

THE VARIETIES OF EXPRESSIVISM

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Abstract This essay represents a novel development of expressivism as a proposal about the meaning of normative language. We show, by example, how to discharge expressivism’s linguistic commitments (particularly as they relate to the Frege-Geach problem), while avoiding some pitfalls of earlier attempts. We also try to characterize how, precisely, expressivism’s commitments regarding the meaning and communicative function of normative language are to be understood—how, by the same token, expressivism’s critics (with not infrequent assistance from expressivists themselves) may be misinterpreting those commitments. We thus gain a fuller understanding of the empirical content of expressivist treatments of meaning—within, but also outside of, the normative realm.

Show me how you do it in the factual realm, and I’ll mimic you in the normative realm.

– Gibbard (1992: 971)

1 Introduction

Expressivism, as a view about the meaning of normative sentences, incurs an array of linguistic commitments. These have been the subject of an enormous amount of attention in the meta-ethical literature, a good deal of it critical. Some critics have observed that expressivists’ attempts to discharge them are wanting. Others argue, more strongly, that they *cannot* be discharged in any sort of satisfactory way.

This essay is a defense, of sorts, of expressivism in meta-ethics, primarily against the latter critic’s attacks. It comprises a novel development of expressivism as a proposal about the semantics and pragmatics (and, more generally, meaning) of normative language. Our goal is to show, by example, how to discharge the linguistic commitments of expressivism, while avoiding the pitfalls of earlier attempts to do the same. In demonstrating the possibility of a reasonably attractive linguistic development of the expressivist meta-ethic, we will also try to characterize *how*, precisely, expressivism’s commitments regarding the meaning and communicative function of normative language ought to be understood—how, by the same token, expressivism’s critics (with not infrequent assistance from expressivists themselves) may be misinterpreting those commitments. In addition to an attractive development of an expressivist view about normative sentence-meaning, then, we aim to gain a fuller, and more precise, understanding of the *empirical* content of expressivist treatments of meaning—within, but also outside of, the normative realm.

Before beginning, a quick summary of the lay of the essay. We begin with a brief description of the Frege-Geach problem, focusing on Mark Schroeder’s exceptionally challenging, recent formulation. We identify a presupposition implicit in this formulation—that an expressivist semantics for normative language must

be fundamentally attitudinal in character—and explain its role in generating this iteration of the Frege-Geach problem. We supply reasons for denying this presupposition. Specifically, we show how a version of the Frege-Geach problem (actually formulated, in its essentials, by R. M. Hare) arises for imperatives, explain a technique for avoiding it that avoids the problematic presupposition while retaining a recognizably expressivist core, and show how to extend that technique to non-imperative, normative sentences.¹ A prescient objection by James Dreier, formulated originally as a worry for Gibbard’s norm-expressivism, is considered. The defense against this objection turns out to be rather involved: it depends on fleshing out an expressivist account of the conventional force of utterances of normative sentences. A variety of options are outlined and considered in detail. We make a tentative case for modeling the conventional force of normative sentences using a formal device familiar from dynamic semantics: the test. The essay closes by describing two new, albeit less serious, empirical challenges for our version of the expressivist meta-ethic.

2 The Terrain

2.1 Characterizing Expressivism

Proponents of META-NORMATIVE EXPRESSIVISM generally associate themselves with some or all of the following theses about *normative sentences* (where ϕ is a normative sentence iff ϕ tokens an auxiliary, verb phrase, modifier, etc., with normative content).

- **NONFACTUALISM.** ϕ is not truth-apt (not evaluable for truth at an index, does not have a proposition as its semantic value at a context, etc.).
- **NONCOGNITIVISM.** The state of mind involved in a normative judgment—accepting that ϕ —is not a cognitive or doxastic state (e.g., belief that ϕ), but a non-cognitive state (e.g., intention, (dis)approval, being for).
- **NORMATIVE SPEECH-ACTS.** A sincere utterance of ϕ does not constitute an assertion. It is neither a proposal for addition to the Common Ground, nor for revision of addressees’ beliefs (on this understanding, see especially Geach 1965; Searle 1962). Hare (1952) argues that normative speech-acts are acts of commendation (a kind of “prescriptive” speech-act, together with commanding). Others, taking their cue from the notion that assertions express beliefs, suggest something more minimal, along the lines of *expressions of (dis)approval*.
- **CONVENTIONAL MEANING AS USE (CMAU).** The state of mind implicated in a judgment that ϕ (or the type of speech-act ϕ is conventionally used to perform) is of specific linguistic import. According to Gibbard, we “explain the meaning of a term” by explaining “what states of mind the term is used to express” (Gibbard 2003: 6-7).

¹ Advertisement: this discussion will be of independent interest to those with a standing interest in the logic, semantics, and pragmatics of imperatives, as well as the connection between imperative and normative language.

Meta-normative expressivism, in my usage, endorses the conjunction of these theses.

Some remarks and caveats about this usage are in order. First, it differs considerably from (and is, in fact, rather more expansive than) other prevalent usages. For instance, Alwood (2010), following Schroeder (2008a), recognizes a distinction between *illocutionary* and *purely expressivist* forms of meta-normative non-cognitivist anti-realism. The distinction is made according to their respective interpretations of the CMAU thesis: illocutionary theories (Alwood identifies the Prescriptivism of Hare 1952 and the Emotivism of Stevenson 1944 as exemplars) explain the meaning of a normative sentence ϕ , primarily or in part, by explaining what sort of speech-act speakers conventionally use ϕ to perform. Purely expressivist theories, according to these authors, reject this interpretation of the CMAU thesis, since they reject the notion of a particular class of normative speech-acts. According to pure expressivists, there is no distinction in functional potential between normative and non-normative sentences. Normative language functions in exactly the same way as non-normative language, so “any differences [in meaning] between normative declarative sentences and non-normative declarative sentences must reduce to [differences in] which states of mind they express” (Alwood 2010: 106).

The prospects for pure expressivism, in this sense, strike me as dim.² Following Stalnaker (1978), assertions are generally understood to be proposals for addition to the Common Ground—a parameter of the context devoted to keeping track of the information exchanged in a conversation (officially: the information mutually presupposed, in Stalnaker’s technical sense, by the participants in a conversation). Specifically, an assertion that ϕ is a proposal to add the proposition that ϕ to the Common Ground. If, as pure expressivism holds, utterances of normative and non-normative sentences alike conventionally involve the performance of assertions, then the speech-act conventionally performed by a speaker’s utterance of normative ϕ is a proposal to add the proposition that ϕ to the Common Ground. Notwithstanding the obvious tension with nonfactualism this notion generates, the pure expressivist incurs an obligation to explain why coming to accept a speaker’s assertion of normative ϕ —coming to think that ϕ —does not involve addition of the proposition that ϕ to one’s beliefs. For, if ϕ is apt for being the object of mutual presupposition, we would expect that ϕ is apt for being the object of belief. It would, at first blush, seem that if uttering normative ϕ conventionally involved the performance of an assertion (in Stalnaker’s sense), noncognitivism would be incorrect. There is a tight link between the acceptance of noncognitivism and the recognition of a type of speech-act peculiar to normative discourse.³

² The view, as formulated, also seems to be an exceedingly marginal player in the contemporary meta-ethical landscape. In a passage notable only for its unexceptionality, Jackson & Pettit (1998) characterize expressivism as a view according to which normative sentences “do not serve to report anything that the speaker believes to be so.” According to the preponderance of views about the norms governing assertion (Grice’s Maxim of Quality, the knowledge norm, etc.), assertions do serve, at least in part, to report what a speaker believes. From this altogether unexceptional description of expressivism, it thus follows that utterances of normative sentences cannot conventionally constitute assertions. Expressivism, in Jackson & Pettit’s sense, is incompatible with pure expressivism, in Alwood’s sense. (Jackson & Pettit go on to argue that expressivism, in this minimal sense, is incoherent, but that is neither here nor there for our merely terminological purposes.)

³ So called “Hybrid Expressivists” (e.g., Copp 2001; Barker 2000; Boisvert 2008; see Schroeder 2009 for discussion) contend that utterances of normative sentences either constitute, or properly involve, assertions

Pure expressivism will not, then, receive major attention in this paper. Nor will we be particularly interested in adjudicating between illocutionary forms of meta-normative non-cognitivist anti-realism and those, like Gibbard's, that give the CMAU thesis a more psychologistic reading. Although there may be reasons for developing meta-normative expressivism as an account of what *states of mind* are conventionally expressed by normative sentences, nothing, so far as I can tell, is lost by developing expressivism as an account of what sort of speech-act is conventionally performed by utterances of normative sentences. Indeed, as we will see later on (§4), a precise characterization of normative speech-acts sheds light on what it is for a normative sentence to express a given state of mind; conversely, having a sense of what state of mind is implicated in a normative speech-act can inform an account of how to model normative speech-acts, in the context of a formal account of the pragmatics of normative and non-normative language.

The upshot of this posture is a certain leniency in attitude about what sorts of meta-normative views should be counted as expressivist. If a meta-normative view is nonfactualist about normative sentences, is noncognitivist about normative judgments, recognizes a special class of normative speech-acts, and endorses either an illocutionary or psychologistic version of the CMAU thesis, that will be sufficient for it to earn the label 'expressivist' for purposes of this essay. This leniency involves a certain danger, namely that the view we will be developing and defending in this essay is not the sort of view against which the critics of expressivism have targeted their arguments. We will not pay this worry much heed here. Even if it is on target (and I do not think that it is), I think it will be fairly clear that our view retains interest as a form of meta-normative non-cognitivist anti-realism that, we will see, (i) bears considerable affinities to the expressivist meta-ethic (particularly as developed by Gibbard), (ii) avoids the major problems afflicting meta-normative expressivism, qua theory of normative meaning, and (iii) is fully explicit about formalizing the semantics and pragmatics for a non-trivial fragment of normative language.

A brief, final remark about usage: many philosophers have recently gone in for expressivism about non-normative (indeed, clearly *doxastic*) language: indicative conditionals (discussed briefly in Schroeder 2008a), the language of subjective uncertainty (Schnieder forthcoming; Yalcin forthcoming), etc. It seems that a more expansive conception of expressivism is required to cover such views. Let K be a class of sentences constituting a natural linguistic kind, and let $\phi \in K$. An *expressivist* view about K is nonfactualist about ϕ , in my usage, holds that an utterance of ϕ does not conventionally constitute an assertion, and that elucidating the state of mind implicated in a judgment that ϕ (or sincere utterance of ϕ) elucidates ϕ 's conventional meaning. Finally, it is noncognitivist in the sense that it rejects the following schema

of some proposition. Such views typically deny both nonfactualism and noncognitivism: normative sentences have a non-normative, propositional content (assigned by the compositional semantics, apt for being the relatum of belief, assertion, and entailment relations) and a normative, non-propositional dimension of conventional meaning. It is an interesting question whether and to what extent the brand of expressivism developed in this paper should be counted as a hybrid view, but we will not consider the matter here. (For an argument that recent linguistic work pushes the expressivist toward a hybrid view, see §5.1.)

for sentences of K .

- (1) S judges that ϕ iff S believes that ϕ

The adverted notion of belief is supposed to be *robust*, in the sense that S believes that ϕ only when all of S 's doxastic alternatives satisfy ϕ . There is, of course, a more minimal sense of belief, according to which S believes that ϕ iff S accepts ϕ (where, if ϕ is truth-apt, S accepts ϕ only when all of S 's doxastic alternatives satisfy ϕ , otherwise—say, if $\phi = \textit{murder is wrong}$ — S accepts ϕ iff, e.g., S disapproves of murder).⁴ If $\phi \in K$, noncognitivism about K will demand rejecting schema (1) on a robust understanding of belief, but will permit accepting it, on the more minimal understanding.

2.2 Expressivist Semantics

Expressivist views about normative language cast themselves partly as theories about the semantics and meaning of normative language. So the question arises: how are we to cash out expressivism as a proposal about the semantics and meaning of natural language, within the enormously successful paradigm of generative linguistics? Truth-conditional approaches to normative language have no special difficulty answering this question: it is open to them to simply treat normative predicates on the model of descriptive predicates (functions from individuals to propositions), normative auxiliaries on the model of modal auxiliaries (functions from propositions to propositions), and so on. A similar strategy is not available to the expressivist, in light of her commitment to nonfactualism.

Here, as is well-known, the expressivist faces a constellation of related worries, generally placed under the umbrella of the “Frege-Geach Problem” (classic references are Searle 1962; Geach 1965). We may summarize the problem as follows. The *embedding profile* of some piece of syntax (the syntactic environments in which it happily embeds) is altogether independent of whether its content is normative or non-normative. Normative sentences, that is to say, share an *embedding profile* with non-normative sentences. They also share a *logical profile*: uniform substitution of normative particle of syntactic type T for a non-normative particle of type T does not affect the logical status of an argument. To take a couple of stock examples, a conditional that licenses modus ponens does so irrespective of its constituents' contents. Left downward monotone generalized quantifiers (e.g., *never*) remain so irrespective of the content of their arguments.

- (2) If lying is wrong, lying for money is wrong.
Lying is wrong.
So, lying for money is wrong.
- (3) Lying is never wrong.
So, lying for money is never wrong.

⁴ The notion of acceptance is discussed at length in Yalcin (forthcoming) and §4.3 of this essay.

Such facts raise distinct challenges—logical and linguistic—for expressivism.⁵

- We require a more general notion of validity to cover arguments containing normative sentences. Preservation of *truth in a model* no longer suffices.
- Whatever logical validity amounts to, we must define (i) some semantic relation E between sentences that holds in virtue of their content, (ii) some method of computing the contents of simple and complex sentences, so that it can be determined whether E holds for a given argument.

