Varieties of Philosophical Expressivism

Mannheim, May 19–21, 2022

Schloss, Room O 138

Program

Thursday, May 19

09.00   Coffee and Reception

09.15–09.30   Welcome and Introduction

09.30–10.40   **Stephen Finlay**: Why I Am (Only) A Quasi-Expressivist

10.50–12.00   **Katharina Felka**: Moorean Infelicity and Moral Discourse

     Optional Lunch

13.45–14.55   **Nadja-Mira Yolcu**: Psychological Expressivism and Expressive Denegation

15.05–16.15   **Felix Bräuer**: The Transparency of Expressivism

     Coffee Break

16.45–17.55   **Luca Incurvati**: Inferential Expressivism

Friday, May 20

09.15   Coffee and Reception

09.30–10.40   **Stephen Barker**: Global Expressivism and the Very Idea of a Theory of Meaning

10.50–12.00   **Christa Peterson & Mark Schroeder**: Secondary Contents for Expressivists

     Optional Lunch

13.45–14.55   **Benjamin Schnieder**: Because

15.05–16.15   **Wolfgang Freitag**: Reason and Expression

Coffee Break

16.45–17.55   **Matthew Chrisman**: Epistemic Expressivism and Placing Beliefs in the Space of Reasons

19.15   Conference Dinner

Saturday, May 21

09.15   Coffee and Reception

09.30–10.40   **Jochen Briesen**: Acquaintance Phenomena and Hybrid Expressivism

10.50–12.00   **Michael Scott**: Religious Expressivism

End of Conference and Optional Lunch

Stephen Barker: Global Expressivism and the Very Idea of a Theory of Meaning

The idea of a theory of meaning dominates how philosophers have thought about the puzzle of linguistic meaning, thought, and reality. The heart of the theory of meaning in analytical philosophy is Semantics. Semantics is a kind of formal science of the nature of meaning, and can take many forms: truth-conditional, possible worlds, inferential, conceptual role, etc. I sketch one deep and abiding issue with the project of Semantics. This is the problem of MetaSemantic reality: what constitutes speaker's grasp of meanings as defined by Semantics? I suggest that this problem might not be solvable. Instead, I offer a radical path to dissolving the MetaSemantical problem through the development of an alternative to Semantics. This is global expressivism (GE, for short). GE is a metasemantics that explains folk semantical facts and intuition. However, GE undercuts the whole idea of Semantics. Just as value-expressivism undercuts the idea of a theory of values or value, GE undercuts the idea of a theory of meaning. GE's anti-semantics stance is not nihilism (or quasi-realism or minimalism) about meaning. Instead, I argue, GE comes with a somewhat surprising metametaphysical stance about meaning, which I call 'emptiness'. According to this stance, there are meanings but they are devoid of any metaphysical nature. Thus to illustrate, a possible-worlds semantics attempts to define sentence propositional-contents as sets of worlds, or an inferential semantics treats content as inferential potential, and so on. Contrast GE's emptiness view: sentences have propositional content but there is no true theoretical-identification of what such content is, not even that it's primitive or defined by platitudes about meaning. I argue that GE allows us to sidestep the MetaSemantic of Semantics, viz., the question of what our grasp of meanings resides in.

Jochen Briesen: Acquaintance Phenomena and Hybrid Expressivism

Sentences containing predicates of personal taste (e.g., "tasty," "funny") and aesthetic predicates (e.g., "beautiful") give rise to certain acquaintance phenomena: They convey the information that speakers have firsthand experience with the object of predication and they can only be uttered appropriately if that is the case. This is surprisingly hard to explain. I will concentrate on aesthetic predicates, and firstly criticize previous attempts to explain the acquaintance phenomena. Second, I will suggest an explanation that rests on a speech-act theoretical version of hybrid expressivism, according to which, in uttering "X is beautiful" speakers perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously: an expressive and an assertive one. I will spell out this suggestion in detail and defend it against objections. In this way, considering puzzles related to certain acquaintance phenomena leads to a powerful argument for a new version of hybrid expressivism in meta-aesthetics.

