
DWORKIN ON EXTERNAL SKEPTICISM

MICHAEL SMITH*

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of *Justice for Hedgehogs*,¹ Ronald Dworkin distinguishes four kinds of skepticism, defined by two cross-cutting distinctions.² His reason for doing this is to show that two kinds of skepticism, the two most commonly defended by philosophers, are demonstrably untenable.³ In what follows, I begin by laying out Dworkin's cross-cutting distinctions. I then explain why Dworkin's arguments fail to show that these two forms of skepticism are untenable.

The first distinction Dworkin makes is that between *internal* skepticism and *external* skepticism:

Internal skepticism about morality is a first-order, substantive moral claim. It appeals to basic and abstract judgments about morality to deny that certain more concrete or applied judgments are true. External skepticism, on the contrary, purports to rely entirely on second-order, external statements about morality. . . . [T]he most sophisticated external skeptics rely . . . on metaphysical theses about the kind of entities the universe contains. They assume that these metaphysical theses are external statements about morality rather than internal judgments of morality. . . . External skeptics . . . claim to be skeptical about morality all the way down. They are able to denigrate moral truth, they say, without relying on it.⁴

* McCosh Professor of Philosophy, Princeton University.

¹ RONALD DWORIN, *JUSTICE FOR HEDGEHOGS* (forthcoming 2010) (Apr. 17, 2009 manuscript, on file with the Boston University Law Review).

² *Id.* (manuscript at 20-21). Two cross-cutting distinctions give us four possibilities, but Dworkin thinks that one of these possibilities does not make any sense. *Id.* (manuscript at 22).

³ *Id.* (manuscript at 25).

⁴ *Id.* (manuscript at 21).

Dworkin's idea is that you can be an internal skeptic about *some* moral claims, but not about *all* moral claims.⁵ Peter Singer, for example, is a skeptic about a great many of the moral claims that people ordinarily accept: the claims that it is permissible to eat meat,⁶ that it is impermissible to have late abortions,⁷ and that it is impermissible to terminate the life of people even if their futures will be miserable.⁸ But he is evidently an *internal* skeptic about these claims because, in arguing against them, he takes a non-skeptical attitude to a very general moral claim on which he depends to defend his views, namely, the claim that we ought to maximize happiness and minimize suffering.⁹ Internal skepticism thus contrasts with external skepticism, which is the attitude we manifest when we are skeptical about all moral claims at once.¹⁰ To anticipate, what is crucial is that an external skeptic must defend his skeptical attitude without at any point presupposing the truth of some moral claim.¹¹

Cross-cutting the distinction between internal and external skepticism is the distinction between *error* skepticism and *status* skepticism:

Error skeptics hold not just that moral judgments are not true but that they are false: they insist that anyone who says that the Iraq war was immoral has made a philosophical mistake. Status skeptics disagree. They believe that it is a mistake to suppose that any moral judgment can be either true or false Status skeptics insist that we understand moral judgments as having the very different status of expressions of feeling or projections of emotion like cheers.¹²

Status skeptics, unlike error skeptics, are thus quite happy to continue making the moral claims about which they are skeptical. What they take issue with is not the appropriateness of making such claims, but rather the idea that in making them we are saying something that purports to be either true or false. They think that moral claims serve the quite different function of expressing feelings or emotions. By contrast, absent some special story – for example, a story about the utility of engaging in a pretence¹³ – error skeptics are not happy to continue making the moral claims about which they are skeptical. This is because they think that, since moral claims do purport to be true or false and the claims about which they are skeptical are false, making such claims violates the norm that we should assert only what we believe to be true.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ PETER SINGER, ANIMAL LIBERATION 159-83 (2002).

⁷ PETER SINGER, RETHINKING LIFE AND DEATH 209-10 (1994).

⁸ *Id.* at 210-17.

⁹ PETER SINGER, HOW ARE WE TO LIVE? 219-35 (1995).

¹⁰ DWORKIN, *supra* note 1 (manuscript at 20-21).

¹¹ *Id.* (manuscript at 21).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *E.g.*, RICHARD JOYCE, THE MYTH OF MORALITY 206-31 (2001).

