Introduction: Expressivisms, Knowledge and Truth

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This Special Issue results from the Royal Institute of Philosophy Departmental Conference 2018. The conference, entitled *Expressivisms, Knowledge and Truth*, took place on the 19th and 20th of October 2018 at University College London. This volume accurately reproduces the talks given there.

As its title indicates, the conference focused on different varieties of contemporary expressivism, and how they fare in relation to the truth-aptness of utterances with expressive meaning, and the status of knowledge claims.

Expressivisms of all kinds share the negative thesis that claims with expressive meaning do not represent states of affairs[1]. This semantic characterisation of the negative thesis also permits the pragmatic wording that the business of expressive discourse is something other than describing. Endorsing this negative thesis suffices for an approach to count as expressivist. The negative thesis can applied to all uses of language, and thus be *global*, or alternatively be restricted to some specific areas of discourse, or to some specific terms and phrases. The first kind of non-global expressivism is *local expressivism*, and I'll call the second kind *term-focused expressivism*. In term-focused expressivism, terms with expressive meaning do not contribute a component to what is said, i.e. they are semantically irrelevant. Frápolli's and Price's contributions defend global versions of expressivism, while Bar-On's, Besson's and Osorio and Villanueva's propose local versions, and Chrisman's, Soria and Stojanovic's, and Zalabardo's views are term-focused varieties.

Within their respective scopes, all expressivisms stick to the negative thesis. It is the positive thesis, i.e. the thesis that identifies what expressive claims and utterances actually do, where a deeper disagreement between the different approaches lies. And at this point the options multiply. Just to give a hint of the variety, the positive thesis has attributed to expressive claims subjective as well as

[1] María J. Frápolli and Neftalí Villanueva, 'Minimal Expressivism', *dialectica*, vol. 66, n°4 (2012), 471–487.

doi:10.1017/S1358246119000055 ©The Royal Institute of Philosophy and the contributors 2019

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246119000055 Published online by Cambridge University Press

objective roles, and individual as well as social roles, depending on the view one favours. Let us consider some examples. Classical emotivism[2] explained the function of ethical claims as expressing, or giving vent to, states of the mind internal to the subject. Semantically, sentences such as 'Torturing animals is wrong' are more similar to disapproving interjections than to non-ethical sentences such as 'Torturing animals is frequent'. Their job is to express feelings, as opposed to expressing beliefs. Classical emotivism is a subjective proposal, in which expressive claims have the job of giving voice to the speaker's emotions. But there are also local expressivisms which are externalist, objective or social semantic proposals. Blackburn's quasi-realism and Brandom's normative expressivism do not explain the role of expressive claims as expressing subjective states of mind. Bar-On's neo-expressivism, on the other hand, is a hybrid view with a subjective, internal tier. According to Bar-On, expressive claims express speakers' mental states, and show the motivational aspects of expressive discourse. What distinguishes neo-expressivism from classical, internalist expressivism is that the former does not characterize semantic contents via the pragmatic force of the claims that express them. Bar-On's neo-expressivism is a sophisticated and worked-out derivation of classical emotivism.

Classical emotivism and neo-expressivism are *local* versions of expressivism. Blackburn's quasi-realism[3], and epistemic expressivisms, as defended by Chrisman and Field[4], are further local approaches. Local expressivisms usually attend to what Price[5] has called the 'bifurcation thesis', i.e. the thesis that there is a principled distinction between the semantics of normative claims and the semantics of descriptive claims. Neo-expressivism is an exception that defends the

[2] C. L. Stevenson, 'The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms', *Mind*, 46 (181) (1937), 14–31; Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Penguin Books,1936).

