The Truth in Ecumenical Expressivism[1]

Early expressivists, such as A.J. Ayer, argued that normative utterances are not truth-apt, and many found this striking claim implausible. After all, ordinary speakers are perfectly happy to ascribe truth and falsity to normative assertions. It is hard to believe that competent speakers could be so wrong about the meanings of their own language, particularly as these meanings are fixed by the conventions implicit in their own linguistic behavior. Later expressivists therefore tried to arrange a marriage between expressivism and the truth-aptness of normative discourse. Like many arranged marriages, this has not been an entirely happy one. In particular, the marriage has seemed to depend on so-called deflationist theories of truth, and these may well turn out to provide at best a shaky foundation for any marriage. Before advising the parties to file for divorce, though, we should first see whether expressivism itself has not been misunderstood. I argue that the marriage of expressivism to the truth-aptness of normative discourse can indeed be saved, though only in the context of a version of expressivism I call "Ecumenical Expressivism."

I. Expressivism and Deflationist Truth: Hostages to Fortune.

A guiding idea behind expressivism is that the meaning of normative predicates should be understood in terms of the way in which they are conventionally used to express pro-attitudes. This idea finds its most natural home in a broadly Lockean philosophy of language. Locke famously argued that the meanings of words in natural languages should be understood in terms of how they are used to express states of mind (see Locke

1975). Locke himself focused on the ways in which language allows us to express ideas.

However, there is no reason in principle to restrict the Lockean approach to ideas as

opposed to other states of mind, including non-cognitive states. A useful foil is found in

the Sellarsian tradition. Lockeans explain the meanings of words and sentences in terms

of the states of mind they are conventionally used to express. Very roughly, Sellarsians

take the opposite approach, and explain the contents of our states of mind in terms of

commitments to affirm or deny corresponding sentences (see, e.g., Brandom 1994).

The Lockean approach has in modern times been considerably refined. For a

modern and extensively worked out rendition of a broadly Lockean approach, see Davies

2003. The work of philosophers like H.P. Grice is also germane here (see Grice 1968).

Grice helpfully distinguishes speaker meaning from sentence meaning, a distinction

which is perhaps best introduced through examples. I might use the sentence 'Well, that

donut was delicious' ironically to mean that the donut in question was disgusting.   While

I mean that the donut was disgusting, my sentence nonetheless literally means that it was

delicious. Indeed, it is only because of the sentence's literal meaning that I am able to

use it ironically to convey the opposite. Speaker meaning depends on the particular

intentions of a given speaker, whereas sentence meaning depends in the first instance on

background conventions.

Within this framework, the expressivist argues (very roughly) that normative

utterances conventionally function primarily to express suitable desire-like states of

mind.[2] Whereas ordinary factual assertions conventionally function to express beliefs

about what the world is like rather than to express desire-like states. Here it is important

to emphasize the distinction between expressing a desire and reporting that one has it. I can report that I approve of the Mets simply by asserting that I do – for example, by saying, "I approve of the Mets." In doing so I directly express my *belief* that I approve of the Mets, thereby reporting my approval of them. By contrast, I can directly express my approval of the Mets with a suitable interjection – for example, by saying, "Hooray for the Mets!" In both cases I indicate my approval of the Mets, but in the former case I do this by expressing a belief about my approval of them.

Early expressivists like A.J. Ayer took the analogy with interjections seriously. They argued that because normative utterances express (and do not report) attitudes, and moreover do not report anything, that they are simply not apt for truth or falsity. Although ordinary folks do without hesitation use the language of truth and falsity in normative contexts, this is all a big mistake, or so Ayer argued. This is a lot to swallow, and Ayer's own argument relied on an extremely controversial and implausible verificationist theory of meaning that few philosophers today would take seriously. Moreover, many critics of these early forms of expressivism have quite reasonably found it incredible that ordinary speakers could be so deeply confused about their own everyday discourse.

Later expressivists have tried to preserve the core insights of expressivism while accommodating the idea that normative utterances might, after all, be truth-apt. Simon Blackburn is perhaps the most famous exponent of this approach (see Blackburn1984, Blackburn 1993 and Blackburn 1998). Blackburn's idea is to "earn the right" to the realist-sounding things ordinary folks say within an expressivist framework. Blackburn calls his approach "quasi-realism" to mark the fact that it allows us to mimic realist

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[2] I provide a more detailed discussion of exactly how we should define expressivism in section two below.

discourse within what is, at some level of abstraction, an anti-realist position. Allan Gibbard takes a similar approach, and sometimes characterizes himself as a sort of quasi-realist (Gibbard 2003: 181).

In his early attempts to marry expressivism to the truth-aptness of normative discourse, Blackburn flirted with a coherence theory of truth, albeit a non-reductionist one (Blackburn 1984: 256-7). However, coherence theories seem to make unintelligible the very idea that the best development of our current stock of beliefs, as informed by future experiences, could be false. Since this idea does seem intelligible, it would be unfortunate if the only form of truth with which expressivism could find domestic bliss was coherentist truth. Blackburn has more recently moved to what I shall call a deflationist conception of truth.[3] More accurately, Blackburn wavers between holding that deflationism is all there is to say about truth and the view that deflationism is at any rate all there is to truth about moral (and, more generally, I suspect, normative) claims.