We are now in a position to identify the two forms of skepticism with which Dworkin takes issue. In his view, while internal error skepticism makes perfect sense, external error skepticism and external status skepticism are both untenable.¹⁴ There is, he argues, no way to take a skeptical attitude towards a moral claim without at some point relying on the truth of some moral claim.¹⁵ If he is right about this, then that is a conclusion of great significance, as a great many philosophers either endorse, or anyway seriously entertain, the possibility that external error skepticism and external status skepticism are correct.¹⁶ In the remainder of this Essay I begin by outlining Dworkin's arguments against external error skepticism and I explain why those arguments fail.¹⁷ I then outline his arguments against external status skepticism and explain why those arguments fail.¹⁸ Of course, these two kinds of external skepticism might still be untenable despite all that. However, proving that they are untenable will require arguments of a very different kind from those on offer in the early parts of *Justice for Hedgehogs*.

I. EXTERNAL ERROR SKEPTICISM

Here is Dworkin's first argument against external error skepticism:

There are three available positions about most questions of moral right and wrong. We may believe that affirmative action programs are morally wrong, or that they are morally required, or that they are neither wrong nor required. If they are neither required nor morally wrong, which is what many educators think, then a university is morally free to make a judgment one way or the other on non-moral grounds: to serve optional educational goals, for example. Presumably that is also the claim that an external error skeptic makes about affirmative action, since he rejects the

¹⁴ DWORKIN, *supra* note 1 (manuscript at 25). Dworkin argues that since an internal skeptic is defined to be someone who assumes the truth of certain moral claims when he argues for the falsehood of others, and since a status skeptic is defined to be someone who denies that moral claims are either true or false, it follows that there is no coherent form of internal status skepticism. *Id.* (manuscript at 22).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *E.g.*, A.J. AYER, LANGUAGE, TRUTH, AND LOGIC 102-20 (2d ed. 1948) ("We shall set ourselves to show that in so far as statements of value are significant, they are . . . simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false."); SIMON BLACKBURN, SPREADING THE WORD 167-71 (1984) (describing emotivism, or the idea that ethical statements are neither true nor false, but simply expressions of emotion); ALAN GIBBARD, WISE CHOICES, APT FEELINGS 126-50 (1990) (describing moral judgments as emotional states); R.M. HARE, THE LANGUAGE OF MORALS 163-79 (1952) (reducing moral imperatives to psychological statements of feeling); JOYCE, *supra* note 13, at 53-79 (defending external error skepticism, the position that there are no moral propositions); JOHN MACKIE, ETHICS: INVENTING RIGHT AND WRONG 15-49 (1977) (arguing for external error skepticism, that there are no objective moral values).

¹⁷ *See infra* Part I.

¹⁸ *See infra* Part II.

alternative claims both that affirmative action is morally forbidden and that it is morally required. But the proposition that affirmative action is neither required nor forbidden is plainly itself a moral judgment. Educators who take that view offer moral arguments in its favor by challenging, on substantive moral grounds, the claims of both those who insist that it is forbidden and those who say it is required. The external skeptic must claim that some moral judgments, including that permissive one, are true.¹⁹

As I understand it, Dworkin's claim here is that we can derive the denial of external error skepticism from theses the external error skeptic himself puts forward in characterizing his view. The external error skeptic claims that certain actions are neither obligatory nor forbidden. Dworkin points out, however, that the possible moral features that an act can have include – in addition to being obligatory or being forbidden – being permissible, where the claim that an action is permissible is entailed by the claim that it is neither obligatory nor forbidden. It therefore follows from the external error skeptic's own characterization of his view that he holds a distinctive moral view – namely, the view that all actions are permissible. External error skepticism thus refutes itself. Those who purport to be external error skeptics are really internal skeptics.

External error skeptics, however, should reply to this argument by stating that Dworkin mischaracterizes their view. As I understand their view, external error skeptics hold for instance, that instituting a policy of affirmative action is not obligatory, is not forbidden, and – and this is the crucial extra thing that Dworkin does not grant in characterizing their view – *that such a policy is not permissible either*. Moreover, there is a very natural way to understand what external error skeptics have in mind in holding this view: that no matter what moral claim we make about affirmative action, the truth of that claim presupposes the truth of something that is in fact false. If someone says that an act is obligatory, forbidden, or permissible, then the truth of what they say presupposes – falsely – that there is something that it would be for actions to be one of these ways when in fact there is not anything that it would be for them to be any of these ways. There is not anything that it would be because the world contains no moral features at all: not the feature of being obligatory, not the feature of being forbidden, and not the feature of being permissible either. This is all to say that external error skeptics deny that *any* moral qualities exist, including the quality of permissiveness.

