

## MORAL DISAGREEMENT AND PRACTICAL DIRECTION

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WHENEVER *A* judges that  $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong and *B* judges that  $\phi$ -ing is not morally wrong, they disagree. At least, this is an intuition that most of us share. It also seems quite clear that (again, intuitively) this is not only a contingent fact about *some* such pairs of moral judgments. Rather, it holds always, or by necessity, that, if we recognize one person as judging that an act is morally wrong, and recognize another person as judging that this act is not morally wrong, then we think that they disagree. This paper presents and argues for a novel account of such moral disagreements. In short, the idea is as follows. Moral judgments are attitudes that one can act in accordance and discordance with, and there is a disagreement between two moral judgments if there is at least some act that is in accordance with one judgment but in discordance with the other. I argue that this account is available for theories of moral judgments for which the standard accounts of moral disagreements are not available (e.g., contextualist/relativist theories).

The two standard types of accounts of moral disagreements both presuppose that the class of moral wrongness judgments is uniform, though in different ways. According to the *belief account*, the disagreement is doxastic: *A* and *B* have beliefs with conflicting contents. This presupposes “belief uniformity”: that the content of moral concepts and beliefs is invariant between judges and contexts in such a way that, whenever *A* believes that  $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong and *B* believes that  $\phi$ -ing is not morally wrong, their beliefs have mutually inconsistent contents. Otherwise, there are at least possible disagreements between pairs of judgments, like *A*’s and *B*’s above, that the belief account cannot explain. Consequently, cognitivist views that accept belief uniformity—all forms of absolutist (aka invariantist or non-relativist) cognitivism—go hand in hand with such accounts. According to the *attitude account*, moral disagreements are non-doxastic: *A* and *B* have clashing practical attitudes, e.g., desires that cannot be satisfied simultaneously. This presupposes “attitude uniformity”: that moral judgments are always accompanied by, or consist of, desire-like attitudes. Otherwise, there are at least possible disagreements between pairs of judgments

like *A*'s and *B*'s above, that the attitude account cannot explain. This account can be used by many non-cognitivist views according to which moral judgments (necessarily) consist of desires, and perhaps other views that imply that moral judgments are necessarily accompanied by desires (e.g., cognitivist views combined with some strong form of moral motivation internalism).

Both uniformity claims are philosophically controversial, however, and a number of theories about moral judgments in the recent literature—most obviously contextualist theories, but also others—imply the denial of *both* uniformity claims. (More about this in section 1.) Such theories therefore face a challenge when it comes to accounting for moral disagreements, since they cannot (at least in any simple way) use one of the two standard accounts above. More specifically, the challenge they face is that of finding (in the absence of belief uniformity and attitude uniformity) a trait that all moral judgments share, such that disagreement can be explained in terms of that trait. The new account of moral disagreement presented in this paper offers an answer to this challenge.

The idea is that a non-doxastic account is available also without attitude uniformity. Even if deontic moral judgments are not desires, and are not always accompanied by desires, it is characteristic of them that they have *practical direction* in the same sense as desires. Intuitively we think of people as *acting in accordance or discordance* with their (and our) moral wrongness judgments. This is to recognize that moral wrongness judgments have *practical direction* in the sense that they are judgments that one can act in accordance (or discordance) with. And it seems that we do, at least pre-theoretically, recognize that moral judgments can have practical direction without being (or being accompanied by) desires. For to the extent that we recognize that people can accept moral judgments without accompanying motivation and desires, we may speak of them as failing to desire (or be motivated) to *act in accordance with* their moral wrongness judgments.

The first step of my argument is to show that we can use the feature of having practical direction to account for deontic moral disagreements. According to the practical direction (PD) account, developed in section 2, there is a disagreement between two deontic moral judgments if there are acts that are in accordance with one judgment but in discordance with the other. The second step is to establish that we can make sense of the idea that deontic moral judgments necessarily have practical direction—i.e., that this is one way in which the class of deontic moral judgments is uniform—even if they are not necessarily accompanied by desires. Even if we recognize this possibility pre-theoretically, it is not obvious that it can be defended on philosophical grounds, since a plausible starting point seems to be that desires, but not beliefs, necessarily have practical direction. I will argue that we can make sense of this idea in

section 3. In section 4, I argue that the PD account can handle various types of moral disagreements that are more complex than those discussed in section 2. I also tentatively suggest a way in which the account can be extended so that it also handles evaluative disagreements (not only deontic moral disagreements) and nonmoral normative disagreements.

But first, section 1 gives a bit more background: I describe theories that reject both uniformity claims, and discuss the relevance in metaethics of an account of disagreement available for such theories.

## 1. PRELIMINARIES

Several different theories in the metaethical literature imply the rejection of both uniformity claims. Many of these can be subsumed under the label

*Content Relativism*: Deontic moral judgments are beliefs, the content of which can vary between believers.

This includes various forms of moral subjectivism and contextualism (a.k.a. “indexical relativism” and “speaker relativism”), according to which the content of a person’s moral judgments depends on her moral standard, in such a way that, e.g., “morally wrong” refers to different properties when used by different persons (such as failure to maximize well-being for some and lack of respect of autonomy for others).<sup>1</sup> It also includes “moral culture relativism” according to which the content of moral judgments can vary between cultures or societies, depending on which moral values govern the particular societies. Further, it includes “metaethical pluralism,” according to which different metaethical analyses can be correct for different people’s moral judgments, so that, e.g., when some people accept moral claims they have beliefs about nonnatural, *sui generis* normative properties of actions, while others have beliefs about some natural properties of actions (such as well-being maximization).<sup>2</sup> All of these content-relativist views imply that the content of moral beliefs varies in such a way that when *A* thinks that  $\phi$ -ing is wrong, and *B* thinks that  $\phi$ -ing is not wrong, then, in contrast to surface appearance, the propositions that they believe need not be inconsistent. Furthermore, even though they are often combined with the idea that moral judgments are intimately connected to motivation and desires, they almost always allow for possible cases of moral judgments that

1 Dreier, “Internalism and Speaker Relativism”; Harman, “Moral Relativism Defended” and “Moral Relativism”; Phillips, “How to Be a Moral Relativist”; Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*; Wong, *Moral Relativity*.

2 Francén, *Metaethical Relativism* and “Moral and Metaethical Pluralism”; Gill, “Metaethical Variability, Incoherence, and Error” and “Indeterminacy and Variability in Metaethics.”

are not accompanied by desires. Thus, they reject both uniformity claims, and can account for moral disagreement in neither of the two standard ways.<sup>3</sup>

Some other views also reject both uniformity claims. One is “variationism,” according to which some moral judgments are beliefs and some are desires.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there are forms of non-cognitivism according to which moral judgments are identified with a cluster of dispositional tendencies that normally come together—of which the disposition to be motivated or have a desire is one—but that allow that there can be moral judgments without all dispositional tendencies being in place.<sup>5</sup> To simplify the discussion in what follows, I will often use content relativism as my example when I present the PD account, though it works for the other kinds of views as well.

