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BY KRISTER BYKVIST AND JONAS OLSON

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Krister Bykvist and Jonas Olson

JUST AS WE CAN BE MORE OR LESS CERTAIN about empirical matters, e.g., that global warming is caused by humans or that the CIA planned the murder of President John F. Kennedy, we can be more or less certain about normative matters, e.g., that male circumcision is morally wrong or that an action is right if and only if it maximizes happiness. In other words, both normative and nonnormative beliefs can vary in degrees. Recently, it has been argued that this is a challenge for noncognitivism about normativity. Noncognitivists think that normative judgments (primarily) express conative or "desire-like" attitudes rather than beliefs, so the challenge is to account for the fact that normative certitude varies in degrees.

Michael Smith presented the challenge in a 2002 paper and James Lenman (2003) and Michael Ridge (2003, 2007) responded independently. We challenged Lenman's and Ridge's responses in our joint 2009 paper. Andrew Sepielli (forthcoming) has now joined the rescue operation. His basic idea is that noncognitivists should employ the notion of *being for* (Schroeder 2008) to account for normative certitude. But as we shall see in section 2, the *being for* account of normative certitude is vulnerable to many problems shared by other noncognitivist theories. Furthermore, Sepielli's favored normalization procedure for degrees of *being for* has highly problematic implications, as we will show in section 3. We begin in section 1 by explaining the *being for* account of normative certitude.

1. The *Being For* Account of Normative Certitude

Sepielli takes noncognitivism to be a psychological theory about normative judgment, and expressivism to be the semantic theory endorsed by most noncognitivists. According to expressivism, the meaning of normative terms is to be understood in terms of the (noncognitive) psychological states they are used to express. A notorious problem for expressivism is to account for the meaning of normative terms when they are embedded in complex sentences. This problem goes by various labels, such as the Frege-Geach problem, the problem of embedding and the negation problem. On Sepielli's view, noncognitivism can account for normative certitude only if expressivism has enough structure to solve the Frege-Geach problem. Sepielli's basic maneuver is to apply Schroeder's recent treatment of the Frege-Geach problem to the problem of normative certitude.

Let us follow Schroeder and focus on negation. Consider the sentence (1) "Jon thinks that murdering is wrong." There are various places where we can insert a negation in this sentence, e.g., the following: (2) "Jon thinks that murdering is not wrong." Now, expressivists face at least two challenges. The first is to explain what kind of noncognitive attitude (2) attributes to Jon. The second is to explain why this attitude is incon-

sistent with the attitude attributed to Jon in (1). Advocates of traditional expressivism might want to say that (1) attributes to Jon a negative attitude to murdering while (2) attributes to Jon an attitude of toleration of murdering. But then it remains to be explained why a negative attitude to murdering and toleration of murdering are inconsistent attitudes. Since the two attitudes have the same content, the alleged inconsistency between them cannot be explained in terms of their content. According to Schroeder's diagnosis, traditional expressivism has too little structure to meet the second challenge, so his fix is to add more structure. He does so by introducing the attitude of *being for*. The idea is that to think an action wrong, right, etc., is to take the attitude of *being for* some other attitude to the action in question. To illustrate, sentence (1) should be understood as (1') "Jon is for blaming for murder" and (2) as (2') "Jon is for not blaming for murder." It is easy to see that the content of the attitude attributed to Jon in (1') is inconsistent with the content of the attitude attributed to Jon in (2').[1]

Smith too, in his original challenge, argued that noncognitivism has too little structure to account for degrees of normative certitude. Noncognitivists could appeal to degrees of desire strength, but then it is not clear how noncognitivists can account for normative importance – the fact that we assign some considerations more normative weight than others. For example, we think there is more reason to save innocent lives than to refrain from lying. Since normative certitude and normative importance can vary independently, noncognitivists cannot understand both phenomena in terms of desire-strength.[2]

Sepielli's response to this challenge is that "degrees of being for are for the non-cognitivist what degrees of belief are for the cognitivist" (9). According to this *being for* account of normative certitude, being highly certain that murder is wrong is to be strongly for blaming for murder. Sepielli identifies degrees of normative importance with degrees of blaming, so having some degree of certitude that there is strong reason not to murder comes out as being, to some degree, for strongly blaming for murdering. As can be readily seen, the degree of *being for* and the degree of blaming can vary independently. For example, I can be strongly for weakly blaming for not paying taxes, which would capture the case when I am highly certain that not paying taxes is a minor wrong. Similarly, I can be weakly for strongly blaming for eating factory-farmed chicken, which would capture the case where I am not so confident that eating factory-farmed chicken is a major wrong.