Is it a mere illusion, or an arcane philosophical fantasy, to suppose that the world contains no moral features at all? I would not have thought so, or, in any case it does not obviously appear to be an illusion. Indeed, I would have thought that anyone who has experienced teenage angst, or who has found themselves identifying with the central characters in works such as *The Outsider* or *Waiting for Godot*, would find this idea not just familiar, but also

¹⁹ DWORKIN, *supra* note 1 (manuscript at 42).

relatively mundane. Moreover, it seems to me that it is quite easy to give a philosophical gloss on what this mundane idea amounts to. Those who think that the world contains no moral features at all are best understood as thinking that there is some sort of non-obvious *incoherence* in ordinary moral thought. In so far as we have moral beliefs, we are committed to the truth of a number of claims that cannot be true in conjunction together: the moral claims themselves and the various claims that would follow as a matter of conceptual necessity from the truth of these moral claims. But since these claims cannot be true, we have to decide which claims we should give up, and the answer is that we should give up the moral claims.

In broad outline, it seems to me that this is the best way to understand what is perhaps the most famous argument for external error skepticism, namely, John Mackie's "argument from queerness."²⁰ Mackie says that we conceive of moral goodness as an objectively prescriptive feature of things, and – on at least one fairly straightforward way of understanding the argument – in so far as we conceive of a property being objective, we conceive of it being such that it could not be prescriptive, and in so far as we conceive of a property as being prescriptive we conceive of it as being such that it could not be objective.²¹ The only conclusion to draw, according to the argument, is that nothing has the property of moral goodness.²² Nothing has the property because there could not be such a property. Though it may not be obvious at first blush, the very idea of such a property contains a contradiction.²³

The argument form here should be familiar. Consider, by way of analogy, an argument for the non-existence of God on the grounds that the very idea of an all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing, creator of everything makes no sense. Here is one version of that argument. To be all-powerful, God would have to have maximal *creative* abilities, so he would have to be able to create a stone that even he could not lift. He would also have to have maximal *lifting* abilities, and so be able to lift everything, including every stone that exists. However, since that idea turns out to be a contradiction – a stone which God creates so as to be too heavy for God to lift which at the same time God can lift – it follows that there is no such thing as being all-powerful and, thus, no such being exists. Now, I am not endorsing such arguments, still less the argument just given. I am simply issuing a reminder that there are many familiar arguments against the existence of something that proceed by showing that the very idea of that thing contains some sort of non-obvious incoherence, or a contradiction.

²⁰ MACKIE, *supra* note 16, at 38-42.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ John McDowell seems to interpret Mackie's argument this way. John McDowell, *Values and Secondary Qualities*, in *MORALITY AND OBJECTIVITY* 110, 117-18 (Ted Honderich ed., 1985).

If I am right that this is the best way to understand at least some of the arguments for external error skepticism, then Dworkin's guiding argument that external error skepticism about morality actually rests on a substantive moral claim should begin to look quite implausible. What, for example, is the substantive moral view that is supposed to be held by someone who is convinced that the idea of an objectively prescriptive property is incoherent? The claim that our concept of moral goodness is the concept of an objectively prescriptive feature of things is not itself a moral judgment. It is a deliverance of conceptual analysis. Nor is the claim that there is some contradiction involved in supposing that a feature could be both objective and prescriptive a moral judgment. This is derived a priori from the analysis. Nor is it a moral judgment the claim that if something has the property of being morally good, it follows that it has a property whose possession would require the truth of a contradiction. These are all distinctively *philosophical* claims and not moral claims. To repeat, one or another of the premises of the argument from queerness might be false, so the argument might be unsound. The point is simply that, contrary to Dworkin, the argument for external error skepticism does not necessarily presuppose the truth of any moral claim.

As it happens, Dworkin himself notes that Mackie's argument for external error skepticism has more or less this form in the following passage:

I mentioned earlier another assumption familiar among status skeptics: that someone who embraces a moral conviction is thereby and automatically motivated at least to some degree to behave in the way the conviction demands. Mackie, an error skeptic, thought that the ordinary view of morality contained an explanation of this supposed phenomenon: that there is something "queer" in the world that causes people both to think that tax cheating is wrong and to want not to cheat on their taxes. He denied that anything like that exists, and so held the ordinary view in error.²⁴

Dworkin then goes on to point out that the crucial assumption that both status skeptics and Mackie make in giving this argument is that *internalism* is true, which he glosses as the view that "moral convictions just on their own provide a motivating reason to act as they direct."²⁵ Moreover, he suggests, the best way to understand this crucial assumption of internalism is as a *conceptual* point and not an *empirical* point.²⁶ That is, internalists should be understood as insisting that when we imagine someone who claims that, for instance, refraining from stealing is obligatory, but who is not correspondingly motivated not to steal, we must ask ourselves "whether it would be correct, as a matter of belief attribution rather than empirical psychology, to say that such

²⁴ DWORKIN, *supra* note 1 (manuscript at 51).

