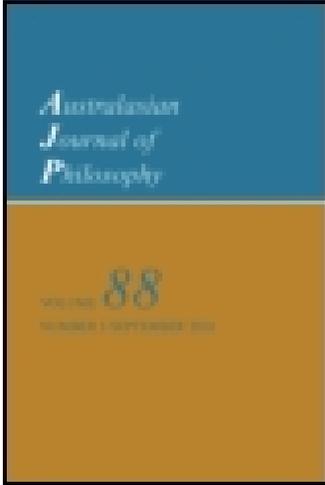


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Impassioned Belief, by Michael Ridge

Jack Woods^a

^a Bilkent University

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BOOK REVIEW

Ridge, Michael, *Impassioned Belief*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. xii + 264, £30 (hardback).

Expressivism has suffered from a myopic focus on a small class of problems, so much so that the recent explosion of *hybrid* expressivist views—views where normative assertions express some combination of conative and cognitive states—looks to be motivated only by disagreement and the Frege-Geach problem. But normative language is an extremely rich and fertile bit of our day-to-day discourse, one about which expressivists have told us rather little. Michael Ridge's *Impassioned Belief* goes a long way towards overcoming this myopia, developing a richly detailed hybrid expressivism. In merely 248 pages, he gives expressivist semantics for 'ought', 'wrong', 'good', 'bad', and 'reason'; a defence of his *ecumenical expressivism* against competitor cognitivist views; an expressivist account of truth, disagreement, and propositions; a solution to the Frege-Geach; and even a cognitivist account of practical rationality. It is a tremendous read.

It is also a challenging read. Not from excessive technicality or laborious prose—Ridge writes deftly—but because he situates his view among a large class of alternatives, offering many choices of how to develop his view if we disagree on particular points. Metaethics is sometimes lampooned as engaging in 'argument by flowchart', but in this case a flowchart would have been quite helpful. Still, the overall picture is clear enough. Ridge's expressivism is a *metasemantic* view: that is, an account of how normative language gets the meaning it does, not an account of the actual (formal) semantics of normative language. As far as normative *semantics* goes, Ridge shows that his ecumenical expressivism is compatible with orthodox truth-conditional semantics and a broadly Kratzerian approach to deontic modals like 'ought' and 'must'.

The metasemantic claim is that normative assertions derive their meaning from the corresponding normative judgments they express. *Normative judgments* are hybrid states combining a normative perspective and a partially derivative normative belief. Roughly, this amounts to a component, roughly constituted by intention-like states, that disendorses various standards for deliberating about what to do *and* the belief that any acceptable set of standards, by the lights of the intention-like component, would be thus-and-so. The 'expression' relation is to be understood as something akin to a sincerity condition on normative assertion—linguistic conventions entail that an asserter of 'monogamy is bad' is liable for believing that any acceptable (by the lights of their normative perspective) set of standards would rank monogamy low as a potential end.

What is a normative perspective? A set of 'relatively stable policies against accepting certain standards of deliberation' [115] as well as positive commitments to perform actions that every acceptable standard requires, aspiration to perform actions that those acceptable standards endorse, and defeasible commitment to encouraging others to do so. Normative perspectives fix the content of 'acceptable'—to judge that something is forbidden is, in part, to believe that any standard that one has no policy against accepting will require one to avoid doing it. The relative stability of policies

is typically maintained by our affective reactions, although Ridge notes that this is not essential. Affectless aliens or atypical human beings can have normative standards and, consequently, can make normative judgments.

Ridge's normative judgments have properties for which, early on, he convincingly argues. They are action-guiding (being partially constituted by intentions to avoid deliberating in various ways), affect-involving (for typical human beings), and potentially acrimonious (fundamental normative disagreement being possible without conceptual or empirical error). Moreover, they allow an elegant solution to the Frege-Geach. Logical operators modify only the belief component of the normative judgment. Judging that something is not good is, in part, believing that it will not be ranked highly by any standard that one has no policy against accepting. Judging that it is not the case that something is good is, in part, to believe that it is not the case that any standard one has no policy against accepting will require one to rank it highly. And so on, in the obvious way.

Validity is defined as follows: a set of beliefs entails a belief when any possible believer, under any acceptable uniform reinterpretation of the beliefs' non-logical components, would be guaranteed to have inconsistent beliefs by holding all of the former and the negation of the latter. Given his treatment of truth as a normative notion, Ridge cannot define inconsistency of belief in terms of truth; but this can be finessed. The resulting consequence relation is extensionally adequate, at least over a substantial fragment of ordinary discourse. Jennifer Carr [forthcoming] has raised some issues about the proper treatment of conditionals; Ridge [forthcoming] addresses these and sketches possible ways forward. Ridge's emphasis on formality is very welcome. However, as I have argued elsewhere, many putative difficulties in giving a *pure* expressivist account of validity disappear once we see that validity is formal [Baker and Woods 2015]. The conclusion that *ecumenical* expressivism is significantly better off than pure expressivism in this regard is thus hasty.

