Schroeder, Mark. *Expressing Our Attitudes: Explanation and Expression in Ethics, Volume 2*

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Expressivists are commonly characterized as committed to denying the existence of propositions in their particular domains. The central theme of this volume is that expressivists should not be characterized in this way and that, in fact, these theorists should embrace the existence of propositions in their domains. Schroeder argues that doing so will afford expressivists a number of theoretical advantages, all of which are attributable to the various, explanatorily useful properties of propositions. All that these theorists need in order to obtain these advantages is a novel, expressivist-friendly account of propositions, and some accompanying, complementary views about the natures of the propositional attitudes.

The volume is divided into four parts consisting of nine essays, two of which are previously unpublished. The essays are categorically excellent. Even a cursory glance at the recent literature on expressivism (about normative and epistemic expressions alike) reveals their high impact and influence. A bonus is the deeply useful introduction, which explains the volume's argumentative themes in a characteristically clear and incisive way. In the preface, Schroeder mentions that the essays selected for the volume represent work spanning roughly a decade. The reader is left with the impression that this was a decade well spent.

I.

Both of the essays in Part 1 mark places where Schroeder thinks he's made important mistakes. In "Expression for Expressivists," Schroeder tries to unpack what metaethical expressivists could mean by 'express.' He argues that a number of plausible or existing candidates are ruled out by certain of the expressivist's antecedent commitments, and goes on to offer an account of 'expression' on behalf of expressivists—*assertability expressivism*—according to which to say that a sentence expresses a state of mind is to say that it's semantically correct to assert that sentence only if you're in that state of mind.

One of the simplest accounts of 'expression' that Schroeder argues is incompatible with the expressivist's commitments is the *same-content* account, according to which to say that a sentence expresses a belief is to say that it has the same propositional content. Schroeder argues that this can't be what metaethical expressivists mean by 'express,' since these theorists are committed to giving an account of the meanings of normative sentences which doesn't require them to associate those sentences with propositions.

This is Schroeder's first self-admitted mistake. Schroeder now believes that expressivists can and should associate normative sentences with propositions—they just need to reject and replace the prevailing picture of propositions, according to which these entities, e.g., determine their own truth conditions. Equipped with an alternative, expressivist-friendly account of propositions, Schroeder now believes that expressivists too can associate *all* declarative sentences with propositional contents. But more on this below.

In "Higher-Order Attitudes, Frege's Abyss, and the Truth in Propositions," Schroeder revisits the prospects of *Higher-Order Attitude theories* (HOA theories) in the face of the *van Roojen Problem*. HOA theories constitute one of the earliest expressivist attempts to solve the problem of providing an adequate account of the meanings of logically complex

sentences—the 'Frege-Geach' problem. The progenitor of the HOA approach is Simon Blackburn, who offered one of the earliest iterations in his *Spreading the Word* (Oxford University Press, 1984). HOA theories identify the thoughts expressed by logically complex sentences with higher-order attitudes toward the attitudes expressed by the sentence's logically simple parts. So according to HOA theories, the meanings of complex sentences consist in the higher-order attitudes they express—hence the name of the approach.

But HOA theories face a famous problem, which Schroeder calls the *van Roojen problem* in honor of its originator, Mark van Roojen. The heart of the van Roojen problem, according to Schroeder's characterization, is that any HOA theory will overgenerate predictions about validity and inconsistency. Schroeder says that for a time he took the van Roojen problem to be fatal for HOA theories. This was his second important mistake. Schroeder now believes that there is exactly *one* solution to the van Roojen problem, but that it requires proponents of HOA theories to adopt some specific and radical commitments concerning the natures of propositions and of the attitudes. The second half of the essay articulates Schroeder's proposed solution to the van Roojen problem, which requires HOA theorists to, *inter alia*, identify propositions with belief states, identify the belief relation with the instantiation relation, and to treat other attitudes as attitudes toward beliefs.

<div align="center">II.</div>

The essays in Part 2 form the core of the volume, explaining how Schroeder's claim that expressivists can and should embrace the existence of propositions in their domains could be true, and illustrating what Schroeder takes to be "the most interesting and important applications" for expressivism (17).

