NOÛS 33:4 (1999) 558–572

Transforming Expressivism

JAMES DREIER
Brown University

In chapter five of *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* Allan Gibbard develops what he calls a 'normative logic' intended to solve some problems that face an expressivist theory of norms like his. The first is "the problem of embedding: The analysis applies to simple contexts, in which it is simply asserted or denied that such-and-such is rational. It says nothing about more complex normative assertions."[1] That is the problem with which I will be concerned. Though he doesn't list it as one of the problems to be solved, Gibbard's devices also explain what it means to say that a certain normative argument is 'valid', that one normative statement follows from some others. Both of these questions arise because of the ways we ordinarily think and speak, ways which on a simplistic version of expressivism appear not to make any sense. An expressivist committed to making sense of the way we ordinarily think and speak in normative language owes some account of embeddings and of logic. Gibbard's device seems to me the clearest and most systematic of any expressivist attempt to meet these challenges.

Since the problems themselves are very well rehearsed in the literature, I will not explain their details.[2] In the first section, I will explain how Gibbard's solution works. In the second section, in anticipation of a certain objection to that solution, I will suggest a generalization of Gibbard's device, first transforming it into an equivalent but more obviously generalizable one. In the third section I will show how an expressivist who adopts the transformed version might expand his account to accommodate an extra feature of ordinary normative talk and thought: we commonly and apparently unproblematically speak and think of normative judgments as being true or false. So far, the apparatus is a boon to expressivist analyses of normative language. In the fourth and last section, though, I raise a troublesome question: Is what emerges from the transformation really an expressivist theory at all?

1. The Formalism

Gibbard's formalism is intended to do for normative language what possible world semantics does for 'factual' language.[3] We want a formal model to display the logical relations among judgments, partly so as to represent the structure of the language in such a way as to make clear what follows from what, and partly so as to explain how meanings of complex chunks of language can be built up from meanings of their simpler parts. In possible worlds semantics we assign to each sentence a set of possible worlds, the set of all worlds in which what the sentence (actually) says is true. Sometimes these sets are called propositions, sometimes they are said to represent propositions; I will adopt the former way of speaking. Sets of possible worlds do both jobs we're interested in doing. First, they explain the semantics of (certain) embeddings. A disjunctive sentence expresses the proposition that is the union of what is expressed by its disjuncts, since it is true in any world in which at least one of those disjuncts is true. A conjunction expresses the intersection of what is expressed by its conjuncts. The negation of a sentence expresses the complement of the set of worlds expressed by the sentence. And so on. Second, possible world propositions explain logical relations. When some premises strictly imply a certain conclusion, that is to say that the intersection of the sets expressed by the premises is a subset of the set expressed by the conclusion (since any world in which all the premises are true must be a world in which the conclusion is true, if the premises strictly imply the conclusion).

Gibbard adapts possible world semantics by taking *pairs* as the elements of his proposition sets instead of worlds. These elements he calls 'factual-normative worlds'. They are pairs $\langle w, n \rangle$, where w is a possible world and n a complete set of norms. Normative sentences express sets of these pairs. Here is the official semantics.

For each normative predicate P (Gibbard is interested in the predicates 'permitted', 'forbidden', 'required') and each complete set of norms, n, we can construct the '*n-corresponding*' predicate, '*P according to n*'. This will be a descriptive predicate, as Gibbard notes—I can recognize which things are permitted by ethical egoism, for instance, without making any normative judgments of my own. Gibbard explains:

> Now to settle whether normative statement S holds in factual-normative world $\langle w, n \rangle$, we do the following. Replace each normative predicate in S with its n-corresponding descriptive predicate. That yields a purely descriptive statement S_n. Then normative statement S holds in $\langle w, n \rangle$ if and only if S_n holds in w... . Having said that, we need only add the dictum "The content of a normative statement is the set of factual-normative worlds for which the statement holds."[4]

These sets work for normative statements the way sets of possible worlds work for factual statements. Truth functional embeddings, for instance, are understood in just the same way. A conjunction expresses the intersection of what is ex-

pressed by its conjuncts, a disjunction the union of what its disjuncts express, and so on. And likewise for strict implication.

2. The Transformation

Useful as they are, sets of possible worlds are too crude to be propositions. Their clumsiness is well known. The set of worlds in which the square root of two is irrational is the set of all possible worlds, and so is the set of worlds in which Fermat's conjecture is true, but it would be perverse to insist that the ancient Greeks proved the proposition that Fermat conjectured to be true. Of course, the very same problems that plague possible world semantics will carry over to Gibbard's device for representing contents of normative judgments. Suppose, for instance, that someone ignorant of chemistry insists that although it is permissible to sprinkle salt on one's beans, it is impermissible to sprinkle sodium chloride on them. If we represent her normative view by the empty set, we will be missing some important distinctions. We will be missing some structure, in general, that ordinary normative thinkers have in their ordinary normative thoughts.