Ridge addresses a number of other desiderata for expressivist accounts. He motivates a notion of disagreement in terms of *conflicting tendencies to advise*, which, he argues, improves on Gibbard's *inconsistency in plan*; he develops a notion of *proposition-as-cognitive-act-type*, drawing on recent work from Scott Soames; and he shows that ecumenical expressivists can use any account of truth they like, freeing expressivists from their deflationary shackles. It is an attractive package. And, like all such packages, its adequacy will be tested by its ability to account for normative discourse without undue commitment to theoretical extravagances.

It pinches here and there. For example, it hardly seems partially constitutive of a normative perspective that we have even a defeasible propensity for getting others to conform to our standards. To be fair, Ridge hedges this commitment to cases where we are being candid and speaking with a child-like spontaneity; but I think this is insufficient. If my exclamation of 'monogamy is bad' expresses a state that is partially constituted by a commitment to encourage others to be non-monogamous, then explicitly displaying my *laissez faire* tendencies is evidence of linguistic incompetence. This is a serious cost. Likewise, some of Ridge's theoretical choices are idiosyncratic: Soames's picture of propositions as cognitive event types is more plausible than the Bratmaniac view that our identity is constituted by bundles of planning states, but both strike me as rather undesirable. Ridge shows us how to weave between various packages of commitments if we dislike this or that choice; and, presumably, more in this vein can be done, so there may be a slightly better fitting version.

But, even then, will it be more fitting than what Ridge calls *ecumenical cognitivism*? In its most plausible guise, this is the view that normative assertions conversationally implicate that we possess the relevant desire-like states. Ridge's most original and, more importantly, general argument against ecumenical cognitivism claims that

normative *judgments*, not merely normative *assertions*, commit us to practical states. But this is strange. Part of the explanation of why there is an implicature in the first place—people tend to be motivated to do what they advise and avow; so, when they make an assertion whose point is to advise or avow, we assume them so-motivated unless told otherwise—also explains why we expect motivation of those who, we learn, judge something to be right. Of course, learning that someone merely thinks that charity is good does not significantly increase my credence that they are inclined to give to charity. But when they bluntly assert that giving to charity is good, and I learn that they feel no inclination to donate, I feel misled. Such data suggest that normative assertion strongly indicates that a speaker possesses the relevant practical states—a feature the pragmatic account easily delivers. This account also plausibly entails that our normative assertions are action-guiding and affect-involving, and it may well deliver enough of the same for normative judgment.

Ecumenical cognitivism does lose the easy explanation of the capacity-based form of judgment internalism for which Ridge argues—roughly, the view that normative judgments must be *able* to motivate us without our having an independently existing desire to do what we ought. Since ecumenical expressivism claims that normative judgments are partially constituted by practical states, it has no trouble explaining this. But this sort of benefit should be weighed against the cost of taking sincere assertions like ‘I must finish grading, but I have no absolutely no intention of doing so’ as indicative of linguistic, not mere rational, incompetence. If this assertion directly commits us to planning to do what we think must be done, then denying that we possess the relevant sort of normative standpoint should jar. Ridge attempts to alleviate this problem by arguing that his capacity-based internalism is entailed by the more plausible claim that in so far as we are not motivated by our (wholehearted, etc.) normative judgments we are not (perfectly) rational (along with a few other plausible commitments). The idea is that attributions of irrationality are punitive, and punishment is warranted only if we could have done otherwise. So, normative judgments must be capable of motivating, independently of our desires. So, we are stuck with this cost anyway. And the easiest currency is ecumenical expressivism. But the argument limps—it is rather plausible that, in some sense of ‘irrational’, lacking the desire to do what we (wholeheartedly judge that we) ought to do is exactly that, in spite of inability to do otherwise. Just ask Aristotle.

Or ask Ridge. In his final chapter, he outlines a novel ecumenical cognitivist picture of rationality judgements where they implicate, but do not express, practical states. He distinguishes between rationality in a capacity sense—a capacity to set and pursue ends—and in a success sense (i.e. successfully exercising those abilities that constitute grounds for calling something rational in the capacity sense). On this account, rationality judgments are not essentially normative. But, noting the prescriptive flavour of describing Gibbard’s perfectly coherent anorexic as irrational, Ridge allows that we ought to treat some uses of ‘irrational’ as criticizing a disposition to do the obviously wrong thing. But we might think that those who are not motivated by their normative judgments, in virtue of lacking the appropriate desire to do what they think they must, are similarly criticisable even if they are unable to do otherwise.

So, in spite of its many virtues, I am unconvinced that ecumenical expressivism is a better picture of normative judgment than close competitors. But this should not be taken as a failure of Ridge’s book. Merely developing a sufficiently detailed expressivist picture enabling this sort of costing is itself a stunning achievement. And many lessons of the book are independent from Ridge’s favoured development of them. The chapters on the Frege-Geach, disagreement, and rationality are especially excellent in this regard, developing theoretical tools that are useful for a wide variety of

views. And the stage-setting chapter on the nature of normative judgment is a festival of argument in the best possible sense. *Impassioned Belief* ought to be read by anyone who is interested in expressivism, contemporary metaethics, and metanormative theory more generally. It must be read by anyone interested in normative metasemantics.

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Jack Woods
Bilkent University
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