"Two Roles for Propositions: Cause for Divorce?" is fittingly identified as "the most central essay of the volume" (16). In it, Schroeder argues that expressivists need to accept the existence of genuine propositions in their domains, claiming that no merely deflationary treatment of proposition-talk will suffice. The reason, according to Schroeder, is that expressivists need propositions to do real explanatory work in their theories—the kind of work that only "non-deflationary propositions" can do (84).

To illustrate the point, Schroeder rehearses a number of general explanatory problems for propositionless views, and explains how each is easily solved by positing propositions. For example, Schroeder highlights that while propositionless semantic frameworks face notorious difficulties in accounting compositionally for the meanings of complex sentences, frameworks that postulate propositions are able to do so straightforwardly. In addition, he claims that views that posit propositions can provide us with simple and elegant explanations of why we're unproblematically able to quantify into the arguments of complement-taking verbs, and to make non-trivial identifications of what we're quantifying into, while propositionless views can provide us with no similarly simple explanations.

Schroeder makes a good case that expressivists would do well to accept propositions. But it's natural to wonder how they could. For in addition to being the objects of attitudes and bearers of truth and falsity, propositions are commonly claimed to carve the world at its joints, to correspond to distinctions in reality, and to be associated with metaphysical commitment. This is precisely why expressivists (about any domain of discourse) have traditionally and explicitly eschewed the use of propositions in the construction of their theories.

Schroeder's answer is ingenious. He claims that it's a mistake to conflate the entities that are the objects of the attitudes and the bearers of truth and falsity with the entities that carve the world at its joints, correspond to worldly distinctions, and carry metaphysical commitments. He proposes to distinguish the things that play the former set of theoretical roles from the things that play the latter. He calls the former entities *propositions* and the latter *representational contents*. Because he thinks that propositions are not the *same* as representational contents, Schroeder thinks that expressivists can accept the existence of genuine (non-deflationary) propositions in their domains without accepting that those propositions correspond to representational contents—and this is what he recommends.

Now if expressivists reject the identification of propositions with representational contents, as Schroeder recommends, then it will of course be incumbent on these theorists to specify what propositions *are*, such that they're capable of playing the explanatory roles that expressivists need them to play. A number of suggestions are made throughout the volume as to how an expressivist-friendly account of propositions might go (see especially the introduction for a clear catalogue of possible contenders). But the particular account that Schroeder floats in "Two Roles for Propositions" is a development of his *biforcated attitude semantics*, first articulated in his book *Being For: Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism* (Oxford Universty Press, 2008). While Schroeder suspects that, ultimately, there will be better ways of developing an expressivist-friendly account of propositions, his biforcated attitude semantics serves the purpose of providing a concrete example of how this might be done. The essay concludes by demonstrating how biforcated attitude semantics goes a significant way to recovering the advantages associated with proposition-based theories.

One natural alternative suggestion for an expressivist-friendly account of propositions (which isn't discussed in the volume, but which often comes up in discussions of Schroeder's work on the topic) is a theory of propositions developed by Scott Soames, according to which propositions are types of cognitive events (*What is Meaning?*, Princeton University Press, 2010). Indeed, in recent work, Michael Ridge has tried to adapt precisely this theory of propositions to his "ecumenical" brand of expressivism (*Impassioned Belief*, Oxford University Press, 2014). However, as is nicely brought out in a recent paper by Andrew Alwood, it's far from clear whether Soames' theory can be fitted to a form of expressivism due to certain of its markedly expressivist-*unfriendly* implications ("Should Expressivism be a Theory at the Level of Metasemantics?," *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 5 [2016]: 13-22). For example, Soames' theory implies that a thinker's entertaining a proposition necessarily involves a mental act of *predication*, and that propositions are "inherently" and "essentially" representational. So perhaps contrary to initial appearances, it seems expressivists might do well to look elsewhere for an appropriately expressivist-friendly account of propositions in attempting to implement the abstract picture Schroeder recommends.

In "How to Be an Expressivist about Truth," Schroeder puts the theoretical machinery developed in "Two Roles for Propositions" to work in exploring how one might begin to construct an expressivist account of truth. The essay emphasizes, in particular, how an expressivist treatment of truth can potentially deal with certain problems of paradox. *Inter alia*, Schroeder claims to show that expressivists have the fitting resources to explain how we can avoid paradoxes of revenge in dealing with the paradox of the liar. According to Schroeder, this is "the most interesting application for expressivism" (17).