The basic inspiration for deflationist accounts of truth stems in part from the deep problems facing more robust theories of truth, perhaps most notably, so-called "correspondence theories." In light of the apparently grave difficulties facing more robust conceptions of truth (a summary of which would go well beyond the present scope), the deflationist begins with the hypothesis that saying (or thinking) p is true is really no different from saying (or thinking) that p. Deflationism is suggested by some of Wittgenstein's remarks, though Wittgenstein himself would probably not have found it useful to develop a philosophical theory of truth. For an early defense of deflationism as

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[3] Blackburn and Gibbard instead refer to this view of truth as 'minimalist', but other philosophers (most notably Crispin Wright and those influenced by his work; see Wright 1992) use 'minimalism' and its cognates to refer to a slightly more robust view of truth. Since 'deflationism' and its cognates is, by contrast, pretty unequivocally used to denote a very slender notion of truth, I perfer that terminology.

a philosophical theory, we should instead turn to F.P. Ramsey (see Ramsey 1978). More recently, the idea has been developed in some detail by Paul Horwich. Horwich maintains that there is nothing more to understanding the truth predicate than there is to understanding the equivalence schema, "It is true that p if and only if p." (Horwich 1990: 7) This schema is taken from the important work of Alfred Tarski on truth in formal languages, and is usually referred to as the "T schema." (see Tarski 1958)

It is easy to see how deflationism might seem like a powerful tool for quasi-realists like Blackburn and Gibbard. For suppose there really is nothing more to saying that it is true that charity is good than there is to saying that charity is good. This suggests that the expressivist can indeed allow that normative utterances are truth-apt. The point will simply be that in saying that it is true that charity is good one is expressing one's attitude in favour of charity in just the same one that one does when one says that charity is good.

However, deflationism is itself hardly a platitude. For a start, some technical results suggest that contemporary forms of deflationism are incompatible with Godel's incompleteness results. The worry was developed independently by Jeff Ketland and Stewart Shapiro (see Ketland 1999 and Shapiro 1998).[4] The details of these results would, unfortunately, take us too far afield here. Suffice it to say that it is not at all obvious how deflationism can avoid the force of this critique.

A second, and less technical, worry about deflationism is that, on at least some construals, it seems to require understanding of all instances of the T-schema in order to count as grasping the concept of truth (see Gupta 2005a). If this really does follow from deflationism, it would indeed be worrying. For instances of the T-schema can range over

all sorts of exotic concepts, ranging from the concept of a quark to the concept of a snail. Clearly, a speaker does not have to have mastery of all possible concepts over which the truth predicate can range (that is, all possible concepts!) in order to grasp the concept of truth. For an interesting deflationist reply to this objection, see Hill 2002; Gupta replies to Hill in Gupta 2005b. Again, this is not the place to delve into the interesting details of this debate.

A third worry about deflationism is that it is incompatible with the platitude that a sentence's meaning plus the relevant worldly fact(s) suffice to fix the sentence's truth-value. This worry is developed in co-authored work by Dorit Bar-On, Clair Hoirsk, and William G. Lycan (see Bar-On, Hoirsk, and Lycan 2005a and Bar-On, Hoirsk, and Lycan 2005b). More precisely, the worry is that if (as many of its defenders claim), deflationism is incompatible with the appeal to truth conditions in the theory of meaning, then deflationism cannot be squared with this apparent platitude about how truth-values are fixed. In fact, deflationists may actually be able to avoid this commitment, but this too is not obvious. Again, I cannot delve into the interesting details of the debate (though Bar-On, Hoirsk and Lycan do in their Postscript).

Perhaps each of these three worries (as well as others I have not mentioned here) about deflationism can be dealt with adequately. Indeed, in spite of these worries, I remain cautiously optimistic about the tenability of deflationism. However, it would be a shame if the fortunes of expressivism had to be so closely tied to the fortunes of deflationism. After all, the motivations for expressivism are not particularly closely tied to debates in the philosophy of mathematics that drive the Ketland/Shapiro objection to deflationism. It would therefore be disappointing for those sympathetic to expressivism

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[4] For further clarification, see discussion at http://www.homepages.ed.ac.uk/jketland/corrigendum.html.

if the tenability of expressivism turned out to rely, in the end, on such seemingly philosophically distant considerations. We should see whether we can insulate expressivism from the debate over deflationism while still arranging a suitable marriage between expressivism and the truth-aptness of normative discourse. In the rest of this paper, I try to do just this. If successful, the account provided here provides expressivists with insurance against the refutation of deflationism. First, though, I must introduce the version of expressivism I want to defend: "Ecumenical Expressivism."[5]

II.   Introducing Ecumenical Expressivism.

So far, I have deliberately left my characterization of expressivism vague. In this section, I want to suggest a slightly unorthodox way of understanding the debate between expressivists and cognitivists. This new framework turns out to provide a new strategy for saving the apparently fragile marriage of expressivism to the truth-aptness of normative discourse; I develop this strategy in sections III and IV.

Much of the debate between cognitivists and expressivists stems from the rather Janus-faced character of normative judgment.[6] In some respects, normative judgments seem like ordinary beliefs. We call them 'beliefs', as when we say things like, "Britney believes that she ought to spend more time at the tanning salon." Most pertinently for present purposes, we do not hesitate to classify them as true or false. In other respects, normative judgments seem more like desires. Normative judgement is practical; it reliably guides action. Changes in normative view reliably track changes in motivation. We tend to question the sincerity of someone who claims that she really ought to do something but shows no signs whatsoever of being motivated to do it, feel bad about not

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[5] I have developed this view in more detail in Ridge 2006a and Ridge forthcoming.
[6] In the next few paragraphs, I draw heavily on Ridge forthcoming.

doing it, etc. Failure to act on one's all things considered normative judgement is irrational.[7] This contrasts with acting contrary to what one believes is required by merely conventional norms like those of etiquette.

These competing characteristics of normative judgments have led to the formation of two diametrically opposed philosophical camps – the cognitivists and the expressivists. Cognitivism is traditionally defined as the doctrine that normative utterances express beliefs rather than desires. Expressivism, by contrast, is traditionally defined as the doctrine that normative utterances express desires rather than beliefs.[8] Unfortunately, the terms of this debate mask the following logical space:

The Ecumenical View: Normative utterances express *both* beliefs and desires.

On the traditional way of carving up the metaethical territory, the Ecumenical View seems to imply that neither expressivism or cognitivism is correct. In that case, one of the central metaethical debates of the past century has been a tempest in a teapot. This might be a welcome conclusion to those weary of apparently interminable debates about those doctrines. However, the issues at stake in that debate remain live ones even if the Ecumenical View is correct. We can usefully redraw the terms of that debate within an ecumenical framework as follows:

Cognitivism: For any normative sentence M, M is conventionally used to express a belief such that M is true if and only if the belief is true.