Felix Bräuer: The Transparency of Expressivism

In this talk, I will argue that Gareth Evans' argument for transparent self-knowledge is based on a conflation of doxastic transparency with ascriptive transparency. Doxastic transparency means that belief about one's own doxastic state, e.g., the belief that one thinks that it will rain, can be warranted by ordinary empirical observation, e.g., of the weather. In contrast, ascriptive transparency says that self-ascriptions of belief, e.g., "I believe it will rain", can be warranted by such observation. I will first show that the thesis of doxastic transparency is ill-motivated and then offer a non-epistemic interpretation of ascriptive transparency by reference to the theory of explicit expressive acts: "I think it will rain" requires attendance to the weather because the utterance expresses a belief about the weather, not about ourselves. This will allow us to avoid what is often called "the puzzle of transparent self-knowledge" while remaining faithful to Evans' linguistic observations.

Matthew Chrisman: Epistemic Expressivism and Placing Beliefs in the Space of Reasons

In this paper, I explain how I conceive of epistemic expressivism and briefly canvass some of the arguments for and against the view. Then, I argue that a constellation of older ideas about the function of epistemic discourse from Sellars, Rorty, and Craig suggest an alternative to epistemic expressivism that I call epistemic inferentialism. This is a nondescriptivist view of categorically normative epistemic claims that is founded on a theory of meaningfulness based in the phenomenon of undertaking mutually recognized

discursive commitments rather than the phenomenon of expressing a speaker's mental states to an audience. I argue that epistemic inferentialism has the same advantages as epistemic expressivism while avoiding many of the objections that have been raised for epistemic expressivism. I also argue that it provides a more richly interpersonal and social picture of the function of epistemic discourse that I think should be antecedently attractive.

Katharina Felka: Moorean Infelicity and Moral Discourse

According to expressivism, moral utterances express non-cognitive attitudes like approval or disapproval in the very same way as ordinary descriptive utterances express cognitive attitudes like belief. However, Woods (2014) argues, if expressivism were correct, utterances of 'Killing is wrong. But I don't disapprove of it' should be just as infelicitous as utterances of 'It is raining. But I don't believe that it is' are. But this prediction is not borne out: while utterances of the latter kind feel 'strongly incoherent', utterances of the former kind feel only 'slightly paradoxical'. The present paper investigates what the relation between moral utterances and non-cognitive attitudes consists in if it is not the expression relation. It argues for a minimal account that drops a fundamental assumption that has been made in the debate: that speakers communicate that they have certain non-cognitive attitudes in making moral utterances. The resulting account is a superior account of the relation between moral utterances and non-cognitive attitudes since it can explain why utterances like 'Killing is wrong. But I don't disapprove of it' feel at least slightly paradoxical while it avoids common pitfalls of its non-minimal competitors.

Stephen Finlay: Why I Am (Only) A Quasi-Expressivist

This talk attempts two things. First, to explain what it is to be a (mere) quasi-expressivist rather than an expressivist proper -- which requires some rumination on what it means to be an expressivist. In a nutshell, quasi-expressivism assigns to conversational pragmatics those features of discourse that expressivism-proper essentially assigns to meaning. The second task is to answer the question in my title: why I am only a quasi-expressivist. Building on the work of others, I will suggest that there are compelling reasons to think that the Frege-Geach problem for expressivism is irresolvable. Expressivists can opt for a single- or a dual-attitude strategy. It's now recognized that single-attitude strategies are committed to an explosion of attitude-types, an implication some thinkers have begun to embrace. I'll object not to the number, but to the types of some of these required attitudes. Whereas dual-attitude strategies escape the Frege-Geach problems, my objection is that they accomplish this only by abandoning central expressivist motivations.

Wolfgang Freitag: Reason and Expression

I will provide an expressivist conception of reason-giving by reference to an expressivist analysis of reason-giving "because"-sentences. I argue that, in giving a reason with the words "I go to London, because John is there," the speaker does not assert some explanatory relation between John's whereabouts and her going to London. Rather, she expresses that her intention of going to London is based on the belief that John is there. Giving a reason is expressing a reason. I will draw consequences for the ontology of reasons: reasons are mental states, not non-psychological facts or propositions.

Luca Incurvati: Inferential Expressivism

In this talk, I will give an overview of inferential expressivism, the view that the meaning of an expression is given in terms of inferential relations to attitude expressions. Inferential expressivism combines elements of inferentialism and expressivism, and I will explain the advantages of the view over traditional forms of expressivism and traditional forms of inferentialism. I will present or outline applications of the inferential expressivist approach to negation, epistemic modals and the truth predicate among others. This talk is based on joint work with Julian Schlöder.