Another challenge for the expressivist is to solve the "normalization problem." This is the problem of finding a natural maximum level of normative certitude. To elaborate, certitude varies from 0 to 1: to be fully

[1] It is perhaps not obvious that this makes the attitudes in (1') and (2') inconsistent. But see Schroeder (2008: 42-3, 59-60) for an argument that expressivists can legitimately assume that *being for* is an "inconsistency-transmitting" attitude.

[2] Ridge (2007) argues that the problem can be solved by adopting a hybrid expressivist theory, according to which moral judgments express both cognitive and noncognitive attitudes. We raise serious problems for Ridge's view in Bykvist and Olson (2009: 212-15). For a more general critical overview of hybrid expressivism, see Schroeder (2009).

certain that *p* is to believe, to degree 1, that *p*, and to have 0 degree of belief that not-*p*. Finding a natural maximum level of normative certitude is not a problem for cognitivists, since they understand normative certitude straightforwardly in terms of degree of belief, which is taken to vary between 0 and 1.[3] But there is no obvious analogue for noncognitive, desire-like attitudes. Complete indifference might be seen as the weakest possible desire, but what is it to desire something completely, or to desire something to degree 1? Part of the problem is that there does not seem to be a natural limit to strength of desire. No matter how much you desire something, we can always imagine that you have an even stronger desire for it (which does not have to be approaching some limit). Before we come to Sepielli's solution of the normalization problem, we shall see that the *being for* account is vulnerable to several problems that can also be pressed against other forms of noncognitivism.[4]

2. Problems for the *Being For* Account of Normative Certitude

Sepielli accepts many of our objections to Lenman and Ridge (4), but he overlooks the fact that several of these objections also have force against the *being for* account of normative certitude.

(i) Gradability

Sepielli does not say much about the nature of the attitude of *being for*, but in order not to betray noncognitivism he must at least maintain that it is a noncognitive attitude. To accommodate degrees of normative certitude, he must also maintain that it is a gradable attitude. But this needs to be argued for since it is not obvious that all noncognitive attitudes come in degrees. Many do, of course – such as desires or wishes – but more problematic examples are intentions or plans. It is debatable, of course, whether these are noncognitive attitudes, but let us assume, along with expressivists such as Allan Gibbard (2003), that they are. It is far from obvious that it makes sense to talk about degrees of intentions or plans, or stronger or weaker intentions or plans (Bykvist and Olson 2009: 205). Of course, we can always talk about one intention being more robust than another in the sense of being more likely to survive various changes in the subject's beliefs, but this is only to say that the robustness of the intention comes in degrees, not the intention itself. In any case, it is fair to say that even if talk about degrees of intentions does make sense at the

[3] To be clear, it is of course not an uncontroversial matter how to understand degrees of belief. It is not even uncontroversial that belief does vary in degrees. All we mean to say here is that accounting for degrees of normative certitude is not a special problem for normative cognitivists, whereas it is for normative noncognitivists. For a recent defense of degrees of belief, see Eriksson and Hájek (2007).

[4] An anonymous reviewer suggested, as an alternative to Sepielli's account, that a subject's attitude of *being for* X at a certain time, t, could be taken to have strength 1 if, and only if, there is no Y, such that the subject is at t more for Y than X. This suggestion has unfortunate implications. For example, one cannot be less than fully certain that utilitarianism is true, but still more certain that utilitarianism is true than that any other normative theory is true.

end of the day, this needs to be argued for. But Sepielli offers no such arguments.

(ii) Motivational maladies

Since *being for* is supposed to be a motivational attitude, it is sensitive to general changes in a subject's psychology. Falling into a state of depression or listlessness generally has a negative impact on motivational attitudes. It is likely, then, that becoming depressed or listless makes one less for blaming and praising for various actions. Suppose that, as a result of falling into a state of general listlessness, a person becomes less for praising for charity work than she used to be. On Sepielli's view, this means that the listless person's certitude that charity work is right has decreased. But this is an implausible implication. Falling into states of depression or listlessness does not entail that one is less certain about nonnormative matters; such motivational maladies do not affect the certitude that 2 + 2 = 4 or that the CIA planned the murder of President Kennedy. So why should falling into states of depression or listlessness entail that one is less certain about normative matters? Of course, one's interest in being moral may wane when one falls into a depression, but moral interest and moral confidence are different things. It is noteworthy that Lenman's and Ridge's expressivist accounts do take this on board and thus are not vulnerable to the problem of motivational maladies (Bykvist and Olson 2009: 208-9, 211). So this is an aspect in which Sepielli's account is in worse shape than previous accounts.