Of course, defenders of possible worlds semantics are aware of such difficulties and they have some replies. They may say that Fermat's conjecture is a sentence, not a proposition, and then agree that no Ancient Greek ever proved that sentence (or any adequate translation thereof). I don't find these replies fully convincing, but there is no need to enter fully into the controversy. My point is that Gibbard's apparatus, *as stated*, is specifically tied to possible worlds semantics. I will show that it need not be. When seen from the right angle, Gibbard's method of assigning formal objects to normative sentences is fully generalizable. The same basic trick that converts sets of possible worlds to sets of factual-normative worlds also produces analogous formal objects from whatever one's favorite sort of proposition happens to be.

Gibbard's device is a good start, but it would be better if we could generalize the account. Given possible world semantics, Gibbard generated a normative analog for expressivists. It would be helpful if we could see how, given some more fine grained conception of propositions, a corresponding conception of normative content could be worked out. Fortunately, the extension is easy enough.[5]

To start, take some set of factual-normative worlds, and partition it into "norm-equivalent subsets" by grouping together factual-normative worlds that share a second member (the set of norms, or as I shall say for brevity, the "norm"). So a given subset could be thought of as, say, the n^* subset, if it contained all and only the pairs whose second member is n^*, and a second subset would be the $n^\#$ subset, and so on. This partition of the content of some normative statement displays for each norm the worlds which 'go with' that norm in the content in question. Next we 'merge' each element of the partition, so that for each such element we substitute the single pair $\langle n, W \rangle$, where W is the set of all worlds appearing in the n subset. Formally, we are taking each of Gibbard's contents, G, the sets of factual-

normative worlds $\langle w, n\rangle$, to new sets of norm-worldset pairs, $\langle n, W\rangle$ by the transformation:

$$\mathcal{T}(G) = \{\langle n, W\rangle \mid (\forall w)(w \in W \leftrightarrow \langle w, n\rangle \in G)\}$$

So if the old set, G, is a set of world-norm pairs, the new one is a set of pairs each of whose first member is a norm, and whose second member is the set of all possible worlds that were paired with that norm in G.

These new sets are equivalent to Gibbard's as formal objects representing normative contents, in that the structure of 'normative propositions' is the same; there is an isomorphism between the Gibbard contents and the new formal objects. To each Gibbard set there corresponds exactly one of the new sets of norm-worldset pairs, and vice versa.[6] What is interesting and salient about these new sets is that they are *functions*. In particular, they are functions from norms, n, to sets of worlds, W. So Gibbard's device for representing the contents of normative statements turns out to represent them as functions from complete sets of norms to sets of possible worlds. As long as we are happy to use sets of possible worlds as propositions, we can think of Gibbard's device as representing the contents of normative statements by functions from sets of norms to propositions. And now for the payoff: insofar as we prefer to have some other sort of abstract object to play the role of propositions in our semantic theory, we can just take the contents of normative statements to be functions from sets of norms to those objects. In general, the contents of normative statements can be thought of as *functions from sets of norms to propositions*. And this is so no matter what propositions are taken to be.

I want to stress that my functions from systems of norms to sets of possible worlds are *isomorphic* to Gibbard's sets of factual-normative worlds. Indeed, in some contexts, a set of factual-normative worlds might be *called* a function from normative systems to sets of possible worlds. (Think of a set of ordered pairs, $\langle x, y\rangle$, such that x is a person and y one of x's ancestors. The complete set of such pairs could be thought of as the function from persons to sets of their ancestors.) So even if the motivation I offered for thinking about the transformation from sets of factual-normative worlds to functions turns out to be badly founded, there is no question of the functions from systems of norms to propositions being incorrect. It is, in effect, a change in perspective, or in notation.

Let me elaborate a bit. We saw that Gibbard's normative contents, the sets of factual-normative worlds, operate in compositional semantics and logical implication in the same way that sets of possible worlds operate in ordinary possible worlds semantics. So let's see first how the transformed apparatus works in the same contexts. Gibbard's contents are sets, and the content of a conjunction is the intersection of the contents of the conjuncts. Our new contents are functions (from sets of norms to possible world propositions), and the content of a conjunction will be a function that is simply constructable from the functions that are

the contents of the conjuncts. Suppose we have two statements, S_1 and S_2, and their conjunction, $S_{1\&2}$, and suppose that the contents of the statements are the functions f_1 and f_2. Then the content of the conjunction will be $f_{1\&2}$, where for each set of norms, n, $f_{1\&2}(n) = f_1(n) \cap f_2(n)$. And similarly for other truth functions, and for logical implication: when a set of premises strictly imply their conclusion, that will mean that for each and every set of norms, n, the intersection of the values of the contents of the premises at argument n will be a subset of the value of the content of the conclusion at argument n.