[3] Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[4] Matthew Chrisman, 'From Epistemic Contextualism to Epistemic Expressivism', *Philosophical Studies*, 135 (2) (2007), 225–254; Matthew Chrisman, 'Epistemic Expressivism', *Philosophy Compass*, 7(2) (2012), 118–126; Hartry Field, 'Epistemology without Metaphysics', *Philosophical Studies*, 143 (2) (2009), 249–290; Hartry Field, 'Epistemology from an Evaluativist Perspective', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 18 (2018).

[5] Huw Price, *Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 30.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246119000055 Published online by Cambridge University Press

semantic continuity of expressive and descriptive claims while stressing the pragmatic specificity of ethical claims.

Barker's global expressivism, Brandom's inferentialism, Gibbard's expressivism, Price's global expressivism, and Schroeder's *being for* proposal[6] are global kinds of expressivism, which generalise to all uses of language the reasons that local expressivism gives for rejecting descriptivism in restricted areas.

The *Tractarian* approach to logical constants is a kind of term-focused expressivism[7], which is not subjective with respect to the positive thesis. The role of logical constants is to indicate the possibilities of truth for complex sentences. Of a similar kind are the approaches to the meaning of the conditional defended by Frege in his *Begriffsschrift*[8], and also defended by Ramsey[9] and Ryle[10]. Their expressivism does not characterize whole areas of discourse, but rather the semantic or pragmatic roles of a well-delimited set of terms or concepts: terms or concepts that will occur in any kind of discourse. Brandom's normative expressivism, i.e. his expressivism about logical, epistemic and semantic notions, as well as Frápolli and Villanueva's minimal expressivism[11], which relates to functions of propositions, are further examples of term-focused expressivisms.

[6] Stephen J. Barker, *Global Expressivism* (Nottingham: Nottingham ePrints, University of Nottingham, 2007); Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons. An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Alan Gibbard, *Meaning and Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Huw Price, op. cit., note 5; Mark Schroeder, *Being For: Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[7] Recall Wittgenstein's remarks on logical constants: 'My fundamental thought is that the "logical constants" do not represent. That the logic of the facts cannot be represented', Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, (London: Routledge, 1922/2014), 4.0312.

[8] Gottlob Frege, '*Begriffsschrift*, a formula language, modelled upon that of arithmetic, for pure thought', in Jean van Heijenoort, *From Frege to Gödel. A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879–1931* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1– 82, section 5.

[9] Frank P. Ramsey, 'General Propositions and Causality', in Frank P. Ramsey, *Philosophical Papers*, edited by D. H. Mellor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 145– 63.

[10] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Routledge, 1949), 104ff.

[11] Robert Brandom, op. cit., note 6; Robert Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing. Towards and Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); María J. Frápolli and Neftalí Villanueva, op. cit., note 1.

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This volume offers a comprehensive survey of the varieties and subtleties of non-descriptivist views currently discussed in the philosophy of language, meta-semantics and meta-ethics. These views are rooted in the two main sources of contemporary expressivism: the approach to the meaning of ethical terms derived from meta-ethical emotivism, and the pragmatic approach to 'meaning as use' that Wittgenstein displayed in his *Philosophical Investigations*. The views included here reflect the latest developments in non-descriptivism, and are presented by some of the leading experts in the field: Dorit Bar-On, Corine Besson, Mathew Chrisman, María José Frápolli, Javier Osorio and Neftalí Villanueva, Huw Price, Andrés Soria and Isidora Stojanovic, and José Zalabardo[12]. In what follows you will find a brief summary of their contributions.

