Philosophy and
Phenomenological Research

Philosophy and Phenomenological Research
Vol. LXXX No. 1, January 2010
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How to be a Normative Expressivist[1]

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Abstract. Expressivism can make space for normative objectivity by treating normative stances as pro or con attitudes that can be correct or incorrect. And it can answer the logical challenges that bedevil it by treating a simple normative assertion not merely as an expression of a normative stance, but as an expression of the endorsement of a proposition that is true if and only if that normative stance is correct. Although this position has superficial similarities to normative realism, it does full justice to the core expressivist thesis that, at bottom, a normative assertion expresses a normative stance rather than a factual belief.

> The expressivist starts with states of mind, and uses these to elucidate normative beliefs or seeming beliefs.... At the outset, ... the initial states of mind ... are explained psychologically, as sentiments or attitudes, perhaps, or as universal preferences, states of norm-acceptance—or states of planning. The expressivist then tries to show that these states of mind act much like beliefs.... A quasi-realist like me stresses the vast extent of the parallel between normative convictions, as they emerge in the theory, and the plainest cases of belief in realistic content. (Gibbard 2003, pp. 180–1)

1 Introduction

Normative expressivism is the view that, at bottom, normative assertions express pro or con attitudes of some kind rather than factual beliefs.[2] A normative expressivist might, for instance, claim that the assertion

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1 Although my title echos the titles of Boyd 1988 and Blackburn 1988b/1993, I am not specifically concerned with the details of either paper.

2 In this paper I use the term "assertion" permissively to refer to indicative sentences uttered with commitment. It would be an error to assume that any assertion so understood must involve the endorsement of a factual proposition.

(1) Eating meat is wrong

expresses the normative stance of *opposing* meat-eating, and that the assertion

(2) Eating meat is not wrong

expresses the normative stance of *accepting* meat-eating. A careful exposition of such a view would include an account of normative stances in general and the particular stances of opposing and accepting. A comprehensive normative expressivism would cover a full range of normative assertions, including assertions that turn on concepts like RIGHT, REQUIRED, PERMITTED, PROHIBITED, OUGHT, MUST, MAY, OBLIGATION, REASON TO, and so on.

The normative as I understand it goes way beyond the moral. An assertion to the effect that somebody ought to do something, or that something is right, wrong, rational, or irrational, is normative regardless of whether it has anything to do with morality.[3] In this paper I have nothing to say about the nature and claims of morality. In line with this, the concept of WRONG on which I focus must be understood as a general normative concept rather than a specifically moral concept. In other words, I never use "wrong" as an abbreviation of "morally wrong," and am indifferent to whether the considerations that move a speaker to assert that something is or is not wrong are of any particular type– e.g., moral, prudential, social, legal, or logical—or any combination of types. Although much of the literature on expressivism is framed in terms of the moral rather than the normative, almost everything in that literature which is germane to my concerns applies as readily to the normative as to the moral. I will accordingly treat it as if it were intended to apply to the normative in general.

I am sympathetic to normative expressivism because agents who make normative assertions do not aim to describe the world but to endorse norms that permit, favor, recommend, require, or prohibit possibilities—or something of that ilk. It is surely obvious that someone who sincerely asserts (1) thereby endorses a norm that prohibits

[3] Although nothing in the arguments of this paper depends upon it, I am inclined to think that the realm of the normative is the same as that of reasons (see, e.g., Raz 1999a, p. 67) and, with this, that normative concepts can, in general, be analyzed well enough in terms of concepts of reasons. For example, "*A*-ing is wrong" could be equated with "There are compelling reasons not to *A*." For a reasons account of "ought" judgments which also takes issue with the common assumption that "ought"—or a particular sense of "ought"—is tied to morality, see Pendlebury 2002a. In the present paper I try to keep things simple by focusing on WRONG without regard to its connections with other normative concepts. I completely duck the question of how my reasoning could be extended to thick normative concepts with partly descriptive contents, e.g., COURAGEOUS and DISGRACEFUL.

meat-eating. Endorsing a norm involves both embracing it oneself and urging it upon others. For, someone who asserts (1) does not express a mere personal desire or preference not to eat meat, but a commitment to a norm against meat-eating that is intended to apply to all members of the relevant population. What this population is could be specified separately, fixed by the context of utterance, or left indeterminate.[4] Understood in this way, a normative stance is no ordinary feeling or emotion, but the sort of attitude that is, perhaps, most clearly expressed by the affirmation of an appropriate imperative aimed at all the members of the relevant population, including oneself—e.g.,

(1*) Don't eat meat

in the case of opposition to meat-eating and

(2*) Eat meat if you will

in the case of acceptance of meat-eating.

As I have suggested, it is possible to distinguish between a norm and a normative stance and treat a normative stance as a commitment to a norm.[5] From this perspective, the content of the sorts of norms involved in accepting and opposing could be specified in terms of the conduct which those norms *approve* and the conduct which they *disapprove*—allowing that there may also be conduct which they neither approve nor disapprove.[6] In these terms, to accept *A* (in the basic case) is to be committed to a norm that approves *A* and does not disapprove anything, and to oppose *A* is to be committed to a norm that disapproves *A* and does not approve anything. Within this framework, the norms involved in accepting *A* and opposing *A* could be counted as opposites on the ground that each approves exactly what the other disapproves.

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4 When it is asserted that it is wrong for a particular individual to do something, I take it that the norm is meant to apply not only to that individual, but also to others who are relevantly like her in unspecified ways. This weak methodological principle of norm universalizability is consistent with the holism that Dancy invokes in favor of his "particularism," but I would argue that it is not, as he claims, "toothless" (see Dancy 2004, Part II, especially p. 95).

5 I intend the phrase "commitment to norms" to be understood as roughly equivalent to Gibbard's "acceptance of norms" (see, e.g., Gibbard 1990, p. 7). I prefer the former because I like its stronger tone, and because the latter would invite confusion given my use of "acceptance" for a particular normative stance. I reserve the term "commitment" for certain attitudes—most notably, normative stances (= commitments to norms) and beliefs (= commitments to propositions)—and "endorsement" for public expressions of those attitudes, e.g., by means of sincere assertions.

