs argue about whether this judgment or that judgment gets things right; they distinguish between thinking that they are right and actually being right; and they employ rational persuasion to convince others of their beliefs. Just like in the moral realm, in the realm of fine cooking, despite widespread disagreement, individuals nevertheless aim at getting things right.

For the connoisseur, that is, for the individual who takes 'edible foodstuffs' seriously, to assert that p, e.g. that one ought not to dip seared sushi grade Ahi Tuna in ketchup, is to put oneself in a position to defend p, to arguing (in Misak's words) 'that I am, and others are, warranted in asserting and believing it' (Misak, 1998, 419) — not unlike the situation for those individuals who take matters of ethics seriously. And since this discourse displays the discipline that is said to be found in moral discourse, according to Misak's view these judgments about 'edible foodstuffs' are going to be not just truth apt but, like moral claims, they will also be likely candidates for truth. If this case is not a *reductio* of her view, at the very least it gives us a good reason to look elsewhere in order to account for the phenomena of individuals taking themselves to be able to learn from and improve on their beliefs.

When we move from the subject matter of 'edible foodstuffs' to the subject matter of cruelty, the ante goes up. There is obviously more at stake when we go from the acceptability of dipping seared sushi grade Ahi Tuna in ketchup to the acceptability of active euthanasia, namely human lives. But we ought not to mistake the thoroughly human desire and accompanying expectation that individuals be accountable for their moral judgments as indicative of the nature of truth, any more than we would expect religious norms to be telling on the question of the existence of a god. The best explanation for why we debate over moral judgments and why claims in this realm demand robust justification is intimately tied to the impact these claims potentially have on others, and the corresponding duty we have to stand behind them.

Misak suggests that the best explanation for the marks of discipline displayed in certain normative discourses is that that the claims found therein are not merely truth apt but also likely candidates for truth. My

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20 http://www.theartisan.net/faux_pas_the_seventh.htm

argument here is in favor of an alternative explanation, which has it that the marks of discipline within a discourse rise and fall according to how much a community has invested in that discourse, and how easy it is for the claims therein to be verified. Moral discourse displays a high level of discipline because the stakes are high here and because moral judgments fail to command widespread agreement. We inquire and debate over moral issues because we seek to convince others of our beliefs, to persuade them and win them over, and because this kind of accountability is what we require if we our going to endorse a claim ourselves. At the end of the day, standards of justification have little to do with the truth of our beliefs and everything to do with the degree of accountability we are prepared to take for them. This idea of explicating justification in terms of subject matter shows us that we do not need to reinflate truth to have a satisfactory explanation of the discipline exhibited in moral discourse. Indeed, we do not need to reinflate truth to avoid quietism about important normative issues. For those who think that there is nothing to be said about truth beyond its logical use, we can (in the spirit of a Rortian pragmatist) reconfigure moral debates as ones, not about truth, but about making ourselves accountable for our beliefs to an increasingly wider audience of individuals.

VII Conclusion

Misak's most interesting idea is that our practices of justification can help us to explain why moral discourse has developed a kind of discipline. Where she goes wrong is in thinking that we need to reinflate truth in order to account for this. This is what leads Misak to her criticism against the disquotationalist, which, I hope to have shown, fails to strike a chord with someone who has no grand pretensions for the truth predicate. I have further argued that Misak's criticism of disquotationalism is systemic of a larger problem with her pragmatist theory of truth, namely her desire to explicate justification in terms of truth. She is right that our assorteric practices involve defending our beliefs to one another, but she is wrong to think that we have to reinflate truth to make sense of this. Like the atheist who wants to account for the problem of evil in the world by pointing, not to God, but to her fellow human beings, the best explanation for divergence in our assertoric practices lies not with a metaphysical entity but with us. Certainly, we do need to make sense of why some discourses are more disciplined, command greater agreement and require less justification for their claims than others. My suggestion here has been that the best way to account for this is to look to the nature of the subject matter introduced by a claim which the predicate 'true' is then applied. In this way, the lone truth predicate can remain a device

of disquotation, serving a purely logical need, and we can continue to think of moral debates as perfectly good ones, whose discipline is shaped by our desire to make ourselves accountable to one another.