So far we are still relying on possible world propositions, so that we still speak of intersections and subsets when specifying contents of truth functional compounds or of the relation of implication. But we can now generalize. We use intersections when explaining conjunction because that is how it is done in possible world semantics. But suppose we had some other sort of proposition in mind. We could borrow the compositional semantics for that sort of proposition, and the account of logical implication too. The contents of normative statements, we say, are functions from sets of norms to regular old propositions, whatever they may be. And when we have a conjunction and we know the functions that are the contents of the two conjuncts, again suppose they are f_1 and f_2, then we can specify which function is to be the content of the conjunction. For each n, we say, the function takes as its value a proposition, namely, the ordinary conjunction of the propositions $f_1(n)$ and $f_2(n)$. The apparatus is now entirely general.

The generalization is helpful to expressivists. It is helpful because it allows an expressivist to accept and make use of any theory of propositions that might be useful. For example, an expressivist could agree that someone could think it permissible to sprinkle salt on one's beans while thinking it impermissible to sprinkle sodium chloride on one's beans. He could make use of any theory of propositions that represents the proposition stated by "John puts salt on his beans" as different from the one stated by "John puts sodium chloride on his beans." Suppose a theory represents the proposition stated by the first sentence as p, and the one stated by the second sentence as q. Then the expressivist can represent the semantic value of "It is permissible for John to put salt on his beans" by a function from norms, n, to the proposition that p is permissible according to n, and the value of "It is impermissible for John to put sodium chloride on his beans" by a function from norms, n, to the proposition that p is impermissible according to n. Since the embedded propositions are distinct, so are the two semantic values.

In general, the problem I presented was that sets of possible worlds are not adequate representations of (ordinary factual) propositions, and that Gibbard's model inherits all the problems that possible world semantics has. The general solution is to see that once Gibbard's sets are transformed into functions from norms to ordinary propositions, any kind of proposition works equally well. So the expressivist semantics need not be saddled with the problems of any particular theory of propositions.

3. A Bonus

It now appears that expressivism's best chance at solving the problems mentioned by Gibbard is to count as the content (or some sort of semantic value) of a normative judgment, a function from sets of norms to ordinary factual propositions. I think that this approach yields a bonus. The expressivist can, with a little imagination, interpret certain ordinary thoughts and remarks that he might otherwise have to count as errors. I am thinking of common sense attributions of truth and falsity to normative judgments. Let me first explain why I think it is an advantage to an expressivist to be able to bring these attributions into his interpretation, rather than counting them as erroneous. Then I will explain just how the trick might work.

Let me first explain what I take to be distinctive about expressivism. As a matter of fact, there are several clustered characteristics of an expressivist view. Notoriously, expressivists deny that normative judgments are true or false. They deny that normative judgments state propositions. And they deny that the function of normative judgment is to express the speaker's beliefs; instead, they express some non-cognitive attitude. Most important, I think, expressivists deny that normative judgments report or represent facts, or say how the world is. So they think there is no special account needed of normative facts, no metaphysical problems to be tackled in moral philosophy. An expressivist can be a naturalist, committed only to the natural facts of the world, without attempting to identify normative facts with any of the natural facts.

By contrast, consider John Mackie's Error Theory.[7] Mackie's metaphysics agree with expressivist metaphysics: they are naturalist. But Mackie thinks that ordinary normative thought is committed to an extraordinary sort of normative fact, one that is 'intrinsically action-guiding', that has 'to-be-doneness' built into it. Like an expressivist, Mackie thinks there are no such facts. Since he thinks the existence of such facts is built into ordinary normative judgment as a kind of pre-supposition, he takes all ordinary normative (or at least moral) judgment to be in error.