6 "Approve" and "disapprove" in this context do not signify attitudes but logical relations that can be used to specify the content of norms in terms of what they rule in and out. Using these notions to specify the content of a norm does not involve either a normative assertion or a normative stance, and does not imply that the norm is endorsed, followed, or otherwise recognized by anyone.

I hope that these sketchy remarks make it a little clearer what I mean by a normative stance, and what is involved in the particular stances of accepting and opposing. One can deny that there are normative stances only on pain of ruling out what we would ordinarily understand by opposition to, or acceptance of, slavery, religious discrimination, meat-eating, or whatever. At the same time, I recognize that I cannot provide an informative account of the enormously complex facts and social practices in virtue of which some states of mind qualify as normative stances. But, as I have hinted, not even normative realists should deny that agents who make normative assertions thereby express normative stances. What they should say, rather, is this: First, there is more to a normative assertion than its expression of a normative stance. Second, what is crucial to a normative assertion is that it expresses a normative belief. Third, a normative belief is a commitment to a normative proposition. Fourth, a normative proposition is a kind of factual proposition. And, fifth, the normative stance expressed by a normative assertion is not something over and above the speaker's commitment to the proposition, but is part and parcel of that commitment.

One reason why I am inclined toward normative expressivism is that I do not understand how a factual proposition could have the property that anyone who is committed to it thereby takes a normative stance.[7] Normative realists could duck this problem by disowning the fifth and last thought with which I have saddled them. But those who take this way out owe us an account of how normative assertions could express the normative stances from which they have now become so thoroughly detached.[8] It is a great attraction of expressivism that it makes the link between normative assertions and normative stances so intimate that little explanation of their connection is required.

But expressivism is no gimme. As I see it, there are two key objections that it must answer. The first is that it cannot do justice to the possibility of normative objectivity. The second is that it cannot provide an adequate account of the logic of normative discourse. I consider these objections *seriatim*, and will be very brief on the first.

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7 This is not equivalent to the assertion that I am sympathetic to expressivism because I cannot see how realism can explain the motivational force of normative judgments. I say nothing about the problem of motivation in this paper. However, in Pendlebury 2002a I advance an account of the motivational force of first-person, present-tense "ought" judgments that is consistent with both realism and expressivism (which I there describe as "robust cognitivism" and "noncognitivism"—terms that I now consider unfortunate and misleading).

8 I am not suggesting here that it is impossible for a realist to provide such an account. My goal in this paper is not to add to the case against realism but to make a positive contribution to the development of expressivism.

The twist comes in the way in which I use my response to the first to construct a new form of expressivism that answers the second. The purpose of this paper is to motivate, explain, and defend this view, which I will refer to as propositional-guise expressivism.

II Normative Objectivity

The claim that normative expressivism provides no space for normative objectivity is advanced much more often in the back rooms of philosophy than in the professional literature.[9] This reflects a widespread assumption that the claim is obvious. And it is indeed obvious in the case of some forms of expressivism (e.g., a naive emotivism in terms of which simple normative assertions express no more than mere affective states) because it is clear that they leave no room for the possibility of error (as opposed to mere disagreement). But, as I shall now argue, it does not apply to normative-stance expressivism.[10]

It is commonly supposed that normative realism can accommodate the possibility of objectivity by positing normative propositions that are also factual insofar as they are true or false according to whether they answer appropriately to an independent world. Expressivism can do as well as this by insisting that normative stances can be correct or incorrect.[11] Correctness is truth in the case of propositions and beliefs, which are commitments to propositions. But other kinds of things can be also correct or incorrect, including choices, pieces of advice, verdicts, penalties, punishments, intentions, and Kantian maxims of conduct (although I would not want to suggest that they can all be correct or incorrect in the same sense). Admittedly there are many pro and con attitudes that are neither correct nor incorrect, including stereotypical cases of wanting, liking, aversion, and disinterest. But my expressivist, who is not a normative nihilist, does not assimilate normative stances to such attitudes. The correctness or incorrectness of a normative stance should not be understood as a matter of whether it is a fitting or unfitting attitude, but of whether the norm involved is correct or incorrect. This depends on how that norm fares in relation to objective

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9 The claim is, however, reflected in the literature—e.g., Shafer-Landau 2003 charges that expressivism cannot accommodate the possibility of error (pp. 26–7) or avoid relativism (pp. 30–3) and Bloomfield 2003 argues that it is implicitly relativistic. For expressivist responses to such charges, see, e.g., Blackburn 1998, Chapter 9, and Horgan and Timmons 2005, 2006a.

10 Henceforth "expressivism" and "normative expressivism" will refer to normative-stance expressivism unless the context dictates otherwise.

11 This is not to suggest that every normative stance must be correct or incorrect. The possibility of indeterminacy must also be recognized.

standards of correctness.[12] Of course the observation that we can and do talk intelligibly of norms and normative stances as correct or incorrect does not establish that they are objectively correct or incorrect. But exactly the same applies to the truth and falsity of normative propositions and beliefs. This undermines the common assumption that realism must beat expressivism on objectivity. Even if we set aside the fact that realism is apt to encourage unwarranted complacency about objectivity, I think that it cuts the other way. For—as recognized by Kant, whose normative theory was closer to expressivism than to realism—normative objectivity is not concerned with what is the case but with what is to be done. Expressivists do better justice to this than realists by placing the fundamental locus of normative objectivity in norms about conduct and the normative stances that involve them.