We concur with Schroeder (2008d) that the logical problems take a backseat to the linguistic one (though there are, of course, constraints of a logical nature on solutions to the latter). Knowing whether the semantic relation E applies to an argument presupposes an account of how its normative particles contribute compositionally to the content of constructions in which they embed. Since validity is a semantic notion, an account of validity in a language is incomplete absent a fully explicit semantics for that language. In the simplest case, if ϕ is normative, we require a method of computing the contents of $\ulcorner \neg\phi \urcorner$ and $\ulcorner \phi \supset \psi \urcorner$ from the contents of ϕ , ψ , \neg , and \supset .

Although deflationism about truth has been seen to offer hope for a conservative expressivist treatment of logic and validity, expressivists have struggled to supply a compositional account of the semantic content of normative language. The major source of difficulty seems to be the expressivist's commitment to the CMAU thesis, on which the conventional meaning of any complex normative sentence (one embedding an atomic normative sentence) is a matter of the mental state it conventionally expresses. For this, combined with the most basic commitment to compositionality about meaning in natural language, would seem to commit the expressivist to identifying (i) a mental state M that a normative sentence ϕ of arbitrary syntactic complexity expresses, (ii) a recursive method for computing M , as a function of the mental states expressed by ϕ 's proper syntactic parts, (iii) a specification of the semantic relation E that makes use of M in characterizing the logical properties of ϕ (e.g., the fact that $\{\phi, \neg\phi\}$ bears E to \perp ; or, the inconsistency of ϕ and $\neg\phi$).

Recently, Schroeder (2008a,c,d) has forcefully argued that the usual ways of discharging these commitments will face problems. Consider the sentences in (4).

- (4) a. It's obligatory that ϕ
 b. It's not obligatory that ϕ

What mental state does wide-scope negation over an obligation-statement express? Two expressivist-friendly responses suggest themselves:

- (4b) and (4a) express the *same attitude*, toward inconsistent contents⁶
- (4b) and (4a) express *distinct attitudes*. While (4a) expresses, perhaps, disapproval of $\neg\phi$, (4b) expresses, perhaps, tolerance of $\neg\phi$.⁷

⁵ For discussion of *how* these worries arise, see Schroeder (2008a).

⁶ Schroeder (2008a) is the best development, to date, of this sort of position. See Schroeder (2008c: 589–95) for a digestible presentation of the view.

⁷ See, e.g., Blackburn (1988); Gibbard (1990, 2003); Dreier (2006). Gibbard and Dreier develop views on

These responses are, it would seem, subject to an additional further requirement: they should explain (as any semantics for sentences and their negations should explain) why the sentences in (4) are *inconsistent*. The same-attitude response is, at first look, well-suited to this demand: we suppose the relevant attitude A is “inconsistency-transmitting,” in the sense that “bearing A toward inconsistent contents is inconsistent,” and explain the inconsistency of (4a) and (4b), not by appeal to simultaneous unsatisfiability in a model, instead by appeal to A ’s inconsistency-transmitting-ness (Schroeder 2008c: 577). The different-attitude response struggles with this requirement: it must effectively *stipulate* norms of disapproval and tolerance such that it is inconsistent to bear these attitudes toward the same content. This would be, Schroeder contends, a strange sort of inconsistency: there are “few good examples” of norms that require these sorts of relations between ontically distinct mental kinds (Schroeder 2008c: 581).⁸

The same-attitude response has that much going for it. But Schroeder (2008a,c,d), continuing a thread begun by Unwin (1999, 2001), notes a problem. Consider the sentences in (5), together with the proposed same-attitude analysis.

- (5)
- a. It’s obligatory that $\phi := A(\phi)$
 - b. It’s not obligatory that $\phi := A(\psi)$
 - c. It’s obligatory that $\neg\phi := A(\neg\phi)$
 - d. It’s not obligatory that $\neg\phi := A(\chi)$

By the same-attitude analysis, for *any* values of A , ψ , χ , the sets $\{\phi, \psi\}$ and $\{\neg\phi, \chi\}$ are both inconsistent, from which follows that the set $\{\psi, \chi\}$ must be inconsistent. Since A is inconsistency-transmitting, (5b) and (5d) are predicted inconsistent. That’s wrong, of course: cases where both ϕ and $\neg\phi$ are permitted are commonplace.

Schroeder does identify a version of the same-attitude approach that avoids the problem. Let normative operators express functions from a complement ϕ to a higher-order, inconsistency-transmitting, non-cognitive attitude (Schroeder suggests *being for*) toward a proposition that a relation (e.g., an attitude A) toward ϕ hold (or fail to). Wide-scope negation over such operators is represented metalinguistically as negation of the the higher-order attitude’s complement, as in (6).⁹

- (6)
- a. It’s obligatory that $\phi := \text{for}(A(\phi))$
 - b. It’s not obligatory that $\phi := \text{for}(\neg A(\phi))$
 - c. It’s obligatory that $\neg\phi := \text{for}(A(\neg\phi))$
 - d. It’s not obligatory that $\neg\phi := \text{for}(\neg A(\neg\phi))$

which the content of an atomic normative sentence is the set of hyperplans (or hyperplan-world pairs) with which it’s consistent (doesn’t disagree). More on this in §3.5.

⁸ There are uncontroversially rational norms that require certain relations between ontically distinct mental kinds (e.g., norms of *practical rationality* that require the presence of an intention in the presence of certain beliefs and desires). I take the point to be that the incoherence attributed to an agent who violates such norms is of the wrong sort. To take, e.g., practical incoherence to involve a kind of genuine logical inconsistency will overgenerate valid arguments (see, e.g., the discussion of van Roojen 1996 at Schroeder 2008d: 709–10). The claim here seems to be that the expressivist is not entitled to assume there are norms of the *right sort* governing relations between ontically distinct mental kinds.

⁹ Likewise for the other connectives. Schroeder (2008a) extends this method to include quantification and formulates general definitions of pairwise inconsistency and logical invalidity.

Supposing that *being for* is inconsistency-transmitting, this looks like a viable (indeed, the only viable) expressivist treatment of normative sentences and their negations.¹⁰

The worry is that connectives can coordinate normative and descriptive sentences, as in, for instance, (7) (Schroeder 2008a,c).

- (7) It's obligatory that ϕ and grass is green.
 a. It's obligatory that $\phi := \text{for}(A(\phi))$
 b. Grass is green := *believe*(ψ)

What mental state does wide-scope conjunction over a normative sentence (one that expresses being for) and descriptive sentence (one that expresses belief) express? There are two options: (7) expresses being for, or (7) expresses belief. But if (7) expresses being for, the expressivist lacks an explanation for the inconsistency of (7) with the negation of (7b): they express *distinct kinds of attitudes*. For the same reason, if (7) expresses belief, the expressivist lacks an explanation for the inconsistency of (7) with the negation of (7a). Explaining these kinds of inconsistency clearly requires that normative and descriptive sentences express the same kind of attitude. This is a bitter pill for the expressivist to swallow. Moreover, the expressivist is clearly committed to classifying this further attitude as non-cognitive. So “expressivists are committed to a radical view not only about semantics, but in the philosophy of mind—the view that belief itself needs to be analyzed in terms of a further non-cognitive attitude” (Schroeder 2008c: 597).

2.3 Expressivist Expression

There is much that the expressivist can say in response to this objection—indeed, Schroeder (2008a) devotes considerable attention to developing a variety of expressivism that faces this objection (and several others which I will not discuss here) head on. Such matters will not concern us here. I wish, instead, to identify a presupposition of the dialectic that is implicit in Schroeder's discussion (and, so far as I know, in all prior discussion of the so-called “negation problem” for expressivism) and which is apparently responsible for generating the difficulties here.

The presupposition is that an expressivist model theory for natural language is, of necessity, attitudinal in character—that sentences have *attitudes as their model-theoretic semantic values*. Since, as everyone apparently agrees, fundamental semantic notions (e.g., inconsistency) are explained in terms of properties of such model-theoretic entities (e.g., the impossibility of a world satisfying a formula and its negation), embracing a model theory of attitudes (known, hereafter, as “SEMANTIC MENTALISM”) will demand explaining inconsistency in terms of properties of the attitudes (e.g., the “disagreement” of disapproval and toleration). The presupposition that expressivists are committed, *ex ante*, to semantic mentalism is what appears to be responsible for Schroeder's presumption that expressivists are committed to explaining inconsistency in terms of properties of the attitudes. And this commitment is what is responsible

¹⁰ “[It yields] a constructive compositional semantics that was exactly as powerful as the analogous story... about which attitudes are expressed by ordinary descriptive sentences. All such states are beliefs, and the compositional semantics merely tells us [their contents]” (Schroeder 2008c: 596).

for generating the difficulties of the prior section.

Schroeder's reasons for taking the expressivist to be committed to semantic mentalism are, however, unclear. Let us take a closer look at how he introduces the Frege-Geach problem. Schroeder remarks that the validity of (2) and (3) requires that embedded occurrences of normative sentences "mean the same thing" as unembedded occurrences (relative to a fixed context of interpretation) (e.g., [Schroeder 2008b](#): 93, [Schroeder 2008c](#): 574–5). Someone who holds that normative sentences express propositions has no difficulty here, of course: connectives denote functions from propositions into propositions, normative sentences contribute the same proposition regardless of the syntactic environment in which they occur. CMAU commits the expressivist to giving a "compositional account of the attitudes expressed by complex normative sentences as a function of the attitudes expressed by their parts" ([Schroeder 2008c](#): 575). And this account, as a theory of the meaning of normative language, should have the *same semantic mileage* as its truth-conditional counterpart. In particular, it should give rise to a natural notion of inconsistency—one which is theoretically kosher for the expressivist.

The reader will notice that this argument is valid only on the assumption that a theory of meaning for a language fragment is interchangeable with a model theory for that fragment.¹¹ But that assumption may be questioned. The distinction between use- or force-theoretic accounts of linguistic meaning and static, compositional, model-theoretic semantics is familiar from the theories developed by semanticists working in Discourse Representation Theory, File-Change Semantics, and Amsterdam-style Dynamic Semantics (explanation and discussion of which I will postpone until §3.4). It is, I'll argue, precisely this distinction that the expressivist is entitled to exploit. Put differently, an expressivist theory which embraces the presupposition of semantic mentalism is just one variety of expressivism, among others (or so I'll argue). While doing justice to CMAU plausibly does require identifying a recursive method of computing the mental state conventionally expressed (as well as speech-act conventionally performed) by sentences in natural language, it in no way commits the expressivist to semantic mentalism. I take this to be a good thing. Semantic mentalism would be a radical revision of model-theoretic semantics in the generative tradition. If there were some way of developing the semantic program of expressivism without having to rebuild our semantic theories from the ground up, that would be a powerful reason to prefer it.

It is important, of course, to say something about what it might be for an utterance

¹¹ [Schroeder \(2008b\)](#) gives a related argument, designed to show that expressivists are committed to the surprising thesis that a non-normative sentence ϕ semantically expresses the proposition that ϕ *only in virtue of* expressing belief that ϕ . We can reconstruct Schroeder's argument as follows. CMAU plausibly commits the expressivist to a compositional account of the attitudes expressed by complex normative sentences, she is committed to treating logical connectives as expressing functions from attitudes into attitudes. Avoiding ambiguity means treating negation as univocally expressing such a function, even when its complement is non-normative. So a complex non-normative sentence must express an attitude, rather than a proposition, and what goes for complex non-normative sentences goes for atomic ones. This argument fails for the same reason: if attitudes are not assigned by the model theory, the argument is invalid. (Indeed, even if normative sentences are assigned attitudes by the model theory, the argument is invalid: a single meaning for negation might have it mapping attitudes—the semantic values of normative sentences—into attitudes and propositions—the semantic values of non-normative sentences—into propositions.)

(utterance-type, sentence, sentence-type, etc.) to express an attitude, in the sense required by the expressivist, if not to have that attitude as its model-theoretic semantic value. However, it is, I think, unwise to commit ourselves to any particular account of the expression relation, in the absence of a worked-out expressivist theory about normative language. In fact, as we'll see, having such a theory will enable us to address the question in a more precise—and, in my view, richer—way than prior discussions have managed.

Some general comments may, however, be in order. To do justice to *CMAU*, the expression relation must clearly be (i) a kind of meaning relation (so that elucidating the relevant attitudes elucidates some sufficiently central fact about the functional potential of the relevant kind of language in thought and communication), (ii) *conventional* in character (not, for instance, a matter of computing conversational implicatures). It should plausibly recognize both the model-theoretic and non-model-theoretic dimensions of linguistic meaning as *linguistically autonomous*, meaning, roughly, the model-theoretic semantics does not settle all the facts about the non-model-theoretic dimension of linguistic meaning, and vice versa. Neither dimension is dispensable. (We shall say more about the issue of linguistic autonomy in §3.8.) Rough though they are, several candidate analyses of the expression relation seem to meet these specifications.

S's utterance *U* of kind *K* expresses attitude *A* iff

- *Conventional association*: There's a linguistic convention *C* (of suitable type) s.t., according to *C*, utterances of type *K* normally imply *S* has *A*.¹²
- *Conventional indication*: There's a linguistic convention *C* (of suitable type) s.t. (i) according to *C*, utterances of type *K* normally imply *S* has *A* and (ii) *S* intends to exploit this convention by using her performance of *U* to indicate she has *A*.¹³
- *Speech-act norms*: There's a linguistic norm *N* (of suitable type) s.t., according to *N*, having *A* is necessary for *S*'s proper performance of an utterance in *K* (hence of *U*) (e.g., Schroeder 2008b: 108–11).

Ordinary conversational reasoning, of either the stock Gricean or sophisticated neo-Gricean (cf. Asher & Lascarides 2003) varieties, can plausibly establish the association analysis from the speech-act norms analysis, and vice versa. For this reason (and in view of the fact that our account will be compatible with each of these analyses), I think we may safely remain neutral between them. Note that, for all we've said (and for all we will say), the fact that an utterance by a speaker expresses a given attitude may be a matter of the utterance conventionally implicating (without, of course, reporting!) her possession of that attitude.¹⁴ So far as I can tell, there is

¹² The implication is plausibly defeasible, and the associated inferences best formalized in a nonmonotonic logic. On the use of defeasible reasoning in performing these sorts of inferences (and nonmonotonic normality conditionals in formalizing them), see especially Asher & Lascarides (2003).