Expressivism is not supposed to be an error theory. It is not supposed to claim that ordinary normative thought is inescapably committed to any kind of metaphysical error. Though expressivists do not believe in normative facts, neither do they allow that ordinary normative thinking must be about purported normative facts in order to make good sense. It is for this reason that an expressivist like Gibbard takes seriously in the first place the problems of embedding and logic of normative statements. An easier (in some ways) reply to these challenges would be to say that normative statements do not actually embed in truth functional compounds at all, and that what look like arguments with normative premises are not really logical arguments at all. But this reply would move expressivism out of its special niche and into the camp of John Mackie; expressivism would then be a kind of error theory. This move may have been attractive to some early expressivists, but latter-day expressivists prefer to *vindicate* ordinary normative think-

ing insofar as they can. Calling a normative statement true or false, and using the notions of truth and falsity in normative reasoning, are parts of common sense, and an expressivist should want to vindicate them if he can.[8]

How does the device of propositional functions, functions from normative sets to propositions, help expressivism provide a sensible interpretation of talk of truth of a normative statement? Propositional functions cannot themselves be true or false simply. Only complete propositions (or whatever expresses them) can be true or false simply, and propositional functions are incomplete propositions. Functions from sets of norms to propositions can be true or false, apparently, only relative to one or another set of norms. But compare indexical sentences (that is, sentences that contain indexical expressions). The primary semantic value of an indexical sentence, according to the popular view, is not a proposition but a propositional function, a character.[9] A character is a function from contexts to contents. The character of an indexical term, like "I", is a function from contexts to referents, and the character of an indexical sentence, like "I am alone in my room," is a function from contexts to propositions. The fact that the semantic value of this indexical sentence is a propositional function, and not a plain proposition, does not prevent it from bearing truth values! For such sentences can straightforwardly bear truth values on one or another occasion of use, because occasions of use provide contexts. All that's needed, then, in order for a normative judgment to be true or false on an occasion of use, on the present expressivist account, is for the context to provide some suitable and salient normative system to plug into the function and yield a proposition. Typically, there is no paucity of normative systems available in a context to do this job. If there is a problem, it is in the overabundance of available sets of norms.

Let me spell out the point with an example of Gibbard's. Cleopatra says,

> "Unless Antony finds his fleet outnumbered, it makes sense for him to give battle."[10]

Suppose Cleopatra addressed this remark to you, and you (as you would naturally want to put it) agree with her. You think what she said is true. Suppose you say so ("That's true," you say). What have you just said? Well, you have *endorsed* Cleo's statement, no doubt. But that is an insufficient explanation. You might go further; you might declaim, "Everything Cleopatra said about Antony is true." Your assertion can itself be taken to be true or false, it has logical implications, it can be embedded in propositional contexts. Or so we would ordinarily think and say. What you said needs some semantic representation just as much as what Cleopatra said needs some. What representation?

Suppose that in saying that what Cleopatra asserted is true, you are yourself expressing norms that require Antony to give battle if his fleet is not outnumbered. This interpretation of what you are doing seems plausible (at least insofar as expressivism seems plausible in the first place). The semantic value of Cleopatra's statement, as we are construing it, is a function from sets of norms to

propositions (it takes a set of norms, *n*, to the proposition: that unless Antony finds his fleet outnumbered, it makes sense according to *n* for him to give battle). When you said that Cleopatra's statement was true, you did not mean that a certain function is true. You must have meant that a certain proposition was true. Which proposition? If we call the set of norms that Cleopatra accepts, n_c, and the set that you accept, n_y, then apparently there are two possibilities. You might be saying that the proposition delivered by the function at argument n_c is true, or you might be saying that the one delivered by the function at n_y is true. The simplest case would be the one in which your normative views are the same as Cleopatra's. And this may be the *only* unproblematic case, for then we'll know that you are expressing the very same thing that Cleopatra expressed. But what if your norms differ from Cleopatra's? If, as I suggested, you are yourself expressing norms that require Antony to give battle if his fleet is not outnumbered, then the proposition you think true is the one delivered by the function at argument n_y. This is a bit odd, since it could not be that proposition that Cleopatra meant to assert. It would be as though Cleopatra had said, "I am queen of the Nile," and you, confident that you are in fact the queen of the Nile, had nodded and said, "That's true." On the face of it, it seems more reasonable to suppose that what you called true was the proposition delivered by the function at argument n_c. You would be saying then that according to Cleopatra's own norms, it does indeed make sense for Antony to give battle if his fleet is not outnumbered. You might believe this, of course, even if you did not at all endorse Cleopatra's norms.

Which proposition you are calling true, I suspect, depends on features of the conversational context. Pure indexicals don't work this way, at least not according to the standard accounts, but there's no doubt that many expressions of ordinary English do. For example, I might remind you:

"I told you last week never to put off till tomorrow what you can do today."