Unfortunately there is little in the expressivist literature on what makes norms and normative stances correct or incorrect,[13] and the development of an adequate account would be a major task that is way beyond the scope of this paper. But for present purposes it is enough that expressivists have no less right than realists to the idea of objective correctness.[14]

III The Logical Challenge

The second objection to normative expressivism is that it cannot provide an adequate account of the fact that the logic of sentences used to make normative assertions is the same as that of sentences used to make factual assertions.[15] Reasonable expressivists do not dispute the

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12 It is important to recognize here that objective standards of correctness do not have to be realistic truth conditions even though the application of those standards will depend in part on questions of fact. See Pendlebury 2007, pp. 536–41, and 2010.

13 However, Horgan and Timmons offer the beginnings of an account of "semantically correct affirmability" for normative assertions within the context of their "Cognitivist Expressivism." They describe such correctness as truth because they wish to count normative assertions as expressions of beliefs (hence their cognitivism). But they insist that these beliefs are non-descriptive and that they involve "ought-commitments" rather than "is-commitments" (hence their expressivism). See, e.g., Horgan and Timmons 2006b, especially pp. 275–82.

14 This could be challenged on the basis of the charge that an expressivist is required to give an expressivist analysis of correctness (which would imply that assertions of correctness are merely expressions of further normative stances). I respond to this charge in section V.

15 Aspects of and variations on the second objection have been developed in several ways in the literature. See, e.g., Geach 1960/1972, 1965/1972, Castañeda 1963, pp. 230–45, 1967, Searle 1970, pp. 136–41, Hale 1986, 1993a, 1993b, 2002, Schueler 1988, Zangwill 1992, Dreier 1996, van Roojen 1996, Unwin 1999, 2001, Sinnott-Armstrong 2000, Dorr 2002, and Mabrito 2005a, 2005b.

phenomena concerned, but only their alleged inability to accommodate them.[16]

The crucial data are as follows. Normative sentences, like factual sentences, occur not only as freestanding assertions but also as clauses within compound sentences, in which the other clauses can be either normative or factual. These occurrences of normative sentences include indefinitely many cases in which they are embedded within the scope of logical operators like negation, disjunction, and the conditional. This is well illustrated by (2) ("Eating meat is not wrong"),

(3) Either it is wrong to eat meat or it is permissible to use other animals as a means to human ends,

and

(4) If human health does not require the consumption of meat, then it is wrong to eat meat.

In such contexts the main logical powers of normative sentences are the same as those of factual sentences. More specifically, the logical properties of and relations between sentences that result from the application of logical operators are the same regardless of whether the embedded clauses are factual or normative. This implies in particular that the basic argument forms that are valid or invalid for factual arguments are equally valid or invalid for normative arguments and mixed arguments that involve both normative and factual clauses.

Normative realists can easily accommodate these phenomena by treating embedded and unembedded occurrences of both normative and factual sentences as expressions of factual propositions that are either true or false; by construing both normative and factual assertions as expressions of beliefs, i.e., commitments to the relevant propositions; and by drawing freely on our well-developed understanding of the logic of propositions. The phenomena present a challenge to normative expressivists because embedded normative sentences characteristically fail to express normative stances.[17] Someone who advances (2), (3), or (4) does not thereby express opposition to meat-eating. Thus any adequate expressivism must provide an account of compound sentences that does justice to the fact that the logical powers of embedded

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16 Expressivist attempts to accommodate various challenging aspects of the logic of normative sentences appear in, e.g., Hare 1970, Blackburn 1973/1993, pp. 123–9, 1984, pp. 189–210, 1988a/1993, 1993b, 1993c, 1998, pp. 68–83, 2002, Gibbard 1986, 1990, pp. 83–102, 1993, 2003, pp.41–87, Horgan and Timmons 2006b, pp. 277–97, Dreier 2006, and Schroeder 2008.

17 There are of course exceptions, as when a normative sentence is a conjunct of an asserted conjunction.

normative sentences are the same as those of embedded factual sentences.[18]

The standard expressivist response to the logical challenge is, in effect, to treat logically compound assertions as expressions of attitudes that are compounded from, or are functions of, the beliefs, normative stances, and other attitudes that would be expressed by assertions of the sentences from which they are compounded, and to attempt to develop a new type of logic for this potentially infinite hierarchy of attitudes which yields much the same results as the well-established logic of propositions.[19] For the approach to succeed, it must not only develop a credible account of the attitudes that are supposedly expressed by compound assertions and a logic of attitudes that matches standard logic even though it is not based on truth, but must also ensure that the two are fully consistent with one another. To illustrate, an expressivist cannot endorse a logic of attitudes that is isomorphic to standard logic and also treat a negative assertion as an expression of an attitude that amounts to a disposition not to have the attitude expressed by the corresponding unnegated assertion. For this would involve the mistaken assimilation of disbelief to the disposition not to believe, and of normative opposition to the disposition not to accept.

I do not know whether the standard expressivist approach can be made to work, but it has been variously argued that the approach, or particular instances of it, cannot account for important phenomena involving conditionals, negations, disjunctions, rational acceptance, and disagreement.[20] Even though it can no doubt answer or get around many of these charges, it always faces the danger that the adjustments which it makes in order to avoid particular problems may result in other problems' popping up elsewhere. Perhaps a

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18 It should be noted here that we cannot account for the logical powers of embedded normative sentences or make sense of the contents of compound sentences in which they occur simply by invoking the distinction between norms and normative stances and insisting that embedded normative sentences express norms rather than normative stances, because we are not entitled to assume that we have a clear understanding of how norms or expressions of norms interact with logical operators and other expressions used to produce compound sentences.

19 This sort of approach is followed by the leading champions of expressivism, Blackburn and Gibbard, in most of their work that addresses the logical challenge as well as by Horgan and Timmons. See, e.g., Blackburn 1984, pp. 189–210, 1988a/1993, 1993b, 1993c, Gibbard 1986, 1990, pp. 83–102, 1993, 2003, pp. 41–87, and Horgan and Timmons 2006b, pp. 277–97. However, Blackburn does not appear to be fully committed to the approach in Blackburn 1973/1993 (see pp. 123–9) and 1998 (see pp. 68–83).