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[7] This is not uncontroversial, but this is not the place to discuss the controversy. For a contrasting view, see Arpaly 2000.

[8] For example, David Brink characterizes the expressivist as holding the view that, "moral judgments must express the appraiser's non-cognitive attitudes, *rather than her beliefs*" (Brink 1997: 9, emphasis added) while "cognitivists interpret moral judgments as expressing cognitive attitudes, such as belief, *rather than non-cognitive attitudes*, such as desire." (Brink 1997: 5, emphasis added) Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit characterize expressivism as holding that moral utterances express desires rather than beliefs (Jackson and Pettit 1998). Although these views are often formulated as views about moral judgment in particular, it is clear that they are very often taken to be plausible views about normative judgment more generally.

Expressivism: For any normative sentence M, M is not conventionally used to express a belief such that M is true if and only if the belief is true.

The distinction is exclusive but not exhaustive. There is logical space for hybrid views according to which some but not all normative utterances express beliefs which provide their truth conditions.[9] For present purposes I put such views to one side. Also, expressivism as characterized here does not include the positive thesis that normative utterances function to express proattitudes. I have not included this in my definition of expressivism simply because I want to emphasize the ecumenical idea that this thesis can be common ground between expressivists and cognitivists. For it should be clear enough that, characterized in these terms, there can be both cognitivist and expressivist versions of the Ecumenical View. The Ecumenical Cognitivist and the Ecumenical Expressivist agree that normative utterances express both beliefs and desires. They disagree about the connection between the truth of the belief expressed and the truth of the sentence.

Here there is a divide between expressivists like Ayer and more quasi-realist expressivists like Blackburn and Gibbard. The former will claim that normative utterances are not truth-apt and so trivially do not inherit the truth-conditions of any belief they express. Quasi-realists, though, want to insist that normative utterances *are* truth-apt. The difficult question then becomes how to maintain that normative utterances conventionally function to express beliefs, are truth-apt (contra Ayer) and yet do not automatically inherit the truth-conditions of the belief they express as ordinary assertions seem to do. Before we can usefully explore this question, though, we must first develop Ecumenical Expressivism in just a little more detail.

On the version of Ecumenical Expressivism I favor, normative utterances express:

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[9] Paul Edwards and David Wiggins have defended such views. See especially Edwards 1955.

1. A suitable state of approval to actions insofar as they would garner the approval of a certain sort of advsior.

And

2. A belief which makes suitable anaphoric reference back to that advsior.

The basic idea is best illustrated through examples. Suppose I am a utilitarian. In that case, my claim that charity is right expresses my perfectly general attitude of approval to actions insofar as they would garner the approval of a certain sort of advsior, which in this case is an advsior who approves of actions just insofar as they promote happiness. My claim *also* expresses a belief which makes anaphoric reference back to that advsior (the one which figures in the content of the attitude I expressed). In this case, the belief is that such an advsior would approve of charity.

The example of a utilitarian is purely illustrative. The account here is compatible with most speakers only having an inchoate conception of the sort of advsior of whom they approve. Most ordinary speakers do not have worked our normative theories, and our metanormative theory must accommodate this. Fortunately one's approval of an evenly inchoately conceived sort of advsior can be expressed, and one can have some idea of at least some of her properties. I could be sure that the sort of advsior of whom I approve would condemn torture but approve of charity, e.g., without having a fixed conception of her overall nature (whether she is a utilitarian, a Kantian, or something else altogether).

Elsewhere, I have argued that Ecumenical Expressivism so understood offers the expressivist new resources with which to deal with the notorious 'Frege-Geach' puzzle, the possibility and irrationality of akrasia, and the otherwise vexing challenge to provide

an expressivist account of the distinction between what Michael Smith has called certitude, robustness and importance.[10] I have also argued that the Ideal Advsior element of the account also helps provide a plausible account of pluralism about reasons and incommensurability as well as a plausible account of the distinction between supererogation and deontic necessity (e.g. moral duty).[11] However, I do not have space here to rehearse these arguments here.

III.

As we saw in section I, existing attempts to marry expressivism to truth-aptness depend on a deflationist understanding of truth. In section I, I have explained how reliance on a deflationist theory of truth gives hostages to fortune. It is worth seeing whether Ecumenical Expressivism offers a more promising path to marital bliss for expressivism and truth-aptness for normative discourse. In section IV, I argue that it does. The key idea is to remain neutral on the correct (non-deflationist) theory of truth, but instead give a novel account of how the truth-bearers for normative utterances are fixed. It turns out that Ecumenical Expressivism provides some handy tools with which to do this. First, however, we need to back up and get a better picture of the logical space the proposed theory will occupy, which is the main topic of the present section. This is actually a rather delicate matter. In order to hone in on the logical space I have in mind, we first must consider just what implications expressivism has for certain assumptions implicit in our everyday discourse. I begin by laying out some of the relevant assumptions.

Ordinary folks happily characterize both normative judgments and descriptive judgments as beliefs. We are just as happy to say that Dorothy believes she is not in

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[10] See Ridge 2006a and Ridge forthcoming.
[11] In Ridge forthcoming and in a draft of a book I am writing on this topic.

Kansas any more as we are to say that she believes its permissible to follow the yellow brick road. Moreover, we do this without any suggestion that 'belief' might be ambiguous, picking out one state of mind in normative contexts and another, rather different, state of mind in descriptive contexts. More controversially, ordinary folks seem to take 'belief' to denote a psychological natural kind with certain characteristic features.[12] According to common sense, beliefs represent the world as being a certain way, have a propositional content which can be true or false, can be based on evidence and perception, and stand in logical relations to one another. These and other folk platitudes about beliefs fix a sort of folk theory which ordinary people implicitly think fixes a natural kind which will figure in a mature theory of human psychology. Ordinary folks do not, after all, have much inclination to eliminative materialism, and they presumably think that psychology studies the ways in which we form and revise our beliefs. This is not to say that the folk theory of beliefs is set in stone. Ordinary folks realize that empirical research can surprise us, and therefore should be prepared to revise elements of their theory of beliefs in light of what the best science (and, for that matter, the best philosophy) tells us. However, the idea that some successor to our ordinary notion of belief will figure as a natural kind in a mature theory of human psychology does seem to be part of our common sense perspective. Adequately defending this ambitious thesis would, of course, be a tall order, but here I am just laying out what I take to be some plausible assumptions to see where they lead. Finally, given a Lockean philosophy of language, ordinary practice seems to assume that the truth of an assertion is a direct