Theories that reject both uniformity claims are minority views among meta-ethicists. But the availability of a satisfactory account of moral disagreement for such theories should not interest only their proponents. First, the alleged failure to account for disagreement is probably the reason against accepting a view of this sort most commonly cited by non-cognitivists (who accept attitude

3 There are also more recent forms of “assessor relativism” according to which the propositional contents of moral beliefs do not vary between different persons, but the content is such that it can be true relative to some people’s moral standards and false relative to others’ (Brogaard, “Moral Contextualism and Moral Relativism” and “Moral Relativism and Moral Expressivism”; Kölbel, “Indexical Relativism versus Genuine Relativism” and “Moral Relativism”; Shafer, “Constructivism and Three Forms of Perspective-Dependence in Metaethics” and “Assessor Relativism and the Problem of Moral Disagreement”; Egan, “Relativist Dispositional Theories of Value”). It has been suggested that such theories, in contrast with content relativism, can explain disagreement intuitions. First, there is a common content to disagree about, and second, from each person’s perspective—when she is assessing the two statements from her own moral standard, at most one of the two statements can be true (Brogaard, “Moral Contextualism and Moral Relativism” and “Moral Relativism and Moral Expressivism”; Kölbel, “Moral Relativism”; MacFarlane, “Relativism and Disagreement”). But this has also been contested. Suppose that *A* and *B* disagree over whether it is always morally wrong to lie. According to assessor relativism, the proposition that it is always wrong to lie can be true or false only relative to specific standards. If it is true relative to *A*’s standard and false relative to *B*’s standard, then *A* will judge it to be true and *B* judge it to be false—which is why we have what might seem like a disagreement. But *A* and *B* may still agree about the truth value of the relevant proposition (lying is always wrong) relative to each specific standard: e.g., that it is true relative to *A*’s and false relative to *B*’s standard. If so, they do not disagree about its truth value at all—after all, it has truth values only relative to standards, and they agree about these truth values. Cf. Dreier, “Relativism (and Expressivism) and the Problem of Disagreement”; Francén, “No Deep Disagreement for New Relativists.” If this is correct, assessor relativism cannot account for moral disagreement as disagreement in belief.

4 This is suggested by Gill, “Metaethical Variability, Incoherence, and Error” and “Indeterminacy and Variability in Metaethics”; Loeb, “Moral Incoherentism.”

5 Björnsson and McPherson, “Moral Attitudes for Expressivists and Relativists.”

uniformity) as well as absolutist cognitivists (who accept belief uniformity). Hence, an important part of the defense of both non-cognitivism and absolutist cognitivism depends on this failure.

Second, and relatedly, arguments against each uniformity claim are highly influential in metaethics. Many non-cognitivists and contextualists/relativists have argued against belief uniformity based on the diversity of moral opinions (between individuals, groups, and/or communities). This kind of argument goes roughly as follows: the (actual or potential) diversity in moral opinions—or differently put, the fact that people apply moral terms and concepts to different kinds of acts—indicates (e.g., shows or is best explained by) that when different people use moral terms and concepts, they do not always, or at least need not, refer to the same properties. Thus, when two people accept the same moral claim—e.g., both judge that it is morally wrong to eat meat—the cognitive content of their moral judgments may differ.<sup>6</sup> Such arguments are, of course, controversial. Absolutist cognitivists contend that diversity does not, in the end, support the rejection of belief uniformity. But diversity arguments and their conclusion nonetheless represent one main strand in metaethics.

Attitude uniformity is also highly contested. This is clear from the debate over moral motivation internalism and externalism. Externalists argue that there can be moral judgments that are entirely unaccompanied by motivation and desires.<sup>7</sup> Most motivational internalists also argue that moral judgments and desires/motivation can come apart under certain conditions, for example, when the judge is practically irrational, or if her judgment is part of a moral practice where most moral judgments motivate.<sup>8</sup> If either of these views is correct, some moral judgments are unaccompanied by desires—which means that an account of moral disagreement in terms of clashing desires will fail

6 Arguments of this kind can be found in, e.g., Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*; Harman, "Moral Relativism"; Horgan and Timmons, "New Wave Moral Realism Meets Moral Twin Earth"; Tersman, *Moral Disagreement*; Wong, *Moral Relativity*; Hare, *The Language of Morals*. There are also less direct arguments against belief uniformity. It has, for example, been argued that theories that imply the rejection of a stable belief content better explain the connection between moral judgments and motivation (Dreier, "Internalism and Speaker Relativism"; Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*).

7 Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*; Gert and Mele, "Lenman on Externalism and Amoralism"; Mele, "Internalist Moral Cognitivism and Listlessness"; Roskies, "Are Ethical Judgments Intrinsically Motivational?"; Stocker, "Desiring the Bad"; Svavarsdóttir, "Moral Cognitivism and Motivation."

8 For views of the former kind, see Smith, *The Moral Problem*; van Rooijen, "Moral Rationalism and Rational Amoralism"; Wedgwood, *The Nature of Normativity*; Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason." For views of the latter kind, see Bedke, "Moral Judgment Purposivism"; Dreier, "Internalism and Speaker Relativism"; Tresan, "The Challenge of Communal Internalism."

to account for instances of disagreement where such judgments are involved. In other words, externalists and many internalists reject the form of attitude uniformity required for the attitude account to cover all moral disagreements.<sup>9</sup>

Proponents of each uniformity claim have used considerations such as those above to argue against the other uniformity claim. But to the extent that we find some plausibility in both kinds of arguments—against attitude uniformity and against belief uniformity—this lends (*prima facie*) support (and has indeed been used to support) theories that imply the rejection of both uniformity claims. Given this, removing what by many is seen as the main reason against accepting such theories—i.e., their alleged inability to account for moral disagreements—*might* alter our conclusion about which kind of theory gains most overall support from the arguments.

The main aim of this paper, then, is to develop a novel plausible account of moral disagreements, the PD account, which requires neither belief uniformity nor attitude uniformity, thus giving theories that reject both uniformity claims a way of explaining our disagreement intuitions. It should be noted that other suggestions have been made as to how, e.g., content relativism can explain disagreement intuitions. Such proposals include explanations in terms of metalinguistic negotiations and presuppositions of shared standards.<sup>10</sup> I will *not* try to evaluate such previous proposals in this paper, but will merely observe that it is controversial whether they succeed.<sup>11</sup> Also, several philosophers have suggested that moral contextualists/relativists could explain disagreements in terms of clashing practical attitudes.<sup>12</sup> I will not examine the details of these proposals, but as noted above, it is hard to see that they can escape the problem

- 9 This is not to say that all forms of internalism according to which moral judgment and motivation can come apart imply that attitude accounts of moral disagreements fail. There are non-cognitivists who argue that moral judgments are desire-like states and that such states are dispositions to motivate under normal circumstances. See, e.g., Björnsson, "How Emotivism Survives Immoralists, Irrationality, and Depression"; Eriksson, *Moved by Morality*; Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*.
- 10 For proposals of the first kind, see Plunkett and Sundell, "Disagreement and the Semantics of Normative and Evaluative Terms," "Dworkin's Interpretivism and the Pragmatics of Legal Disputes," and "Antipositivist Arguments from Legal Thought and Talk"; Bolinger, "Metalinguistic Negotiations in Moral Disagreement." For proposals of the second kind, see Dreier, "The Supervenience Argument against Moral Realism"; Harman, "What Is Moral Relativism?"; López de Sa, "Presuppositions of Commonality" and "Expressing Disagreement."
- 11 Marques, "What Metalinguistic Negotiations Can't Do"; MacFarlane, "Relativism and Disagreement"; Finlay, "Disagreement Lost and Found"; Marques and García-Carpintero, "Disagreement about Taste"; Beddor, "Subjective Disagreement."
- 12 Björnsson and Finlay, "Metaethical Contextualism Defended"; Dreier, "Transforming Expressivism" and "Relativism (and Expressivism) and the Problem of Disagreement"; Marques, "Doxastic Disagreement" and "Disagreeing in Context"; Harman, "Moral

that some cases of intuitive disagreement are left unexplained, *as long as* moral judgment and non-cognitive attitudes sometimes come apart.<sup>13</sup> This is *at least* a *prima facie* problem for these views, a problem that motivates the search for alternative solutions. Perhaps it can be argued that *most* disagreement intuitions can be explained by an attitude account and that those that cannot can be explained away.<sup>14</sup> I see no principled reason to reject such debunking explanations, but as with the other suggestions above, I will not try to evaluate this strategy here. Instead, this paper focuses on presenting and developing a positive case in favor of the new PD account of moral disagreement: a non-doxastic account that does not require practical attitudes to be present for a moral disagreement to occur—and that therefore does not require explaining away certain disagreement intuitions.