20 See, e.g., the works by Hale, Schueler, Zangwill, van Roojen, Unwin, Sinnott-Armstrong, Dorr, and Mabrito that are cited in footnote 15.

complicated version of the approach avoids all possible logical problems. But if significant complication is required to save standard expressivism, then this alone is a strike against the theory. Moreover, the endless hierarchy of attitudes required by the standard approach is itself a heavy price for expressivism, and it should be avoided if possible.[21]

IV A New Approach

I would like to advocate an alternative expressivist response to the logical challenge that is simple and straightforward, and avoids the difficulties of the standard approach.[22] The heart of my proposal is this: Do not treat a simple normative assertion, like (1) ("Eating meat is wrong"), as an expression of the corresponding normative stance, but as an expression of commitment to a proposition which is true if and only if that normative stance is correct. Then exploit the standard logic of propositions to do the remaining work.

I here adapt an insightful idea of Hector-Neri Castañeda's,[23] which he summarized as follows.

> [T]he language of oughts (etc.) is a first-order "reflection" or "image" of the second-order language about the justification of imperatives and assertions of decision. (Castañeda 1963, pp. 222–3.)

Framed in similar terms, my proposal is that we understand indicative normative language as a first-order "reflection" or "image" of second-order language about the correctness of normative stances.[24]

My central thesis is that a simple indicative normative sentence, whether it occurs as a freestanding assertion or an embedded clause, expresses a first-order proposition which is true if and only if the corresponding normative stance is correct. By this I mean that such a sentence has (near enough)[25] the same truth conditions as a claim to

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21 This hierarchy is, incidentally, comparable to the endless hierarchy of different types of belief that was required by and probably sank Russell's "multiple-relation" theory of belief (as advanced in, e.g., Russell 1918/1956, pp. 216–28)—although Russell's hierarchy starts, so to speak, lower down.

22 For a completely different attempt to avoid the difficulties of the standard approach, see Ridge 2006.

23 See, e.g., Castañeda 1963, especially pp. 272–92. The same idea appears in a slightly different guise in Castañeda 1975, pp. 239–45.

24 It will soon become evident that the notion of an image as it occurs here should be understood metaphorically rather than set-theoretically.

25 Absolute precision would obviously be an inappropriate goal in this territory.

the effect that the corresponding normative stance is correct. Thus simple indicative normative sentences express certain propositional manifestations of normative stances. I accordingly dub my proposal the *propositional-guise* account of normative sentences, thereby honoring Castañeda by misappropriating one of his distinctive terms.[26]

Before I turn to the question of how the propositional-guise account saves expressivism, let me unpack it a bit, beginning with its application to normative sentences with the same basic form as (1). I will represent this form by means of the schema

(5) *A* is wrong,

where "*A*" stands in for appropriate phrases that refer to conduct. I will also use

(6) **Opp** *A*

as an explicit expression of the normative stance of opposing *A*. Thus "**Opp** eating meat" counts as a direct expression of opposition to meat-eating.

According to the propositional-guise account, then, (5) should not be treated simply as an expression of the normative stance of opposing *A*—i.e., as a mere substitute for (6)—but as an expression of a proposition that is equivalent to

(7) "**Opp** *A*" is correct.[27]

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[26] What Castañeda calls propositional guises are, so to speak, different manifestations of propositions rather than propositional manifestations of items that are not propositions. Castañeda's propositional guises are crucial to his theory of perception, belief, and consciousness (see, e.g., Castañeda 1977, pp. 327–37) but play no part in his account of normative language.

[27] This must be understood to mean that the normative stance of opposing *A* is correct—not that it is correct to express opposition to *A*, which is a very different thing.

In a slogan, to be wrong is to be an object of correct opposition.[28] This analysis assigns truth-conditional senses to instances of (5) that remain the same regardless of whether they occur as freestanding assertions or embedded clauses and thus meets a crucially important demand on any adequate expressivism.[29] Furthermore, it makes it possible for standard truth clauses for logical operators to apply to (5). This application straightforwardly yields truth conditions for logically compound sentences in which instances of (5) are embedded and ensures that the logic of instances of (5) is the same as that of factual sentences.[30]

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28 This is structurally similar to a number of other analyses of various normative and evaluative concepts that have been proposed recently. For example:

(a) According to the "buck-passing" analysis of value, for something to be good is for there to be reasons to favor it, or for it to be a fitting object of a pro-attitude, or something of that ilk. (See, e.g., Scanlon 1998, pp.95–100, Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004, and Stratton-Lake and Hooker 2006.)

(b) Neo-sentimentalists hold that for something to have a normative or evaluative feature is for it to be in some sense worthy of some feeling or emotion (see, e.g., D'Arms and Jacobson 2000, especially pp. 69–70, and 2006, especially pp. 194–7). A good example of this is Gibbard's proposal that "to call an action *morally reprehensible* ... is to say this: it would be rational for the agent to feel guilt over having performed the action, and for others to feel angry at him for having performed it." (Gibbard 1990, p. 44)

(c) White 2007 in effect analyses "x ought to A" as "an intention by x to A is supported by practical reasons." (White describes intentions that are supported by practical reasons as "correct," but this notion of correctness is not the same as that involved in the propositional-guise account.)

Each of the above positions resembles the propositional-guise account inasmuch as it analyses something normative or evaluative in terms of a positive feature of some attitude. But none of them are in themselves expressivist. It is, however, possible to give an expressivist version of any one of these positions by supplementing it with an expressivist account of the positive feature. (Here I am indebted to Mark Schroeder.) This suggests that the propositional-guise account of normative indicatives should be counted as expressivist only if it is supplemented by an expressivist account of my conception of correctness.

I address this challenge indirectly toward the end of section IV by showing how the propositional-guise account does justice to the core expressivist thesis that, at bottom, a normative assertion expresses a normative stance rather than a factual belief. And I answer it directly in section V by arguing explicitly that my conception of correctness is not normative and so does not require an expressivist account.

