

# Ridge's *Impassioned Belief*

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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 solely in an attempt to deal with disagreement and the Frege-Geach problem. But normative language is an extremely rich and fertile bit of our day-to-day discourse, one which expressivists (hybrid or otherwise) have told us rather little about. Michael Ridge's *Impassioned Belief* goes a long way towards overcoming this myopia, developing a richly detailed form of hybrid expressivism. In merely 248 pages, he gives expressivist semantics for 'ought', 'wrong', 'good', 'bad', and 'reason'; a defense 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 of he situates his view among a large class of alternatives, offering many choices of how to develop his view if we disagree on this or that point. 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 view is that expressivism is best articulated as a view in *metasemantics*. That is, as an account of how normative language gets the meaning that 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 the 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, which 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 condi-

tion 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’ as well as positive commitments to perform actions which every acceptable standard requires, to aspire to perform those acceptable standards endorse, and a defeasible commitment to encouraging others to be do so as well. Normative perspectives fix the content of ‘acceptable’ as it occurs in the belief-component of a normative judgment—to judge that something is forbidden is, in part, to believe that any standard I have no policy against accepting will require me to avoid doing it. The relative stability of policies is typically maintained by our affective reactions, though 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 all the properties he convincingly argues for early on. They are action-guiding (as they are partially constituted by intentions to avoid deliberating in various ways), affect-involving (at least in typical human beings), and potentially acrimonious (since fundamental normative disagreement is entirely possible without conceptual or empirical error). Moreover, they allow an elegant solution to the Frege-Geach. Logical operators only modify the belief component of the normative judgment. Judging that something is not good is, in part, to believe that any standard I have no policy against accepting will not rank it highly (as an end). To judge that it is not the case that something is good is, in part, to believe that it is not the case that any standard I have no policy against accepting will require me to rank it highly. And so on in the obvious way.

Validity is defined as follows: a set of beliefs  $\Gamma$  entails a belief  $\phi$  when any possible believer, under any acceptable uniform reinterpretation of the non-logical components of the beliefs, would thereby be guaranteed to have inconsistent beliefs by holding all the former and the negation of the latter. Given his later treatment of truth as a normative notion, Ridge cannot define inconsistency of belief in terms of truth, but we can spot him something along the lines of “cannot co-represent reality” or somesuch. The resulting consequence relation is extensionally adequate at least over a substantial fragment of ordinary discourse. Ridge sketches how to accommodate intensional contexts, but other fancy constructions will take further work. (Carr Forthcoming) raises some issues having to do with the proper treatment of conditionals; (Ridge Forthcoming) addresses these and sketches possible ways forward. The emphasis on formality is a very welcome step and one I think long overdue. However, as I have argued elsewhere, many putative difficulties in giving a *pure* expressivist account of validity, such as the so-called negation problem, disappear once we note that validity is formal (Baker and Woods, forthcoming). The conclusion

that *ecumenical* expressivism has an obvious advantage over pure expressivism in this regard is thus a bit hasty.

Ridge proceeds to show us how to account for a number of other desiderata for any expressivist account. 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 goes on to show that ecumenical expressivists can use any old account of truth they like, freeing expressivists from their deflationary shackles. All in all, it is an attractive package. And like all such packages, its adequacy will be seen in terms of its overall ability to account for normative discourse without undue commitment to theoretical extravagances.

It pinches here and there; it hardly seems partially constitutive of a normative perspective that we have even a defeasible propensity to getting others to conform to our standards, for example. To be fair, Ridge hedges this commitment to cases where we are being *candid* and speaking with a child-like spontaneity. I don't think this entirely alleviates the problem. If my assertion that 'monogamy is bad' expresses a state which 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 (for his preferred version of ecumenical expressivism) are idiosyncratic—Soames's picture of propositions as cognitive event types is more plausible than the Bratmanian view that our identity is constituted by bundles of planning states, but both strike me as undesirable. Ridge does show us how to weave between various packages of commitments if we dislike this or that choice, and more in this vein can presumably be done, so there may be a slightly better fitting version after we cost out various commitments.

But, even then, will it be more plausible than what Ridge calls *ecumenical cognitivism*? In its most plausible guise, this is the view that normative assertions conversationally implicate, in some sense, possession of desire-like states. Two of Ridge's arguments have to do with particular relativist versions of this view, so I will bracket them. The most original argument against ecumenical cognitivism amounts to the claim that our normative *judgments*, not merely our 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 we learn to judge something good, right, and so on. Of course, when I learn that someone merely *thinks* that charity is good, it does not significantly increase my credence that they are inclined to give to charity. On the other hand, when they *assert* bluntly that giving to charity is good and I learn they feel no inclination to donate, I feel misled. This sort of data suggests that normative assertion strongly indi-

cate a speaker possesses the relevant practical states, a feature the pragmatic account easily delivers. This account also plausibly delivers the result that our normative assertions are action-guiding and affect-involving and it may very well deliver enough of the same for normative judgment.

Ecumenical cognitivism does lose the easy explanation of the capacity-based form of judgment internalism Ridge argues for—roughly, that normative judgments must be able to motivate without an independently existing desire to do what we ought. Since ecumenical expressivism claims 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 to do so.

as indicative of linguistic, not mere rational, incompetence. On the face of it, if this assertion directly commits us to planning to do what we think must, then denying we possess the relevant sort of normative standpoint should jar. Ridge attempts to alleviate this problem by arguing that the more plausible claim

Insofar as we are not motivated by our (wholehearted, etc) normative judgments we are not (perfectly) rational

entails his capacity-based internalism. Roughly, the idea is that attributions of irrationality are punitive and punishment is not warranted unless we could have done otherwise. So normative judgments must be capable of motivating independently of our desires. So, we are stuck with this cost anyways. 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 we) ought is exactly that, in spite of an 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—roughly a capacity to set and pursue ends—and in a success sense, the success sense being well-exercising those abilities which constitute the grounds for calling something rational in the capacity sense. On this account, rationality judgments are not essentially normative. But noting that calling Gibbard’s perfectly coherent anorexic irrational seems prescriptive, Ridge allows that we ought to treat some uses of ‘irrational’ as criticizing a disposition to do the obviously wrong thing. But we might—I reckon we should—think that is exactly what is going on in the case of someone who is not motivated by their normative judgments *in virtue of lacking the appropriate desire to do what they think they must*. But this type of irrationality does not plausibly require the ability 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, in itself, a stunning achievement. And many lessons of the book, as Ridge notes, are independent from his favored development of them. The chapters on the Frege-Geach, disagreement, and rationality are especially excellent in this regard, developing theoretical tools useful for a wide variety of expressivist and non-expressivist 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.

### Works Cited

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