## 2. THE PRACTICAL DIRECTION ACCOUNT OF MORAL DISAGREEMENT

### 2.1. Practical Direction

Deontic moral judgments have practical direction in the following sense: intuitively, there are ways of acting that are to act in accordance with, or follow, them. If I judge it morally right or obligatory to give to charity, then if you do so, you act in accordance with my judgment. If I believe that it is morally wrong to steal but still do it, then I act against (or in discordance with) my own judgment. I take this to be fairly uncontroversial; this is how we intuitively think and talk about deontic moral judgments.

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Relativism”; Sundell, “Disagreements about Taste”; Wong, *Moral Relativity*; Finlay, *Confusion of Tongues*; Jackson, “The Argument from the Persistence of Moral Disagreement.”

- 13 The most elaborate and complex account of this sort is probably that of Finlay, *Confusion of Tongues*, ch. 8. However, in the end, since Finlay characterizes “fundamental disagreements as involving a basic conflict in preferred ends” (234), his view seems to require the presence of the relevant practical attitudes (preferences)—i.e., attitude uniformity—for this kind of disagreement to occur. (For a more elaborate argument to the effect that contextualists cannot explain disagreements in terms of clashing practical attitudes, see Eriksson, “Explaining Disagreement.”)
- 14 Could content relativists instead hold that, in cases where moral judgments are not accompanied by the relevant practical attitude (assuming that we acknowledge the possibility of such cases), we do not have disagreement intuitions to start with? This is much less plausible. As long as we really identify one person, *A*, as holding that eating meat is wrong, and another, *B*, as holding that it is not wrong, even if we stipulate that they lack certain additional practical attitudes, the (pre-theoretically) intuitively plausible verdict is that they disagree about whether eating meat is wrong. Of course, one’s intuitions *might* start to waver as an effect of accepting content relativism, but then the pre-theoretic intuition still needs explaining. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for bringing up both this and the explaining-away strategy.)



Moral judgments share this trait with a bunch of other things. *Desires* have practical direction in the relevant sense: intuitively, there are ways of acting that are to act in accordance with, or follow, them. For example, if I eat ice cream, I act in accordance with my desire to eat ice cream. Many other things also have practical direction in this sense: they are things that we intuitively think that one can act in accordance or discordance with. One can act in accordance or discordance with verbal *orders*. One may succeed or fail to follow, or build in accordance with, *blueprints* for building constructions. Similarly, we can succeed or fail to assemble furniture in accordance with the *assembly instructions*. When we play chess (or any other game), making certain moves is to follow (i.e., play in accordance with) the *rules*. If we have a *shopping list*, shopping certain things is to shop in accordance with the list.

For all of these things, we experience them as directing us toward (or against) certain specific courses of actions (e.g., shopping for certain groceries, assembly of certain parts in a certain order, performance of actions judged obligatory), and the performance of these actions is then experienced as being in accordance (or discordance) with the thing.<sup>15</sup> We will return to the question of what it is that makes them things that we think of as having practical direction in this sense, what it is that unites them. For now, let us just grant that, *intuitively*, certain mental attitudes and other things are such that there are ways of acting that are to act in accordance with them.

Most things do not have practical direction in the intended sense—my kitchen table does not point me toward a specific action that would be to act in accordance with it, neither does the sun, the Eiffel Tower, the number three, etc. More to the point, in contrast to desires, ordinary descriptive beliefs do not have practical direction in this sense. Consider the belief that grass is green, or the belief that all horses can fly. These beliefs can be true, if they represent reality correctly. But just like my kitchen table (and the other things above), they do not point to specific ways of acting that would, intuitively, be to act in accordance, follow, or comply with them. The difference between beliefs and desires that I am after here is related to the common idea that desires, unlike beliefs, are attitudes that can be fulfilled or satisfied, rather than true. This I take it is another way of capturing the idea that desires, but not beliefs, have a practical implication, in the sense that they in some way seem to give us direction, or point to certain specific actions (or types of actions) such that doing those actions would be to comply with the attitude.<sup>16</sup>

15 “Specific courses of actions” should be understood as including specific token actions, specific types of actions, or specific sets of (types of) actions.

16 The distinction is also plausibly related to the idea that desires and beliefs have different directions of fit. I will not pursue this similarity here, however. The notion of directions



The idea can be further clarified by considering two potential concerns to the effect that ordinary descriptive beliefs also can have practical direction. If I believe that Alva will go for a swim tomorrow, and Alva actually does this, has she not acted in accordance with my belief? In one sense she has—she has acted as I believed she would. But this does not mean that the belief has practical direction in the sense intended above. My belief merely aimed to represent reality, not point out an act as one to be done. So it does not make sense to say that Alva could have *followed* or *complied with* the belief, in the sense of doing what it told her to do. In this way it differs from a judgment that Alva ought to swim tomorrow.<sup>17</sup>

Consider next my belief that a lion will kill me unless I run away. When I run, do I not act in accordance with that belief? This is also different from the things that have practical direction discussed above. Running away is not to act in accordance with belief *considered by itself*. That belief *by itself* does not point to any specific action, which is to follow the belief. This is obvious from the fact that I might desire to be killed by a lion. Contrast this with, e.g., a blueprint. If the blueprint specifies that bricks are to be used for the façade, then even if you hate brick façades, *in order to follow the blueprint*, you need to use bricks. That is, there is some act (way of building) that is in accordance with the blueprint *considered by itself*, irrespective of your goals, etc. Deontic moral judgments also have practical direction in this sense: if I judge  $\phi$ -ing morally wrong (right) then  $\phi$ -ing is to act in discordance (accordance) with the judgment *considered by itself*.

## 2.2. The Practical Direction Account of Moral Disagreement

Deontic moral judgments can concern what we are morally allowed, obliged, and disallowed to do. Which acts are in accordance and discordance with deontic moral judgments of these different kinds? Plausibly,  $\phi$ -ing is to *act in discordance* with judgments to the effect that  $\phi$ -ing is morally disallowed—e.g., that it is morally wrong to  $\phi$ , that you ought not  $\phi$ , or that it is morally obligatory not to  $\phi$ . Of course,  $\phi$ -ing is to *act in accordance* with judgments that “tell you to  $\phi$ ,” i.e., moral judgments to the effect that  $\phi$ -ing is morally required, or that  $\phi$ -ing is something that you ought to do. But we should also say that  $\phi$ -ing is to

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of fit is highly theoretically contested. Depending on how you understand the idea of direction of fit, the claim that moral judgments have world-to-mind direction of fit will be highly controversial, whereas I hope that most can agree that, in some intuitive sense,  $\phi$ -ing is to act in accordance with your judgement that  $\phi$ -ing is morally obligatory.

<sup>17</sup> Note that also, e.g., deontic judgments about past actions have practical direction in the relevant sense. The judgment that it was wrong of Alva to swim yesterday states that Alva's swimming was not a thing to be done, so not swimming would have been for Alva to act in accordance with the practical implication of the judgment. (This also means that, if Alva had (magically) known about the judgment prior to her act, she could have followed the judgment in the sense of choosing to avoid the act that it states is not to be done.)

act in accordance with weaker moral judgments: judgments to the effect that  $\phi$ -ing is morally permissible (or not impermissible, i.e., not wrong). If you think that it is morally OK to eat tomatoes, then eating tomatoes is in line with that judgment. To summarize:

*Discordance:* Acting in discordance with a moral judgment, MJ, is to act in a way that MJ says (or implies) is *disallowed*.

*Accordance:* Acting in accordance with MJ is to act in a way that MJ says (or implies) is morally *allowed* (or *not morally disallowed*).

If a judgment has no implications about the moral status of  $\phi$ -ing—e.g., the judgment that snow is white—then  $\phi$ -ing is not to act in accordance (or discordance) with the judgment.