It would be awfully pedantic of you to retort, "Not at all; last week, Tuesday I think it was, you told me not to put off until last Wednesday what I could have done last Tuesday. Now you are telling me not to put off till tomorrow what I can do today. Will you please make up your mind?" Admittedly the example involves an idiom, but there are others. Calling me from the Mall in Washington, you ask me where the National Gallery is, and I tell you it is just a few blocks away from you. You tell your brother standing outside the phone booth, "He says it is not far." Then you ask me whether I can deliver the package you left me to the apartment of a mutual friend, and I tell you I will be glad to, since the friend lives on my block. You tell your brother, "He says her apartment is not far." The content of "not far" depends on context. In ordinary English, it clearly depends on *conversational* context. The semantic value of "not far" seems to be a function that delivers a location (a set of locations) given a location as argument, and which location is to be the argument seems to be a matter of which is salient in the conversational context. And so it might be with normative expressions. Calling

one true might be calling a certain proposition true, and which proposition could be determined by the conversational context.

There may be other ways to make sense of attributions of truth to normative statements, consistent with the sophisticated expressivism I have been considering. The resources made available by using propositional functions, semantic values that are strikingly similar to indexical characters, are fairly open-ended. I have suggested just a handful of related possibilities.

4. Expressivism Transformed?

So far, I think, my suggestion has been friendly to sophisticated expressivist accounts like Gibbard's. But the suggestion also raises a concern. The account is beginning to look awfully 'cognitivist'. The worry is not just that having provided an interpretation for so much 'realistic' normative language, the expressivist has crowded out everything distinctive he wanted to say in the first place; that is a familiar concern,[11] and expressivist responses are fairly familiar too.[12] It is rather that from a more theoretic point of view, the semantic model that emerges from the transformation of Gibbard's original apparatus is so close to a more plainly cognitivist model that we must wonder exactly what the difference is. An indexical view[13] of normative sentences assigns as semantic values to normative statements the same objects, namely, functions from sets of norms to factual propositions, as are assigned as 'contents' by Gibbard's sophisticated expressivism. The question is whether the two theories are really the same theory after all.

Theories can use the same formalism while differing philosophically, since they might make very different uses of the formalism. In the last analysis, semantic formalism gets philosophical content by a further story about how the objects in the model are related to what we are doing when we use the language.[14] On the face of it, the theories do differ. But it is not clear how deep the differences are. I will give two examples to illustrate. I want to warn the reader, though, that this last section is not very conclusive. As I will explain, it seems to me an open question whether sophisticated expressivism really does differ significantly from an indexical theory of normative semantics.

According to an indexical theory, a given assertion of a normative statement will certainly express a belief by stating a proposition. The proposition stated (the content of the belief expressed) will be of the ordinary sort. There will be nothing particularly 'normative' about the *proposition*, any more than there is anything especially indexical about the proposition I state when I say to Ernie, "You are an epistemologist." So saying I express the same old proposition that I express when I say, "Ernie is an epistemologist." It is the way I express the proposition, rather than the proposition itself, that is indexical. Similarly, according to the indexical theory of normative language, there is nothing particularly normative about the proposition I express when I say, "Antony ought to give battle." Suppose that the set of norms salient in the context is my own set of norms, n_j. Then anyone could express the same proposition by saying, "Antony is required by n_j to give battle."

The normative *sentence* expresses the proposition in a normative way, much as the indexical sentence expresses its proposition in an indexical way. It isn't the proposition that's normative. Still, the point is that the indexical theorist wants to say that anyone sincerely asserting a normative sentence will express a belief by stating a proposition.

By contrast, an expressivist, especially Gibbard, does not (initially at least) want to agree that the normative statement expresses any proposition at all. Its utterance expresses no belief, but a noncognitive attitude instead. Gibbard does say that the sentence spoken has a semantic value, a kind of 'content', and that value is exactly the same as the value assigned to it by the indexical theorist, but Gibbard denies that the 'character' of the sentence enables it to state any proposition on any occasion of use.

This appears to be a significant contrast. But I'm not so sure. After all, both theorists will agree that there is something in the speech act that is distinctively normative, and they will agree that that something is represented in the semantic value of the sentence, and they will agree about what that semantic value is. And even an expressivist might be willing to allow that there is a proposition closely related to the assertion, just the one I mentioned, that is made very salient by the utterance of the normative sentence. The expressivist may not agree that this proposition was *said*, or *asserted*, but this reluctance is so very theoretical that it is not easy to see what real difference it makes. As I noted, someone who heard the utterance might naturally say that it is true, and presumably the expressivist will have to explain what that would mean. If the explanation involves some proposition's being true, and the proposition is recovered from the propositional function that expressivism uses as the semantic value of the sentence, then surely it is just one of the propositions yielded by the function at some argument, some set of norms. And this is exactly what the indexical theory says. So the indexical theorist and the expressivist appear to have at most shallow differences over whether any proposition is expressed by assertion of a normative sentence.