In her paper 'Neo-Expressivism: (Self-)Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth', Dorit Bar-On offers a proposal aimed at accounting for both the semantic similarities and the pragmatic dissimilarities between expressive and non-expressive claims and acts. The semantic similarities explain mixed arguments in which expressive and non-expressive uses of sentences occur together. The pragmatic dissimilarities explain how expressive claims are motivational in a way that descriptive claims are not. Here Bar-On maintains the distinction between what a particular utterance a-expresses and what the sentence used to make that claim expresses, as found in the semantics she proposed with Matthew Chrisman in 2011[13]. Neither here nor in 2011 does she work out this semantic proposal in any detail. However, she hints that it might well be disquotational, and she seems to be happy with a conservative, compositional semantics for ethical claims. Her expressivism is a kind of pragmatism, concerned with understanding what we do with ethical claims, as opposed as what ethical sentences and terms mean. Concerning the kind of act in question, first-person avowals and ethical claims behave much like non-verbal acts, thus letting neo-expressivism inherit some classical emotivist insights. Nevertheless, neo-expressivism also acknowledges an independent semantic layer, in which the declarative sentence used to make the avowal possesses propositional content that consists in ascribing to the speaker the mental state thus avowed. The point at which neo-expressivism departs from other kinds of expressivism is when it denies

[12] I am deeply grateful to all of them for their participation in the workshop that gave rise to this volume, as well as for their contributions to it.

[13] Dorit Bar-On and Matthew Chrisman, 'Ethical Neo-Expressivism', in R. Shafer-Landau, (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, volume 4, Oxford University Press, 2011, 132–165.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246119000055 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that the expressive act accounts for the semantics of ethical and first-person sentences.

In her paper 'Logical Expressivism and Carroll's Regress', Corine Besson offers a battery of arguments against a specific brand of logical expressivism, i.e. one that understands logical discourse, and the mental states expressed by logical sentences, along the lines of classical ethical expressivism. Classical meta-ethics assumes the Humean framework that draws a divide between cognitive and non-cognitive states, as well as adopting the subsequent intuition that ethical claims possess essentially motivational force. There is at least some kind of practical incoherence, it is assumed, in accepting an ethical principle without acting in accordance with it. In the logical debate, such a connection between ethical claims and action finds its analogue in the 'logic moves the mind' view, i.e. the view that one cannot accept the premises of a valid argument without thereby accepting the conclusion. This non-cognitivist view has been explicitly or implicitly adopted by Simon Blackburn, Paul Boghosian, Hartry Field, Gilbert Ryle, and Crispin Wright, among others. Besson argues for her cognitivist position in two steps: a negative step in which she analyses Carroll's Regress argument, and a positive step in which she explains what the role of logical principles is. Her main negative argument establishes that even if logical principles are not premises in our reasoning, as Carroll's regress argument shows, this does not imply that they express non-cognitive states. On the positive side, her paper provides a defence of logical cognitivism. Logical principles are propositions which can be known. Knowledge of logical propositions enables us to accomplish our goals, and it is this enabling role, as opposed to the motivational role attributed to them by logical motivational internalism, that characterizes logical principles.

In 'What is a Theory of Normative Concepts for?', Matthew Chrisman reviews the proposal developed in his recent book, *The Meaning of 'Ought'*,[14] and contrasts it with a similar analysis of normative terms put forward by Millgram.[15] Millgram's and Chrisman's projects have in common that they treat the ought-concept as a quantifier, although they disagree about what kind of quantifier it is, and about its quantificational range. Millgram understands the role of 'ought' as that of an existential quantifier ranging over the set of

[14] Matthew Chrisman, *The Meaning of 'Ought'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[15] Elijah Millgram, *The Great Endarkenment: Philosophy for an Age of Hyperspecialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

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arguments for doing something, whereas Chrisman assimilates 'ought' with a general quantifier ranging over possibilities. The two projects that have exhausted the analysis of ethical terms in meta-ethics are, according to Chrisman, the project of explaining what ethical and normative thought is about, i.e. attempting to account for the nature and the source of normativity, and the project of determining the meaning of ethical terms. His proposal moves on from this classical approach to normativity, and pursues a more original and promising approach: that of explaining what distinguishes normative from non-normative concepts, and the distinctive role of normative concepts in reasoning. Nevertheless, Chrisman doesn't reject the two classical projects in twentieth-century meta-ethics, which he still thinks are worthwhile. Even if his proposal implies some account of concepts, his argument mainly focuses on the semantics of 'ought' and 'ought'-sentences. His proposal is compatible with some modifications of representational and expressivist semantics for normative claims, even though he argues that none of these traditional approaches is preferable to an inferentialist account of modal discourse. His proposal is not explicitly expressivist, but is semantically pluralist and partially non-representationalist. It is a term-focused variety of non-representationalism which maintains that 'ought' is not a referential term but rather a quantifier-like expression whose meaning discloses inferential connections between normative contents.