Here is a first stab at a criterion of disagreement in terms of practical direction: there is a moral disagreement between two persons if they accept moral judgments such that one cannot act in accordance with both.<sup>18</sup> Consider this pair of judgments:

K: In situation S, it is morally wrong to kill Q.

U: In situation S, it is morally wrong not to kill Q.

If I am in situation S, then I cannot act in accordance with both of these judgments. According to our initial criterion, then, there is a conflict between

<sup>18</sup> Note the similarity between this preliminary statement of the PD account of disagreement and Stevenson's famous idea of disagreement in attitude, that is, the idea that moral disagreement is disagreement in the sense that it "involves an opposition of attitudes both of which cannot be satisfied" (Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" 2). The discussion below shows that Stevenson's account, just like the preliminary version of the PD account, needs to be amended to handle many cases of moral disagreement. Furthermore, while Stevenson's ambition was to provide an account of moral disagreement that was plausible given non-cognitivism, my aim is to argue that the PD account is available even if moral judgments are not constituted by (or necessarily accompanied by) desires, since moral judgments, even if they are not desires, are mental states that one can act in accordance with. Since this is my objective, it makes more sense to state the account in terms of "states that one can act in accordance with" rather than "states that can be satisfied." When we talk about desires, both expressions sound felicitous: "eating that ice cream *satisfied* (or fulfilled) my desire to eat something sweet" and "I thereby acted in accordance with my desire." For moral judgments, it sounds strange to say that, by donating to charity, I *satisfy* my judgment that one ought to do so. But it sounds perfectly felicitous to say that I acted in accordance with my judgment. (The same holds for chess rules, shopping lists, blueprints, etc.) We might think that this is just a choice of words, but to make the account plausible, it matters. My goal is to make sense of our disagreement intuitions, and to do that I aim to show that thinking of moral judgments as things that one can act in accordance with makes intuitive sense, and that disagreement can be accounted for in terms of this notion.

the judgments, and *K* and *U* disagree. There are two problems with this initial criterion. The first is that the criterion overgeneralizes. Consider *X*'s judgment that grass is green. There is no disagreement between *K*'s judgment and *X*'s judgment. But it does hold that one cannot act in accordance with both—for the simple reason that one cannot act in accordance at all with the latter. What this makes evident is that the initial criterion fails to capture the idea that there is a disagreement if two judgments have practical directions that clash with each other—since it can be fulfilled without one of the judgments even having practical direction. So we might consider the idea that there is a disagreement between two judgments if one cannot act in accordance with one judgment without acting in discordance with the other. On this criterion, there is a disagreement between *K* and *U*, but not between *K* and *X*.

But this amendment runs into the second problem. Consider the following two judgments.

*U*: In *S*, eating meat is morally wrong.

*K*: In *S*, eating meat is not morally wrong (both doing so and not is permissible).

Clearly there is a disagreement here. But in this case, it is possible to act in accordance with one judgment without acting in discordance with the other. If I eat vegetarian, then I have acted in accordance with *U*'s judgment. But I have not acted in discordance with *K*'s judgment. This illustrates that for two normative judgments to be in conflict it need not hold for every action that they give different verdicts about whether it should be performed—it suffices that they give different verdicts for some action. Consequently, what we should say is that there is a practical direction disagreement between two moral judgments, as long as there is at least some act that is in accordance with one judgment but in discordance with the other judgment. In the case at hand, eating meat is such an action.

*Practical Direction Account*: There is a deontic moral disagreement between *A* and *B* if and only if they accept moral judgments respectively ( $J_A$  and  $J_B$ ) such that there is at least some act that is in accordance with  $J_A$  and in discordance with  $J_B$ .

This account, it seems, captures the practical dimension of deontic moral disagreements: they are disagreements about how to act, and plausibly two people are in such a disagreement if they accept judgments such that some ways of acting are in accordance with one judgment but in discordance with the other.

The existence of such acts shows that the two judgments have, as it were, clashing practical implications (with regard to some action). There is at least some action that, if it is performed, will be in line with one of the judgments but go against the other.

Let us see how the PD account explains some simple cases of deontic moral disagreement.

$J_1$ :  $\phi$ -ing is wrong (or: you ought not  $\phi$ ; not  $\phi$ -ing is obligatory).

$J_2$ :  $\phi$ -ing is not wrong (or: is permissible, is right, or is obligatory).

The PD account implies that there is a disagreement here:  $\phi$ -ing is in accordance with  $J_2$  but in discordance with  $J_1$ .

$J_3$ :  $\phi$ -ing is morally obligatory.

$J_4$ :  $\phi$ -ing is not morally obligatory.

Here, the PD account implies that there is disagreement since not- $\phi$ -ing is in accordance with  $J_4$  (because  $J_4$  implies that not  $\phi$ -ing is permissible), and in discordance with  $J_3$ .

$J_5$ :  $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong.

$J_6$ : Not- $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong.

On the one hand, if genuine moral dilemmas are possible, then there is no disagreement, since both  $J_5$  and  $J_6$  can hold (indeed, one person can accept both). And this is accurately captured by the PD account.  $\phi$ -ing is in discordance with  $J_5$ , but not in accordance with  $J_6$ . For under the presupposition that genuine moral dilemmas are possible,  $J_6$  is silent on  $\phi$ -ing; it does not imply that  $\phi$ -ing is morally permitted. On the other hand, if genuine moral dilemmas are not possible, then there is a disagreement, which is captured by the PD account: the only way to act in accordance with  $J_5$  is to not  $\phi$ , which is to act in discordance with  $J_6$ . I am not taking a stand on whether genuine moral dilemmas are possible or not, but either way, the PD account captures the presence/absence of disagreement.

The PD account can capture our disagreement intuitions about these cases since they can be construed as disagreements about what to do. In section 4, we will look at deontic moral disagreements that are less straightforward disagreements about how to act, and I will argue that the PD account can nonetheless handle those cases.

I have now argued that the idea that deontic moral judgments have practical direction, in the intuitive sense described in section 2.1, can be used

to explain moral disagreement intuitions. In section 3, I give this intuitive explanation more substance, through presenting a theory about what it is that makes moral judgments (and certain other things) have practical direction. There I will also argue that moral judgments can have practical direction even if they are not desires, so that the PD account is available to content relativists. Before that, however, let us consider a potential objection that helps clarify the account.

### 2.3. *Endorsement*

According to the PD account, there is a deontic moral disagreement whenever the practical directions of moral judgments clash. It might seem that this view is committed to the more general view that all clashes in practical direction between mental attitudes constitute disagreements. But then there are counterexamples. Imagine a drug addict who wants to take heroin and his father who wants him not to. Do they, by virtue of their wanting different things—and the fact that there is some act, i.e., taking heroin, that is in accordance with one of these attitudes and in discordance with the other—disagree about something, e.g., about what the drug addict is to do? Not necessarily, it would seem. The drug addict might well desire that he not want to take heroin and think that he should not. So, they might want inconsistent things without disagreeing. Arguably, this holds in many cases of clashing desires.

But there is a good reason to think that all pairs of moral judgments with clashing practical directions constitute disagreements (as the PD account holds), even though this is not so for all clashing desire pairs. For the clash of two attitudes to constitute disagreement, they plausibly have to involve endorsement (or taking a stand) of some sort. To *judge* that it is wrong to eat meat, in contrast to just entertaining the idea that it is wrong, is to endorse (or accept) the moral claim in question. In contrast, the drug addict's desire to take heroin does not involve endorsement. We can compare with disagreements about factual matters, conceived of as clashing propositions. There is no disagreement between someone who merely entertains the thought that grass is green and someone who entertains the thought that grass is blue—because entertainings, in contrast to beliefs, do not involve endorsement.

I do not have a view about what endorsement is, or in which way moral judgments involve endorsement, given the kind of content relativism and other views that are in focus in this paper. But I take it that any theory about moral judgments that is not a nonstarter will have to be able to say that *accepting* a moral claim involves endorsement in some sense. If it can, it can avoid the implication that all cases of attitudes with clashing practical direction are disagreements.