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

a person really does believe that stealing is wrong.”²⁷ The internalist thinks that we should give an affirmative answer to this question: what makes a belief a belief about the wrongness of stealing is the fact that someone who has that belief has a motivating reason to avoid doing what he believes to be wrong.²⁸

Though Dworkin does not pursue the point, it is remarkable that the assumption of internalism, understood in just the way Dworkin suggests, together with some further philosophical doctrines about the natures of beliefs and motivating reasons, appears enough, alone, to generate external error skepticism of the kind just described – that is, error skepticism grounded in the incoherence of the idea that moral features are objectively prescriptive. This is because internalism, understood in the way Dworkin suggests, offers a rather plausible alternative interpretation of the idea that moral features are objectively prescriptive. On this way of understanding what it is for a moral feature to be objective, moral features count as objective in so far as we can form *beliefs* about them. They are objective in so far as they are features of an objective world that we cognize. Further, moral features are prescriptive in so far as, when we believe that something in the world has such a feature, that belief satisfies the internalism requirement that someone who has such a belief has a *motivating reason*. The trouble is, however, that if we elaborate on what we have just said in the light of some philosophical doctrines about the nature of beliefs and motivating reasons, we seem to derive a contradiction.

For example, according to analytic functionalism, that which makes a psychological state a belief is its distinctive functional role – namely its role in representing things to be the way they are. And that which makes a psychological state a motivating reason is its distinctive functional role – namely its role in bringing about the action that it motivates. Crucially, however, these functional roles – that is, the functional role definitive of belief and the functional role definitive of motivating reasons – are different. Since they are different, it follows that we can imagine someone who is in a state with the one kind of functional role but not in a state with the other kind. In other words, if the imagination is in this case a good guide to what is possible, it follows that there is at least one possible world, the one we have just imagined, in which someone is in a state that has the functional role of the belief that an act is wrong, but they are not in a state that has the functional role of the corresponding motivating reason. This, however, is just the denial of the entailment that internalism says must hold. Internalism says that it is a conceptual necessity that someone who has the belief has a motivating reason. And this, of course, is a contradiction.

The upshot is that there does indeed seem to be an inconsistency of the kind external error skeptics say that there is in supposing that there are objectively prescriptive features, where the idea of an objectively prescriptive feature is understood in the alternative way we have just understood it. We must

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

therefore give something up. Since we cannot give up our conception of belief as a state that represents, and we cannot give up our conception of motivating reasons as states that bring things about, it follows that we have no alternative but to give up the idea that there are beliefs of the kind that internalism says there are. In other words, we have to be external error skeptics. Again, I am not endorsing this argument. Indeed, for the point that I am making to stand, it is strictly irrelevant whether you think that the philosophical theses that have been appealed to in stating the argument – internalism itself, and the analytic functionalist’s conception of belief and motivating reasons – are true or false. What is important is that these theses are plainly philosophical theses, not substantive moral views.

I said that Dworkin himself lays out the premises of this argument.²⁹ Unfortunately, however, having laid out the premises, he does not address the argument. Instead, he changes the topic. Dworkin tells us that “[w]e do better to treat the argument as part of a more general and important philosophical issue. When does someone have a reason to do something?”³⁰ Crucially, however, the philosophical issue he focuses on is when there exists a *justification* for someone doing something.³¹ Specifically, he wonders whether someone having a desire is a condition of having a justification for doing something.³² But this is a completely different question from that raised by internalism, at least as that doctrine figures in the argument just given for external error skepticism. Internalism, as that doctrine figures in the argument just given, is the doctrine that there is a necessary connection between two psychological states: if someone believes that he has an obligation to act in a certain way, then he has a motivating reason to act in that way. The philosophical issue Dworkin talks about has nothing to do with this. The issue he talks about is whether having a desire is a condition on someone having a justification for doing something. It is therefore unclear to me what Dworkin thinks the relevance is of the philosophical issue he talks about to the argument for external error skepticism raised by internalism.