¹³ Schroeder (2008b) reads Gibbard (1990: 84–6) as endorsing the indication analysis. I think we could just as well read him as endorsing the weaker association analysis.

¹⁴ Cf. Barker (2000). Schroeder (2008b: 101–2)'s objections to this view presuppose mentalism.

no immediate pressure to settle on any single account of the expression relation or any single classification of the implication (as, e.g., conventional implicature, presupposition, conventional expressive content in the sense of Potts 2007, etc.). Although I am unable to give these issues due attention here, most of the objections leveled against such accounts (see esp. Schroeder 2008b) disappear once we jettison the presupposition of semantic mentalism.

3 Imperative and Expressivist Semantics

Suggesting we jettison semantic mentalism is one thing. Actually developing an expressivist model theory for normative language that does not take attitudes to be the semantic values of normative sentences is quite another. In this section, I will try to do just that.

In so doing, I will be drawing heavily on recent linguistic work on model-theoretic semantics for natural language imperatives. To be clear, the point here is not to commit ourselves to the notion of there being any deep similarities—whether in model theory, use, or communicative function—between imperative and normative language. We will, rather, simply be illustrating a general technique for avoiding an imperative version of the expressivist’s negation problem (which is, I’ll suggest, a “syntacticized” version of the expressivist’s negation problem). We show how to make use of this technique in developing a view about the meaning of imperatives that is recognizably expressivist in character, and we subsequently explain how this model might be extended to normative language. The technique, we see, raises an abundance of philosophical questions and worries. These questions and worries—many of which were raised for Gibbard (1990)’s expressivism in Dreier (1999)’s prescient and sophisticated discussion—are of fundamental importance to the expressivist project of characterizing the semantic content of normative language. Much of our attention in this section, therefore, shall be spent on clarifying and addressing them.

A brief plug before jumping in: philosophers with an independent interest in the logic, semantics, and pragmatics of imperatives, quite apart from the issue of expressivism’s viability, may find the discussion of this section worthwhile.

3.1 *Semantic Reduction and its Discontents*

In this section, I will sketch, in rather broad outline, a general strategy for doing the semantics and logic for a toy imperative language \mathcal{L}_{IMP} , whose ingredients are a first-order language \mathcal{L} and an imperative operator ‘!’ (read *see to it that*) taking formulas of \mathcal{L} as complements.¹⁵ The strategy will be *reductive*, not in the usual sense employed in philosophical discussion (of, for instance, metaphysical or inter-theoretical reduction), but in the idiosyncratic sense that conditions on the basic semantic relation for \mathcal{L}_{IMP} (the imperative analogue of satisfaction) will be stated in terms of *satisfaction-conditions* for a *non-imperative* language.

¹⁵ Much of this material is from Charlow (2009a), which develops the proposal in more detail.

More precisely, we will say that an imperative semantics is REDUCIBLE if there exists a “reduction” map μ from formulas and models of \mathcal{L}_{IMP} to formulas and models of some non-imperative language \mathcal{L}_N that’s homomorphic wrt the basic semantic relation for \mathcal{L}_{IMP} , $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{\text{IMP}}}$:

$$(8) \quad \mathcal{M} \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{\text{IMP}}} \phi \text{ iff } \mu(\mathcal{M}) \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_N} \mu(\phi)$$

The intuitive idea is just that a semantics for some language is reducible iff it could be stated in terms of the semantics for a different (and, implicitly, somehow more basic) language. A rather wide variety of approaches to the semantics of imperatives exhibit reducibility, in this special sense. For instance:

- Those that analyze imperatives with formulas of an alethic deontic language (*see to it that you do x* \approx *you must do x*) (see, e.g., [Aloni 2007](#); [Åqvist 1964](#); [Han 1998](#); [Schwager 2006](#)).
- Those that analyze imperatives with explicit performatives (*see to it that you do x* \approx *I command you to do x*) and assign the latter satisfaction conditions (see, e.g., [Lewis 1970](#)).
- Those that analyze imperatives in terms of future-tense indicatives (*see to it that you do x* \approx *you’ll do x*) (see, e.g., [Geach 1958](#)).
- Those claiming the semantics of an imperative $\ulcorner !\phi \urcorner$ is exhausted by its fulfillment-conditions (i.e., the satisfaction-conditions for ϕ) (see, e.g., [Bennett 1970](#); [Jørgensen 1937-8](#); [Hare 1952](#)), so that:

$$\mu(\phi) = \begin{cases} \phi, & \text{if } \phi \in \mathcal{L} \\ \psi, & \text{if } \phi = !\psi \end{cases}$$

The advantages of a successful reduction—a semantics and logic for imperatives, essentially for free, supposing that we begin with a well-founded semantics and logic for the reduction “base”—are clear enough. An immediate worry, however, about such approaches is that making use of a reductive semantics would seem to suggest that imperative semantics is somehow dispensable or of marginal intrinsic interest. This suggestion should, I think, be resisted. For one, it is hardly *obvious* either that the semantics of imperatives is reducible, or, if it is, what sort of reduction semanticists should be on the lookout for. Ascertaining answers to either of these questions would yield real, and significant, discoveries about natural language.¹⁶ More interestingly, for our purposes, is the observation that a reductive semantics for some linguistic kind K does not, in any sense, imply semantic eliminativism about K . There may be interesting semantic facts about K -language that fail to show up in the base language, and vice versa. Imperatives might, for instance, lack truth-values, despite formulas of the base language being truth-evaluable (as is the case with each of the reducible approaches listed above).

¹⁶ [Vranas \(forthcoming: §4\)](#) notes imperative inferences might be useful, in virtue of being easier to perform or more transparent than inferences in the reduced-to language. This response supplies a rational justification for reliance on imperative inference, as a kind of useful heuristic for practical reasoning, but fails to motivate imperative logic as an object of *intrinsic* interest for the semanticist.

But wait a minute! Don't reductions mapping imperative formulas to truth-evaluable formulas give imperatives literal satisfaction-conditions? Won't this mean an imperative can be *true* or *false*, depending on whether its translation is satisfied? Won't this mean that reducible approaches are committed to a truth-conditional (!) semantics for the imperative, on which the semantic value of an imperative formula is of the same type as its translation, a proposition? But, if that were right, utterances of imperatives would be generally interpretable as *fact-stating* or *information-providing*. And they are not.

Here, perhaps, the common turnstile notation for basic semantic relations (between model-theoretic entities and formulas) obscures something important: they needn't be understood in terms of truth or satisfaction. We have other options. Which is best is a substantive philosophical issue, turning on our commitments to the nature of discourse and thought conducted in the kind of language we're interested in representing. In this vein, Lemmon (1965) suggests the notion of an imperative's *being in force*.¹⁷ Even supposing the conditions under which an imperative ϕ is in force are equivalent to those under which $\mu(\phi)$ is satisfied, it doesn't follow that $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{\text{IMP}}}$ expresses satisfaction or truth.¹⁸ Nor does the class of models for \mathcal{L}_{IMP} need to be the same as the class of models for \mathcal{L}_{N} . They might, in fact, be constructed of different *kinds* of things. For instance: satisfaction/truth is generally understood as being relative to contexts and worlds. But being in force might be relative to a plan or To-Do List (Portner 2004, 2008), hyperplanners (Gibbard 2003), etc.

Even if the classes of models for \mathcal{L}_{IMP} and \mathcal{L}_{N} overlapped, and formulas of \mathcal{L}_{IMP} and \mathcal{L}_{N} characterized, e.g., sets of worlds at a context, it wouldn't follow that imperatives denote propositions. Suppose imperatives characterized the set of worlds where they're in force. There would be no reason, save a predilection for identifying theoretical notions with their set-theoretical representations, for thinking this set, in this theoretical context, should play the functional role of a proposition, or that a sentence's characterizing such a set should indicate much at all about its functional potential.¹⁹ (This is, to be sure, a very quick first pass at a very complex set of philosophical issues. We will expand significantly on these points in §3.7.)

3.2 Deontic Reduction and Negation

I am a pluralist, of sorts, about imperative semantics. The reasonability of deontic versus performative reductions will often depend on our local theoretical aims. Since deontic reductions are particularly useful for illustrating the points I wish to make, I

¹⁷ Segerberg (1990) suggests *requirement* with respect to a system of commands and a world. Lemmon's suggestion is perhaps superior if we represent the permissive content of imperatives in the logic. It makes good sense to say a permission is in force, less sense to say it's required.

¹⁸ If \mathcal{L}_{IMP} contains imperative and non-imperative formulas, $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{\text{IMP}}}$ is interpreted as follows: a model satisfies or fails to satisfy ϕ if ϕ is non-imperative, otherwise ϕ is or is not in force there.

¹⁹ A suggestive analogy: in the dynamic logic of computing, programs and formulas alike are interpreted as characterizing relations on states (worlds), formulas a special kind of relation (namely, a function from states into $\{0,1\}$) (see, e.g., Harel et al. 2000). Would anyone say that a program which counted the number n of strokes in a given input state, terminating in 1 if n were even, 0 if odd, expressed a proposition, was true or false, the sort of thing that could be asserted, and so on? (Thanks to Thony Gillies [pc] for suggesting this point.)

will focus on them. But nothing important turns on this.²⁰

Deontic reductions come with both a pedigree (Green 1997 claims they date to Kant’s *Grundlegung*) and baggage. The pedigree is certainly not hard to understand: it makes intuitive sense to say an imperative $!\phi$ is in force just in case ϕ is required. A major piece of baggage is a kind of problem with negation, one first noticed by Hare (1967) that, interestingly, very closely parallels the expressivist’s problem with negation.²¹ Hare notes that imperatives apparently lack negations to serve as their “contradictories”: the negation of an imperative is either ungrammatical (cf. 11a), or expresses a “a meta-linguistic statement; it reports the second-order fact that somebody has” failed to issue the relevant command (cf. 11b). (Hare leans hard on his intuition about the meaning of (11b); we will allow, for sake of illustration, that it is unproblematic.)

- (11) a. *Not: do x
b. You aren’t to do x

These facts suggest a marked contrast with the language of deontic logic, \mathcal{L}_D , which has formulas embedding freely under Boolean negation. What is the significance of this contrast? One thing it seems to establish, formally, is that the inverse of μ , μ^{-1} , is non-homomorphic with respect to $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D}$, as it won’t generally hold that:

$$\mathcal{M} \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D} \phi \text{ implies } \mu^{-1}(\mathcal{M}) \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{IMP}} \mu^{-1}(\phi)$$

For suppose ϕ is imperative. Although $\mu(\phi), \neg\mu(\phi) \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D} \perp$, it won’t, of course, generally hold that $\mu^{-1}(\mu(\phi)), \mu^{-1}(\neg\mu(\phi)) \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{IMP}} \perp$.

Why not? Though many imperative formulas are inconsistent, in an intuitive sense, with *do x* (*don’t do x*, for instance), none seems to be a viable candidate for the value of $\mu^{-1}(\neg\mu(\phi))$: because $\neg\mu(\phi)$ expresses a mere permission (that $\neg\phi$), $\mu^{-1}(\neg\mu(\phi))$ should likewise express a permission (that $\neg\phi$), nothing more. But there is, in view of Hare’s observation, no obvious way of expressing this in \mathcal{L}_{IMP} . So $\mu^{-1}(\neg\mu(\phi))$ will be *undefined*. The problem with this isn’t, I take it, so much the lack of an imperative-deontic isomorphism *per se* as the fact, while there is a natural “contradictory” for any formula of \mathcal{L}_D (namely, its negation), there is none for an imperative, suggesting some sort of fundamental disanalogy between imperative and deontic logic. (It does not matter for our purposes what, exactly, this disanalogy might amount to, or what theoretical work Hare uses it to do.)

²⁰ For discussion of the menu of other options, see Charlow (2009a: §3.2).

²¹ Green (1997) voices a different worry: the directive force of an imperative is generally *directed at* a specific individual or group of individuals: “In contrast to imperatives, the truth of a deontic proposition does not, as such, lay obligations upon any one person rather than another.” But note that neither \mathcal{L}_{IMP} nor \mathcal{L}_D has resources for expressing this sort of directedness. \mathcal{L}_{IMP} , for instance, lacks the resources to distinguish between (9a) and (9b); \mathcal{L}_D lacks the resources to distinguish between their deontic cognates.

- (9) a. See to it that Fred takes shelter!
b. Fred, take shelter!
(10) a. It must be that: Fred takes shelter
b. Fred must take shelter

This is, as various people have argued, an expressive deficiency *in both* languages (cf. Belnap, Jr. & Perloff 1988; Geach 1982; Wedgwood 2003; Williams 1981).