(iii) The wrong kind of reasons

Another serious problem is that the attitude of *being for* and the degrees to which one is for bearing some relation to some action can vary independently of moral certitude (Bykvist and Olson 2009: 205-6). For example, a utilitarian might be certain that murder is wrong but not be for blaming for murder since he thinks that the attitude of blaming for murder is suboptimal in terms of net happiness. Or to take another example, I might be very much for praising male circumcision, not because I have a high degree of certitude that male circumcision is right, but because an evil demon has threatened to torture my family unless I am for praising male circumcision. This is to say that the *being for* account is vulnerable to the notorious wrong-kind-of-reason problem, which has been much discussed recently in other areas of normative theory.[5] In this context the problem is that one can be for bearing some relation to an action without this having any bearing on one's normative certitude; the reasons for *being for* bearing some relation to an action are in some cases of the wrong kind to capture normative certitude. There is as yet no general solution to the

[5] An anonymous reviewer raised the question of whether cognitivists are on any better footing here. The answer is that they are, since according to cognitivists, normative certitude is not different from certitude with respect to other subject matters. In particular, cognitivists hold that certitude is not a matter of *being for* some other attitude, so the wrong-kind-of-reason problem does not arise.

wrong-kind-of-reason problem that has won general acceptance, and it is not easy to see what the solution would be in this particular context.[6]

(iv) Cross-attitudinal comparisons

A plausible account of normative certitude should allow comparisons between normative and nonnormative certitude. For instance, one can be more certain that 2 + 2 = 4 than that an action is right if and only if it maximizes net happiness. We think that part of this problem is the lack of a natural maximum level for desire-like attitudes (Bykvist and Olson 2009: 212). But even on the assumption that Sepielli has solved the normalization problem for *being for* and shown that *being for* varies between 0 and 1, just like belief does, it is not clear that his account can make sense of comparisons between normative and nonnormative certitude. Remember that, on pain of betraying noncognitivism, Sepielli must hold that *being for* is a noncognitive attitude, i.e., a kind of attitude different from belief. What, then, does it mean to say that one's belief that 2 + 2 = 4 is stronger than one's attitude of *being for* praising actions if and only if they maximize happiness? Even if the respective scales both vary between 0 and 1, degrees of belief and degrees of *being for* seem too different to be meaningfully calibrated, since the attitudes themselves are so different. But intuitively, we *can* make sense of comparisons between normative and nonnormative certitude, and for cognitivists this is no problem at all.

Sepielli could perhaps try to adopt Schroeder's 2008 proposal in order to avoid this problem. Schroeder suggests a noncognitivist view of belief, according to which belief reduces to the attitude of *being for*: believing that *p* is *being for* proceeding as if *p*.

For example, to believe that 2 + 2 = 4 is to *be for* proceeding as if 2 + 2 = 4. So, to say that one's belief that 2 + 2 = 4 is stronger than one's attitude of *being for* praising actions of a certain kind is to say that one is more strongly for proceeding as if *p* than one is for praising actions of a certain kind. On this view of belief, comparisons between descriptive beliefs and normative judgments are no longer cross-attitudinal, since they boil down to comparisons between attitudes of *being for*.

We do not think this approach works. It takes the noncognitivists out of the frying pan into the fire – three fires, to be more precise.

First, problems (i)-(iii) above will now arise with respect to all kinds of belief. Noncognitivists will now face problems of gradability, motivational maladies and wrong kind of reason for ordinary descriptive beliefs!

Second, as Schroeder points out, to reduce descriptive beliefs to attitudes of *being for* is not only implausible on its face, but it is also to abandon one of the main motivations for expressivism. What drove the expressivists away from cognitivist accounts of moral thought and discourse in the first place was precisely the idea that cognitive and noncognitive attitudes are two very different states. If beliefs are reduced to atti-

[6] For examples of the recent debate on the wrong-kind-of-reason problem, see, e.g., Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004); Danielsson and Olson (2007); Lang (2008); Olson (2009); Schroeder (2010).

tudes of *being for*, this guiding idea is abandoned. Indeed, once this reduction is accepted, it is not clear what justification expressivists (or anyone else) have for calling ordinary descriptive beliefs cognitive rather than noncognitive.