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[12] Here I am skirting around an enormous literature in the philosophy of mind, where there is a big debate between so-called 'theory theorists' and 'simulation theorists' (and other views as well). The text commits me to a kind of theory theory, albeit one which is compatible with the use of simulation in the relevant

function of the truth of the propositional content of the belief the assertion is conventionally used (in the context) to express. On this view, truth is in the first instance ascribed to propositions. The truth of a belief is then fixed by the truth of its propositional content. The truth of an assertion is, in turn, fixed by the truth of the belief it is conventionally used (in the context at hand) to express.[13]

Expressivism, whether ecumenical or non-ecumenical, seems inconsistent with this common sense perspective. For on any plausible version of expressivism, the real natural kind picked out by 'belief' in a mature theory of human psychology will not map neatly on to our ordinary uses of 'belief'. Understood as a natural kind, beliefs are states which function to represent the world; they have what is typically referred to as a 'mind to world direction of fit'. I am here glossing this direction of fit in terms of the biological function of belief, though this is controversial.[14] Beliefs have other features (such as playing certain roles in inference, say) which distinguish them from other sorts of representational states (such as perceptual states), but we need not get into these further details to see the problem.

On a standard (non-ecumenical) version of expressivism, so-called 'normative beliefs' are simply not beliefs in this natural kind sense at all. They are instead proattitudes, the function of which is to prompt the agent to act in ways which bring about their content rather than to register the way the world is anyway. Ecumenical Expressivism holds that so-called 'normative beliefs' are actually belief/proattitude pairs in the natural kind sense of 'belief'. Expressivism therefore seems to upset our ordinary

sense to decide whether someone else has the relevant theoretically understood state of mind. For discussion of alternative views, see Carruthers 1996.

[13] A special story must be told here about so-called 'conventional implicatures'. I lack the space to explore that difficult terrain here. For useful discussion, see Davies 2005: 147-160.

conception of ourselves. We think that our use of 'belief' is causally regulated by a single unified natural kind which has some and perhaps all of the features our common sense theory of beliefs as representational states of a certain sort associates with belief. Given expressivism, though, our use of 'belief' is causally regulated not only by beliefs in this strict natural kind sense. Our use of 'belief' is also causally regulated by either proattitudes of a certain sort (Non-Ecumenical Expressivism) or by certain sorts of belief/proattitude pairs (Ecumenical Expressivism).

This basic point is familiar enough. For on a quasi-realist version of expressivism, we should be happy to continue talking about normative beliefs even though normative beliefs are actually (at least partially) constituted by pro-attitudes while descriptive beliefs are not. Indeed, this idea has already been made explicit in the work of Non-Ecumenical Expressivists. Allan Gibbard, for example, distinguishes what he calls "prosaic beliefs" from "plan-laden beliefs," and argues that normative beliefs are plan-laden while descriptive beliefs are prosaic (Gibbard 2003: 221). Presumably, he would be happy to allow that our ordinary uses of 'belief' are causally regulated by the disjunction of these two sorts of belief. Simon Blackburn makes a similar point (Blackburn 1998: 79) Neil Sinclair explores a similar distinction (Sinclair forthcoming).

Ecumenical Expressivism might seem to hold an advantage here, insofar as Ecumenical Expressivism does at least allow that our normative utterances express beliefs in a strict sense of 'belief' as well as proattitudes. However, the Ecumenical Expressivist also insists that the sentence uttered is not semantically guaranteed to be true just in case the belief expressed is true. This is meant to pick up on the idea that the point of normative discourse is to discuss how to live rather than to discuss how the world is.

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[14] For a survey of different ways of cashing out the 'direction of fit' metaphor, see Humberstone 1992.

This, in turn, is meant to pick up on the idea that the relevant notion of agreement in these contexts is something like Charles Stevenson's notion of 'agreement in attitude' or Gibbard's notion of 'agreement in plan'.[15] At least in the natural kind sense of 'belief' as a robustly representational state, Ecumenical Expressivism allows that I can admit that the belief expressed by your utterance is true but without semantic confusion deny the truth of what you have said. For example, my utilitarian friend may say that charity is right and thereby express a belief whose content is (roughly) that a utilitarian saint would approve of charity. I might agree that such a saint would approve of charity but deny that charity is right. Given Ecumenical Expressivism, I can deny this without semantic confusion simply by refusing to approve in the relevant way of a utilitarian saint and instead approving of a sort of advsior who (by my lights, anyway) would not insist on charity.

So Ecumenical Expressivism (like Non-Ecumenical Expressivism) still seems to imply that part of our implicit pre-theoretical understanding of ourselves is flawed. For we pre-theoretically might have supposed that assertions, whether normative or descriptive, express beliefs qua representational natural kinds, and that the assertion is true just in case the belief expressed is true. Ecumenical Expressivism severs this connection between the truth of the belief (qua representational natural kind) and the truth of the assertion. So in spite of being closer to common sense than Non-Ecumenical Expressivism in allowing that normative utterances do express beliefs qua representational natural kinds, Ecumenical Expressivism does imply that our understanding of ourselves is in an important way mistaken.

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[15] See Stevenson 1944 and Gibbard 2003.