Furthermore, an indexical theorist and an expressivist will agree about what it is that makes a sentence, and its assertion, normative. It is the primary semantic value of the sentence, a function from norms (in the context) to propositions, that makes a sentence normative. By asserting one, a person commits herself to a set of norms: the set containing all and only those norms that the function takes to *true* propositions. The indexical theorist calls this function a character. The expressivist can call it something else. But it is playing the same role in the explanation of what makes a sentence normative.

Let me try to forestall a certain objection.[15] I am not suggesting that any descriptive sentence *has the same meaning* as any normative sentence. I don't believe that a normative sentence can mean the same thing as any descriptive sentence. Nor do I think that any indexical-free sentence ever means the same thing as any indexical sentence. But an indexical-free sentence can *express the same proposition* as an indexical sentence; they can have the same *content*. These notions of 'same proposition' and 'same content' are, needless to say, somewhat

theoretic, they are not entirely due to common sense, though they do draw their potency from common talk. I am suggesting that similarly, a normative sentence uttered on a particular occasion, in a particular context, may have the same content, some truth conditions perhaps, as a descriptive sentence has. This distinction, between 'same meaning' and 'same content', is crucial.

Compare Gibbard's idea that the meaning of a normative sentence lies in "what it rules out."[16] This seems right. And think of what I rule out when I inform you: "I am here now." I rule out nothing. My assertion provides no information (at least, none that I couldn't have provided by grunting or otherwise getting you to notice my existence). This is so even though *what I said* might have been false! One story of what is going on is David Kaplan's.[17] You know the meaning of an indexical when you know, not its content, but a function, a rule for getting from contexts to contents. The rules for "I" and "here" and "now" insure that "I am here now" is true in every context, even though it has different contents in different contexts. That is why it is so maximally uninformative. That is why it rules out nothing.

Similarly, what is ruled out by an assertion of a normative sentence seems to be a matter of its factual-normative content, as Gibbard puts it, or of its function, the one that delivers descriptive propositions given normative systems. What is ruled out when I say, "I am shorter than Shaq", is some combinations: a context in which the speaker is Napoleon, combined with the proposition that Napoleon is as tall as Shaq; a context in which the speaker is Wilt, combined with the proposition that Wilt is as tall as Shaq; and so on. And what I rule out when I say, "It makes sense for Antony to give battle", is some combinations: a hedonistic system combined with the descriptive fact that by giving battle Antony will produce less welfare for himself than he might; a utilitarian system combined with the descriptive fact that by giving battle Antony will produce less happiness in the world as a whole than he might; and so on.

That is why it seems to me that the formal apparatus common to Gibbard's sophisticated expressivist and my indexical theorist is playing the same role in the two theories. In each theory, the 'meaning' is just a matter of what assertion of the sentence rules out. And, of course, what is ruled out be a certain sentence according to indexical theory is just the same as what is ruled out by that sentence according to expressivism.

Take a second example. It is a well known objection to relativist meta-ethical theories that they give an incorrect account (or no account) of moral disagreement. An indexical view of normative language seems to be relativist in the relevant sense, and appears to be subject to the objection. For suppose Cleopatra says, "Antony ought to give battle," and Brutus says, "Antony ought not to give battle." Surely any sensible theory of what this exchange meant must have Cleopatra and Brutus disagreeing. But if the sentences, and in particular the 'ought's, are indexical, then they are not in disagreement at all, anymore than you and I disagree when I say, "I was born in New York" and you say, "I was not born in New York." Now expressivists have long advertised their account as having a

clear advantage over a relativist theory in just this respect.[18] They note that according to their theory, the states of mind expressed by the two sentences do disagree in a natural and obvious way: the one is approval of Antony's giving battle, the other disapproval.

But this objection is too quick, at least as an objection to a moderately sophisticated indexical theory.[19] As I've noted, natural English indexicals do not quite fit the simplest models that philosophers of language have proposed for them. Take "here". If Cleopatra said, "The papyrus we're looking for is here somewhere," and Brutus said, "No, it is not here," they would be disagreeing in the most obvious way. But doesn't "here" always refer to the location of the speaker? And don't two speakers always have different locations? No, of course not; the conversational context determines how far (and in which directions) the denotation[20] of "here" extends, and in our example each use clearly denotes the region of common interest between Cleopatra and Brutus. And similarly with "ought", it might be said: two speakers may often share enough in the way of norms they accept that in conversation their utterances may have the same content, the "area of overlap between them." So Brutus and Cleopatra may be disagreeing about Antony's giving battle after all, disagreeing in the straightforward sense of asserting contrary propositions. Of course, they may not be. They may not accept enough of the same norms, and they may even know that they don't. But in that case, the indexical theorist may say just the same thing that the expressivist says, namely, that there is real disagreement *in norms*, or in attitude. And this, I think, shouldn't be surprising, since the indexical theory so closely resembles the sophisticated expressivist theory in its formalities.