My reasoning in section V suggests that there are two key differences between the propositional-guise account and the above analyses that explain why the former but not the latter could be understood as expressivist. First, the positive feature involved in the propositional-guise account (correctness) is not normative, while the positive features involved in the others (e.g., being supported by reasons, fitting, worthy, rational) are normative. Second, the underlying attitudes involved in the propositional-guise account (normative stances) are themselves normative, but those involved in the others (e.g., feelings, emotions, intentions) need not be.

29 See especially Dreier 1996 and Sinnott-Armstrong 2000.

30 For the sake of simplicity I assume here that standard truth clauses adequately capture the logic of factual sentences.

Most importantly, it achieves these results without positing the endless hierarchy of attitudes required by the standard approach to expressivism. For once we have used the propositional-guise strategy to construct propositions corresponding to simple normative indicatives, we are free to take advantage of the logic of propositions to make sense of complex sentences in which they are embedded. Let me illustrate the point by showing how it applies to sentence (3) ("Either it is wrong to eat meat or it is permissible to use other animals as a means to human ends"). Given a pinch of salt, on the propositional-guise approach this should be analyzed as

(3*) Either it is correct to oppose meat-eating or it is correct to accept the use of other animals as a means to human ends.

This requires the possibility of attitudes of opposing meat-eating and accepting the use of other animals as a means to human ends. But (3*) does not also require a further "disjunctive" attitude defined in terms of them because, as a result of the work done by the two occurrences of the predicate "correct," (3*) is a disjunction of propositional sentences rather than a disjunction of locutions that express the underlying attitudes.

But all this works only if we are operating with a suitable conception of correctness. A deflationary conception, however attractive it may at first appear to an expressivist, definitely will not do. By a deflationary conception of correctness I mean one according to which the assertion that a normative stance is correct is merely an alternative way of expressing that very stance. In other words, it is one that is committed to the following definition of correctness (in which "φ" is a schema for expressions of normative stances).

(C) "φ" is correct $\leftrightarrow_{\text{DEF}}$ φ

But this is useless to the propositional-guise expressivist because it reduces (7) to (6) and thus de-propositionalizes (5) by rendering it equivalent to (6). The propositional-guise account would, therefore, collapse under the unbearable lightness of a deflationary conception of correctness.

A deflationary conception of correctness is in any case inconsistent with what I said about the correctness and incorrectness of normative stances in section **II**, viz., that they are a function of how the norms involved fare in relation to objective standards of correctness. This is not the place for an account of what constitutes objective standards,[31] but it may be useful to note that such

[31] I adumbrate such an account on pp. 536–41 of Pendlebury 2007 and develop and defend it in Pendlebury 2010.

standards will include general standards of consistency and coherence[32] as well as further non-arbitrary standards of correctness that are appropriately responsive to the needs, goals, commitments, identities, and other significant features of the agents in the relevant populations, and to explicitly-mentioned or contextually-determined constraints on what kinds of evaluation, if any, are to be applied.

To count a normative stance as correct, then, is to judge that the norm involved satisfies appropriate objective standards. It is crucial to my argument that this judgment itself involves a commitment to the norm even though it also goes beyond this commitment (as implied by my rejection of a deflationary account of correctness). I claim, therefore, that one cannot count a normative stance as correct without taking that stance. This is closely analogous to the claim that one cannot count a belief as true without holding that belief, which is widely accepted as a platitude among philosophers who are not deflationists about truth.[33] Indeed, it is reasonable to see these two claims as expressions of different applications of the same underlying principle, viz., that, for anything (like a proposition or a norm) to which the relevant

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32 Several such standards could easily be formulated in terms of the approval/disapproval semantics for representing norm contents mooted in section **II**, or some variant thereof. We could, e.g., use this sort of apparatus to specify significant conditions of equivalence, contradiction, consistency, correctness, etc. for the norms involved in basic normative stances like opposition and acceptance. This would help to differentiate normative stances from mere affective responses (e.g., those expressed by exclamations like "Wow!" and "Yuk!") and support their claim to objectivity. Candidate principles that would be worth considering include the following.

(α1) Two norms are equivalent iff they approve and disapprove the same conduct.

(α2) If two norms are equivalent, then one is correct iff the other is.

(β1) Two norms are contradictories iff (one approves conduct iff the other disapproves it).

(β2) If two norms are contradictories, then one is correct iff the other is incorrect.

(γ1) Two or more norms are jointly consistent iff there is no conduct that is approved by one and disapproved by another.

(γ2) If two or more norms are not jointly consistent, then not all of them are correct.

(δ1) One norm involves another iff the first approves all conduct approved by the second and disapproves all conduct disapproved by the second.

(δ2) If one norm involves another, then the second is correct if the first is correct.

Note that these leave open the possibility of norms that are indeterminate (in the sense that they are neither correct nor incorrect). Note also that I am not here suggesting that approval/disapproval semantics could or should be used as a basis for the development of a logic of a potentially infinite hierarchy of attitudes of the kind to which standard expressivists are committed—for (again) one of the key attractions of propositional-guise expressivism is that it obviates the need for such a hierarchy.

33 For deflationists about truth it is, of course, absolutely trivial.

notion of correctness can be applied, to count it as correct is implicitly to be committed to it. The claim that counting a normative stance as correct involves taking that stance is nonetheless subject to challenge, but I postpone my response to this challenge until section V.

Let us now step back from the details of the propositional-guise response to the logical challenge to address the important question of whether it really is a form of normative expressivism. It is certainly at one with normative *realism* to the extent that it treats an everyday normative sentence like (1) as an expression of a proposition in all relevant verbal contexts, and also as an expression of commitment to that proposition—in other words, a belief—in cases in which it functions as a freestanding assertion. This explains why the propositional-guise approach must yield the right logic of both normative and mixed sentences if, as we are assuming, their logic is the same as the logic of propositional sentences. It also explains why the propositional-guise approach avoids the difficulties that confront the standard approach to expressivism. For, since it is free to make sense of compound assertions with embedded normative indicatives by treating them as endorsements of propositions, it has no need for any other special attitudes that correspond to and are expressed by these assertions.