In "Hard Cases for Combining Expressivism and Deflationist Truth," Schroeder addresses whether expressivism can be combined with deflationist truth. He argues, convincingly, that there can be no general problem in combining the two, but acknowledges that certain *applications* for expressivism might seem to raise complications for deflationism. By Schroeder's lights, some of the "most promising" applications for expressivism are to the cases of epistemic modals and indicative conditionals (124). However, he observes, there's a *prima facie* tension between deflationism and the *motivations* for expressivism about these topics. This is because the main motivations for expressivism about epistemic modals and conditionals seem to require that modal and conditional sentences don't express propositions, such that there is no content in which you have a high credence, when you believe an epistemic modal or conditional claim. But propositions are the bearers of truth and falsity. And so the motivations for expressivism about epistemic modals and conditionals seem to preclude truth from being correctly ascribed to claims of either kind. And if this is right, then deflationist truth can't be extended to epistemic modals and conditionals.

The solution, according to Schroeder, is to deny that credences are defined over propositions. Instead, he suggests, expressivists about epistemic modals and conditionals should say that credences are defined over *representational contents*. Doing so allows them to consistently claim that there is no content in which you have a high credence, when you believe an epistemic modal or conditional claim, but that epistemic modal and conditional sentences express propositions (such that 'true' can be correctly applied to them).

Schroeder's solution is interesting and resourceful, but it's worth noting that the explicit appeal to epistemic modal propositions that it involves makes pressing the task of providing an adequate, expressivist-friendly account of epistemic modal propositions. And it's also worth noting in this vein that the account of 'might' that Schroeder floats in the appendix to chapter 12 of *Being For*, within the framework of his biforcated attitude semantics, falls short in this regard (by his own admission). This is because Schroeder's account implausibly rules out the possibility of consistently believing that PvQ, that it might be that ¬P, and that it might be that ¬Q (96n.24). This isn't to criticize Schroeder, or his efforts at providing an expressivist-friendly account of epistemic modal propositions; rather it's simply to highlight that the expressivist about epistemic modals has her work cut out for her if she wants to combine her theory with deflationist truth in the way Schroeder recommends.

<div align="center">III.</div>

The essays in Part 3 concern the prospects for hybrid expressivist views, whose proponents are typically characterized as holding that the class of claims about which they're expressivists express two states of mind: an ordinary descriptive belief-state and a desire-like state. For example, a hybrid metaethical expressivist about 'wrong' might say that the meaning of 'lying is wrong' consists in the expression of both an 'ordinary' belief that lying has some non-normative property K and disapproval of actions that are K. Hybrid theories are usually advertised as having all of the advantages of pure expressivism, but none of the costs.

But in his well-known "Hybrid Expressivism: Virtue and Vices," Schroeder argues plausibly that the most defensible form of hybrid expressivism will be saddled with a number of cumbersome commitments (e.g., its proponents will have to say that each normative term about which they're a hybrid theorist has a single, invariant, descriptive content)

which together conspire to make it very difficult to see what advantages the view has over ordinary, realist cognitivism. For example, Schroeder argues, the hybrid expressivist's commitments make it difficult (if not impossible) to see how she has any advantage at all over externalist cognitivists in explaining the motivating power of normative judgments.

In "Tempered Expressivism," Schroeder introduces an "immediate generalization" of the hybrid approach, which he calls *relational expressivism* (22). According to relational expressivism, the meaning of each declarative sentence 'P' consists in a function from an agent's desire-like attitudinal state, holistically characterized, to ordinary descriptive contents. This function tells us what proposition an agent must (ordinarily descriptively) believe, in order to count as believing that P. For example, on relational expressivism, the meaning of 'lying is wrong' is given by a function from a holistic characterization of an agent's desire-like attitudinal state to the descriptive proposition that it is necessary and sufficient for the agent to believe (holding fixed that holistic characterization of her attitudinal state), in order to believe that lying is wrong. Schroeder suggests that the functions in which the meanings of sentences consist, on this view, can be fruitfully thought of as propositions (23).