María J. Frápolli's contribution, 'Propositions First: Biting Geach's Bullet', is a defence of the non-representational, basic and immediate intuition—the 'organic intuition'—that she detects in all arguments for and against expressivism. The organic intuition tells us that to be a proposition is to possess propositional properties. It is this intuition which makes Geach's criticism of ascriptivism so convincing. Nevertheless, the intuition is neutral with respect to the debate between representationalism and non-representationalism. Frápolli locates it at the level of a meta-theory of propositions, untouched by particular partisan semantic and metaphysical debates. Part of the success of the so-called 'Frege-Geach Argument' derives from a misplaces support to the organic intuition and is due to a sort of justificatory metonymy. The organic intuition does not offer a circular identification of propositions insofar as propositional properties are independently identified. This paper does not challenge the standard characterization of propositions, which are the bearers of truth, the items that stand in inferential relations, and the arguments of propositional-attitude verbs. The paper also offers a logico-semantic analysis of the two argument-patterns that

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Geach uses in his seminal criticism: the 'is true' argument and the 'is bad' argument, and shows that these two patterns differ with respect to the non-representationalist explanatory options open to them.

Huw Price's 'Global Expressivism by the Method of Differences' demarcates and defends a kind of global expressivism (GE) by contrasting it with five close proposals in the vicinity of pragmatism and expressivism. Global expressivism is a general approach to the use of language, but it does not develop any particular semantics. In fact, as happens with Bar-On's neo-expressivism, Price combines his global expressivism with a non-committal disquotational approach which does not assume that the use of language defines or implies any specific semantic development. As Price says in his discussion of response-dependent realism (section 5), the 'right place of pragmatic factors was in use conditions not truth or content conditions'. Aside from its global nature, GE is distinguished by Price's insistence on placing philosophical analysis at the metalinguistic level, as opposed to the metaphysical level. The five positions against which Price contrasts his proposal are what he calls the Canberra Plan, Moorean non-naturalism, what Sarah McGrath calls 'relaxed realism'[16], local expressivism and response-dependent realism. GE differs from local versions of pragmatism in its global nature, which implies a rejection of the bifurcation thesis, and an assumption that the semantic and pragmatic reasons one has for defending expressivism with respect to a particular area of discourse also apply to the rest of language. A related discrepancy with local expressivism is seen in the kind of naturalism that most local expressivists support in the realm of non-expressivist discourse. Price is not an object naturalist. He rejects semantic representationalism and any substantive kind of metaphysical realism. He is a non-naturalist in a Moorean sense, i.e. in the sense that moral properties are not natural properties, and a subject naturalist in a Humean sense. Like Hume's naturalism, Prices's naturalism relies on our condition as natural creatures who use language as a basis for our natural behaviour. At the end of his paper, Price exhibits some connections that his global expressivism has with other two general expressivist views: *Pittsburgh Pragmatism*, represented by Sellars and Brandom, and *Cambridge Pragmatism*, which he ascribes to Ramsey, Wittgenstein and Blackburn, as well as to Mellor, Anscombe, Craig, von Wright and Bernard Williams.