At this point, someone unsympathetic to expressivism might say, "so much the worse for Ecumenical Expressivism, for we surely are not this badly mistaken about ourselves." This, however, would be far too glib. Consider an analogy. For centuries, and even to this very day, most ordinary folks have endorsed a dualist understanding of the mind that infects their understanding of beliefs and desires. A powerful battery of philosophical objections and empirical evidence strongly suggests that this self understanding is simply false, and it would be far too glib to suggest that we simply could not be so badly mistaken about ourselves. If the arguments against dualism are powerful enough, then it is the dualist self-understanding which must give way, and not the anti-dualist views in the philosophy of mind. The same sort of point can be made on behalf of expressivism. If the arguments in favor of Ecumenical Expressivism are powerful enough, then it is our understanding of ourselves, and not Ecumenical Expressivism, which must give way. Furthermore, given the quasi-realist account of how it would be incredibly useful for us to treat our normative commitments as beliefs, it would not be surprising if we developed an assertoric discourse in which to express those commitments. This, in turn, might make it easy to see how we could fall into the trap of assuming that normative and descriptive assertions all function to express beliefs in just the same sense.

Indeed, in a perverse way, the fact that expressivism entails that one part of our self understanding is mistaken is actually a dialectical advantage. For quasi-realists have often been accused by their critics of being victims of their own success. The worry is that insofar as their projects succeeds, the quasi-realist can accommodate *everything* a realist would say. In that case, though, the very distinction between realism and quasi-

realism vanishes and their own view is best understood as a form of realism.[16] The line of argument pursued here suggests that this objection misses its mark. Expressivism upturns some of the ways in which we otherwise would understand ourselves, and therefore does not leave everything as it was before. The distinction between expressivism and cognitivism therefore remains a robust one.

It seems that our understanding of how truth ascriptions work breaks down in the case of normative discourse. For that understanding assumes that declarative sentences express beliefs in a univocal sense across both normative and descriptive contexts, and that the a given sentence is true just in case the belief expressed is true. Ecumenical Expressivism suggests that this understanding of ourselves is false. So should we conclude that the real lesson of Ecumenical Expressivism is that normative discourse is not truth-apt after all? Perhaps A.J. Ayer was not so far off as contemporary expressivists like to think. However, we must not jump to hasty conclusions. Before throwing out the truth-apt baby with the cognitivist bath water, we should pause to consider other cases in which our common sense theory in some area of discourse has turned out to be defective in some way.

Two examples are worth briefly canvassing and contrasting here – the history of 'jade' and 'witch'. As in the case of 'belief', ordinary folks made various assumptions about the reference of 'jade' and 'witch'. Before modern chemistry demonstrated the falsity of this assumption, ordinary folks may well have assumed that 'jade' picked out a genuine natural kind. This is speculative; it is hard to say with any confidence whether ordinary folks thought about jade in this way, but for present purposes we can just assume for the sake of argument that this was so. The philosophical lesson I want to

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[16] See Wright 1985 and Harcourt 2005. For a reply to Harcourt, see Ridge 2006b.

draw here does not depend on the historical accuracy of this claim. It turns out that jade is not a natural kind. Our use of 'jade' is actually causally regulated by two distinct natural kinds – jadeite and nephrite. From the point of view of mineralogy, these two stones represent distinct kinds, in spite of the superficial similarity. This mineralogical discovery could have led us to decide that there is no jade, but instead we just accepted that jade is actually not a natural kind. In this case, we let the underlying nature of the stuff which causally regulate our use of the term determine its reference, rather than our theoretical assumptions about the nature of that stuff.

The case of 'witch' is rather different. Witches presumably were taken to represent a sort of supernatural kind. Being a witch was associated with various supernatural powers, relations with the devil, and so on. It turned out, of course, that there are no women with these supernatural powers, relations with the devil and so on. Just as with the case of jade, there turned out to be a divergence between what causally regulated our use of the term 'witch' and the folk theories people had about the underlying nature (supernature?) of witches. Unlike the case of jade, though, in the case of 'witch' the fact that no entities answered well enough to our theories about the nature of witches led to the conclusion that there are no witches. In this case, the theory took precedence over the nature of the stuff which casually regulated our use of the term, as opposed to vice versa. This was not inevitable or necessary. We could have concluded that our theory of witches was radically wrong, but continued to hold that there are witches. The idea would be that the nature of witches is fixed by what causally regulates our use of 'witch', and here we could have held that witches are simply a certain subset of women with no supernatural powers or relations with the devil, but who had certain

features which for various sociological reasons made them vulnerable to accusations of supernatural mischief.

Someone might insist that this different treatment of 'jade' and 'witch' is just arbitrary, and in certain respects it is. For all language is conventional and in that sense somewhat arbitrary. However, what is arbitrary is that we use a particular word ('witch' rather than 'smitch') to have a certain meaning. What need not be arbitrary is whether we have a word with a particular meaning at all. The point is that the point of our discourse about jade in ordinary life was not held hostage to whether jade was really a natural kind. Jade continues to be an attractive gemstone, and the superficial features by which we pick out jade and which causally regulate our use of 'jade' continue to have an obvious point and utility quite apart from whether jade is in fact a natural kind. For the jeweler's purposes, the distinction between jadeite and nephrite has little or no importance. So it made sense to continue to use 'jade' to pick out the disjunction of jadeite and nephrite.[17] By contrast, the whole point of discourse about witches really was driven by theory. Apart from an interest in picking out women with certain supernatural powers and connections with the devil, it is not clear what function witch discourse would fulfil. So it also made some sense, upon learning that there are no women with the relevant supernatural powers, etc., to conclude that there are no witches, rather than conclude that witches are a certain sociologically defined subset of women. So our different treatment of these cases was in a deeper sense not arbitrary after all.

We are now in a position to return to expressivism and truth. Ecumenical Expressivism entails that at least some of the stuff that causally regulates our use of 'belief' is rather different from our folk theory of the nature of beliefs. In particular,

Ecumenical Expressivism entails that our use of 'belief' to refer to normative judgments is in tension with our underlying folk theory as a unified and non-disjunctive kind which is constant across normative and descriptive contexts. So at some level of abstraction, the problem that arises here is a bit like the problem that arose with 'jade' and 'witch'. In which case, we can ask whether we should treat 'belief' more like 'jade' or more like 'witch'.