However, these very benefits suggest that the propositional-guise account does not save expressivism, but sacrifices it to realism. My response to this challenge is two-fold.

First, I claim that the propositional-guise approach leaves much more room for truth-value indeterminacy among simple normative propositions than a realist should be willing to countenance. For, given that realistic truth is (roughly speaking) a matter of correctly describing features of a determinate, independent world, realism allows only for truth-value indeterminacy that results from such factors as vagueness and presupposition failure,[34] and the indeterminacy permitted by the propositional-guise approach rightly goes beyond this. It is, admittedly, unusual for this sort of consideration to be brought into play in normative theory, and I will not pursue it further, but it seems to me desirable for normative theory to operate with a conception of realism that also works well in other domains. If so, it is not clear that the propositional-guise account is an instance of realism.

Second—and this is of much greater significance—the propositional-guise account saves expressivism because it does justice to the view that normative assertions are, at bottom, expressions of normative stances rather than factual beliefs. For the propositions that it posits for simple

[34] I defend such an understanding of realism in Pendlebury 2010, drawing significantly on the work of Dummett, especially Dummett 1982/1993 and 1993a.

normative indicatives to express are not factual propositions that are true or false according to whether they describe an independent world, but normative propositions that are true or false according to whether the associated normative stances are correct or incorrect. Thus it treats normative stances as primary, and understands normative propositions as secondary propositionalized transformations of them.

This is why on the propositional-guise approach there is no puzzle about how it can be that agents who endorse normative propositions thereby take normative stances. Suppose that Hermione sincerely and wittingly asserts (1), thereby endorsing the proposition that it is correct to oppose meat-eating. Thus Hermione holds that it is correct to oppose meat-eating. But to hold that it is correct to oppose meat-eating is implicitly to oppose it. Thus Hermione cannot be committed to the proposition that it is wrong to eat meat without taking the normative stance of opposing meat-eating. As I suggested near the beginning of this paper, no similar story is available to the normative realist.

It can also be shown by means of a generalizable example that the propositional-guise approach yields the right results concerning negations of sentences that say that something is wrong. This applies subject to the very reasonable principle of equivalence

(E) It is correct to accept A if and only if it is incorrect to oppose A.[35]

Suppose, then, that Hermione sincerely and wittingly asserts (2) ("Eating meat is not wrong"), thereby endorsing a proposition which, by the standard truth clause for negation, is true if and only if (1) is not true. By the propositional-guise account, this implies that she is committed to the proposition that it is not correct to oppose meat-eating. By an application of (E), this in turn implies that she is committed to the proposition that it is correct to accept meat-eating. Thus, Hermione must hold that it is correct to accept meat-eating. But to hold that it is correct to accept meat-eating is implicitly to accept it. Therefore Hermione cannot be committed to the proposition that it is not wrong to eat meat without taking the normative stance of accepting meat-eating. This squares with what I took for granted at the start of the paper. However, at this point the claim does not show up as

[35] Notice that (E) need not be taken as a basic assumption, for it is a straightforward logical consequence of the approval/disapproval accounts of acceptance and opposition proposed in section II taken together with principles (β1) and (β2) of footnote 32. Thus propositional-guise expressivism is not subject to the embarrassment of having to depend upon the assumption of a pair contradictory basic attitudes whose logical relations to one another are taken as inexplicable (see, e.g., Dreier 2006, pp. 218–9).

mere stipulation or assumption, but as a welcome consequence of the propositional-guise account of "wrong." I see this as another significant point in favor of that account.

To sum up, if we treat a normative assertion as an expression of commitment to the proposition that the corresponding normative stance is correct, then we can easily account for the logic of normative discourse and also do justice to the core expressivist thesis that, at bottom, a normative assertion expresses a normative stance rather than a factual belief.

V Objections and Replies

In this final section I seek to close some gaps in the above exposition of propositional-guise expressivism and consolidate the case for the position by replying to four significant objections.

Objection 1

It is possible for someone to accept normative expressivism because she regards it as a useful and legitimate way to avoid what she takes to be spurious epistemic questions about normative objectivity that realists must confront but cannot answer. The propositional-guise approach is useless to any such expressivist because it is committed to the view that normative stances can be objectively correct or incorrect.[36]

Reply

I readily concede that the approach is useless to a naive emotivist who holds that simple normative assertions express no more than mere affective states and that unasserted normative clauses in compound sentences therefore make no sense. I nonetheless insist that it could be very useful to a more sophisticated emotivist who holds that normative assertions masquerade as objective claims by expressing objectivist projections of emotions that are not objectively correct or incorrect, and that they thereby perform their function of encouraging the speaker's addressees to feel similar emotions (see, e.g., Fisher 2006). In terms of such an emotivism, normative assertions present themselves as expressions of commitment to the correctness of the emotions concerned. If we bracket off the difference between emotions and normative stances, this is completely in line with the propositional-guise account.

Of course the sophisticated emotivist also holds that the emotions corresponding to normative sentences are not the kinds of things that can be

[36] Here I am indebted to John Carroll.

objectively correct or incorrect. This does not, however, invalidate a propositional-guise account based on emotions, but merely commits the sophisticated emotivist to the view that normative assertions, however effective they may be in encouraging the addressees to feel emotions like those which they express, are always in error in the sense that the propositions that they express are never true.[37] As this in turn shows, it is possible for an expressivist to answer the logical challenge by adopting the propositional-guise account of normative sentences without accepting that normative stances are objectively correct or incorrect.