Soria and Stojanovic's paper, 'On Linguistic Evidence for Expressivism', provides a battery of criteria for distinguishing

[16] Sarah McGrath, 'Relax? Don't Do It! Why Moral Realism Won't Come Cheap', *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, volume 9 (2014), 186–214.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246119000055 Published online by Cambridge University Press

expressive from factual uses of adjectives. They defend their position on 'linguistic grounds', as they explicitly claim. This is a pragmatic approach, focused on uses of terms and not on their standard linguistic meanings. The authors assume a kind of term-focused expressivism, which implies a semantic pluralism. Opposing Schroeder, who states that 'there is no linguistic evidence whatsoever' that moral and descriptive terms function differently from a grammatical viewpoint, Soria and Stojanovic offer four criteria that show that expressive and descriptive uses can be discriminated from a strictly linguistic perspective. The first criterion develops a widely emphasized feature of expressive terms: their motivational character. Descriptive terms neither presuppose nor imply any particular course of action by the speaker. Thus, there is no linguistic oddity in asserting that eating meat is unpopular and asserting, at the same time, one's willingness to eat meat. By contrast, if one says that eating meat is wrong, one's audience will expect some kind of practical behaviour along the lines of avoiding abusive meat consumption. For this reason,

(1) *I think that eating meat is unpopular, *although* my consumption of meat is above average.

sounds odd, whereas

(2) I think that eating meat is wrong, *although* my consumption of meat is above average.

is perfectly fine. The reason for this is that 'although' indicates some kind of contrast between the meanings of the two clauses. (1) sounds unnatural because it is not obvious what this contrast would consist in. In (2), on the other hand, the contrast is clearly identifiable due to the motivational sort of meaning associated with the predicate 'is wrong'.

The background of the second criterion is epistemic. The authors exploit the fact that terms with expressive meaning do not require epistemic justification for their application. Besides—and this is a further criterion—one cannot be accused of lying when using an expressive term. A claim such as

(3) The film was awful.

(assuming the speaker just saw the film in question) cannot be challenged by asking: 'How do you know?'. A final criterion concerns the kind of disagreement the use of expressive and descriptive terms gives rise to. Soria and Stojanovic's paper advances the cause of expressivism by showing that the distinction between factual and expressive uses of language is linguistically motivated.

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Introduction

In their paper, 'Crossed Disagreements and Expressivism', Javier Osorio and Neftalí Villanueva explore the connection between expressivism and disagreement. More specifically, they argue that one of the desiderata that can be derived from the study of disagreement—the existence of 'crossed disagreements'—can only be accommodated within a semantic theory that respects, at the meta-semantic level, certain expressivist restrictions. To argue for their point, they compare contemporary dynamic expressivism with three different varieties of contextualist strategies for accommodating the specificities of evaluative language: indexical contextualism (truth-conditional pragmatics), pragmatic strategies using implicatures, and presuppositional accounts. They conclude that certain expressivist assumptions are needed for any semantic account of evaluative uses of language that allows us to detect and prevent crossed disagreements.

In 'The Primacy of Practice', Jose Zalabardo defends a pragmatic characterization of how we can distinguish representational expressions (and their contents) from non-representational expressions. Representational predicates depict objects as being a certain way. By applying them we attribute representational properties to an object and assume that it satisfies the predicate. If this is so, we say that the sentence with which we apply the predicate to the object is true. Zalabardo's paper involves a deeply pragmatist approach. It begins with Wittgenstein's metaphor of the toolbox: a powerful image and the paradigm of semantic and pragmatic pluralism. Some expressions, terms and phrases are in the business of representing how things are, while others are not. Zalabardo offers an account of what it is for a predicate to represent, and develops this into an account of the central semantic predicate 'represents' and the semantic relation of reference. The representational status of predicates is determined by pragmatic procedures. Knowledge of the reference of these predicates is explained in pragmatic terms, related to the practices by means of which we decide whether they apply to objects, and how we use them in our wider practices. If Zalabardo has an expressivist position about some range of predicates, this is not explicit in his paper. Nevertheless his pluralism and pragmatism suggest that his approach closely resembles a local and social kind of expressivism.

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