The natural thought is to try to get around this by introducing some sort of permission-granting operator \jmath , such that $!\phi$ and $\jmath\neg\phi$ are *defined-inconsistent*, so that, by definition:

$$\neg\exists\mathcal{M}: \mathcal{M} \models_{\mathcal{L}_{\text{IMP}}} !\phi \text{ and } \mathcal{M} \models_{\mathcal{L}_{\text{IMP}}} \jmath\neg\phi$$

There is, we note, nothing *ad hoc* about the introduction of such an operator. For, as an authority can restrict the options of her subject with a command, she can expand the same with a permission (for the classic discussion, see Lewis 1979). So there's reason to include such an operator in a "directive" language; the fact that it enables us to formulate a natural contradictory for an arbitrary imperative is an ancillary benefit. The real upshot, I think, of Hare's discussion is that such an operator *isn't* \mathcal{L}_{IMP} -*definable* (as, for instance, $\neg!\neg$); it must be introduced *as a primitive*. And so this maneuver seems as if it will run headlong into a Schroeder-style objection: we have no explanation for why $!\phi$ and $\jmath\neg\phi$ should be defined-inconsistent, given the fact that the imperative and permission operators represent ontically and logically distinct kinds of speech-acts—commands, on the one hand, grants of permission (or, to make the parallel even more direct, expressions of toleration) on the other.²²

I wish to stress a sense in which the expressivist and imperative negation problems are, at bottom, the *same problem*. Or, less contentiously, the problems are explained by very similar mechanisms. The expressivist's negation problem (ENP) arises because the naïve same-attitude analysis (in terms of, say, disapproval) renders us incapable of identifying a suitable attitude that is expressed by a sentence like 'it's not obligatory that ϕ '. Similarly, the imperative negation problem (INP) arises because no formula of the form $\ulcorner!\phi\urcorner$ is capable of expressing the imperative analogue of a negated obligation-sentence: a grant of permission. The problem with the different-attitude response to ENP is that we lack an explanation of why the attitudes expressed by an obligation-statement and its negation are inconsistent. Similarly, the problem with the different-operator response to INP is that we lack an explanation of why the command represented by $!\phi$ is inconsistent with the permission represented by $\jmath\neg\phi$. A useful way of thinking about the similarity is this. ENP stems from properties of the relevant attitudes, and INP represents this problem explicitly in the object language: the behavior of the imperative and permission operators formally parallels the behavior of the corresponding expressivist attitudes.

But, of course, the command represented by $!\phi$ is *inconsistent* with the permission represented by $\jmath\neg\phi$, even though neither the operators in the set $\{!, \jmath\}$ nor the speech-acts they represent are, in any sense, interdefinable. So, we can be confident there is a solution (a version on which $!\phi$ and $\jmath\neg\phi$ express logically and ontically distinct speech-acts²³) to INP, even with no particular solution in mind! And because of the structural parallels between ENP and INP, we've reason to be optimistic that whatever

22 I'm equivocating, harmlessly, between an imperative formula $!\phi$ and the command it expresses (to see to it that ϕ). The equivocation is harmless because, just as all agree that \jmath and $!$ are not interdefinable, all will agree that commands and permissions are not interdefinable. Schroeder's commitment to the ontic distinctness of disapproval and toleration plausibly *commits* him to this. There are, as I argue in Charlow (2009a), strong reasons for thinking permission is *sui generis* in this sense.

23 We might say $!\phi$ and $\jmath\neg\phi$ are inconsistent in virtue of expressing attitudes (or speech-acts) of respective "forms" $\ulcorner\text{for}(A(\phi))\urcorner$ and $\ulcorner\text{for}(\neg A(\phi))\urcorner$. This has the advantage of being a kind of "off-the-shelf" solution, but it's only in the mix because of what I take to be a misguided response to Frege-Geach. Insofar as there is no pressure for us to go in this direction, we will avoid it.

solution we devise for INP will adapt to a solution for ENP .

Note that by shifting our immediate focus to INP , and away from ENP , we have also shifted the dialectic. Though we followed Hare in introducing INP as a problem for deontic reductions of the imperative, we can see it will apply to any language containing syntactically primitive imperative and permission operators (so, plausibly, it will apply to *English*). Insofar as (i) all should be interested in giving a semantics for \imath with the right logical properties, and (ii) there is no obvious off-the-shelf solution to INP (no obvious imperative analogue, that's to say, of the cognitivist position about indicative normative language), INP is everyone's problem. This dialectical shift makes the terrain more favorable for the expressivist. Whereas ENP , Schroeder argues, is expressivist-specific (and of uncertain solubility), INP is a problem for anyone, regardless of her meta-normative commitments, and seems as if it must have a solution. And, because of the structural parallels between INP and ENP , we have reason to suspect that such a solution, whatever it is, will adapt to a resolution of ENP . This, I take it, reestablishes some sort of entitlement for the expressivist to count on the existence of a solution to ENP .

While we might, I suppose, rest content with this response to Schroeder, we won't. In the following sections, I aim to decisively vindicate the suspicion—first, by presenting a solution to INP according to which $\imath\phi$ and $\imath\neg\phi$ express logically and ontically distinct speech-acts, next showing how it adapts to a satisfactory resolution of ENP . The eventual upshot will be a constructive, compositional, expressivist-friendly semantics for normative language.

3.3 A General Strategy for Imperatives

The road to this goal is a rather long one. Our first step will be to outline a general strategy for developing a reductive semantics for \mathcal{L}_{IMP} . Specifically, we will outline a parametrized version of the semantics, then fill it in with a simple deontic version of the reduction. We will then consider whether and how the semantics is able to capture a satisfactory notion of consistency.

A reductive semantics for \mathcal{L}_{IMP} in terms of a semantics for some language \mathcal{L}_N will satisfy condition (8) and specify values for the following parameters:

- (12) *Parametrized reductive semantics*
- a. A theoretical interpretation of $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{IMP}}$
 - b. A definition of the class of models/model denizens $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{IMP}}$ is relative to
 - c. A definition of \mathcal{L}_N
 - d. A theoretical interpretation of *and statement of conditions on* $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_N}$
 - e. A definition of the class of models/model denizens $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_N}$ is relative to
 - f. A definition of μ

With that in the background, the simplest *deontic* reduction²⁴ interprets $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{IMP}}$ as *enforces* or *orders* (so that an imperative or permission is in force iff it is en-

²⁴ This is a simplified presentation of the semantics of Segerberg (1990) (from whom the Command Set notion derives). Although he doesn't present the semantics as a deontic reduction, it clearly is. The Command Set has a close theoretical parallel in Portner (2004, 2008)'s notion of the To-Do List.

forced/ordered), the imperative operator $!$ as an obligation-imposing version of the deontic operator O (read *it is commanded that*) of the deontic language \mathcal{L}_D , and the permission operator $;$ as a permission-granting version of O 's dual. Informally, we will interpret $O\phi$ relative to a set of propositions (represented here as subsets of the universe) that are commanded by the relevant authority. This set is known as the **COMMAND SET**. As a first pass, we will try to capture this with a neighborhood (a.k.a. Montague-Scott) semantics, so that $O\phi$ is satisfied iff the proposition that ϕ is in the Command Set (a.k.a. neighborhood).²⁵ Since there is no need to vary the models for the imperative language, we won't.

(13) *Command Set Semantics (css) for \mathcal{L}_{IMP}*

Let w a world, Δ_w the Command Set at w , $\mu(!\phi) = O\phi$, $\mu(;\phi) = \neg O\neg\phi$

a. $\Delta_w, w \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{IMP}} !\phi \Leftrightarrow \Delta_w, w \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D} O\phi \Leftrightarrow \{w : w \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D} \phi\} \in \Delta_w$

b. $\Delta_w, w \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{IMP}} ;\phi \Leftrightarrow \Delta_w, w \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D} \neg O\neg\phi$

Although simple and elegant, *css* is not, by itself terribly illuminating about the semantics of imperatives. We will bracket that, since making the semantics more realistic is orthogonal to **IMP**.²⁶ *css* has a property which is of immediate relevance to **IMP**: it is straightforwardly inconsistent for a Command Set Δ to both require ϕ and tolerate ϕ 's absence, so that both $!\phi$ and $;\neg\phi$ are in force relative to Δ . For suppose otherwise—that for some Δ , both $!\phi$ and $;\neg\phi$ are in force relative to Δ . Then Δ would satisfy $O\phi$ and $\neg O\neg\phi$; Δ would *satisfy a classical contradiction*.

An important point: what does the work in generating this inconsistency is not (or, rather, is not *merely*) the fact that, according to the semantics for \mathcal{L}_{IMP} , $!\phi$ and $;\neg\phi$ impose inconsistent requirements on the Command Set. That is something which we, mindful of [Schroeder \(2008c\)](#)'s objection to [Gibbard \(2003\)](#)'s hyperplanner semantics for normative sentences, would like to avoid. The objection applies Schroeder's general complaint against expressivist treatments of inconsistency to Gibbard's hyperplanner semantics for normative sentences. In rough outline, Gibbard's hyperplanner semantics has it that the content of an atomic normative sentence is the set of hyperplans²⁷ (or hyperplan-world pairs) with which it is consistent (does not disagree). Once we're in the habit of representing contents in terms of sets, a certain kind of inconsistency comes cheap: logical connectives denote the usual Boolean operations on sets (with negation denoting complement with respect to the universe), and the content of a formula and its negation are represented with disjoint sets. So obligation-statements and their negations are inconsistent *in virtue of expressing disjoint sets* of hyperplanners. But Schroeder objects:

By assigning the complement set of hyperplanners to a negated sentence,
all that Gibbard's account does, is to stipulate that it is to express a state of

²⁵ Neighborhood semantics for modal languages generalize relational (Kripkean) approaches to the semantics of modal languages. For discussion, see esp. [Chellas \(1980: Ch. 7\)](#).

²⁶ An interesting issue that we will also bracket: what are the closure conditions on Command Sets? Logical consequence runs into special difficulties. See [Charlow \(2009a\)](#) for extended discussion.

²⁷ Formally, [Gibbard \(2003: 54\)](#) defines a hyperplan H to be a contingency plan that is *maximal*, in the sense that, for any situation S and any action α , either H is decided for α in S , or H is decided against α in S . A worry about this conception of maximality is discussed in §3.5.

mind that is inconsistent with the state of mind expressed by the original sentence. But it does nothing to tell us what that state of mind is like, or *why* it is inconsistent with the state of mind expressed by the original sentence (Schroeder 2008c: 585).

I do think this is a cogent worry: disjointness is fairly cheap. In Gibbard's case, we need some reason for thinking that the contents of the relevant non-cognitive states of mind (disapproval and toleration) are accurately represented with disjoint sets; similarly, we need some reason for thinking the content of the states of mind expressed by conjunctions (disjunctions) of normative claims, which are ontically distinct from the states of mind expressed by the conjuncts (disjuncts), are accurately represented as the overlap between (union of) sets. For all we know, this familiar sort of representation might be inappropriate for ontically distinct mental kinds, and "the states with which it makes sense to disagree are the ones that are really representations of independent fact," which is to say, cognitive states after all (Dreier 2006: 220).

Supposing this worry (more precisely, its obvious extension to the imperative case) is cogent, *css* reveals a strategy for avoiding it. To say that $!\phi$ and $;\neg\phi$ are inconsistent is to say that there is no Command Set Δ such that both $!\phi$ and $;\neg\phi$ are in force with respect to Δ . And indeed there's no such Δ , according to *css*. But this is no mere matter of *stipulation* or *definition*: the absence of such Δ is explained by the fact that its existence would lead to an ordinary contradiction in the "intermediate" deontic language. From the fact that $!\phi$ and $;\neg\phi$ are in force (with respect to Δ) just in case their deontic translations are satisfied (with respect Δ), it follows straightaway that $!\phi$ and $;\neg\phi$ are inconsistent.

What is doing the major explanatory work here, then, is the claim that imperative semantics is susceptible of a deontic reduction. Note, though, that the availability of this sort of explanation doesn't turn on the use of a specifically deontic reduction: *any* instantiation of the parametrized reductive semantics will do, so long as $!\phi$ and $;\neg\phi$ are mapped (by μ) to classically inconsistent formulas in the preferred intermediate language. Take any version of the reductive semantics that satisfies this condition. The satisfactoriness of its response to *INP* can be seen as a *substantive* (actually, in this case *empirical*), rather than formal, question: it depends on the empirical adequacy of an analysis of imperative semantics in terms of the semantics of the relevant intermediate language (whether it licenses the right object-language inferences, predicts the right sort of conventional force for imperatives and permissives, etc.²⁸). But there is no question of the reduction resolving *INP*, supposing that it is empirically adequate.

To foreshadow a worry that arises for our solution to *ENP*, it might seem *ad hoc* to plump for a reductive solution to *INP*; *ad hoc*, indeed, to even think that this sort of technique should be regarded as part of the semanticist's toolkit. Two reasons it's not. First, the reductive strategy is the only promising way of resolving *INP* (so far as I know). If we were unsure that *INP* had a solution, we might worry about this one; since we're fairly sure that it does, we shouldn't. Second, there are independent

²⁸ Charlow (2009a: §3) states some empirical conditions of adequacy on imperative semantics.

reasons—reasons having nothing to do with *INP*—for liking reductive analyses of the imperative. Proposals for the compositional semantics of imperatives, by both linguists and philosophers, are dominantly reductive (see §3.1 for citations). Semantic reduction is a useful and independently well-motivated part of the semanticist’s toolkit.

3.4 *Speech-Acts in Dynamic Semantics*

It would be fair to say that the consensus linguistic view about the meaning of imperatives is recognizably expressivist. It’s common ground, even among semanticists who think the imperative operator is *literally* a type of deontic necessity operator (Aloni 2007; Han 1998; Schwager 2006), that imperative utterances conventionally neither constitute assertions nor involve the expression of a speaker’s belief. Rather, imperative utterances conventionally constitute a distinctive, *sui generis* type of speech-act (associated with a distinctive kind of prescriptive force), and typically (though not always) involve the expression of a speaker’s desire as it concerns the actions of the addressee (for the most sophisticated development of this picture to date, see Portner 2004, 2008). Few would endorse factualist truth-conditions for imperative sentences (those who do having been unnecessarily driven there by a misunderstanding of the commitments they’ve incurred by going reductive). And most everyone agrees that explaining the states of mind conventionally expressed and speech-acts conventionally performed by imperative utterances helps to explain their meaning (although there is disagreement about the centrality of such an account to a theory of the conventional meaning of imperative utterances).

So far, our account of imperatives is expressivist only in the sense of being nonfactualist: we have said nothing about the pragmatics of imperative utterances, or about how speaker-attitudes explain their meaning. I will try to fill part of that lacuna here (although we will save the bulk of our remarks about pragmatics and illocutionary force for §4).