Objection 2

Your argument for the claim that the propositional-guise account does justice to the core expressivist thesis that, at bottom, a normative assertion expresses a normative stance rather than a factual belief, depends on the assumption that it is not possible to judge that a normative stance is correct[38] without taking that stance. But, in general, it is possible to judge that it is correct to *A* without *A*-ing. For example, it is possible to judge that it is correct to move my king without moving it, or to judge that it is correct to intend to leave the party at the next suitable opportunity without actually forming this intention. And so on. The propositional-guise expressivist must justify the claim that normative stances are different.[39]

Reply

I begin by trying to make it more plausible that normative stances are indeed different. It is not possible to establish this simply on the basis of knock-down differences in our intuitive responses to examples, because the vocabulary that I have adopted to talk about normative stances also has much more familiar applications that could easily influence these responses. It nonetheless seems to me that if we guard against this, e.g., by reminding ourselves that opposition is an attitude that does not require observable speech or behavior, however minimal, we are likely to find the claim

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37 This is not to say that they should be treated as false. In order to make sense of the application of negation to normative sentences, it would be better to treat them as neither true nor false. It is also worth noting here that the sophisticated emotivist is not the same kind of error theorist as Mackie, who did not endorse an expressivist account of the meaning of the normative assertions with which he was concerned (see Mackie 1977, Chapter 1).

38 Elsewhere in this paper I use the phrases "holds that φ is correct" and "counts φ as correct" as mere stylistic variants of "judges that φ is corrrect."

39 Here I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this journal, who was the first to raise this challenge, and who also provided the chess example.

(8) Hermione does not oppose meat-eating even though she holds that it is correct to oppose it

much more odd than

(9) Harry is not moving his king even though he holds that it is correct to move it.

For it is easy to make sense of a gap between Harry's judging that it is correct to move his king and his moving it by allowing for various things that could come between the two. It is possible that he wants to delay moving to unsettle his opponent or to take stock of his position. Or perhaps he is playing with a beginner and wants to make an incorrect move in order to test him or give him the chance to win. But it is not at all clear what, if anything, could come between Hermione's judging that it is correct to oppose meat-eating and her opposing it.

The difference between these cases cannot be explained by the observation that moving a king is an overt action while opposing meat-eating is an attitude, for something could also come between Harry's judging that it is correct to intend to leave a party and his actually intending to do so. He could be distracted by a charming woman or an absorbing conversation. Or his will could be weak as a result of drinking too much or being afraid to offend his hostess. What, then, is so special about the case of normative stances?

Two related factors that I have already mentioned make all the difference. First, normative stances are commitments to norms in the same sense as beliefs are commitments to propositions, while the other attitudes and actions are not commitments in this sense.[40] Second, the conception of correctness that I am applying to normative stances is a second-order semantic conception which applies more directly to the norms that they involve, and which also applies to propositions and beliefs, when it is usually called "truth." In contrast, the conception of correctness that applies most readily to the other attitudes and actions is a first-order normative conception that could just as well be expressed by an overtly normative predicate like "required" or "right," depending on the details of the case. And it is of course no news that someone can count something as required or right but still fail to do it.

My claims about the crucial features of normative stances and their correctness are supported by the fact that an assertion about belief analogous to (8) —e.g.,

[40] This is not, of course, to deny that the word "commitment" could reasonably be used to describe some other attitudes, e.g., intentions and decisions.

(10) Hermione does not believe that Ron is a vegan even though she holds that this belief is true

—is odd in the same way as I claim (8) is odd, for it is not at all clear what, if anything, could come between Hermione's judging that it is true that Ron is a vegan and her believing that he is a vegan. However, this still does not explain *why* it is not possible to count a commitment (whether it be belief or a normative stance) as correct without having that commitment.

In this paper I cannot hope to do more than gesture in the direction of what I take to be a worthwhile explanation. The crux lies in the nature of commitment, which I have not explored. I now wish to suggest that commitments in general are intimately connected with correctness in much the same way as the most familiar cases of commitments, viz., beliefs, are intimately connected with truth. This connection between beliefs and truth is well expressed by Bernard Williams's famous dictum "beliefs aim at truth" (Williams 1970/1973, p. 136), even though it is not obvious how this is best understood. I will use it to mean, roughly, that a kind of attitude cannot be belief unless it is an attitude to propositions (i.e., things that can be true or false) and it involves some form of positive responsiveness to and stake in their truth, allowing that these connections with truth may be external inasmuch as the concept of truth may not occur in the propositions concerned.[41] However this is to be unpacked, it is reasonable to suppose that a necessary condition for beliefs to aim at truth is that it not be possible to count a proposition as true without believing it, for no more flagrant break between belief and truth is imaginable.

Mimicking Williams, I want to give voice to what I take to be the key feature of commitments by saying that commitments aim at correctness. This should not be taken to mean that being committed to something is one and the same as counting it as correct, for this would get us into the same trouble as the deflationary account of correctness. It means, rather, that, just as belief is an attitude to propositions that involves a responsiveness to and stake in their truth, commitment is an attitude to things that can be correct or incorrect that involves a similar responsiveness to and stake in their correctness, which could (again) be external. In the absence of a substantive account of normative objectivity, the difficulty of unpacking these thoughts in relation to normative stances would certainly be much greater than that of doing

[41] These claims overlap with but are not equivalent to those which Williams associates with his dictum. For a study of the nature of belief from a somewhat different perspective, see Pendlebury 2002b, which includes a more careful discussion of what I here describe as positive responsiveness to and stake in truth on pp. 212–4.

so in relation to beliefs. Despite this, it is reasonable to suppose that, as in the case of beliefs, a necessary condition for commitments to aim at correctness is that it not be possible to count a commitment as correct without having it, for no more flagrant break between commitment and correctness is imaginable.

But even if we set aside this flailing gesture at an explanation, my earlier remarks about the key differences between the correctness of commitments and the correctness of other attitudes and actions are sufficient to show that, although it is in general possible to judge that it is correct to *A* without *A*-ing, there is reason to suppose that this does not apply in the case of normative stances.