In fact, things are slightly more complicated than this. For in the case of 'jade' and 'witch' there was simply no real natural kind which could plausibly be taken to be the referent of the term. Jadeite and nephrite are presumably natural kinds, but neither has any more plausible claim to be the referent of 'jade' than the other, so 'plumping' for one as the referent really would be arbitrary. Such an arbitrary decision would be fine, of course, but we are trying to see whether there are any non-arbitrary decisions we can make in the case of our discourse about beliefs. The contrast is that it is quite plausible (though still controversial) that there really is a natural kind which answers to many of our folk platitudes about beliefs. Eliminative materialists and certain other theorists will deny this, but though I lack the space to argue for this here I do not think they have made a good case for their radical claims. Beliefs may be rather different in many ways from our folk conception, but it at least seems to me to be an open question whether the states that partially (normative discourse to one side now) regulate our use of 'belief' do not indeed form a natural kind whose distinctive and theoretically germane features include having certain representational features, having propositional content, and so on.

The upshot is that, upon being convinced of Ecumenical Expressivism, we have more choices worthy of consideration with respect to 'belief' than we did in the case of

[17] See Putnam 1975: 241-2.

'jade' and 'witch'. First, of course, we could just conclude that there are no beliefs in much the same way that we concluded that there are no witches. I take it that, eliminative materialism notwithstanding, that this is not a very plausible view and in any event not at all well motivated by Ecumenical Expressivism.

Second, and much more interestingly, we could conclude that the reference of 'belief' is unequivocally fixed by the natural kind which figures in a mature theory of human psychology and which best fits with our folk theory of the nature of beliefs. Given Ecumenical Expressivism, this would entail that we could no longer literally speak of normative beliefs. For beliefs will now simply be the representational states which only partially constitute a so-called normative belief, and a hybrid of a belief and a proattitude is not, on this construal, itself a belief. This option would be unlike both the case of 'jade' and 'witch' and would be more like the case of a theoretical term which does refer to a natural kind but where some of our folk assumptions about the kind, most notably that there are normative beliefs, end up being rejected outright. A better analogy might be 'motion', since motion presumably is a concept which figures in a mature account of physics. However, given relativity theory, motion must be understood in terms of relativistic understandings of space and time, whereas our ordinary concept of motion (and least prior to relativity theory) arguably relied on an absolute theory of space and time.

An obvious cost of this first linguistic approach is that we must give up talk of normative belief. Such talk might still be quite useful insofar as we think the analogies between so-called normative beliefs and descriptive beliefs are important, though. So called normative judgments do, after all, figure in rational inferences, stand in logical

relations to one another and so on if the quasi-realist project succeeds independently on these other fronts, and I have argued elsewhere that it does.[18] This very naturally suggests a third option, which is closer to the case of 'jade' though still importantly different. We could simply allow that 'belief' is ambiguous between referring to the relevant natural kind and referring to the stuff which causally regulates our use of 'belief' in ordinary discourse. By contrast, in the case of 'jade' we took it univocally to refer to the stuff which causally regulates our use of the term, simply because there was no kind we could non-arbitrarily choose to be the referent of the term. On this third approach, 'belief' has a strict and theoretically defined sense and a much broader sense which is fixed by what causally regulates our use of the term. In the strict sense, which is fixed by what a mature theory of human psychology tells us, 'belief' refers to a natural kind with certain distinctive features. In this sense of 'belief' there are no normative beliefs. However, in a wider sense of 'belief', the meaning of which is fixed by the stuff which actually causally regulates our use of 'belief', beliefs do not represent a natural kind. In this broader sense a combination of a belief in the strict natural kind sense and a suitable pro-attitude is itself a belief; not so in the strict sense natural kind sense of 'belief'. In this broader sense of 'belief' there are normative beliefs, but they are constituted by beliefs (in the strict sense of 'belief') and proattitudes.

In my view, this third option is the most plausible, although this is itself a normative question about how our linguistic conventions should evolve in the (no doubt vanishingly unlikely!) event that we should all agree that Ecumenical Expressivism is true. This question is of philosophical interest quite apart from any fantasies of universal expressivism and large scale linguistic reform, though. For the mere fact that we could

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[18] See Ridge forthcoming.

preserve most of our ordinary practices in normative discourse without any major costs by such a shift suggests that our current discourse, while not entirely without defect, is not so far off the mark either. That, in itself, is a happy conclusion for those with quasi-realist ambitions.

Why, though, is this third option the most sensible one? Here the point is that there is a good reason that we have come to treat our normative judgments as beliefs. Normative judgments figure in rational inferences, we think we can give good and bad reasons for them, and it is important to us to reach agreement (in attitude) with one another about them or else explain to our satisfaction why those with whom we disagree have a flawed perspective. These standard quasi-realist points of commonality between normative judgments and beliefs in the strict natural kind sense suggest that it would make a great deal of sense to hold onto a word which refers to the broader set of beliefs in the strict sense as well as normative beliefs (which are, of course, hybrid states on the theory on offer). We do not have to use 'belief' for this purpose, of course, though I think as long as we are careful not to equivocate that this would be fine. The main point is to retain a place in our conceptual economy for this broader category; we need not use 'belief' to refer to it. We could instead use 'belief' to refer only to the relevant natural kind and stipulate that some predicate, 'judgment', say, refers to the broader class of descriptive beliefs and so-called normative beliefs. To avoid confusion in what follows, though, I shall simply use 'natural-kind-belief' and 'causal-regulation-belief' to disambiguate my uses of 'belief' throughout.

Fully defending the choice of this third option would require a lot more argument than I will be able to present here. I must instead offer a very large promissory note,

albeit one I try to make good elsewhere.[19] Suppose, though, that we agree that this is the right way for expressivists to go. The key question to ask now is how, within this framework, we should accommodate the truth-aptness of normative discourse.