My approach here²⁹ will take a familiar cue from dynamic accounts of sentence-meaning.³⁰ Somewhat informally, dynamic accounts of sentence-meaning (*DYNAMIC SEMANTICS*, as such accounts are generally known) are distinguished by taking the theoretically interesting notion of sentence-meaning to lie in how utterances of such sentences update states. Dynamic semantics is to be contrasted with static (truth-conditional, model-theoretic) semantics, which traditionally takes the meaning of a sentence to lie in its truth- or satisfaction-conditions, or the proposition that

²⁹ For an approach that, if I understand it correctly, is in a broadly similar vein, see Alwood (2010). Although Alwood and I share, as far as I can tell, some foundational assumptions, his article does not attempt to furnish a non-cognitivist account of normative sentence-meaning—merely to establish a case for optimism that such an account is *possible*. See Schroeder (2010) for some compelling worries about Alwood’s presentation.

³⁰ Some classic references in the dynamic tradition are Kamp (1981); Heim (1982); Groenendijk & Stokhof (1991); Veltman (1996). I’m afraid I don’t have space for more than a cursory sketch of the dynamic worldview. For a short introduction to the dynamic approach and its motivations, see von Stechow & Gillies (2007). Dynamic semantics is, the reader should note, a more extreme example than is needed for my purposes. Its proponents tend to take it to characterize the only theoretically interesting notion of sentence-meaning. For the analogy to suit our purposes, the theory only needs to characterize one theoretically central notion of sentence-meaning, perhaps among others.

it semantically expresses. According to dynamic semanticists, the conventional meaning of a sentence is something like an instruction for updating an input state with new information. The conventional meaning of a sentence is thus identified with its *conventional force*, or the speech-act that a speaker conventionally performs in uttering that sentence. The dynamic notion of meaning is use-theoretic in nature and inspiration: the conventional meaning of a sentence is tied very closely to the conventional function of that sentence in a discourse—what the sentence is generally used to do, by an ordinary speaker interested in communicating with an audience.

More formally, a dynamic semantics for a language \mathcal{L} generally begins with a static semantics for \mathcal{L} , which is then appealed to in a recursive definition of *update* (a.k.a. *context change*) potentials for formulas of \mathcal{L} . An update-potential for a formula is a function from input states to output states (contexts, if you like). A stock example, letting $\llbracket \cdot \rrbracket$ be an interpretation function mapping a formula to the set of worlds where it's satisfied, $[\cdot]$ an interpretation function mapping a formula to its update-potential, σ an information-state (for immediate purposes, just the set of worlds compatible with what's known at σ), and $\sigma[\phi]$ be the result of updating σ with ϕ :

- (14) a. $\sigma[p] = \sigma \cap \llbracket p \rrbracket$
 b. $\sigma[\neg\phi] = \sigma - \sigma[\phi]$
 c. $\sigma[\phi \wedge \psi] = \sigma[\phi][\psi]$

Dynamic approaches take the theoretically interesting notion of sentence-meaning to be captured by $[\cdot]$, rather than $\llbracket \cdot \rrbracket$: ϕ 's meaning lies, quite literally, in *what it's used to do* (add the information that ϕ to an input state), rather than its “static” truth-conditions. Still, we see a *base-level* reliance on the truth-conditional semantics for the language in the recursive definition of $[\cdot]$. While we explain ϕ 's meaning by pointing to its associated update-potential (force, speech-act, etc.), rather than its static truth-conditions, the latter are indispensable for characterizing that update-potential. So while speech-acts are theoretically central in this picture, they're not semantically fundamental: we do not (indeed, could not) let speech-acts somehow *supplant* or *eliminate* truth-conditions in the theory. Modeling a sentence as adding its informational content to an input-state presupposes a static characterization (in terms of truth-conditions) of informational content. So, should we need to define static notions of consistency, entailment, and so forth, in terms of static truth-conditions, we may; truth-conditions are available for this sort of exploitation.

The insight here is that a dynamic, speech-act theory of sentence-meaning may begin with a static semantics, layering an additional, speech-act- or use-theoretic dimension of meaning on top of that (in accordance with the preferred linguistic theory about how speech-acts are conventionally associated with sentences in the language³¹). For lack of a better name, I'll refer to this way of developing a speech-act theory of meaning as BOTTOM-UP (versus TOP-DOWN). Bottom-up approaches layer dynamic meaning (discourse-function, use, force, speech-act, etc.) on top of static. Top-down approaches, to contrast, begin with dynamic or pragmatic notions and

³¹ The inspiration for the dynamic picture is [Stalnaker \(1978\)](#)'s classic account of assertion, on which the canonical discourse effect of asserting that ϕ is to add the information that ϕ to the context.

try to explain ordinary static notions in terms of them. The example of dynamic semantics shows there are bottom-up theories of sentence-meaning satisfying CMAU . Schroeder, we've seen, assumes the expressivist's endorsement of CMAU commits her to a top-down approach to normative sentence-meaning. Plainly this was wrong. The bottom-up approach is well-suited to imperatives, on account of INP . Indeed, there is a case to be made that resolving INP *demand*s it. Similarly, it's well-suited to an expressivist account of normative language, on account of ENP .

Layering an account of conventional imperative force on top of the static CSS semantics happens to be fairly simple. Here's one way of doing it.³² States are assigned a more complicated semantic type: states have both information-tracking and action-guiding parameters. Formally, σ is a pair $\langle \iota, \Delta \rangle$, with ι a body of information (so, $\iota \subseteq W$), Δ a Command Set (so $\Delta \subseteq 2^W$). Updating with non-imperative sentences follows definition (14). Imperative and permissive update involve strengthening and weakening Δ , respectively:

- (15) a. $\langle \iota, \Delta \rangle [! \phi] = \langle \iota, \Delta \cup \{ \llbracket \phi \rrbracket \} \rangle$
 b. $\langle \iota, \Delta \rangle [; \phi] = \langle \iota, \Delta - \{ \llbracket \neg \phi \rrbracket \} \rangle$

This is quite crude, but it does for present purposes.³³ Imperatives add their complements to what's commanded; permissions remove their complements' negations; both leave the information unchanged. Updating with $! \phi$ yields a state with respect to which $! \phi$ is *in force* (since $! \phi$ is in force with respect to the updated state's Command Set); similarly, updating with $; \phi$ yields a state with respect to which $; \phi$ is in force. We can view CSS as specifying *targets* at which the Command Set Dynamics (CSD) aims: imperative (permissive) force amounts to enforcing new commands (permissions), which, by CSS , amounts to making their deontic "translations" *true*.³⁴

Even in this crude form, we see the makings of a bottom-up, expressivist analysis of imperative meaning. Imperative force is clearly distinct from assertoric force, in virtue of updating an action-guiding, rather than informational, parameter of the state. Supposing $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{\text{IMP}}}$ expresses the relation of being in force with respect to a Command Set, the static semantics is nonfactualist. Assuming $[\cdot]$ captures a theoretically central aspect of imperative meaning, CSD satisfies an imperative version of CMAU . Speaker-attitudes, as such, play no role in the account, but this is easily remedied, since the performance of a speech-act by some speaker generally amounts to the expression of some non-factive attitude by that speaker: asserting ϕ expresses belief that ϕ , commanding ϕ expresses some attitude (say, *enjoinder*) toward ϕ , permitting ϕ expresses a "dual" attitude (say, *allowing*) toward ϕ . For familiar reasons (cf. Dreier 2006), enjoinder and allowing are not interdefinable (likewise with commanding and permitting). But that is no strike against our view. For attitudes are elucidating the relevant speech-acts, not explaining properly static notions like

32 The basic approach is largely from Portner (2004, 2008). Charlow (2009a, forthcoming) are extended discussions of the dynamics of imperative force.

33 This is an exceptionally simplistic treatment of the dynamics of permissive force, which introduces a bevy of difficulties and complexities that our approach ignores. The classic presentation of these difficulties is Lewis (1979). For a more recent discussion, see van Rooy (2000).

34 For a more sophisticated analysis of how the expressivist should understand the interface between the static and dynamic components of her theory, see §4.

consistency.

3.5 Back to Normative Language

Extending the ideas developed in the prior sections to an expressivist analysis of indicative normative language isn't too difficult. In this section, I'll sketch a schematic strategy for doing this (and gesture at how relevant parameters might get filled in). This takes very little time; most of the space here is reserved for addressing worries that seem to arise for the strategy I outline.

A reductive expressivist semantics for a normative language (to simplify, let's suppose this is the deontic language \mathcal{L}_D , although will, of course, be giving it a different semantics here) states conditions on $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D}$ in terms of satisfaction-conditions for some non-normative language \mathcal{L}_A so that condition (8) is satisfied, while specifying values for these parameters:

- (16) *Parametrized nonfactualist semantics*
- a. A nonfactualist interpretation of $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D}$
 - b. A definition of the class of models/model denizens $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D}$ is relative to
 - c. A definition of \mathcal{L}_A
 - d. A theoretical interpretation of and statement of conditions on $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_A}$
 - e. A definition of the class of models/model denizens $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_A}$ is relative to
 - f. A definition of μ

We need a concrete version of this semantics to work with. So, simply for the sake of discussion, we will suppose that $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D}$ expresses *endorsement* relative to a Norm-System Π , a set of propositions the speaker is committed to governing her behavior in accordance with.³⁵ From here, we will go modal: the O operator is analyzed in terms of a necessity modality interpreted with respect to an accessibility relation R_Π characterized by Π , such that w can see v iff v is Π -ideal:

$$R_\Pi := \{\langle w, v \rangle : v \in \bigcap \Pi\}$$

The basic idea is that a Norm-System Π will endorse an obligation-description $O\phi$ iff $\Box\phi$ is satisfied relative to R_Π :

$$(17) \quad \Pi, w \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_D} O\phi \Leftrightarrow \Pi, w \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_A} \Box\phi \Leftrightarrow \forall v : wR_\Pi v \Rightarrow \Pi, v \vDash_{\mathcal{L}_A} \phi$$

In tidier notation (omitting language-markers for clarity):

$$(18) \quad \llbracket O\phi \rrbracket^{\Pi, w} = 1 \Leftrightarrow \llbracket \Box\phi \rrbracket^{\Pi, w} = 1$$

As was the case with the imperative-to-deontic reduction, the viability of the deontic-to-modal reduction is an issue to be adjudicated by empirical work in linguistic semantics. A favorable data-point: modal languages (and their familiar

³⁵ Norm-Systems, in Gibbard (1990: Ch. 5)'s sense, are rather complicated entities: a set of norms, combined with a metric for weighting/prioritizing norms (or sets of norms) vis-à-vis other norms (or sets of norms). I have no objection to this, but a simpler account suits my purposes here.

semantics), it is well known, are useful tools for understanding the semantics of normative language (classic treatments are [van Fraassen 1972](#); [Lewis 1974](#); [Kratzer 1981](#); [Jackson 1985](#)). From here it might seem a short step to viewing deontic operators (*ought*, *must*, etc.) as *literally* modal operators, expressing modal concepts mapping propositions into propositions. We have, however, seen that this inference is not generally valid: using the semantics of deontic operators to *understand* the semantics of imperative operators doesn't commit us to viewing imperative operators *as* deontic operators. This is a substantive syntacto-semantic claim, to be adjudicated however such claims are customarily adjudicated.³⁶ Similarly, the claim that the normative concepts expressed by deontic operators are modal concepts is a substantive *philosophical* claim, about which expressivists and their opponents will have meaty disagreements. Using the semantics of modal operators as suggested here is orthogonal to this further claim. Expressivists and their opponents can agree on the empirical viability of the deontic-to-modal reduction (indeed, they can even agree that the relevant logics are isomorphic; see, e.g., [Gibbard 1992: 972](#)), while disagreeing about the kind of concept deontic operators express.

3.6 *Gibbard's Semantics as a Special Case*

It is interesting to note that [Gibbard \(1990, 2003\)](#)'s semantics is actually a special case of this modal semantics: Gibbard identifies the content of an obligation-description $O\phi$, $\llbracket O\phi \rrbracket$, with the set of Norm-world (or Hyperplan-world) pairs $\langle \Pi, w \rangle$ such that ϕ is required according to Π at w , where 'required according to Π ' is a descriptive predicate expressing some sort of modal concept that can hold or not of ϕ at w . This is just the notion of normative content captured by (18). Gibbard's semantics is a special case because it introduces substantive restrictions on Norm-Systems. Norm-Systems (and Hyperplans), for Gibbard, are practical analogues to possible worlds: they are *maximal* (meaning, in this context, that if Π is a Norm-System, then for all ϕ , either ϕ is a Norm of Π , or $\neg\phi$ is), and *consistent* (have a model). This is an extreme simplification, but nothing here turns on it.

As with INP , we should be sensitive to Schroeder's worry that "explaining" the inconsistency of $O\phi$ and $\neg O\phi$ by appeal to the fact that negation corresponds to complement (so, $\llbracket O\phi \rrbracket \cap \llbracket \neg O\phi \rrbracket = \emptyset$) is no explanation at all. Trying, as [Gibbard \(2003\)](#) does, to motivate the use of such disjoint sets to represent the contents of $O\phi$ and $\neg O\phi$ by appeal to the facts that (i) $O\phi$ expresses disapproval of ϕ 's absence, (ii) $\neg O\phi$ expresses toleration of ϕ 's absence, and (iii) these attitudes *disagree*, comes, as we have seen, with its own explanatory deficiencies. Understanding the Gibbard semantics as a modal reduction shows us how to explain normative inconsistency without appeal to either of these problematic strategies. A Norm-System Π endorses $O\phi$ and $\neg O\phi$ iff Π satisfies a contradiction: $\Box\phi \wedge \neg\Box\phi$. What is doing the explanatory work here is the claim that a normative sentence's *endorsement*-conditions (with respect to a Norm-System) are equivalent to some modal sentence's *truth*-conditions (with respect to that Norm-System).