## 3. PRACTICAL DIRECTION WITHOUT DESIRES

3.1. *The Challenge: Explaining Practical Direction*

It is part of the aim of this paper to show that the PD account of moral disagreement can be used by content relativism and other theories about moral judgments that imply the denial of both belief uniformity and attitude uniformity. For this to work, these theories about moral judgments must be able to accommodate the view that deontic moral judgments necessarily have practical direction, otherwise the PD account of moral disagreement cannot explain all cases of deontic moral disagreement. But—and this is the challenge in this section—there is *prima facie* reason to doubt that the theories in question can do this.

On the face of things, there seem to be only two straightforward ways to get the result that moral judgments necessarily have practical direction. First, since desires (but not beliefs) have practical direction, one way would be to hold that moral judgments are, or are necessarily accompanied by, desires. But that is not available to views that reject attitude uniformity, i.e., views that say that (all or some) deontic moral judgments are beliefs not accompanied by desires. Second, nonnaturalists can hold that since moral judgments are beliefs about special normative facts—i.e., facts that are categorically prescriptive, as Mackie put it—these facts have practical direction built into them.<sup>19</sup> They could hold that moral judgments have practical direction indirectly, through being beliefs in facts with practical direction. Most variants of content relativism cannot hold this, however. While strictly nonnaturalist forms of content relativism are possible, the variants of content relativism that are actually defended in philosophical literature do not take this form. Rather, they tend to imply that (all or most) moral beliefs are beliefs with a naturalistic content. And I want to suggest an account of moral disagreements that works for these theories. Thus, neither of these two straightforward explanations of the practical direction of moral judgments is available for content relativism. This means that these theories face a challenge of explaining the practical direction of deontic moral judgments.<sup>20</sup>

In the next two subsections, I will argue that, once we understand in virtue of what certain attitudes (and other phenomena) have practical direction, this challenge can be answered.

19 Mackie, *Ethics*.

20 We should also note that if some theory of moral judgments fails to explain the practical direction of moral judgments, this does not only take away a possible explanation of moral disagreement, but it is also a serious shortcoming in itself. As we noted above, it seems to be a platitude that moral judgments necessarily have practical direction. This, then, is a challenge for all theories that imply that moral judgments are beliefs about naturalistic properties and are not necessarily accompanied by desires.

### 3.2. *An Account of Practical Direction*

What does it take to have practical direction—that is, what makes us experience some things as things that one can follow, or act in accordance with? We can start by asking in virtue of what desires have practical direction. One thought is that desires have practical direction—i.e., are such that we can act in accordance with or follow them—in virtue of being motivational states. In contrast to beliefs, they are attitudes that intrinsically and/or necessarily motivate (or dispose) us to act in certain specific ways. One might then think that this is what makes us experience acting in those ways as acting in accordance with the desire. This would also explain why ordinary beliefs do not have practical direction, since ordinary beliefs do not necessarily motivate (at least on a standard Humean picture of motivation). If this view about practical direction is correct, then views that imply that moral judgments are not necessarily motivating also imply that they do not necessarily have practical direction.

But if we broaden our perspective, we see that the simple view above is incorrect. As noted above, some things other than desires have practical direction. For example, we can act in accordance or discordance with juridical laws, build in accordance with blueprints, play in accordance with chess rules, shop in accordance with shopping lists, and assemble furniture in accordance with assembly instructions. But these phenomena do not necessarily or intrinsically motivate anyone to act in accordance. There can be assembly instructions and laws that no one is motivated to follow—but they would still be assembly instructions and laws, and thus the sorts of things that *can be followed*. Consequently, the simple motivation view is too crude: once we have identified types of things that have practical direction, we clearly can think of at least individual tokens of those types (e.g., individual laws or assembly instructions) that people are not motivated to act upon, but that we still intuitively think of as things that one can act in accordance with.

It seems to me that our initial view was on the right track, however, in that it focuses on action-influencing tendencies. Even though many types of things that have practical direction do not necessarily or intrinsically motivate people to act, what unites them is that they are types of things whose function for us is to influence actions in specific ways. They are either mental attitudes—like desires—or human communicative acts or constructions—like blueprints, chess rules, juridical laws, requests, and orders—that point out certain ways of acting, and, in different ways, function to guide or influence people to perform (or not perform) those acts. The idea is that the fact that the main function or role they have for us is to get people to act in specific ways, explains (and makes



sense of) why we think of those ways of acting as ways of acting in accordance with, complying with, or following the desires, blueprints, chess rules, etc.

More precisely, in order to explain the fact that we think of the blueprint and law, etc., that no one is motivated to use as having practical direction, we should say that when a *type* of thing—e.g., blueprints or assembly instructions—has as its (main) function to influence actions in specific ways, then we will see tokens of that kind—e.g., individual blueprints and assembly instructions—as being things that one can follow or act in accordance with, even if that token does not actually influence anyone to act. As long as those “anomalous” tokens have traits that make them count as belonging to such an action-influencing type, they will also count as having practical direction. (They are, as it were, free riders of the type to which they belong.) I suggest that this is what unites the things that we think of as having practical direction.

If we compare the different types of things that have practical direction, we see that they gain their action-influencing function in different ways. Desires (arguably) have it due to their intrinsic nature (at least if we accept a common form of functionalism about desires). Laws, blueprints, assembly instructions and (verbal) orders have that role due to social conventions. Shopping lists have it due to people’s decisions: when I create a list with the purpose of using it to guide my shopping, I thereby give it the function and also make it a shopping list.

The latter examples make it clear that things that do not have practical direction thanks to their intrinsic nature can still become things with practical direction if they gain an action-influencing function in some human practice. A piece of paper with words referring to groceries does not, as such, have practical direction. It could be an enumeration of the first words that come to the author’s mind or a list of things in her fridge. If so, there is no action that is to act in accordance with it. It is only if it is or starts to be used with the function of guiding behavior that it becomes a shopping list and becomes a thing that we think of as something that one can act in accordance with. That is, *qua* list, it does not have practical direction, but *qua* shopping list, it does.

Further, for at least many of the phenomena that we think of as having practical direction, this feature is also integrated in the concept in question as a necessary condition: e.g., in order for *x* to count as a shopping list, there have to be ways of acting that are to act in accordance with *x*; and in order for *x* to be a rule in chess, there has to be some way to play that is in accordance with it. Consequently, these phenomena have practical direction by conceptual necessity.

We also have an explanation of why ordinary descriptive beliefs do not have practical direction. When I believe that it is sunny today, the function of this belief, taken by itself, is not to influence or guide me to act in any *specific* way. We might think that one of its functions is to influence behavior, so that the

belief, when combined with, e.g., a desire to be out in the sun, or to stay away from the sun, or to dance a little dance when it is sunny, disposes the agent to act. But the very fact that its function (if we think it has such a function) is to dispose for different actions when combined with different desires, shows that there is not *one specific way* of acting that can be thought of as acting in accordance with the belief.

### 3.3. *The Practical Direction of Moral Judgments*

Whether or not we accept that deontic moral judgments are intrinsically or necessarily motivating, we should accept that they have a practical role in our social lives: as central parts of our moral practice they function to influence actions in specific ways. Specific subtypes of deontic moral judgments are tied to specific ways of acting. Judging an action morally wrong generally, though perhaps contingently, functions to dispose the judge to *avoid* the action. This is often also why we tell people, and sometimes argue with them, that certain types of acts are wrong—not just to ensure that they have correct views on this matter, but to influence them to avoid these types of actions. In these ways, moral-wrongness judgments have a specific practical function in our social practice in the following sense: they (typically) play a certain causal role in how people interact with each other and in how they regulate their actions; this role is such that it ties the judgments in question to one specific way of acting (avoidance). Similarly with other subtypes of deontic moral judgments. This action-influencing function is undoubtedly a salient feature of deontic moral judgments. Indeed, any theory of moral judgments that is not consistent with, or that cannot account for, moral judgments having at least a contingent action-influencing function of this sort will be implausible to start with.