IV.   Truth Regained.

According to Ecumenical Expressivism, my judgment that X is required is constituted in part by my belief (in the natural kind sense) that a certain sort of advisor would insist on X. This naturally suggests that by my lights 'X is required' is true just in case X would be approved of by the relevant sort of advisor. So perhaps my remarks about the truth of other people's sayings and thinkings should itself be understood in expressivist terms, in the following way. You say that charity is required, and I agree, though I have no idea whether you endorse the same overall normative outlook as me. In judging that your view is true, I simply believe that it is true that the relevant sort of advsior would insist on charity. This leaves it open whether we do in fact approve of the same sort of advsior. You might approve of a utilitarian saint and I might approve of a Kantian saint even though we both agree that charity is required. So we cannot assume that our agreement is best understood in terms of agreement in belief in the natural kind sense of 'belief'. Instead, our agreement will be a sort of agreement in attitude, a concept most famously discussed by Charles Stevenson (see Stevenson 1944), or perhaps instead what Allan Gibbard calls 'agreement in plan' (see Gibbard 2003) or perhaps some further notion of agreement in conative states that is different from both of these. Given our respective proattitude/belief pair, we both are committed to favoring a way of living which involves charity when it is possible, anyway. In this sense, we agree in that we both take charity to be the thing to do. The appeal to agreement and disagreement in attitude (or in plan, to

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[19] In forthcoming work.

follow Gibbard), however, is a familiar move for the expressivist to make.[20] In itself this

introduces no new difficulties for Ecumenical Expressivism.

The basic idea here is make use of our account of how claims and judgments

about truth fix a particular truth *bearer* to explain the truth-aptness of normative

discourse. This is in contrast to the deflationist approach discussed in section I, which

instead relies on a particular account of truth itself. The account developed here is

compatible with any of the main theories of truth discussed in the literature – deflationist,

correspondence, identity, coherence – insert your favorite theory here. The key

theoretical moves to make are ones which take us from a truth claim to a suitable truth

bearer – a suitable proposition, in this case. We can then understand the claim that the

relevant proposition is true in whatever way the best theory of truth indicates.

Ecumenical Expressivism in this way does not give hostages to fortune. How, though, do

we generalize this account?

The basic idea is that to say someone's belief (in the broad sense) that p is true is

to say that there is a proposition q which (at least partly) constitutes what we might

characterize as the *correct* way to believe that p, and q is true. Crucially, though 'correct'

in this formulation is itself an expressivistic notion and not a disguised reference to truth

in any way. The same approach works for normative utterances as well as beliefs, just

cast in terms of the belief they would express with that utterance *if* they accept the

judgment in the right way. What counts as 'the right way' is given by one's normative

outlook – by the sort of advsior of whom one approves. So, in particular, claims in which

'p is true' are used should be understood as follows. Take any sentence 'p' in which

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[20] See also Gibbard 2003:268-287; Gibbard distinguishes his own account of disagreement in *plan* from Stevenson's account of disagreement in *attitude*.

locutions of the form 'q is true' are used. On the proposed account, an utterance of 'p'

expresses two states of mind:

(1) A suitable pro-attitude to a certain sort of advsior

(2) The natural-kind-belief that r, where r is what you get when you take 'p' and replace

all uses of 'q is true' with 'there is a proposition s, natural-kind-belief in which would

(at least partly) constitute the causal-regulation-belief that q for anybody who

endorses *that* sort of advsior [anaphoric reference back to the content of the

proattitude in (1) here]*,* and s is true'.

Notice that this approach makes central use of the idea that normative judgments are

partially constituted by beliefs in a strict sense – natural kind beliefs. That means the

approach is unavailable to Non-Ecumenical Expressivists like Blackburn and Gibbard.

So if the approach works, it provides an additional reason (beyond those I have explored

elsewhere) to favor Ecumenical Expressivism over its Non-Ecumenical rivals.

The general schema for truth ascriptions given above is a mouthful, but the basic

idea is actually not that complex. Suppose I say that what the Pope believes about charity

is true. I thereby express my general pro-attitude to a certain sort of advsior and the

belief that, given one's endorsement of that sort of advsior as fixed, there are certain

propositions one would need to natural-kind-believe in order to count as having the same

causal-regulation-beliefs as the Pope about charity, and those propositions are true. To

make the example more concrete, suppose I am a utilitarian. In that case, my utterance

expresses my approval of a utilitarian saint and my belief that to accept the Pope's belief

about charity *while approving of a that sort of advisor (which here just is a utilitarian*

saint) would involve believing certain propositions, and those propositions are true. So if

I learned that the Pope thinks charity is required, then if I continue to think that his views are true this is because (given my normative outlook) I shall believe that the proposition one would need to believe in order to count as believing that charity is required while approving of a utilitarian saint is true. For me, this shall be the proposition that charity would be insisted on by a utilitarian saint, though for the Pope the relevant proposition may be different – for him, the relevant proposition might be that charity would be insisted on by an advsior just like the actual God. The fact that the Pope does not approve of the same sort of advisor as me does not prevent me from judging that his views on charity are correct. I shall so judge, though, not because I think his beliefs about the sort of advisor of whom he approves are true. Rather, insofar as I am a self-conscious utilitarian, I shall judge that his beliefs are true insofar as the beliefs one would have to hold in order to agree with the Pope about charity while approving of a utilitarian saint are true. Once again, my agreement with the Pope shall be agreement in attitude rather than agreement in belief, but that is a standard expressivist move. The fact that you can agree with the Pope's views on charity while not endorsing the same sort of advisor as him is, in my view, a virtue of the account. For intuitively we can agree with someone's verdict in a particular case while disagreeing with the background normative theory on which his judgment in the particular case is based. Kantians and utilitarians can agree that lying is generally wrong, e.g.

It should be clear enough how this account allows me to admit that the natural-kind-belief expressed by someone's normative utterance is true without allowing that the sentence he uttered is true. Suppose I know you are a Kantian and you say that charity is required. You thereby express a natural kind belief, the content of which is given by the

proposition that a Kantian saint would approve of charity. I could therefore without inconsistency allow that the natural-kind-belief you expressed in saying charity is required is true without admitting that what you said is true. For by my lights, the approval of a utilitarian saint provides the truth conditions for your utterance, not the approval of a Kantian saint.

It might sound odd to say that I could allow that the belief you expressed is true but also insist that what you said is not true. Here the distinction between natural-kind-beliefs and causal-regulation-beliefs does some real work, though. For it is only the natural-kind-belief expressed by your utterance that I can consistently allow is true while denying the truth of what you have said. For to endorse the truth of the causal-regulation-belief you have expressed is really just to endorse your claim that charity is required (or whatever) is true. I cannot, of course, do that and at the same time consistently deny that it is true that charity is required. For to do that would be to simultaneously express the beliefs that the relevant sort of advisor would and would not insist on charity.