Objection 3

Sentence (7) ("'**Opp** *A*' is correct"), which gives your proposed analysis of (5) ("*A* is wrong"), is itself a puzzling normative assertion that is just as much in need of an expressivist analysis as (5). But it is not obvious how to give a propositional-guise analysis of (7)—i.e., an analysis in terms of the correctness of a normative stance—because it is not at all clear what normative stance corresponds to (7). Even if it is possible to finesse this problem, any propositional-guise analysis of (7) must lead to either a vicious circle or an infinite regress of different senses of "correct."[42]

Reply

Given their view that (5) is a first-order equivalent of (7), propositional-guise theorists cannot deny that (7) is a normative sentence. They should also accept that this critic's argument for the claim that (7) cannot be given a propositional-guise analysis is compelling. But they should at the same time insist that (7) does not require an expressivist analysis.

The reason for this is simply that "correct" as it occurs in (7) is not a normative predicate. This is evident from the fact that the result of applying it to a non-normative sentence is also a non-normative sentence. Consider

(11) "The Ukraine is bigger than France" is correct,

which is no more normative than

(12) The Ukraine is bigger than France.

Thus the normativity of (7) is not due to the mere fact that it contains the predicate "correct." It gets its normativity, rather, by inheriting it

[42] Here I am indebted to Robert Mabrito for a written critique of an earlier version of this paper that includes a passage of which this paragraph is a close paraphrase.

from the normative-stance locution that it mentions as a result of the application of the predicate "correct" to that locution. This happens because the predicate has a general disquotational effect that is indifferent to whether the locution to which it is applied is normative or not. This effect is, of course, just another manifestation of the key principle that it is not possible to judge that a commitment is correct without having that commitment, which I defended in response to Objection 2.

It is crucial that the claim that "correct" in the relevant sense is not normative does not imply that it is descriptive,[43] for if this were the case, then the propositional-guise account would turn out to be a form of realism. "Correct" is neither normative nor descriptive, but is, as I have said, a second-order semantic predicate. As such, it should be recognized as a completely different sort of term with applications that transcend the distinction between the normative and the descriptive. Although this may be a puzzling property, it is not unique, for it is common to many predicates of logic, including, "equivalent," "contradictory," "implies," and "valid."

These remarks still leave me open to the charge that I have not given an informative, non-circular, analytical definition of "correct." This is true. But I doubt that such a definition is possible.[44] We could try to get at the use of the word by summarizing the main points I have mentioned in the slogan "to count a commitment as correct is to have-it-because-one-judges-that-it-satisfies-the-relevant-objective-standards," but I see no way of converting anything like this into a reasonable analytical definition. However, we do not need such a definition in order to recognize that one cannot count a commitment as correct without having it, and therefore that the predicate "correct" is up to the job to which the propositional-guise theorist assigns it.

But now I hear the murmur that my talk of standards of correctness—which could also be described as "norms"—shows that "correct" is after all normative. The point is well taken. At a deeper level, there is a sense in which "correct" *is* normative. But *all* language, including the most obviously descriptive language, is normative in this sense, because it all involves standards (see, e.g., Pendlebury 1998). The expressivist's goal is not to plumb the depths of this sort of normativity, but only to make sense of everyday first-order sentences and assertions involving overtly normative words like "right," "wrong," "required," "permitted," "ought," "must," and so on. The propositional-guise account is well suited to this task.

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43 Here I am indebted to Mark Timmons.

44 Here I am in the company of Kant and Frege, both of whom hold that truth is undefinable. See Kant 1787/1933, pp. 97–8 (= A57–9/B82–3) and Frege 1925/1956, p.291.

Objection 4

Whatever the merits of the propositional-guise account, it is not expressivist because the distinctive feature of expressivist semantics is that the semantic values which it assigns to sentences are attitudes *instead of* propositions.[45]

Reply

If this critic is right about what expressivism is, then the propositional-guise account is definitely not expressivist. But what is expressivism? Although this is ultimately a verbal question, it is not trivial, for it affects the boundaries that we draw between different types of positions in metaethics, and these boundaries could in turn make a difference to which possible positions we regard as open. My critic's characterization of expressivism certainly fits non-cognitivist versions of expressivism. It also sits well with the assumption that the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism marks a fundamental divide in metaethics. This divide was once important because of a widespread background assumption that beliefs have realistic contents, i.e., that they represent ways the world might be. However, as a result of recent developments in philosophy of psychology, philosophy of language, and metaethics itself, this assumption is no longer sacrosanct, and cognitivism about normative judgments need not involve the metaethical realism that once accompanied it.[46] So I think that the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism is no longer fundamental to metaethics.[47] I would, therefore, prefer not to associate expressivism with non-cognitivism, but (once again to echo the opening sentence of this paper) to understand it as the view that, at bottom, normative assertions express pro or con attitudes of some kind rather than factual beliefs. This is broad enough to cover all positions that are generally counted as expressivist but also narrow enough, I believe, to exclude positions that are generally counted as realist. On this understanding of expressivism, the propositional guise account is expressivist. But in the end I am less concerned that it should be counted as expressivist than that it should

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45 Here I am indebted to Mark Schroeder.

46 This is well illustrated by the "Cognitivist Expressivism" of Horgan and Timmons, who reject normative realism but still treat normative assertions as expressions of beliefs (see, e.g., Horgan and Timmons 2006b), and could be part of the reason why Gibbard is now wary of the label "non-cognitivist" and cagey about whether his "normative commitments" are "genuine beliefs" or "pseudo-beliefs" (see Gibbard 2003, pp. 180–4).

47 For more on the sustainability of the distinction, see, e.g., van Roojen 2005, section 5, and Harold 2007.

be seen to have some of the most important virtues of expressivism—as indeed it does.[48]

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[48] I am grateful to John Carroll, Randy Carter, Jennifer Fisher, James Harold, Sean McKeever, Mark Schroeder, Mark Timmons, Mary Tjiattas, Mark van Roojen, Heath White, and especially Robert Mabrito and an anonymous reviewer for this journal for philosophical stimulation or useful comments and questions on various versions of this work.

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