With the account of practical direction defended in the previous section, this explains why we think of deontic moral judgments as having practical direction. Since judgments that  $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong have the function to influence actions in a specific way—namely so that  $\phi$ -ing is avoided—it makes sense that we think of avoidance of  $\phi$ -ing as being to act in accordance with, or to comply with, such judgments. It makes sense, in the same way as it makes sense that we think of blueprints and chess rules as being things that one can act in accordance with.

This explanation of why deontic moral judgments have practical direction does not require that they are intrinsically or necessarily connected to motivation to act. Above we noted that most things that we think of as things that one can act in accordance with are not intrinsically motivational—e.g., blueprints, shopping lists, chess rules, and juridical laws. They influence actions because they are part of a practice where people are contingently interested in

following them. Many cognitivists hold similar views about moral judgments. Also, as noted above, there may well be token blueprints and juridical laws, for example, that do not motivate anyone, and that never serve to influence or guide action. As long as they have traits that make them belong to the relevant type of things (e.g., blueprints and juridical laws) which typically have as their function to guide behavior, they will be experienced as things that one can act in accordance with. Similarly, this account allows that moral judgments entirely unaccompanied by motivation still count as having practical direction.

We now have an explanation of moral judgments being mental attitudes that one can act in accordance with that does not require that they are desires, or are necessarily accompanied by desires. For example, the explanation is available to cognitivist theories according to which moral judgments have an action-influencing function due to a strong but contingent relation to motivation. To be clear, I do not here propose some specific view about the mechanisms behind the action-influencing function of moral judgments. The point is instead that the general idea about why moral judgments have practical direction is compatible with different views on this. Cognitivists will hold that deontic moral beliefs are a subclass of our beliefs connected in some special (but contingent) way to motivation. They may say that our motivation to avoid immoral acts is partly due to the special content (or character) of moral-wrongness judgments, innate psychological mechanisms, and/or moral upbringing, perhaps in combination with a complex pattern of social reactive attitudes toward people who act in ways perceived as immoral and a drive to avoid being subject to such attitudes.<sup>21</sup>

There is no reason to think that the kind of theories in focus in this paper—those that reject both uniformity claims—would be unable to use this account of practical direction. Content relativists hold that the wrongness beliefs of different individuals (or in different societies) have different contents, so on a general level what they will need to hold is that beliefs with different content serve the relevant action-influencing role for different individuals (or in different societies). More concretely, one common group of content-relativist theories is especially congenial with the idea that moral judgments have an action-influencing function. These are views according to which the content of moral beliefs (at least in normal cases) depends on the judge's moral standard, where her moral standard is taken to consist in some subclass of

21 This should also make it clear that the claim that moral judgments have an action-influencing function should not be construed in such a way that functionalism about mental states implies that they are, e.g., desires. Rather, the action-influencing role that makes us see, e.g., wrong judgments as connected to one way of acting (avoiding the action judged wrong), can be due to external and contingent motivation. (Thanks to a referee for pushing me to be explicit about this.)

her motivational states (states of the kind that non-cognitivists *identify* moral judgments with), or an idealized version of such a subclass.<sup>22</sup> As we saw in section 1, these relativist theories allow that moral judgments, on the one hand, and desires or motivation, on the other hand, can come apart. Therefore they cannot account for (all) moral disagreements in terms of clashing desires. However, since these theories still imply that there is a tight connection between moral judgment and motivation to act, they have no problem accounting for the action-influencing aspect of moral judgments, and thus for the practical direction of moral judgments—which means that the account of disagreement in terms of practical direction is available to them.

Similarly, other theories that reject both uniformity claims are consistent with moral judgments having an action-influencing function. Variantists, who hold that some moral judgments are beliefs and some are desires, can hold that the action-influencing role is served sometimes by beliefs and sometimes by desires (or alternatively: that most but not all moral judgments motivate because most moral judgments are desires, only some are beliefs).<sup>23</sup> Non-cognitivist theories that identify moral judgments with a cluster of dispositional tendencies that normally come together—of which the disposition to be motivated or have a desire is one—but that allow that there can be moral judgments without all dispositional tendencies being in place, can explain the practical direction of moral judgments in the suggested manner, since they hold that, in normal cases, moral judgments influence action in one specific direction.<sup>24</sup>

To sum up (and once again focusing on cognitivist content relativism as our example): one can hold that moral beliefs have practical direction even though beliefs in general do not. Like other beliefs they are not intrinsically or necessarily motivating. But, unlike other beliefs, they function to influence action in a specific direction. Or differently put, the role they have in our psychologies and moral practices is (for reasons that cognitivists may disagree about) such that they are tied to specific ways of acting. In this respect, they are much like shopping lists or assembly instructions: pieces of paper with words or drawings do not generally have practical direction, but some such pieces of papers have

22 Such theories include those defended in Brogaard, “Moral Contextualism and Moral Relativism”; Dreier, “Internalism and Speaker Relativism”; Harman, “Moral Relativism”; Kölbel, “Moral Relativism”; Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*; Wong, *Moral Relativity*.

23 For variantist views, see Gill, “Metaethical Variability, Incoherence, and Error” and “Indeterminacy and Variability in Metaethics”; Loeb, “Moral Incoherentism.”

24 For an expressivist view of this kind, see Björnsson and McPherson, “Moral Attitudes for Expressivists and Relativists.”

been given an action-influencing role (through individual decisions or social conventions) uniquely tying them to certain specific ways of acting.

Furthermore, just like with the concept of a shopping list or blueprint, the practical direction has become a conceptually necessary feature for counting as a deontic moral judgment: by conceptual necessity, a judgment that  $\phi$ -ing is *O* is not a judgment to the effect that  $\phi$ -ing is morally obligatory unless  $\phi$ -ing is to act in accordance with the judgment.

### 3.4. *Summing Up*

If the idea about practical direction just defended is correct, then theories about moral judgments that reject both uniformity claims about the class of moral judgments can nonetheless maintain that deontic moral judgments necessarily have practical direction. And if the PD account of moral disagreements presented in section 2 is correct, then we can account for deontic moral disagreements in terms of practical direction. Taken together, this would mean that the PD account allows also theories that reject both uniformity claims to explain moral disagreements. Before we draw that conclusion, however, we need to see how the PD account can handle certain types of moral disagreements not yet discussed.

## 4. THE PRACTICAL DIRECTION ACCOUNT AND COMPLEX MORAL DISAGREEMENTS

Recall what the PD account says:

*Practical Direction Account:* There is a deontic moral disagreement between *A* and *B* if and only if they accept moral judgments respectively ( $J_A$  and  $J_B$ ) such that there is at least some act that is in accordance with  $J_A$  and in discordance with  $J_B$ .

In section 2, I described how this account handles some simple types of moral disagreement—disagreements that can easily be construed as straightforward disagreements about what to do. I will now turn to more complex types of deontic moral disagreements, not as obviously explainable by the PD account. In sections 4.1–4.6, I will argue that the PD account can handle these disagreements as well—the trick is to find the (sometimes fairly complex) act that is in accordance with one and in discordance with the other judgment. In section 4.7, I outline how the PD account can (perhaps) be extended from deontic to evaluative moral disagreements.

#### 4.1. Conditional Moral Judgments

$J_9$ :  $\phi$ -ing is morally permitted if and only if  $\phi$ -ing maximizes happiness.

$J_{10}$ :  $\phi$ -ing is morally permitted whether or not  $\phi$ -ing maximizes happiness.

*Problem*:  $J_9$  and  $J_{10}$  intuitively disagree, but since  $\phi$ -ing is neither in accordance nor discordance with  $J_9$ , it would seem that the PD account does not capture that.