It should also be emphasized that the account on offer, if it works at all, generalizes nicely across normative and descriptive contexts. I have so far explained how the account works in normative contexts simply because that is the hard case. In the cases in which truth is ascribed to purely descriptive judgments, the expression of approval of a certain sort of advsior in order to fix on the relevant proposition is a sort of idle wheel, doing no essential work, but also causing no problems. For trivially, the belief which (at least partially) constitutes your belief that grass is green if you endorse the same sort of advsior as me will still just be the plain old natural-kind-belief that grass

is green. For in the case of ordinary descriptive beliefs, one's belief is not constituted by one's approval of an advsior in the first place. So the nature of the belief remains constant across all possible normative outlooks. It might seem odd that we must keep the special machinery developed for normative contexts in place even in contexts of purely descriptive discourse, where that machinery is clearly an idle wheel. However, this overlooks the point that discourse about truth is often very useful in contexts in which someone tells us that something is true without our yet knowing whether the relevant something is normative or descriptive. We therefore need an account of truth ascriptions that can work in what we might call these topic neutral cases.

Another worry one might have about the account developed here is that it makes claims about truth normative, though not because truth itself is normative (we are here neutral on the nature of truth itself). Instead, normativity enters the scene to help pick out the relevant truth-bearer(s) – the relevant proposition to which truth is ascribed. This may seem weird, but in fact I think it is actually an advantage of Ecumenical Expressivism as developed here. For the proposal on offer provides us with a useful resource with which to deflect an otherwise powerful objection to the plausible Humean idea that you can never derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. The objection, pressed by Mark Nelson (Nelson 1995), is roughly as follows (the example is my own, not Nelson's). That the Pope believes that charity is good is, even on an expressivist account, a matter of descriptive fact – a fact about the Pope's psychology. However, it can also seem plausible to suppose that the fact that the Pope's beliefs about charity are true (if it is a fact) is also a purely descriptive fact. Certainly, the fact that his beliefs about charity are true does not in itself entail any normative conclusions, and indeed is logically consistent

with nihilism. Also, the truth fact can hold in worlds in which the Pope has no normative beliefs but still has beliefs about charity. However, these two facts provide the basis for a valid argument that charity is good:

(1) The Pope believes that charity is good.

(2) All the Pope's beliefs about charity are true.

So, (3) Charity is good.

Here we apparently can derive a normative conclusion from what seemed like purely descriptive/factual premises, so Hume's claim about not being able to logically derive an 'ought' from an 'is' breaks down. It should be clear enough where this argument goes wrong on the account of truth attributions proposed here. Claims about truth *are*, it turns out, normative in an important sense, and not purely factual. For such claims express a speaker's pro-attitude to a suitable advsior, and this pro-attitude constitutes the speaker's conception of how one ought to live. Indeed, it is only by understanding judgments of truth in this way that we can preserve what we might call the topic-neutrality of truth judgments – their ability to range freely over normative and non-normative contexts alike. So the proposed counter-example to Hume's dictum does not hold on the account offered here, which provides a further (indirect) argument in favor of it, at least insofar as we find Hume's dictum itself plausible.

So far I have focused on what we should say about attributions of truth to what other people say or think, but there is a further question. For we can ascribe truth directly to propositions. Here, though, we simply need to make clear whether 'proposition' is being used in a strict and philosophical sense or in a sense in which its meaning is somehow fixed by whatever causally regulates our use of the term. In the former case, all

propositions in the strict and philosophical sense are descriptive and we understand ascriptions of truth to those in whatever way the best theory of truth holds – deflationist truth, correspondence truth, coherentist truth – whatever the best theory tells us. If, however, we leave open that some of the propositions in question are normative then, given expressivism, we must understand 'proposition' in a much more deflationist way. Just as we must allow for strict and looser senses of 'belief' we must do the same for 'propositions'.

Here, though, we do not need to posit two different kinds of entities as we did in the case of 'belief' (natural kind beliefs and natural kind/proattitude pairs). Here the idea is that from the point of view of metaphysics alone there are only the descriptive propositions; there is no metaphysical need to posit an independent realm of normative propositions. That way lies Moorean non-naturalism. Instead, the point is that to take a descriptive proposition to also constitute a normative proposition is to take up a certain attitude – to decide to live in a certain way, to be disposed to urge others to live in that way (when being fully honest and candid, anyway), and so on. In particular, to claim that a proposition p in the broad sense of 'proposition' is true is to express one's approval of a certain sort of advsior and one's belief that the strict-sense proposition one would need to believe in order to count as believing that p while at the same time approving of that sort of advsior is true. So, for example, if I say that the proposition that charity is required is true, I express my approval of a certain sort of advsior as well as my belief that the (strict sense) proposition one would need to believe in order to count as believing that charity is required while at the same time approving of such an advisor is itself true. So the account

on offer can be extended easily enough to ascriptions of truth to propositions as well as beliefs and sentences.

Conclusion.

I have argued that existing attempts to marry expressivism to the truth-aptness of normative discourse give hostages to fortune by relying so heavily on deflationist theories of truth (section I). I have argued, however, that we can avoid giving such hostages to fortune by embracing what I have called Ecumenical Expressivism (developed in section II). Ecumenical Expressivism gives us the resources with which to construct a suitable account of truth attributions in the broadest "topic neutral" sense (sections III and IV). An important advantage of this account is that it does not depend on any particular view of how we should understand truth in the most fundamental sense – truth as it should be understood with respect to purely descriptive discourse. In order to make this move we must be willing to broaden our conception of key psychological and semantic predicates, most notably 'belief' and 'proposition'. In addition to being ecumenical in our expressivism, we should also be ecumenical in our construal of predicates like 'belief' and 'proposition'. This is not a trivial move, but insofar as Ecumenical Expressivism is otherwise plausible, we thereby have good reason to take these further ecumenical turns.

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