Third, Schroeder argues very convincingly that even if descriptive beliefs are seen as attitudes of *being for*, the resulting version of expressivism has severe limitations. For example, it breaks down when it comes to assigning meaning to statements involving notions of modality and tense.[7]

3. Normalization of *Being For*

In trying to solve the normalization problem for the attitude of *being for*, Sepielli begins by noting that the normalization axiom is often formulated as $p(\Omega) = 1$, where p signifies subjective probability and Ω signifies "'the universal set' whose members are all possible events" (12). Informally, this means that the subjective probability that some event or other will occur is 1. Whatever degree of belief one has that some particular event will occur, this degree cannot be greater than the degree to which one believes that some event or other will occur. Sepielli suggests an analogous normalization axiom for the attitude of *being for*: $(\Omega) = 1$, where Ω signifies the universal set of all possible relations an agent may bear to an action.

Sepielli's normalization procedure has some awkward consequences. First of all, it entails that we must *be for*, to degree 1, (blaming for A or not blaming for A), since this is how Sepielli understands our certainty that either A is wrong or A is not wrong. But as Schroeder is careful to stress, *being for* is supposed to be a practical, action-guiding attitude:

> [N]ormative thought is tied to action, in the broadest possible sense. When you are for something ..., then other things being equal, this is what you do. So understood [*being for*] is a motivating state and hence naturally understood as akin to desire, rather than belief (Schroeder 2008: 84).

What are you motivated to do when you are for (blaming for A or not blaming for A)? The simple answer might be that you are motivated to perform a tautologous act of the form "doing X or not-X", an act that, for logical reasons, you cannot avoid doing. Even if we grant the curious idea of tautologous acts – an idea we find questionable – it is far from clear that we can be motivated to perform tautologous acts. No matter whether you have any thoughts or feelings about the act of blaming or not blaming, you will succeed in performing it. In particular, your decisions can never have any causal bearing on whether you perform this act. An act that is not sensitive to your thoughts, feelings and decisions can hardly be an act that you can be motivated to perform (unless you mistakenly think that the act depends on your decisions).

Here is an even more worrying implication. Whenever one is less than fully for blaming for A, one must be more for (blaming for A or not

[7] Schroeder (2008: 169-72).

blaming for A) than for blaming for A. To revert to our earlier example, suppose that you have a high degree of certitude that male circumcision is wrong, but you are less than fully certain. On the *being for* account, this means that you are strongly – but less than fully – for blaming for male circumcision. Sepielli would then say that you must be more for (blaming for male circumcision or not blaming for male circumcision) than for blaming for male circumcision, since you must be fully for (blaming for male circumcision or not blaming for male circumcision) and you are less than fully for blaming for male circumcision. But this seems absurd. As an analogy, suppose that you are for being happy but you are slightly more for being free. Sepielli's account would then say that you are more for (being happy or not being happy) than for being happy, which seems absurd. How can you be more for a tautology than for being happy?

Another way to express the worry is to say that Sepielli's account of *being for* violates a famous principle of preference logic, often called disjunction interpolation, which is very compelling, at least when it is applied to contradictory pairs of alternatives. If X is weakly preferred to not-X, then X is weakly preferred to (X or not-X) and (X or not-X) is weakly preferred to not-X. In order words, if X is weakly preferred to not-X, then (X or not-X) cannot be ranked above X or below not-X.[8] Sepielli's account can be shown to violate this principle if we stipulate that you weakly prefer X to Y just in case you are at least as much for X as you are for Y, and make the uncontroversial assumption that if you are for X then you are more for X than you are for not-X.

Sepielli might try to allay these worries by pointing to some difference between his notion of *being for* and the intuitive notion of *being for* appealed to in our example. But it is not enough to point to just any difference between his notion of *being for* and the intuitive one; it must be a *relevant* difference. In particular, it must be a difference that explains why it is *not* absurd that whenever one is more for blaming for A than not blaming for A, but less than fully for blaming for A, one must be more for (blaming for A or not blaming for A) than for blaming for A. We cannot see how this could be done, especially since Sepielli must assume that *being for* is a motivational state and thus similar to ordinary preferences.

We conclude that the *being for* account of normative certitude is not promising. First, it is vulnerable to several objections we have leveled at previous accounts. Second, its solution to the normalization problem has implausible consequences.[9]

Krister Bykvist
Jesus College, University of Oxford
Faculty of Philosophy
krister.bykvist@jesus.ox.ac.uk

Jonas Olson
Stockholm University
Department of Philosophy
jonas.olson@philosophy.su.se

[8] For more on this principle, see Hansson (2001: ch. 6, sect. 6.6; ch. 7, sect. 7.7).
[9] Thanks to two anonymous reviewers and the editor for very helpful comments.

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