

Reply to Skorupski

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In his recent paper “The Frege--Geach objection to expressivism: still unanswered” (2012), John Skorupski accuses Mark Schroeder's partial defense of expressivism in his *Being For* (2008) of failing and of failing for similar reasons to earlier expressivist accounts. Skorupski's objections are misplaced. His main claim is that Schroeder hasn't given an account of the action of the logical connectives on normative sentences which successfully distinguishes between sentences such as:

(4) It's not the case that you should take a taxi

(5) You should not take a taxi

when 'You should take a taxi.' is taken to be the normative sentence corresponding to the attitude of being for taking a taxi. And, indeed, as Skorupski claims (11), Schroeder doesn't give an account of which normative sentence expresses attitudes such as *being for* taking a taxi.

There's a good reason for this: Schroeder's account requires that we find a mapping * from atomic normative sentences to attitudes such that for every (atomic) normative sentence Φ of, say, ordinary English moral discourse, $*(\Phi)$ is an attitude of being for some action described by a gerundival phrase β . In Schroeder's preferred case, we send a normative sentence (presumably atomic) like 'Murdering is wrong.' to the attitude *being for* blaming for murdering. There is no requirement that there be a mapping such that every attitude of *being for* some action described by some gerundival phrase β is described by some atomic normative sentence of English. We could perhaps object to Schroeder's account by finding some fault with his preferred mapping or by claiming that such mappings are ad

hoc, but neither is Skorupski's claim.¹

Rather, Skorupski seems to believe that Schroeder needs to give us normative sentences corresponding to attitudes like *being for* kissing:

For by the commitments of Schroeder's own semantics there will have to be some other, structurally simple, normative sentences that play the role of 'A', 'B', etc. These will be the 'atomic' normative sentences on which the sentential connectives operate, and which simply or primitively express being for some attitude or action: FOR(α), FOR (β), and so on.

(Skorupski 12)

That is, he seems to think that Schroeder is obliged to generate for every action β some simple normative sentence which expresses the state of being for β . But why would this be true? Nothing about Schroeder's discussion, nor anything about the expressivist project itself requires that there be such normative sentences.² Skorupski doesn't give us a reason other than that expressions like 'A' and 'B' are called 'atomic' in Schroeder's discussion and that Schroeder doesn't tell us how they should be interpreted.³ Perhaps Skorupski was misled by the use of 'atomic' and by Schroeder's use of simple examples of attitudes like *being for* kissing in discussing his recursive definition of the action of the connectives. If we take this to mean that the atomic normative sentences cannot contain any connectives, then Skorupski's claim would be well-taken. However, it's clear that Schroeder intends that the gerundival expressions figuring within can be negated, conjoined, disjoined, etc. and that complex gerundival expressions can figure into atomic normative sentences.⁴ Schroeder would

1 Schroeder intends the use of 'blaming for' to be a placeholder for a more sophisticated and plausible account. The first objection would thus have to proceed by claiming that no such action as 'blaming for' could do the work Schroeder needs.

2 Schroeder explicitly claims that it's implausible that such a mapping exists. (Schroeder 63)

3 Schroeder doesn't tell us explicitly, anyways. His examples of translating sentences involving 'is wrong' and his discussion of gerundival phrases gives a clear enough sense of how he intends these to be taken.

4 Schroeder's use of 'gerundival connectives' on pg. 63 of *Being For* is clear evidence of this as is his later discussion of the logical relations between gerundival expressions on pg. 73.

otherwise have no way of getting from 'Not murdering is wrong' to what he says is expressed thereby: *being for* blaming for not murdering. (Schroeder 73) Even if Schroeder is less than fully explicit about this, a charitable reading of his semantics would yield that this is obviously what is intended.

We *can* accommodate the difference between sentences such as (4) and (5) in terms of some notion like 'blaming for' which is tied to 'should' the way the placeholder attitude of 'blaming for' is tied to 'is wrong'. Let's introduce such a notion. Let 'recommending that' stand to the (non-moral) 'should' the way 'blaming for' stands to 'is wrong'. We can then expand a mapping like * so as to accommodate atomic normative sentences like 'You should take a taxi'. Let $*(x \text{ should } \beta) = \textit{being for}$ recommending that $x \beta$. Then, for inner negations such as that in 'You should not β ', we get that $*(x \text{ should not } \beta) = \textit{being for}$ recommending that $x \text{ not } \beta$. Then we can see the difference between (4) and (5) on Schroeder's account as (4) expresses:

(4') *being for* not recommending that you take a taxi

whereas (5) expresses:

(5') *being for* recommending that you not take a taxi

Applying this procedure to every one of Skorupski's examples of normative sentences that Schroeder purportedly can't distinguish yields a distinction in the attitude expressed. As a final example, consider Skorupski's two disjunctive sentences which should be distinguished:

(10) You should do α or you should do β

(11) You should do α or β

Applying our map * above and Schroeder's recursive definition yields:

(10') *being for* recommending that you do α or recommending that you do β

(11') *being for* recommending that you do α or β .

which are clearly distinct.

References:

Skorupski, J. 2012. The Frege--Geach objection to expressivism: still unanswered. *Analysis* 72: 9-18

Schroeder, M. 2008. *Being For, Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.