As [Dreier \(2006\)](#) and [Schroeder \(2008c\)](#) note, however, there is a major snag.

³⁶ For the best attempt at adjudicating the claim for imperatives, see [von Fintel & Iatridou \(2009\)](#).

On the Gibbard semantics, the content of $O\phi$ is the set of Norm-world pairs $\langle \Pi, w \rangle$ such that ϕ is a norm of Π . The complement of this set is the set of Norm-world pairs $\langle \Pi', w \rangle$ such that ϕ is *not* a norm of Π' . By maximality, the latter is just the set of Norm-world pairs $\langle \Pi^*, w \rangle$ such that $\neg\phi$ is a norm of Π^* . So the content of $\neg O\phi$ is identified with the content of $O\neg\phi$ —not a happy result! To avoid this, Dreier proposes that Gibbard take on a primitive distinction between three incompatible kinds of maximal Norm-Systems: those having ϕ as a norm, those having $\neg\phi$ as a norm, and those *indifferent* between ϕ and $\neg\phi$.

The problem with taking this tack is that it would seem to re-commit the expressivist to a top-down semantics (with all of its difficulties). Our original explanation for the inconsistency of $O\phi$ and $\neg O\phi$ was that there is no Π such that Π endorses both $O\phi$ and $\neg O\phi$. Why is there no such Π ? Because the existence of such Π would lead to contradiction. So far so good. But consider some Norm-System Π_i that is indifferent between ϕ and $\neg\phi$. Any semantics worth its salt will have it that Π_i endorses $\neg O\phi$ and does not endorse $O\phi$. But *why* does Π_i not endorse $O\phi$? What, in other words, is the motivation for a semantics according to which a Norm-System that is indifferent between ϕ and $\neg\phi$ does not endorse $O\phi$ and does not satisfy $\Box\phi$? The only available answer, so far as I can tell, is that indifference between ϕ and $\neg\phi$ is simply inconsistent with having ϕ as a norm. To say this, of course, is to lapse back into the top-down semantic mentalism that we have worked so hard to avoid (cf. Schroeder 2008c: 586–7). The problem, in a nutshell, with Dreier’s proposal is that sets of Norm-world pairs are once again being *used* to represent various states of mind that, by assumption, disagree about ϕ : disapproval of $\neg\phi$, disapproval of ϕ , and indifference between ϕ and $\neg\phi$, respectively. Since it is left unexplained why the last of these should be inconsistent with either of the first two, it is unclear whether or why the envisioned set-theoretic representation is appropriate. That is exactly what our strategy was designed to avoid.

A more general version of the modal approach can, however, avoid this trouble, simply by jettisoning the maximality requirement on Norm-Systems. From the modal perspective, the job of a Norm-System Π is just to characterize an *accessibility relation* R_Π (or, if we like, a partial-order) on worlds, not to play the role of practical analogue to possible worlds. So there is simply no formal need for Norm-Systems to be maximal. Indeed, if we move to an ordering-semantics, on the model of Kratzer (1981); Lewis (1981), so that modals quantify over the Π -*best* worlds (worlds satisfying as many norms in Π as any other world) rather than the Π -*ideal* worlds, Norm-Systems needn’t even be consistent.³⁷

It might be objected that the expressivist who takes my modal approach is still in need of an answer to the question: why, if some Norm-System Π endorses $O\phi$, could Π not also endorse $\neg O\phi$? What, in other words, is the motivation for a semantics according to which a Norm-System that endorses $O\phi$ cannot also endorse $\neg O\phi$ and cannot also satisfy $\neg\Box\phi$? The suggested explanation, to repeat, is that (i) endorsement-conditions for a normative sentence are equivalent to satisfaction-

³⁷ For a formal development of the modal semantics which stays truer to Gibbard (2003)’s emphasis on planning, see Charlow (2009b: §4). For a discussion of some of the metaethical issues concerning the modal representation of deontic force, see Charlow (2009a: §4).

conditions for a modal sentence, and (ii) the normative sentences $O\phi$ and $\neg O\phi$ are associated with the classically inconsistent modal sentences $\Box\phi$ and $\neg\Box\phi$.

3.7 Worries about Worlds

Perhaps you are suspicious this all is too good to be true. Allow me to stoke that suspicion for a bit. Suppose a meta-normative realist gives a factualist semantics for some normative fragment. It would appear that I am suggesting (or am, at least, committed to suggesting) that this semantics, whatever its shape, is directly co-opt-able by the expressivist: truth-conditions get recast as endorsement-conditions, nothing else really needs changing. Indeed, that is *exactly* what I want to suggest. But then it would seem unclear what is ultimately *distinctive* about the expressivist's nonfactualist semantics for normative language. Something is amiss.

A flip reply: suppose a realist about imperative language gives a factualist semantics for imperatives. The semantics is directly co-opt-able by the expressivist about imperative language: truth-conditions get recast as enforcement-conditions, but the formalism is simply assimilated by the expressivist. Is this a worry for the expressivist about imperative language? No. The proper response to this scenario, I take it, is that, supposing the realist about imperative language has hit on the right conditions for $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}_{\text{IMP}}}$, she has merely mistaken them for truth-conditions. The expressivist is entitled to this response because there are good independent reasons for thinking the semantic function of the imperative is not to express a modal proposition. The expressivist is entitled to a similar response in the normative case *if* there are good independent reasons for thinking the semantic function of, e.g., deontic operators is not to express a modal proposition. Whether that holds is a purely philosophical issue, outside the purview of formal semantics.

My claim is that there need be nothing essentially distinctive about an expressivist semantics for normative language, aside from the philosophical interpretation of the formalism. Those given to a dim view of philosophical interpretations of formalism—particularly ham-fisted attempts to distinguish isomorphic accounts—might still be worried. Isomorphism is rather strong (if not decisive) evidence of theoretical identity. I will try out two ways of developing such worries in this section, each falling out of a certain understanding of the nature of truth-conditions.

Yalcin (forthcoming) states the understanding well: “Factualist truth-conditions,” he claims, “are truth-conditions which are a *function of the world-coordinate* of the points of evaluation in question.” By “factualist truth-conditions,” Yalcin means to invoke what I have simply been referring to as truth-conditions—i.e., the sort of thing the expressivist cannot countenance about normative language. Translating into my idiom, Yalcin is claiming that truth-conditions for a language \mathcal{L} are conditions on $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}}$ that depend on the world-coordinate. It follows that if $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}}$ can hold *contingently* (can vary with the world-coordinate), $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}}$ is an honest-to-goodness satisfaction relation. A world-dependent semantics for \mathcal{L} leaves no room for further philosophical interpretation of $\vDash_{\mathcal{L}}$.

Note that our semantics for \mathcal{L}_{D} precludes this sort of dependence: the world coordinate is idle. The semantics, as stated in (17,18), is equivalent to the world-

independent semantics in (19).

$$(19) \quad \llbracket O\phi \rrbracket^{\Pi, w} = 1 \Leftrightarrow \bigcap \Pi \subseteq \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^{\Pi}$$

But the same *can't* be said of the css for imperatives (which, following earlier approaches, relativized Command Sets to worlds; see (13)). Nor can it be said of the Gibbard (1990, 2003) semantics, which is designed to handle thick normative predicates (e.g., *brave*) blending descriptive (world-dependent) and normative content. By Yalcin's lights, these proposals are each factualist. Worse, commands (and obligations) *can't* be in force contingently (without thereby being factual) and thick normative predicates *necessitate* a factualist semantics. Surely, this is too strong.³⁸

Dreier (1999) voices a related, though ultimately distinct, worry. Sets of Norm-world pairs, he worriedly notes, are derivable from functions from Norms to sets of worlds, and vice versa, by use of the transformation operation τ :

$$\tau(\mathcal{S}) = \lambda \Pi \lambda w. \langle \Pi, w \rangle \in \mathcal{S}$$

But we normally think of Kaplanian *characters* as characterizing sets of worlds, relative to a parameter (usually a context, here a Norm). Compare the expressivist semantics of (17,18) to an "indexical" semantics of normative language, on which $O\phi$'s content, relative to Π , is the *proposition* that ϕ is required according to Π .

An indexical view 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. (Dreier 1999: 566).

This is a modest, but surprisingly powerful, claim: because the indexical and expressivist semantics are isomorphic (and since isomorphism is strong evidence of theoretical identity), the onus is on the expressivist to differentiate her theory. The expressivist will emphasize that "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" (Dreier 1999: 566). All well and good, but how precisely *does* the expressivist's story here differ from the indexicalist's?

The natural response is to point to other philosophical touchstones of the expressivist theory: the notion that normative speech-acts are not assertions (and normative judgments are not beliefs). All well and good, but *why* are they not assertions? Dreier, on Gibbard's behalf, considers the Gibbardian notion that "the

³⁸ A further worry. Assessor relativism, as formulated by MacFarlane (forthcoming), plausibly involves a view about the compositional semantics of epistemic modals different from Yalcin (forthcoming)'s expressivism. Yalcin's notion of truth-conditions seems to collapse them (although Yalcin himself may not regard this as a bad consequence; see Yalcin 2006).

There's a whole paper in such worries (and possible responses). Space prevents me from doing them justice here. Ultimately, though, Yalcin's view is not so different from mine. We both favor expressivism about the relevant sort of language (epistemic and deontic operators respectively), but we nevertheless each endorse a modal (quantificational) analysis of the relevant operator. We also each endorse a non-assertive pragmatics for conventional uses of the relevant sort of language (see §4).

meaning of a normative sentence lies in ‘what [Norm-world pairs] it rules out [i.e., is incompatible with]’ (Dreier 1999: 568). Since we explain the meaning of a normative sentence by explaining what speech-act it’s conventionally used to perform, the content of a normative sentence (i.e., the set of Norm-world pairs it’s compatible with) *can’t* be fit for being the content of an assertion. But this won’t do:

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 (Dreier 1999: 568).

In short, that an utterance rules out a class of Norm-world pairs does not, by itself, settle whether that utterance constitutes an assertion. What avenues are open to the expressivist? What I dubbed the “flip reply” (analogizing normative to imperative language) is compelling *if* we have independent reasons for thinking there is something actually distinctive about the expressivist’s account of the use/function of normative language. We clearly have this with imperatives (see §3.4), but currently we are struggling to show we have it with normative language.

3.8 Looking Ahead

To avoid Dreier’s worry, the expressivist must develop a distinctive account of the use/function (i.e., conventional meaning) of normative language. There are two ways for her to do this, consistent with her making use of the modal reduction sketched above. First, develop a distinctive, non-cognitivist account of normative thought and judgment. Second, develop a distinctive account of normative speech-acts. In each case, she must argue that her account reveals something central about the conventional meaning of normative language (cf. §2.3). And, in each case, her account must be *autonomous* from the modal semantics, in the following sense: the content of a normative judgment or normative speech-act cannot be a straight deliverance of the modal semantics (i.e., it cannot be just the coordinates with respect to which $\varepsilon_{\mathcal{L}_b}$ holds). Dreier’s argument shows that such coordinates fail to distinguish the expressivist account from the indexical account.

Let me emphasize that nothing is surprising about the need for an autonomous account of normative meaning. As I claimed in §2.3, doing justice to *CMAU* (while avoiding the morass of semantic mentalism) requires identifying a dimension of normative meaning that’s *not* a straight deliverance of the static, model-theoretic semantics. An expressivism that jettisons semantic mentalism must be bottom-up, rather than top-down: something *besides* attitudes (or speech-acts) does the semantic heavy-lifting (defining notions of consistency and the like). So, the expressivist about

normative language, like the expressivist about imperatives (cf. §3.4), is already committed to identifying an additional layer of meaning in which use-theoretic notions (discourse-function, force, speech-act, expressed attitude, etc.) are central. Seen in this light, Dreier’s argument tells us nothing we didn’t already know.

4 Expressivist Pragmatics

In the penultimate section of this paper, I’ll do a very quick canvass of various ways for the expressivist to distinguish her theory, by giving an account of a *use-centric layer of normative meaning*. Our focus will be on giving a precise account of normative speech-acts (rather than normative thought or judgment) that (i) captures a sense in which normative speech-acts express practical attitudes of their agents, (ii) firmly establishes normative speech-acts as a distinctive kind of speech-act. The view will be bottom-up, rather than top-down: we will be layering—or, more precisely, canvassing various possible ways of layering—a use-centric dimension of meaning on top of the properly semantic dimension of meaning developed in §3. We will, for short, be interested in an expressivist pragmatics for normative language.

4.1 What’s Wanted

Speaking generally, a pragmatics for a language fragment \mathcal{L} is an account comprised of the following two components:

- *Formal*: a recursive definition of an interpretation function $[\cdot]$ assigning update-potentials (functions from input states into output states) to arbitrary sentences of \mathcal{L} .
- *Theoretical*: A (prose) interpretation and motivation for that definition.

The relationship between sentences and update-potentials specified by $[\cdot]$ is to be thought of as *conventional* or *canonical* in character: the value that results from application of the interpretation function to ϕ , $[\phi]$, is a formal representation of the illocutionary force conventionally associated with (equivalently, for our purposes, the speech-act conventionally performed or discourse-effect canonically achieved by) a speaker’s sincere utterance of ϕ . The job of the “theoretical” component of a pragmatic account is to motivate this representation: to give a linguistic (possibly, though not necessarily, empirical) case for modeling the conventional discourse-effect of an utterance of ϕ as represented by $[\phi]$.³⁹

An expressivist pragmatics is subject to an additional constraint. It must, as we saw in the prior section, be *distinctive*. For the expressivist pragmatics for normative language to be distinctive, in the desired way, it’s necessary that $[\cdot]$ assign different *kinds* of update-potentials to normative and non-normative sentences. The update-potentials of descriptive sentences will need to be distinct, formally speaking, from

³⁹ To give an example, Stalnaker (1978) models assertion as intersection of a possible-worlds proposition with a prior context-set (the Common Ground). The formal representation is supported by a theoretical account of the purpose of the activity of assertion; according to Stalnaker, “The purpose of expressing propositions is to [distinguish among alternative possible ways that things may be].”

those of normative sentences; it will not do to have both normative and non-normative sentences adding a set of worlds to the information-tracking parameter of the input state. There must, moreover, be a theoretical case for having $[\cdot]$ assign different kinds of update-potentials to normative and non-normative sentences. We require some sort of reason for modeling the conventional discourse-effect of a normative utterance in the envisioned manner, and it is the expressivist's job to supply one.

