

Relaxing Normativity

Essays on Relaxed Approaches to Realism about Normativity

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Abstract

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This thesis is concerned with a relaxed form of normative realism. Relaxed realists accept the existence of mind-independent normative truths, properties, and facts, but argue that normative truths do not have truthmakers and that normative properties and facts are not metaphysically robust. The thesis develops relaxed realism by responding to various objections and challenges.

The first paper, “Is Relaxed Realism a Genuinely Novel View?,” argues that relaxed realists can answer questions about normative language without their theory collapsing into one of the familiar theories in the literature or becoming implausible. More specifically, contrary to Ridge (2019), it argues that relaxed realists can embrace an inferentialist account of normative terms without their theory collapsing into naturalism or quasi-realism.

The second paper, “Relaxed Realism and Normative Belief: A Functionalist Account,” offers an account of normative belief specifically designed for relaxed realists. It argues that relaxed realists can explain normative belief through a functionalist theory of mind. This proposal not only provides relaxed realists with an explicit explanation of normative belief but also distinguishes it from related theories, notably quasi-realist theories. In doing so, it addresses a previously unresolved dilemma raised by Ridge (2019) and Böddeling (2020) concerning the relaxed realist’s view of normative belief.

The third paper, “Relaxed Realism, Robust Realism, and The Truthmaker Challenge,” clarifies and defends relaxed realism. It justifies the claim that normative truths do not have truthmakers by arguing that these truths are true not because of the existence of truthmaking entities but simply because of the way things are normatively.

The fourth paper, “Relaxed Realism, The Truthmaker Challenge, and a Domain-Centered View,” examines the kind of relaxed realist theory that Scanlon (2014) defends within a “domain-centered view” of existence and truth. The article highlights how this view makes relaxed realism more viable by defending it against objections based on substantive domain-independent ideas, such as the idea that all (synthetic) truths must have truthmakers. Additionally, it presents a distinct argument, different from the one presented in the third paper, to justify the claim that normative truths do not have truthmakers.