Abstract

The Frege-Geach problem is arguably the most historically important line of objection to metaethical expressivism. Yet it seems most cognitivists are cognitivists not because of Frege-Geach, but because they have “deeper” worries about expressivism—worries they have spent comparatively little time pursuing in print. Part of the explanation for this, I suspect, is that cognitivists recognize that these deeper worries stem largely from metaphysical intuitions. For instance, many cognitivists—especially, self-styled realists—hold that normative truth must be appropriately objective. Yet if normative thought and language aren’t representational, it is hard to see how this could be so. Nevertheless, expressivism is not a metaphysical view—at least not straightforwardly—but rather a view about normative thought and language. And many expressivists claim that ultimately they can accommodate all of cognitivists’ (or at least the folk’s) metaphysical talk. Realists might still worry that expressivists are failing to capture the spirit of such talk. But these are difficult charges to make stick. My goal in this paper is to make some of these charges stick by introducing claims about thought and language, rather than about metaphysics, that capture aspects of the relevant intuitions about objectivity. I argue that expressivists cannot accommodate the claims in question if they are to solve “the negation problem”—part of Frege-Geach. If successful, this will show that expressivists really do have a problem with objectivity. But, importantly, it will do so without requiring any assumptions about what expressivist metaphysics look like.