It is not my aim (nor would it be possible) in this section to furnish a complete expressivist pragmatics for normative language. My primary focus is restricted to the formal component of the pragmatics: I will describe and attempt to evaluate different possibilities for the value of $[\phi]$, when ϕ is (or embeds) a normative sentence. The theoretical component involves matters far beyond the scope of this paper: issues at the interface of moral psychology (the cognitive character and functional role of normative judgment), formal linguistics (the connection between normative judgment and normative language), and social psychology (the conversational function of the use of normative language). Such issues—which are, unsurprisingly, a major focus of Blackburn (1984, 1998); Gibbard (1990, 2003)—are what make expressivism a philosophically interesting view, and it is on issues that the ultimate success or failure of meta-normative expressivism will turn. My aim here, as in §3, is to answer a forceful challenge about the *possibility* of marrying expressivism to a semantico-pragmatic account of normative language. Substantive philosophical, rather than formal, considerations will settle the larger question of meta-normative expressivism's *attractiveness* as a theory of normative judgment and communication.

Although our focus is nominally on an expressivist pragmatics of normative language, most attempts of which I'm aware to develop a non-assertivist pragmatics for a type of language in the indicative (as opposed to interrogative or imperative) mood have focused on the language of subjective uncertainty (epistemic *might*, *must*, *probably*, and the like; here I have in mind Veltman 1996; Yalcin forthcoming; Swanson 2005, 2006, 2008; von Fintel & Gillies 2007; Schnieder forthcoming). We'll draw freely on these references in the subsequent discussion.

4.2 *Speech-Act Modifiers*

For simplicity, our focus remains on language of a restricted syntactic type: normative (and epistemic) sentential operators. If Δ is such a sentential operator, a Speech-Act Modifier (SAM) analysis of sentences of the form $\Delta\phi$ will hold that:

- The compositional semantic value of $\Delta\phi$ does not differ from that of ϕ , so that $\llbracket\Delta\phi\rrbracket = \llbracket\phi\rrbracket$.
- The conventional force of $\Delta\phi$ is of a *different type* than that of ϕ , so that $[\Delta\phi]$ and $[\phi]$ correspond to different types of illocutionary force.

According to the SAM analysis, the contribution of Δ is wholly pragmatic: an utterance of $\Delta\phi$ conventionally proffers ϕ as its content, but in a different manner than a bare utterance of ϕ . Developed as a view about epistemic or evidential operators, the SAM analysis treats an utterance of $\Delta\phi$ as, for instance, somehow conventionally indicating

(without asserting) that the speaker stands in a certain epistemic or evidential relation toward ϕ (Schnieder forthcoming), or, alternatively, as conventionally advising the speaker's addressee "not to overlook the possibility" that ϕ (with advising a different sort of speech-act than asserting) (Swanson 2005).

The semantic half of the SAM analysis makes it a clear non-starter for the language of subjective uncertainty. The following sentences clearly do not have the same compositional semantic value. According to the SAM analysis, they do. The same fact makes it a clear non-starter for normative language.

- (20) a. Paul thinks it's raining.
b. Paul thinks it might be raining.
- (21) a. Paul thinks he's dancing.
b. Paul thinks it's obligatory that he's dancing.

This has nothing to do with the peculiarities of attitude ascriptions: the problem lies with SAM analyses' failure to "allow the contribution of epistemic modals to have compositional effects in embedded positions" (von Fintel & Gillies 2007).

Note that the pragmatic half of SAM analyses is in no way proprietary to them. Indeed, the views canvassed in this section all treat the conventional force of $\Delta\phi$ as of different type than that of ϕ . If anything recommends the SAM analysis as a way of developing an expressivist pragmatics about some type of language, it recommends these other views equally.

4.3 Advice, Constraints, and Coordination

Consider, by way of illustration, the expressivist view defended by Yalcin (2007, forthcoming) (due in its essentials to Veltman 1996) about the pragmatics of epistemically modalized sentences. Ignoring complexities that are irrelevant for our purposes, Yalcin endorses the following conditions on an information-state σ (construed, for now, as a set of worlds) *accepting* a formula ϕ (notation: $\sigma \Vdash \phi$) of a language with a primitive epistemic possibility operator \diamond .

- (22) a. $\sigma \Vdash p \Leftrightarrow \sigma \subseteq \llbracket \phi \rrbracket$
b. $\sigma \Vdash \neg\phi \Leftrightarrow \forall \sigma' \subseteq \sigma : \sigma' \not\Vdash \phi$
c. $\sigma \Vdash \phi \wedge \psi \Leftrightarrow \sigma \Vdash \phi$ and $\sigma \Vdash \psi$
d. $\sigma \Vdash \diamond\phi \Leftrightarrow \sigma \cap \llbracket \phi \rrbracket \neq \emptyset$

The intuition Yalcin is exploiting is that an information-state σ accepts non-modal ϕ iff ϕ is entailed by the information of σ , whereas σ accepts epistemically modal $\diamond\phi$, *not* iff $\diamond\phi$ is *entailed* by σ , instead iff ϕ is *compatible* with σ . Note that, once we have a full specification of the acceptance relation, it is possible to associate each formula ϕ of the epistemic language with a *property* of an information-state: the property of accepting ϕ . According to Yalcin's favored pragmatics, the conventional force of an utterance of ϕ is simply to propose "to coordinate the [informational] states of [one's] interlocutors with respect to that property" (Yalcin forthcoming: 26).

On this way of conceptualizing pragmatics (call it the Advice, Constraints, and

Coordination model, ACC for short), the conventional force of an utterance of ϕ is to propose that a salient information-state (perhaps that associated with the context of utterance, perhaps that associated with the addressee, and perhaps both) come to satisfy a property conventionally specified by the utterance: the property of accepting ϕ . Three things are important to note about the ACC model:

- Speech-act-types are individuated by the *sort of proposal* they involve. Assertions are proposals to add their contents to relevant body of information (the Common Ground, or, more generally, the information-tracking parameter of the relevant state). Commands are proposals to add to the addressee’s To-Do List (or the action-guiding parameter of the relevant state). And so on.
- Coordination with respect to the relevant property is not the sole way of understanding the purpose of utterance. There is, indeed, a sense in which an utterance of ϕ conventionally involves the articulation of a *constraint* on a salient-information state (namely, the constraint of satisfying the relevant property; cf. Swanson 2008), as well as the proffering of a piece of *cognitive advice* (namely, the advice to modify the salient information-state so that it satisfies the relevant property; cf. Swanson 2005, 2006). The appropriateness of one understanding over another may depend on our local theoretical aims.
- The model is independent of any particular specification of what acceptance by an information-state amounts to, in two senses. One, endorsing Yalcin’s conditions on \models does not commit us to endorsing the ACC pragmatics (§4.4 has an illustration). Two, endorsing an ACC pragmatics for, e.g., epistemic modals does not commit us to endorsing Yalcin’s conditions on \models .

This last point is important. It illustrates that there’s nothing expressivist, *per se*, about the ACC pragmatics for epistemic modals. Suppose, for instance, we say a state σ accepts $\diamond\phi$ iff σ represents what Yalcin (forthcoming) calls a “second-order” state of mind, to the effect that ϕ is compatible with σ (so that $\sigma \models \diamond\phi \Leftrightarrow \sigma \subseteq \llbracket \diamond\phi \rrbracket$). Then, if we retain the ACC pragmatics, the proposal conventionally made by an utterance of $\diamond\phi$ is simply an *assertion*: it involves modifying the relevant information-state σ so that $\sigma[\diamond\phi]$ represents this second-order state of mind (so that, i.e., $\sigma[\diamond\phi] \subseteq \llbracket \diamond\phi \rrbracket$). On Yalcin’s view, the conventional force of an utterance of $\diamond\phi$ is not that of an assertion: it does not involve adding the second-order information that ϕ is compatible with the information to the information-state. It rather involves making the information-state compatible with ϕ , so that $\sigma[\diamond\phi] \cap \llbracket \phi \rrbracket \neq \emptyset$. Generally speaking, then, and not surprisingly, developing an expressivistic ACC pragmatics for some kind of language requires that we define a notion of acceptance of a sentence ϕ of that kind by an information-state σ on which σ ’s accepting ϕ is not a matter of σ representing the information that ϕ .⁴⁰

Returning to normative language, the natural first idea is simply to adopt Yalcin’s proposal for epistemic modals to normative language. Formally (but still very

⁴⁰ For this reason, any honest-to-goodness expressivist pragmatics will be able to avoid the pitfalls of Speaker Subjectivism, detailed in Schroeder (2008b: 89-92).

crudely), we have a state $\sigma = \langle \iota, \Pi \rangle$ (with ι the information-tracking parameter, Π the action-guiding parameter) accepting $O\phi$ iff ϕ is required by Π :

$$(23) \quad \langle \iota, \Pi \rangle \Vdash O\phi \Leftrightarrow \bigcap \Pi \subseteq \llbracket \phi \rrbracket$$

A state's accepting a normative sentence $O\phi$, on this model, does not involve *representing* the second-order information that ϕ is required by the relevant norm-system.⁴¹ Rather, it involves the state's *having* a norm-system according to which ϕ is required. Indeed, the property a state has when it accepts $O\phi$ is not a property of the information-tracking parameter at all. Rather, it is a property of the action-guiding parameter. Marrying this to the ACC pragmatics, the conventional force of an utterance of $O\phi$ is not that of an assertion: it does not involve the addition of second-order information (that ϕ is required) to the state. Rather, it involves a proposal to *make* ϕ required by the state, so that $\sigma[O\phi] \Vdash O\phi$. The conventional force of an utterance of $O\phi$ is to propose to coordinate the states of one's interlocutors with respect to the property of accepting $O\phi$. The natural way to make this into a fully explicit pragmatics is this:

$$(24) \quad \langle \iota, \Pi \rangle [O\phi] = \langle \iota, \Pi \cup \{\llbracket \phi \rrbracket\} \rangle$$

According to (24), the conventional force of an utterance of $O\phi$ is to add (except in cases where the proposal is, for whatever reason, rejected) the proposition that ϕ to the norm-system of the relevant state.⁴²

While this, at first glance, is an attractive way of developing an expressivist pragmatics for normative language, there is a rather major flaw. Recent linguistic work on the pragmatics of *imperatives* (cf. the discussions in §3.4 and Portner 2004, 2008; Charlow 2009b,a, forthcoming) models their conventional force in terms of proposals to modify the action-guiding parameter of a state as in (24), so that $O\phi$ is accepted, in the sense of (23), in $\sigma[! \phi]$ (recall Def. 15). Since, according to the ACC expressivist pragmatics, utterances of normative and imperative sentences are conventionally associated with the same sort of proposal, they are predicted to have the same conventional force. But the *performative* (obligation-introducing) force of conventional uses of imperatives is generally assumed to be distinct from the conventional, *non-performative* force of normative language. Substantial empirical evidence would be needed to justify revising this assumption. Presently, I see none.

⁴¹ This demands revision of the clause for negation specified in (22), as follows. In the base case, we define acceptance of negated atoms and negated O -sentences.

- $\langle \iota, \Pi \rangle \Vdash \neg p \Leftrightarrow \iota \subseteq \llbracket \neg p \rrbracket$
- $\langle \iota, \Pi \rangle \Vdash \neg O\phi \Leftrightarrow \bigcap \Pi \not\subseteq \llbracket \phi \rrbracket$

In the general case, we say a negation $\neg\phi$ is accepted in σ iff $(\neg\phi)^{\text{CNF}}$ (i.e., the conversion of $\neg\phi$ into conjunctive normal form) is accepted in σ . The definition is completed by retaining (22)'s clause for \wedge and adding the following clause for \vee :

- $\sigma \Vdash \phi \vee \psi \Leftrightarrow \sigma \Vdash \phi \text{ or } \sigma \Vdash \psi$

⁴² Defining update potentials for formulas of the form $\neg O\phi$, so that $\sigma[\neg O\phi] \Vdash \neg O\phi$, is delicate business, for reasons well-rehearsed in Lewis (1979); van Rooy (2000). We'll rest content with the informal idea that an utterance of $\neg O\phi$ conventionally proposes to make $\neg O\phi$ accepted in the relevant state, as defined in footnote 41.