To sum up, Dworkin argues that, in characterizing their view, external error skeptics commit themselves to the truth of a moral claim. I have argued that Dworkin only thinks that this is so because he mischaracterizes external error skepticism. External error skepticism is better characterized as the view that our ordinary moral concepts contain a non-obvious incoherence. So understood, the arguments for external error skepticism evidently do not presuppose the truth of any moral claim.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.* (manuscript at 51-52).

II. EXTERNAL STATUS SKEPTICISM

Let us now focus on external *status* skepticism. External status skepticism is the view that moral judgements are neither true nor false. Dworkin summarizes his objections to this view in the following terms:

I said that a status skeptic must find a way to reject the thesis he opposes, which is that moral judgments are candidates for objective truth, without also rejecting the first-order, substantive moral declarations he wishes to leave standing. I described two strategies he might use. He might claim, first, that the thesis he rejects is a second-order, philosophical claim different in meaning from the first-order substantive judgments he does not mean to oppose. . . . The strategy fails unless he can identify a claim about the status of moral judgments that he rejects and that satisfies the two conditions of pertinence and independence. He cannot do this. I tried to illustrate his difficulty in the previous discussion: I canvassed many familiar arguments to suggest a more general thesis. Hume's principle makes the strategy fruitless because a skeptical judgment about morality is still, in the pertinent sense, a moral judgment.³³

Dworkin insists that the external status skeptic must identify a claim about the status of moral judgments that satisfies the condition of *pertinence*.³⁴ A claim will satisfy this condition just in case it is a claim that "the status skeptic is concerned to deny," that is, if it attributes to moral judgments an "objective, truth-bearing status."³⁵ But the status skeptic must also identify a claim about the status of moral judgments that satisfies the condition of *independence*.³⁶ A claim about the status of moral judgments will satisfy this condition just in case it is a claim that he can deny while leaving first-order moral commitments intact.³⁷ This is necessary because status skeptics do not deny the appropriateness of making moral claims, but only the appropriateness of attributing to these moral claims truth or falsity.³⁸ Dworkin's conjecture is that the external status skeptic cannot find a claim about the status of moral judgments that satisfies these two conditions.³⁹

Suppose, for example, a person thinks he is a skeptic about the claim that moral judgments are either true or false. The trouble is that when he goes on to express his first order moral commitments he will say things like "abortion is permissible," which is simply the equivalent to saying "it is true that abortion is permissible."⁴⁰ The upshot is that the claim he is skeptical about – "it is true

³³ *Id.* (manuscript at 53).

³⁴ *Id.* (manuscript at 46).

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.* (manuscript at 23).

³⁹ *Id.* (manuscript at 46-48).

⁴⁰ *See id.* (manuscript at 47).

that abortion is permissible” – while satisfying the condition of pertinence, does not satisfy the condition of independence.⁴¹ This is a good challenge, but I do not think Dworkin considers all of the ways in which an external status skeptic might try to meet it.

During the last twenty years, external status skeptics have basically abandoned the view with which Dworkin takes issue. Moreover, I think it is only fair to say that they have done so at least in part for reasons like those given by Dworkin in earlier work.⁴² But this does not mean that external status skeptics have entirely abandoned their view. While they now agree that moral judgments can be true or false, and agree that moral judgments express beliefs, they still insist that there is something distinctive to be said about moral beliefs, and hence about moral truths and falsehoods.⁴³ This is because, since internalism is true – and since internalism leads to incoherence of the kind described earlier⁴⁴ – it follows that we must suppose that the beliefs that moral judgments express are beliefs of a special kind. But what is special about them? What distinguishes beliefs about moral matters of fact from beliefs about non-moral matters of fact, external status skeptics now say, is that beliefs about moral matters of fact are entirely constituted by desires about non-moral matters of fact, while non-moral matters of fact are not.⁴⁵ This defuses the argument for the incoherence of our moral concepts that proceeds from the premise of internalism. Alternatively put, though beliefs about moral matters of fact and beliefs about non-moral matters of fact are both sensitivities to matters of fact, we cannot give a deeper explanation of what beliefs about non-

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *E.g.*, Ronald Dworkin, *Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It*, 25 PHIL. & PUB. AFF. 87, 97-99 (1996) (arguing against external status skepticism because the denial of the truth or falsity of second-order moral claims entails the denial of the first-order moral claim); Ronald Dworkin, *Reply by Ronald Dworkin*, BROWN ELECTRONIC ARTICLE RES. SERV. MORAL & POL. PHIL., Apr. 9, 1997, <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Philosophy/bears/9704dwor.html> (replying to Simon Blackburn and arguing that external status skeptics necessarily contradict themselves in asserting moral claims are merely expressive and do not rely on the truth or falsity of objective moral claims).