In these examples, and as far as I can tell they are typical, the indexical theorist says more or less the same things that the expressivist says, only in different words. This needn't be any *objection* to sophisticated expressivism, but it does seem to deprive the view of some of its distinctiveness. As Jon Tresan says in a different context,[21] if a cognitivist theory can account for everything in normative language that is accounted for by expressivism, we may be less inclined to take expressivism seriously. I don't mean to be saying only that the formal objects presented as semantic values for normative sentences are the same for both theories. I agree with Simon Blackburn, among others, that what is interesting and distinctive about expressivism is the sort of explanation it gives of our normative judgments, rather than the details of which of them it says are true, or more generally how its formal semantics work out. My point is that the formalities strongly suggest that the *kinds* of explanations available to each sort of theory are strikingly similar.

I will give one final example of what appears to be a difference between the indexical conception of normative judgment and the sophisticated expressivist conception. I said that according to the indexical conception, whenever someone makes some normative statement there is some definite descriptive proposition expressed. I added that although an expressivist will not want to say that, he may be happy to admit that there is a definite descriptive proposition that is especially

salient in the context: the one that the normative sentence's function yields when the argument is (for example) the speaker's own normative system. But this is to suppose that a speaker has a definite normative system. Gibbard himself never supposes any such thing. He rather assumes that real speakers have incomplete systems of norms, systems that could be filled out consistently in any number of ways. A speaker typically has not decided which of these ways to accept, and the question of which she would accept if she had time enough and intellectual powers to think everything through carefully may not have any determinate answer.[22] Expressivism, then, may have a significant advantage in that it need not assume something that is psychologically unrealistic.

This advantage may be real, but I am not sure that it is. An indexical theorist still has some resources. He might say that when there is no particular completed normative system made salient in the context, there isn't any definite proposition expressed by a normative sentence in that context either. Instead, the utterance is vague. And in that case, it might be neither true nor false, though not for the reasons that expressivists sometimes give. It might be true on some specifications and false on others, just as any vague utterance might be. The logic of such sentences would then be the logic of vagueness. For example, if the norms Peter accepts are broadly utilitarian norms, but he is unsettled in his conception of utility, then his judgment "Raising animals for food makes no sense" might come out true in *any* complete specification of his actual present attitudes, but the claim "Only the character of the experiences of sentient beings is important" might come out neither true nor false, since it comes out true on a 'mental state' specification of utilitarianism but false on a 'preference satisfaction' specification. While this strategy seems promising to me, it is far from clear that it is satisfactory, and even less clear that it brings the indexical theory back into line with a form of expressivism. How deep a difference does this makes between the indexical theory and the expressivist theory? I must leave that question open.

Historically speaking, expressivism was initially a theory of normative statements that made them out to be mainly unstructured; it quite seriously compared normative judgment to expressive acts like yawning or wincing. While this feature was very distinctive, it was not very plausible, and later expressivists added complexity and particularly structure to their semantics. The amendment makes expressivism more plausible, but also less distinctive.[23] I am suggesting that it may now have become so much less distinctive that it has lost its status as a separate theory. It is now a kind of cognitivism after all.[24]

Notes

[1] (Gibbard 1990, p. 92).

[2] For the problem, see (Geach 1960; Geach 1965) and (Searle 1962; Searle 1969), esp. the appendix on 'The Speech Act Fallacy'. For some attempted solutions, aside from Gibbard's, see (Blackburn 1971; Blackburn 1984; Blackburn 1988) and a different approach in (Hare 1970).

[3] It is obviously question-begging to contrast normative with factual language. To make out this contrast I would have to give an argument in favor of expressivism, which I do not intend to give. But I will happily be begging the relevant question right until the end of this paper.

[4] (Gibbard 1990 p. 96). I don't think this is really what Gibbard wants, but it his officially stated formula for finding the content of a normative statement. Here is an example of a normative statement that seems to get the wrong content if we follow Gibbard's exact instructions. "If most Americans believe that playing the lottery is rationally permitted, then it really is rationally permitted." Replacing the normative predicate with its *n*-corresponding predicate we have, "If most Americans believe that playing the lottery is *n*-permitted, then it really is *n*-permitted." Take an *n* according to which playing the lottery is permitted; *n* will be paired with each world in which most Americans believe, not that playing the lottery is permitted, but that it is permitted by *n*. This seems wrong. The problem tends to arise when a normative predicate is embedded in an intentional context. I. L. Humberstone pointed out to me this apparently unintended consequence of Gibbard's official formula. Presumably, Gibbard would want to add some complications for intentional embeddings of normative predicates.