Christa Peterson and Mark Schroeder: Secondary Contents for Expressivists

It is by now a familiar idea in metaethics, explored by many different theorists over the last twenty or more years, that normative sentences, when asserted in conversational context, may have a kind of secondary content, in addition to their primary, compositional, semantic content. Whether this secondary content is a matter of semantics or pragmatics is a matter of much dispute, as are the questions of what form it takes

and how if at all it varies. Many though not all of these discussions have focused on how judicious appeal to secondary contents can help ordinary realist views attain some of the advantages of expressivism. But even those not focused on this aim have in all cases assumed that we are adding secondary contents on top of an underlying ordinary descriptive content. Our goal in this paper is in contrast to explore how appealing to secondary contents can be of use to *expressivist* metaethical theories. That expressivists can appeal to secondary contents is a trivial consequence of the fact that expressivists can appeal, in principle, to any of the same developments in the philosophy of language and semantics that can be appealed to by cognitivist theories, so long as they can satisfactorily overcome the minimal bar of making sense of composition in the first place. Though there are likely to be many applications of this idea in expressivist thought, we'll focus on its virtues for understanding the diversity and complexity of moral concepts.

Benjamin Schnieder: Because

It is often said that the connective 'because' is used to explain why a cited fact obtains. While that is true, there is another important function of 'because', as evidenced by the example:

> The Shermans are at home, because their lights are on.

The point of this utterance is not to explain why the Shermans are at home. It is rather, in first shot, to

> (i) assert – in the main clause – that the Shermans are at home and

> (ii) to provide – in the because-clause – some evidence for this assertion.

My talk examines this function of 'because'.

Michael Scott: Religious Expressivism

The first part of this paper reviews the historical background to research on religious language, with a focus on accounts that are expressivist or allied to religious expressivism; this include work by George Berkeley, Wittgenstein and R. B. Braithwaite, 'paradox' theories and theories about the speech acts employed in religious discourse. Focusing on those positions that put into question the speaker's belief in, or even understanding of, the content of the religious affirmations they make, a distinction between holding true a sentence and believing the proposition that it expresses (Ullmann-Margalit and Margalit, 1992) is employed to elaborate this idea.

The second part sets out some of the main obstacles in the way of developing religious expressivism and considers why, notwithstanding the attention given to antirealist accounts of religious language, there have been relatively few attempts to defend expressivism. These include: the logical discipline exhibited by religious discourse that allow for the construction of religious variants of the Frege-Geach problem; the problem with identifying a relevant set of noncognitive states of mind that are expressed in religious discourse; the logical and intellectual relations between religious judgements and ostensibly descriptive ones.

The third part of the paper considers a potentially more promising way of defending religious expressivism that draws on recent proposals for articulating expressivist theories in terms of the conditions under which sentences of the target discourse are correctly asserted (Schroeder 2008). The recent debate about the nature of religious faith is introduced, with particular focus on objectual faith (or faith *in*). A version of religious expressivism is proposed according to which it is correct to assert a given religious sentence only if one possesses a relevant variety of objectual faith.

Nadja-Mira Yolcu: Psychological Expressivism and Expressive Denegation

With language we do not only describe the (outer) world but also present ourselves as being in mental states. For instance, in asserting "It is raining," the speaker also expresses a belief that it is raining. As the mental state expressed is not explicitly mentioned in the utterance, this constitutes what we call a *non-explicit expressive act*.

The central claim of *psychological expressivism* is that there are also *explicit* expressive acts. Serious and competent utterances of present tense self-ascriptions of mental states are typically expressive of the first-

order mental state named: With "I believe that it is raining" the speaker expresses the belief that it is raining. More generally, with a propositional avowal of the form "I ψ that p", where "ψ" denotes a propositional attitude, a speaker typically expresses the first-order mental state of ψ-ing that p.

In this talk, I will present and defend psychological expressivism. I will not only consider positive self-ascriptions of mental states but also negative self-ascriptions – *dis*avowals as I call them – such as "I don't believe that it is raining". While disavowals are often posed as a challenge to the expressivist thesis, I will make the case for extending psychological expresssivism to disavowals. I propose that (at least some) disavowals are instances of *expressive denegation*: With, say, "I don't believe that it is raining" the speaker expresses, in some sense, the absence of the belief that it is raining. I end with exploring some consequences for expressivism.