*Solution*: Intuitively, this is a disagreement about whether it is ok to  $\phi$  in a situation where  $\phi$ -ing does not maximize happiness. So, there is one action type—i.e.,  *$\phi$ -ing in situation where  $\phi$ -ing does not maximize happiness*—which is in accordance with  $J_{10}$ , but in discordance with  $J_9$ . Thus, allowing such “situation-based individuations” of acts, lets the PD account handle disagreement between conditional moral judgments.

#### 4.2. Conjunctive moral judgments

$J_{11}$ : Both  $j$ -ing and  $y$ -ing is morally permitted

$J_{12}$ : Doing both  $j$  and  $y$  is not morally permitted

*Problem*: Since  $J_{12}$  does not state that doing *only one* of  $j$  or  $y$  is impermissible, neither of these individual acts is in discordance with  $J_{12}$ . So how can the PD account capture the disagreement?

*Solution*: There is one kind of act that is in discordance with  $J_{12}$  and in accordance with  $J_{11}$ —the combinatory act of both  $j$ -ing and  $y$ -ing. Allowing “combinatory acts” thus lets the PD account handle such disagreements.

#### 4.3. Disjunctive and Quantified Moral Judgments

$J_{13}$ :  $\phi$ -ing is morally permitted or  $y$ -ing is morally permitted.

$J_{14}$ : Neither  $\phi$ -ing nor  $y$ -ing is morally permitted.

*Problem*: Intuitively, this is a disagreement (about whether at least one of  $\phi$ -ing and  $y$ -ing is permitted). But since  $J_{13}$  is disjunctive, and therefore does not imply that any of the two acts mentioned is permitted, neither of these acts is in accordance with  $J_{13}$ . So how can the PD account explain this kind of disagreement?

*Solution*: The disagreement at hand can be construed as a disagreement about whether it is permissible to perform one of the two acts ( $\phi$  or  $y$ ) *given that the other act is not permissible*. For example,  $J_{13}$  implies that, in a situation where  $y$ -ing is not morally permitted (i.e., a situation where the second disjunct does not hold),  $j$ -ing is permitted. So the situation-individuated act  *$j$ -ing in a*

situation where *y-ing* is not morally permitted is in accordance with  $J_{13}$ . Further, this act is in discordance with  $J_{14}$ , since  $J_{14}$  implies that *j-ing* is not permitted.

More generally it holds that disjunctive moral judgments have, for each moral disjunct, implications for what is allowed or not allowed *if the situation is such that none of the other disjuncts hold*. This, then, is the clue to finding the relevant acts in relation to moral disagreements involving disjunctive judgments, that is, acts that are in accordance with one judgment and discordance with the other.

Furthermore, we can make sense of moral disagreements involving quantifiers—e.g., disagreement about whether *at least one* act, *four* acts, *most* acts, *a few* acts, etc., are wrong—in the same way. This is because such quantified statements, for our purposes here, can be seen as equivalent to disjunctions.<sup>25</sup> For example, the judgment that there is at least one act that is permissible in the domain consisting of  $\phi$  and  $y$  is equivalent to  $J_{13}$  above.

Consider also the disagreement between one who thinks that at least one action (of all possible actions) is morally wrong and another who rejects this. Then for each action,  $x$ , there is a disagreement about whether it is wrong to *perform  $x$  given that no other acts are wrong*. The PD account captures this since this (italicized) act is in accordance with one and in discordance with the other judgment. Another example:

$J_{15}$ : Most of  $A_1$ – $A_3$  are morally wrong.

$J_{16}$ : It is not the case that most of  $A_1$ – $A_3$  are morally wrong.

$J_{15}$  is equivalent to a disjunctive judgment: [15i] both and only  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  are wrong, or [15ii] both and only  $A_1$  and  $A_3$  are wrong, or [15iii] both and only  $A_2$  and  $A_3$  are wrong, or [15iv] all of  $A_1$ – $A_3$  are wrong.  $J_{16}$  is equivalent to: [16i] both and only  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  are not wrong, or [16ii] both and only  $A_1$  and  $A_3$  are not wrong, or [16iii] both and only  $A_2$  and  $A_3$  are not wrong, or [16iv] all of  $A_1$ – $A_3$  are not wrong.

We can now find acts (one for each disjunct) that are in accordance with  $J_{16}$ . For example:  $J_{16}$  implies that doing both  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  is permissible (not wrong) (i.e., that 16-i holds), in a situation where disjunctions (16ii–iv) do not hold. So, *doing both  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  in a situation where 16ii–iv do not hold* is in accordance with  $J_{16}$ . And doing both  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  is in discordance with  $J_{15}$ , since  $J_{15}$  implies that at least one of these acts is wrong. This means that the PD account implies that there is a disagreement since there is an act that is in accordance with one judgment and in discordance with the other.

Other disagreements involving quantifiers can be handled similar ways.

25 Allowing for infinite disjunctions, when the domain existentially quantified over is infinite, should not cause problems in this context.



#### 4.4. Inter-normative Discourse

MW:  $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong.

PW:  $\phi$ -ing is not prudentially wrong.

AW:  $\phi$ -ing is not aesthetically wrong.

*Problem:* Intuitively, there is no disagreement between MW, on the one hand, and either AW or PW on the other. But it might seem that the PD account gives us disagreement (and thus overgeneralizes). For  $\phi$ -ing is to act in accordance with PW and AW, but in discordance with MW.

*Solution:* If there are different specific kinds of normative wrongs (or reasons), then none of these are all-things-considered wrongs (reasons). If so, a judgment to the effect that an act is morally or prudentially wrong does not tell us not to do it. Consequently, doing the act is not in discordance with the judgment, and consequently there is no disagreement between MW and PW/AW.

But do we then get the unwanted implication that no such judgment can be involved in PD disagreements at all? No. Similar to conditional and disjunctive moral judgments, we can find other (situation-individuated) acts that are in accordance/discordance with such judgments. MW in effect tells us that  $\phi$ -ing is not to be done, if the situation is one where moral reasons are the only reasons relevant to the all-things-considered status of the act—either because they are the only or the strongest reasons. This means that  *$\phi$ -ing in a situation where only moral reasons are relevant* (in the above sense) is to act in discordance with MW. Likewise,  *$\phi$ -ing in a situation where only prudential reasons are relevant* is to act in accordance with PW. So a “simple moral disagreement case” like that between  $J_1$  ( $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong) and  $J_2$  ( $\phi$ -ing is not morally wrong) is not a disagreement about what to do *simpliciter*. Rather it is a disagreement about whether to  $\phi$  in a situation where only moral reasons are relevant. (The reason that there is no disagreement between MW and PW/AW is that there is no situation-based individuation of an act that is in discordance with MW but in accordance with PW/AW.)

We should note, however, that some moral (and prudential, etc.) judgments are all-things-considered judgments. One may judge, e.g., that  *$\phi$ -ing is all-things-considered wrong for moral reasons*. Indeed, this might be what people often have in mind when they think that  $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong. If this is how we construe  $J_1$  and  $J_2$ , then this is a simple disagreement about whether to  $\phi$ . Also, for such all-things-considered judgments, there can be disagreements between different normative domains: if someone judges that  *$\phi$ -ing is all-things-considered not wrong, for prudential reasons*, then there is a disagreement about whether to  $\phi$  between this judgment and the previous moral judgment.

#### 4.5. Pro Tanto Reasons

$J_{17}$ : There is a *pro tanto* moral reason to  $\phi$ .

$J_{18}$ : There is no *pro tanto* moral reason to  $\phi$ .

*Problem*: Intuitively there is a disagreement here, but the PD account seemingly does not account for it. For there is no action that is in accordance or discordance with  $J_{17}$  (or  $J_{18}$ ). This is what to expect, since this is not a simple disagreement about what to do—two people who accept  $J_{17}$  and  $J_{18}$  may well agree about what is to be done (all things considered).