Relational expressivism shares all the advantages of hybrid expressivism. For example, like hybrid expressivism, relational expressivism avoids the central difficulties associated with the Frege-Geach problem, as well as Cian Dorr's wishful thinking problem ("Non-Cognitivism and Wishful Thinking," *Nous* 36 [2002]: 97-103). Moreover, relational expressivism is burdened with none of the undesirable commitments that come with the hybrid approach. (Indeed, it's plausible that hybrid expressivism is burdened with the awkward commitments that it is only because it implements relational expressivism in the particular way that it does.) But relational expressivism has problems of its own, not the least of which, as Schroeder highlights, is its difficulty in explaining why agents who believe the same proposition *agree*, and why agents who believe contradictory propositions *disagree*. According to Schroeder, relational expressivism would be "the most promising form of expressivism about normative discourse" if not for this problem (23). But fortunately, certain of relational expressivism's proponents have begun to tackle the issue. See, for example, Teemu Toppinen, "Belief in Expressivism," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 8 (2013): 252-82.

IV

The essays in Part 4 explore how far purely formal methods can take us in our semantic theorizing. In "Is Semantics Formal?," Schroeder investigates whether the project of providing a formal semantics can be separated from the task of deciding between competing interpretations of the relevant formal semantic system. He concludes that it cannot—i.e., that the task of constructing a formal semantics needs to be informed by philosophical work concerning how the system is to be interpreted. This conclusion runs contrary to what Schroeder calls the "autonomy thesis," according to which formal semantics is to be understood as strictly autonomous from conceptual questions of interpretation (217).

One of the considerations Schroeder cites against the autonomy thesis is the fact that the interpretation that we give to a formal semantic system can affect which compositional principles are natural to use in that system. For example, Schroeder argues that while the compositional principles of complementation, intersection, and union *may* be employed within each of a number of semantic paradigms, including (e.g.) the dynamic, ex-

pressivist, and relativist paradigms, these principles are "a poor fit" from the expressivist point of view (219). Indeed, according to Schroeder's assessment, "the core of the difficulties involved with the traditional Frege-Geach problem for expressivism have to do with a poor fit between these compositional principles and the expressivist paradigm" (220).

The final essay, "Attitudes and Epistemics," which is identified as the "second-most central chapter" of the volume (26), expounds on this last point. Schroeder claims that what makes the principles of complementation, intersection, and union inapt for expressivists is that the ultimate semantic values on an expressivist semantic framework—belief-states—don't obey these principles. For example, the conditions under which someone believes that PvQ are not the union of the conditions under which she believes that P and those under which she believes that Q. As a consequence, Schroeder suggests, any expressivist semantic framework which applies the methods of complementation, intersection, and union (directly or indirectly) to its ultimate semantic values runs the risk of yielding intuitively implausible predictions concerning the logical relationships among belief-states.

This point is familiar from Schroeder's earlier work on metaethical expressivism (see particularly *Being For*). But in "Attitudes and Epistemics," Schroeder's focus is on expressivism about epistemic expressions. The central target is Seth Yalcin's expressivist semantics for epistemic modals and indicative conditionals (see "Epistemic Modals," *Mind* 116 [2007]: 983-1026; and "Nonfactualism about Epistemic Modality," in Egan and Weatherson [eds.], *Epistemic Modals*, Oxford University Press [2011]: 295-332). Yalcin's framework applies the methods of complementation, intersection, and union directly to its primary semantic values—sets of world/information-space pairs—which determine its secondary semantic values—states of mind—in accordance with Yalcin's semantics for attitude-ascriptions. And while there are some (very interesting) complications, the consequences of applying these methods are consonant with Schroeder's prediction: Yalcin's system yields intuitively implausible predictions concerning the logical relationships among beliefs.

"Attitudes and Epistemics" concludes with a discussion fit for the end of the volume. Here, Schroeder reiterates the reasons why expressivists need to traffic in propositions, and offers some methodological advice about how to approach the question of what propositions should be like on an expressivist framework. As noted above, the essays in the volume outline a number of options for an expressivist-friendly account of propositions. But it's worth noting in closing that, even by Schroeder's lights, none of these are fully satisfactory. So if the hope is to recover all the explanatory advantages associated with positing propositions, expressivists have more work to do. Still, Schroeder's case for the conclusion that expressivists can more fruitfully approach the various problems they face, if they allow for propositions, is powerful. In the view of this reviewer, expressivists would do well to heed it.