[5] The remainder of this section owes much to some discussions with I. L. Humberstone and others in a seminar given by Humberstone at Monash University in 1994. A treatment of Gibbard's device that is (unobviously, I think) related to mine can be found in section 6 of (Humberstone 1996), especially at pages 153-4; and see note 31 in that paper for a casual remark that foresees the transformation that I explain here.

[6] This one-one correspondence is fairly easy to see. To get the set of norm-worldset pairs from a given set of factual-normative worlds, take each n_i and find which worlds are paired with it, and put them together in a set W_i; then put all those worlds together in a set $\langle n_i, W_i \rangle$. To recover the set of factual-normative worlds, just take each of the n_i and pair it with a world *w* just in case *w* is a member of the worldset with which n_i is paired in the norm-worldset pairs content. To show that we have a one-one mapping, we have to show that we get the same set of factual-normative worlds that we started with; but it should be obvious that we do.

[7] (Mackie 1977).

[8] Most famously, Simon Blackburn takes a large part the job of quasi-realism to be "earning the right to speak of truth" in moral contexts. See (Blackburn 1984, esp. pp. 196-7).

[9] (Kaplan 1989).

[10] (Gibbard 1990, p.94). According to Gibbard, to say that something "makes sense" to do is to express norms that require doing that thing.

[11] See (Wright 1988) and (Hale 1990).

[12] See Gibbard and the Blackburn and Hare sources cited in note 2.

[13] (Dreier 1990), and also (Wong 1984) for a similar account.

[14] See Gibbard, pp. 97-102.

[15] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this objection forcefully.

[16] See Gibbard, pp. 97-99.

[17] (Kaplan 1989).

[18] For example, (Stevenson 1963) and (Ayer 1952).

[19] See (Dreier 1990).

[20] A little attention shows that "here" has no denotation strictly speaking, since it is neither a noun nor a pronoun but an adverb. I leave this end loose.

[21] "Cognitivism can account for morality's practical nature", unpublished ms. at the time of this writing.

[22] I thank an anonymous Referee for pointing out this difference between Gibbard's view and the indexical conception.

[23] Susan Wolf made this point in a discussion (not about the present paper) at the Australian National University in 1994.

[24] Thanks to Matt McGrath, Philip Pettit and Daniel Stoljar for some comments on an early draft.

References

Ayer, A. J. (1952), *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Dover, New York.
Blackburn, Simon (1971), "Moral Realism", in Casey (ed.), *Morality and Moral Reasoning*, Methuen, London, pp. 101-24.
Blackburn, Simon (1984), *Spreading the Word*, Blackwell, Oxford.
Blackburn, Simon (1988), "Attitudes and Contents", *Ethics*, vol. 98, pp. 501-517.
Dreier, James (1990), "Internalism and Speaker Relativism", *Ethics*, vol. 101(1), pp. 6-26.
Geach, P. T. (1960), "Ascriptivism", *Philosophical Review*, vol. 69, pp. 221-225.
Geach, P. T. (1965), "Assertion", *Philosophical Review*, vol. 74, pp. 449-65.
Gibbard, Allan (1990), *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.
Hale, Bob (1990), "Can There Be a Logic of Attitudes?", in J. Haldane (ed.), *Reality, Representation and Projection*, Oxford University Press, London, pp. 337-363.
Hare, R. M. (1970), "Meaning and Speech Acts", *Philosophical Review*, vol. 79, pp. 3-24.
Humberstone, I. L. (1996), "A Study in Philosophical Taxonomy", *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 83, pp. 121-169.
Kaplan, David (1989), "Demonstratives", in J. Almog, J. Perry and H. Wettstein (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 481-563.
Mackie, J. L. (1977), *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
Searle, John (1962), "Meaning and Speech Acts", *Philosophical Review*, vol. 71, pp. 423-32.
Searle, John (1969), *Speech Acts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Stevenson, C. L. (1963), *Facts and Values*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
Wong, David (1984), *Moral Relativity*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
Wright, Crispin (1988), "Realism, Anti-Realism, Irrealism, and Quasi-Realism", in P. French, T. Uehling Jr. and H. Wettstein (eds.), *Midwest Studies* 12, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.