*Solution*: Even though it is not a disagreement about what to do *all things considered*, it can be construed as a conflict about what to do in a situation where there are no reasons against  $\phi$ -ing to consider. The act of *not  $\phi$ -ing in such a situation* goes against  $J_{17}$ , but is in accordance with  $J_{18}$ .

#### 4.6. Summing Up

The driving thought behind the PD account is the plausible idea that all deontic moral judgments are, in more or less direct ways, directed toward actions—they are judgments about how to act. The most straightforward deontic moral judgments are thus judgments that one can act in accordance or discordance with, and the PD account uses that feature of them to account for disagreement: there is a disagreement between such simple deontic judgments if there are acts that are in accordance with one judgment but in discordance with the other. The disagreement consists, as it were, in a clash in practical direction between the two judgments. We have now considered deontic moral judgments that have a more complex structure—conditional, conjunctive, disjunctive, and quantified judgments, judgments about *pro tanto* reasons, and about different kinds of normative reasons. I have argued that also for these kinds of judgments, it is possible to find (types of) actions that are in accordance/discordance with the judgments, and that the PD account therefore accounts for disagreements between such judgments.

#### 4.7. Evaluative Disagreements

I have argued that the PD account can handle *deontic* moral disagreements. This is the main purpose of this paper. In this subsection I briefly outline how the PD account could also be developed to handle *evaluative* moral disagreements. Consider the following judgments:

$J_{19}$ :  $x$  is good.

$J_{20}$ :  $x$  is not good.

*Problem:* Evaluative judgments are not (in a simple way) judgments that can be acted in accordance with. So the PD account cannot handle them.

*Solution:* It is quite plausible that that one's negative and positive attitudes, or preferences, can be in accordance/discordance with one's (and others') evaluative judgments. This idea is congenial with views according to which having value is to be *desirable* (or to be a thing that it is *fitting to desire*). Reasonably, if I judge that  $x$  is desirable, then desiring  $x$  is to desire in accordance with that judgment. (Other attitudes than desires might be relevant depending on what kind of evaluative judgments we are concerned with: about intrinsic moral values, character evaluations, aesthetic evaluations, prudential evaluations, etc.). According to the present rough suggestion, then, there is a disagreement between  $J_{19}$  and  $J_{20}$  because:

Liking/desiring/appreciating/admiring  $x$  (or preferring  $x$  to something neutral) is in accordance with  $J_{19}$  but in discordance with  $J_{20}$ .

Even though I find it plausible that some account of evaluative disagreements along these lines will work, the exact relation between values and positive/negative attitudes is a complicated and disputed issue, and the details needs to be worked out elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main aim of this paper has been to develop a plausible account of moral disagreements, the PD account, which requires neither belief uniformity nor attitude uniformity. The PD account is a non-doxastic account of moral disagreements, similar to accounts in terms of clashing desires, but does not require that all moral judgments are, or are accompanied by, desires. This is possible because (i) moral judgments necessarily have practical direction, in

26 One further issue, both regarding deontic and evaluative disagreements, concerns disagreements that involve epistemic modals:

$J_{21}$ :  $\phi$ -ing might be morally wrong.

$J_{22}$ :  $\phi$ -ing is (definitely) not morally wrong.

There seems to be a disagreement here, but not about whether  $\phi$ -ing is wrong (although there is a potential disagreement about that), rather about whether it is certain that  $\phi$ -ing is not wrong. This means that there is no disagreement about what to do here and, consequently, the disagreement is not captured by the original PD account.

One possible solution is to say that, here,  $\phi$ -ing is in accordance with a moral claim endorsed through the acceptance of  $J_{22}$  but in discordance with a moral claim *actively held open through the acceptance of*  $J_{21}$ . I tentatively suggest that this is what the disagreement consists in. To handle these sorts of cases, the statement of the PD account would need to be amended accordingly.

the sense that they are judgments that one can act in accordance with, even if they are beliefs that are only contingently accompanied by desires, and (ii) moral disagreement can be construed as clashes in practical direction. If this is correct, theories about moral judgments that reject both uniformity claims—most prominently various versions of content relativism—cannot be dismissed due to an inability to account for moral disagreement.

It might be objected that the PD account fails to explain one aspect of moral disagreement. It accounts for moral disagreements as practical disagreements (about what to do). But we also experience them as disagreements *about whether something is the case (or is true)*: e.g., about whether it is wrong to eat meat. In this way, they have the appearance of conflicts in belief (beliefs in contradictory propositions).

Here I can only outline one possible way for defenders of the PD account to handle this appearance. Plausibly, the account should be understood as claiming that, in normative domains, what on the surface has the same appearance as disagreements in belief (at least partly: they also appear to be practical disagreements), ultimately, under the surface, is another kind of disagreement. This is similar to what many non-cognitivists have argued: that we can make sense of moral judgments and moral discourse having an (in many respects) absolutist cognitivist surface appearance, while they have a different underlying nature. If such a strategy works, then the surface appearance of moral disagreement need not be problematic.

Indeed, on pain of being complete nonstarters, content relativists (and others rejecting belief uniformity) need some strategy like this, *irrespective of how they explain disagreement*. This means that the appearance of moral disagreements is not an *extra* explanatory burden for these views. In short: consider the class of all judgments *that killing is morally wrong*. We represent this class *as if* they were judgments with the same propositional content: that is, we represent them (in language and thought) with the same that-clause. Content relativists (and others rejecting belief uniformity) hold that this surface—this way of representing them—is misleading: the judgments in the class need not share content. (Rather they share something else that makes them judgments *that killing is wrong*.) If content relativists can make sense of this much, which they must do to get off the ground, then they have also, it seems, made sense of the fact that we think and talk of moral disagreements *as if* they are conflicts between beliefs with contradictory propositional content. For the beliefs between which there are disagreements (PD disagreements, if I am right), are judgments that we represent as if they are beliefs with conflicting contents: e.g., a judgment *that killing is wrong* and a judgment *that killing is not wrong*. Given this, it makes sense that we think of it as a disagreement *about whether killing is*

*wrong* even though the conflict that is actually there is a clash in practical direction.<sup>27</sup> To summarize: the PD account lets content relativists (and others who reject both uniformity claims) acknowledge that people morally disagree in cases where we intuitively think they disagree; then it remains to be explained why moral judgments and moral disagreements have an absolutist surface appearance, but that is a challenge that content relativists need to tackle anyway.

Finally, let me propose that, even if the dialectical significance of the PD account partly comes from the fact that it requires neither belief uniformity nor attitude uniformity, it might be considered part of the complete picture of moral disagreement even if one of the uniformity claims holds. First, if attitude uniformity holds, e.g., because some variant of non-cognitivism is correct, then moral judgments have practical direction (are such that they can be acted in accordance with) by virtue of being practical desire-like states. Consequently, the PD account is applicable. We may then perhaps see the attitude account of moral disagreement as an instance of the more general PD account (where the latter explains in which way the practical attitudes in question clash).<sup>28</sup> (The question of how this relates to other ways of understanding disagreements in attitude will have to be discussed elsewhere.) Second, even if absolutist cognitivism (and thereby belief uniformity) is correct, and moral disagreement can be accounted for in terms of beliefs in contradictory propositions, we should acknowledge that when two people disagree about whether something is morally disallowed, allowed, or obligatory, they *also* disagree in the sense that at least some way of acting is in accordance with one person's judgment but in discordance with the other person's judgment.<sup>29</sup>

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27 Furthermore, if the PD account works as I have argued above, then it is extensionally equivalent to an absolutist cognitivist belief account. That is, the two accounts imply that we disagree in exactly same cases (namely, the cases that intuitively count as moral disagreements). This means that descriptions of moral disagreements as if they were conflicts between beliefs in contradictory propositions can be used, without extensional mismatches, to represent conflicts consisting of clashes in practical direction.

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