⁴³ *E.g.*, CRISPIN WRIGHT, TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY 195 (1992) (suggesting that moral claims are unique in that non-moral claims can be used as an explanation for their effects on agents); James Dreier, *Meta-Ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism*, 18 PHIL. PERSPECTIVES 23, 41-42 (2004) (arguing that external status skeptics consider moral claims true in a minimalist sense, but unique from claims about natural facts in that moral claims are explained solely through desire regarding non-moral matters of fact); Paul Horwich, *The Essence of Expressivism*, 54 ANALYSIS 19, 20 (1994) (distinguishing moral claims as those expressing a desire, but denying that moral claims cannot be true); Paul Horwich, *Gibbard's Theory of Norms*, 22 PHIL. & PUB. AFF. 67, 77 (1993) (reviewing GIBBARD, *supra* note 16) (distinguishing normative claims from claims about the natural world in that normative claims, while true in a minimalist sense, are simply expressing feeling).

⁴⁴ *See supra* Part I.

⁴⁵ This is Dreier's point. *See generally* Dreier, *supra* note 43.

moral matters of fact are. We have to think of them as sensitivities to non-moral matters of fact. We can, however, give a deeper explanation of what beliefs about moral matters of fact are. Specifically, we can fully account for them in terms of the desires about non-moral matters of fact that constitute them. This in turn implies that moral truths and non-moral truths, though the same in so far as they are both truths, are nonetheless different. Moral truths, in so far as they are objects of belief, are the object of beliefs that are constituted by desires about non-moral matters of fact; non-moral truths are not.

On this way of giving expression to external status skepticism, notice that what external status skeptics are skeptical about is not the claim that moral judgments are either true or false. Instead, they are skeptical about the claim that moral judgments express truths or falsehoods of exactly the same kind as the truths and falsehoods that we express when we express beliefs that are not constituted by desires about non-moral matters of fact. This is, in turn, important as it means external status skeptics can meet the two conditions of *pertinence* and *independence* that Dworkin insists upon. Suppose someone who rejects status skepticism – Dworkin perhaps – says “Lying is wrong,” and he then adds, “And I thereby express a belief, but a belief that is not of a special sort, by which I mean that the belief I express *is not* constituted entirely by a desire about a non-moral matter of fact.” And suppose he further adds “And the truth that I thereby express is not of a special kind either, by which I mean that it is not a truth of the kind that I express when I express a belief that *is* constituted by a desire about a non-moral matter of fact.” External status skeptics are concerned to deny these claims, so they satisfy Dworkin’s *pertinence* condition. But what the external status skeptics deny is also something that they can deny without calling into question their first-order moral commitments, so it also satisfies Dworkin’s *independence* condition. For we can imagine an external status skeptic happily saying, along with Dworkin, “Lying is wrong,” and even “It is true that lying is wrong.” We simply have to imagine him adding, “And, contrary to what Dworkin says, I thereby express a belief, but a belief that is of a special sort, namely, a belief that *is* constituted by a desire about a non-moral matter of fact,” and “The truth that I thereby express is of a special kind too, by which I mean that it is a truth of the kind that I express when I express a belief that *is* constituted by a desire about a non-moral matter of fact.” There is no contradiction here because, once again, what is being denied is a distinctively *philosophical* thesis, ultimately, a metaphysical thesis about the constitution of moral belief.

Dworkin challenges external status skeptics to come up with a statement of what they are skeptical about that satisfies the two conditions of pertinence and independence. He argues, convincingly, that certain ways of giving expression to external status skepticism will fail to satisfy these two conditions. What I have suggested, however, is that there is an alternative way of giving expression to external status skepticism, a way that does satisfy these two conditions. What external status skeptics are skeptical about is whether moral

beliefs are like non-moral beliefs in not being wholly constituted by desires about non-moral matters of fact. To put the point another way, external status skeptics believe that the truths we express when we express our moral beliefs are in an important sense truths of a different kind from the truths that we express when we express our non-moral beliefs. Nothing Dworkin says counts against the possibility of external status skepticism, so understood.