4.4 *Pure Expression*

The last possibility for an expressivist pragmatics for normative language we will consider here is, I think, the most promising. Consider, again by way of illustration, the pragmatics for epistemic modals proposed in von Fintel & Gillies (2007). Their favored pragmatics (again due in its essentials to Veltman 1996) makes implicit use of a notion of acceptance that is equivalent to Yalcin’s (see Def. 22). The difference is that the conventional force of an utterance of $\diamond\phi$ isn’t to propose to coordinate interlocutors’ information-states with respect to the property of accepting $\diamond\phi$. Rather, it is simply to *proffer a test* on an information-state. The test conventionally associated with $\diamond\phi$ checks to see whether the input-state accepts $\diamond\phi$, returning that state in the event that it does, returning some other value otherwise.

$$(25) \quad \sigma[\diamond\phi] = \begin{cases} \sigma, & \text{if } \sigma \Vdash \diamond\phi \\ \emptyset, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Note that Def. 25 is *not* to be interpreted as an update-instruction. It is more like a program that, given an information-state as input, returns information about that state as output. The information is simply an answer to the question of whether ϕ is compatible with the state. Executing the test yields this information without attempting to induce the state to either (i) represent that information as true (contra a descriptivist pragmatics for epistemic modals), or (ii) satisfy the relevant property (contra Yalcin’s AAC pragmatics for epistemic modals). The motivating intuitions behind this proposal are well-stated by Veltman:

[A]ll you can do when told that it might be the case that ϕ is to agree or to disagree. If ϕ is acceptable in your information state σ , you must accept $\diamond\phi$. And if ϕ is not acceptable in σ , neither is $\diamond\phi$. Clearly, then, sentences of the form $\diamond\phi$ provide an invitation to perform a test on σ rather than to incorporate some new information in it (Veltman 1996: 229)

The speech-act conventionally involved, according to this proposal, in an utterance of $\diamond\phi$ could, without distortion, be characterized as a speaker’s *pure expression* of the acceptance of $\diamond\phi$ by her information-state—nothing more, and nothing less. The general notion of a *purely expressive speech-act* I have in mind here is, very roughly, this: a speaker S ’s utterance of ψ of kind K is an expression of attitude A iff that utterance, as a matter of linguistic conventions governing utterances of kind K :

- Implies, without asserting, that S accepts ψ ⁴³
- Raises the question of whether S ’s interlocutors also accept ψ

⁴³ This condition, as formulated, allows the possibility that the implicature is merely conversational. To rule that out, we would normally strengthen the condition to require that the implication be non-cancellable (so that ψ , *but I don’t accept ψ* is infelicitous) and non-reinforceable (so that ψ , *in fact I accept ψ* is infelicitous). But such constructions are *always* absurd (because Moore-paradoxical). Hence, the usual ways of testing whether the implication is part of the conventional meaning of the sentence are of dubious use here. Other diagnostics are needed, the complexities of which we are in no position to confront here.

The test apparatus is a nice way of representing expressive speech-acts, in this sense, since (i) linguistic conventions governing the use of tests by speakers will presumably state that speakers do not proffer tests unless their own information-states pass them, and (ii) proffering a test is a good strategy for a speaker interested in establishing whether the information-states of her interlocutors agree with her own. Although the performance of such a speech-act may *set the stage* for attempts to coordinate on the relevant property (if, for instance, the speech-act brings to light a failure in coordination), there is no proposal that aims, as such, at such coordination and which is part of the conventional meaning of $\diamond\phi$.

It is straightforward to adapt the Pure Expression (PE) pragmatics to normative language. The definition of acceptance of normative sentences by a state remains as in Def. 23. We abandon the idea that the conventional force of an utterance of $O\phi$ is to propose coordination with respect to the property of accepting $O\phi$. Instead, we say that the conventional force of an utterance of $O\phi$ is a pure expression of acceptance of $O\phi$ by the speaker's information-state. We model this formally by having a speaker's utterance of $O\phi$ conventionally proffer a test on states (more specifically, a test on their action-guiding parameters).⁴⁴

$$(26) \quad \sigma[O\phi] = \begin{cases} \sigma, & \text{if } \sigma \Vdash O\phi \\ \emptyset, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

In formal pragmatics, speech-acts are traditionally modeled as performing *restrictive* operations on information-states: assertion is modeled as restriction of a state's doxastic alternatives (intersection of its content with the informational parameter), commanding as restriction of a state's practical alternatives (addition of what's commanded to the action-guiding parameter). On the PE pragmatics for epistemic and normative language, we see that things may be more complicated than this. For each of the four kinds of language we have considered (descriptive, epistemic, imperative, and normative), we observe a different pragmatic profile: each is conventionally associated with a different type of force or speech-act, depending on (i) which parameter of the information-state the speech-act "operates" on (informational or action-guiding), (ii) what sort of operation on that parameter the speech-act is modeled as performing (restriction, R, or test, T).

⁴⁴ The full definition of $[\cdot]$ is stated as follows. Negated formulas pose the main difficulty here. In the base case, we define $[\cdot]$ for negated atoms and negated O -sentences.

- $\langle t, \Pi \rangle[\neg p] = \langle t - \llbracket p \rrbracket, \Pi \rangle$
- $\langle t, \Pi \rangle[\neg O\phi] = \begin{cases} \langle t, \Pi \rangle, & \text{if } \langle t, \Pi \rangle \not\# O\phi \\ \emptyset, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$

In the general case, we identify $[\neg\phi]$ with $[(\neg\phi)^{\text{CNF}}]$. The definition is completed with clauses for \wedge , \vee .

- $[\phi \wedge \psi] = \lambda\sigma.\sigma[\phi][\psi]$
- $[\phi \vee \psi] = [\phi] \cup [\psi]$ (?)

There is, it turns out, a major problem with interpreting \vee as \cup . See §5.2 for discussion.

	ι	Π	R	T
Descriptive	✓		✓	
Epistemic	✓			✓
Imperative		✓	✓	
Normative		✓		✓

The upshot is that the PE pragmatics for normative language avoids the problem that afflicted the ACC pragmatics: the performative force conventionally associated with imperatives is, indeed, distinct from the non-performative force conventionally associated with normative language. An expressivist looking for a way to fill in the pragmatic half of her theory would, I submit, do well to start with the PE pragmatics.

5 Summing Up, and New Worries

This, I take it, answers the challenge posed in §§3.7 and 3.8: we have at least one distinctive, and, so far as we can tell, formally viable, account of the conventional meaning (in its use-theoretic/functional dimension) of normative language available to the expressivist: the PE pragmatics for normative language.

Let us try to better situate this pragmatics in our overall train of argument. Specifically, let us consider how the PE pragmatics, like the expressivist pragmatics for imperative language sketched in §3.4, is a central part of a bottom-up, apparently expressivist theory of the conventional meaning of normative language. Recall that we began with a static, modaloid semantics for normative sentences (§3.5), which we immediately put to use in defining properly semantic notions like consistency. On top of that, we layered a use-theoretic dimension of conventional normative meaning (the PE pragmatics). According to that account, uttering a normative sentence $O\phi$ conventionally involves a speaker expressing acceptance of $O\phi$. We see now that the use-theoretic dimension imbues the static dimension with expressivist overtones: normative sentences are not in the business of expressing propositions, and they do not have truth-conditions. In light of the PE pragmatics, we see, rather, that normative sentences encode *properties of norm-systems*. The static semantics characterizes *acceptance-conditions* (what we formerly referred to as *endorsement-conditions*), not truth-conditions, for normative sentences. Attitudes and speech-acts are absolutely central to elucidating both dimensions of normative meaning. This despite the fact that they play no role whatever in defining properly semantic notions like consistency.

The traditional worries for the semantico-pragmatic program of expressivism, articulated so forcefully by Schroeder, seem to have fallen away. We've seen that a static expressivist semantics for normative language needn't have any remarkable formal properties. In the static context, expressivism is best construed as a proposal about *how best to conceive of* the fundamental semantic relation. For the most part, the expressivist can do static, model-theoretic semantics as we have always done it. Compositionality and logic come basically for free. The dialectical effect of this is to place the focus of the debate about expressivism back on substantive philosophical issues regarding the character of normative judgments, concepts, and discourse.

A semantics and pragmatics is available to the expressivist, provided there is a substantive philosophical case to be made for her view.

That is a welcome result. I think it is fair to say the expressivist strategy outlined in this paper is has a few other things going for it besides. For one, it is absolutely explicit about how an expressivist should seek to discharge the linguistic commitments of her view (more explicit than any other attempt of which I am aware, including that of [Schroeder 2008a](#)). Moreover, it actually discharges them.

But expressivism isn't completely in the clear. To close this essay, I sketch two rather surprising ways that this strategy generates new commitments and/or difficulties for meta-normative expressivism. Although I lack the space to develop these worries adequately here, they are, I submit, the real problems for the semantico-pragmatic program of expressivism. While not decisive, they do need to be addressed.

5.1 *Clause-Types and Conventional Force*

The strategy we have pursued for defending expressivism relies heavily on an *empirical* claim about the type of illocutionary force conventionally associated with utterances of normative sentences. So, generally, will any attempt to answer Dreier's challenge by developing an expressivist pragmatics on which normative speech-acts are distinct from assertions. There is a sense in which this is a boon to the expressivist: expressivism is potentially supportable by appeal to empirical data—indeed, potentially the very same sort of empirical data that has been taken to motivate non-assertoric pragmatics for epistemic modals.⁴⁵ And there is a sense in which it is a burden: if expressivism depends on the truth of an empirical claim about the conventional force of normative utterances, the burden is on the expressivist to demonstrate that this empirical claim is supported by the evidence.

Let me stress that the burden here really *is* on the expressivist, rather than the realist. It is a plausible linguistic hypothesis, as [Portner \(2004\)](#) has recently argued, that universal clause-types (clause-types present in all known natural languages, with declarative, interrogative, and imperative serving as standard examples) are conventionally individually associated with distinct types of illocutionary force. Declarative clauses are standardly assumed to have conventionalized assertoric force. In light of the possibility of a PE pragmatics for epistemically modalized declaratives, we might consider weakening this generalization, so that the conventionalized force of declaratives simply pertains to the *information* of one's interlocutors or of the context. Further weakening the generalization to accommodate a PE OR ACC pragmatics for normatively modalized declaratives would, however, seem to vitiate its force as a substantive linguistic universal. Perhaps, in the end, there is no substantive linguistic universal to be had here. But the expressivist is not entitled to this claim in the absence of empirical evidence.

So, we should ask, what are the prospects for the sort of illocutionary answer

⁴⁵ A mildly adverse data point: the data exploited by [Yalcin \(2007, forthcoming\)](#) concerning epistemic contradictions simply does not extend to normative language. I say "mildly" because much of the other data on the perspectival nature of epistemic judgments (which I take, contra [MacFarlane forthcoming](#), to support expressivism, rather than relativism, about epistemic language) does seem to me to extend to normative language, although I cannot support this claim here.

to Dreier developed above, if we take the hypothesized clause-type/conventional force connection at face value? Unclear. Significantly, recognizing that normative sentences have conventionalized assertoric force does not, as such, require denying that they also have conventionalized non-assertoric (expressive) force. Asher & Lascarides (2001), for instance, have rather persuasively argued that interrogatives like (27) have *both* conventionalized interrogative and directive force, captured by (27a) and (27b), respectively.

- (27) Can you pass the salt?
 a. Are you able to pass the salt?
 b. Pass the salt, please.

Perhaps, the suggestion goes, normative sentences are like this: in addition to their conventionalized assertoric force, they conventionally function to express properties of norm-systems, non-cognitive attitudes like disapproval, whatever. Precisely this view has, in fact, been recently defended in print (see the “Dual-Use Principle” of Boisvert 2008). The worry is that this sort of idea is characteristic of a Hybrid Expressivist view.⁴⁶ Although, unfortunately, I am unable to give this matter due attention here, suffice it to say that this would be a surprising result—one with which many “orthodox” expressivists would be uncomfortable.

5.2 *The Disjunction Problem for Expressivism*

The second worry is of a more technical nature, and also arises on any attempt to answer Dreier’s challenge by developing an expressivist pragmatics on which normative speech-acts are distinct from assertions. The problem is just that, given such a pragmatics, there seems to be no good answer to the question: *what is the conventional force of uttering a disjunction of the form $O\phi \vee \psi$?*⁴⁷ Answering the question would seem to require defining a two-place operation \blacktriangle such that $[O\phi]\blacktriangle[\psi]$ is a reasonable candidate for representing the conventional force of such an utterance. One possibility:

- $\blacktriangle = \cup$ (as in footnote 44)

The problem with this idea is that, if $[O\phi]$ and $[\psi]$ are functions, then $[O\phi] \cup [\psi]$ will tend to denote a *relation* between an input-state and $1 \leq i \leq 2$ output-states, rather than a function. So applying $[O\phi] \cup [\psi]$ to a state σ will tend to execute either $[O\phi]$ or $[\psi]$ on σ (although which ends up being executed will not, in general, be known by the speaker *ex ante*). This cannot be right, for two reasons. First, linguistic competency plausibly requires that a competent speaker generally know, *ex ante*, what the conventional effect of uttering $O\phi \vee \psi$ will be. Second, this predicts that the pragmatic effect of $O\phi \vee \psi$, on a given occasion of use, is either identical to the conventional force of $O\phi$, or to that of ψ . That is clearly incorrect.

Another possibility:

⁴⁶ For a characterization of Hybrid Expressivism (with references), see footnote 3.

⁴⁷ The problem is actually somewhat more general than this: it is hard to define a reasonable operation on states for a disjunctive speech-act to perform. See Charlow (*forthcoming*) for discussion.

- $[O\phi]\blacktriangle[\psi]$ is a function mapping a state σ into the set $\{\sigma[O\phi], \sigma[\psi]\}$, a set of *alternative states/contexts*. More generally, $[O\phi]\blacktriangle[\psi]$ maps a set of states $\{\sigma_1, \dots, \sigma_n\}$ into $\{\sigma_1[O\phi], \sigma_1[\psi], \dots, \sigma_n[O\phi], \sigma_n[\psi]\}$

Sets of such alternatives represent something like the “live possibilities” or “options” for an individual or at a context. This sort of idea has some precedent in the work of Krifka (2004); Groenendijk & Roelofsen (2009). But it is formally unwieldy: updating σ sequentially with k disjunctions will result in a set of 2^k alternatives.

The difficulties here trace directly to the notion that normative speech-acts are distinct from assertions—a notion to which, I argued, the expressivist’s nonfactualism and noncognitivism plausibly commit her (see §2.1). If normative speech-acts were assertions, the following, exceedingly simple account would be available to us: the conventional force of uttering $O\phi \vee \psi$ is to add the information that $O\phi \vee \psi$ to the information-tracking parameter of the relevant state. If normative speech-acts are distinct from assertions, we would, of course, have reason to discount the relative simplicity of this account. Once again, the expressivist incurs an empirical burden to adduce evidence for the distinctness of normative speech-acts and assertions.

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