



DISCUSSION NOTE

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IN A RECENT ARTICLE, JOHN SKORUPSKI (2012) argues that Mark Schroeder's attempts to solve the Frege-Geach Problem in *Being For* (2008) fare as badly as the attempts of earlier expressivists. In this paper I argue that Skorupski's objection fails. I will first explain briefly what the Frege-Geach Problem is and how Schroeder attempts to solve it. I will then present Skorupski's objection to Schroeder, how to answer it and respond to a variety of ways how Skorupski might save his objection.

For the purposes of this paper the Frege-Geach Problem can be understood as the following: Expressivism is the hypothesis that the meaning of normative sentences in natural languages can be explained in terms of those sentences expressing conative attitudes. To be true, expressivism should be able to give a semantics for normative sentences that can account for the semantic and logical properties of those sentences. One of those properties is that

(1) Murder is wrong

and

(2) It is not the case that murder is wrong

are inconsistent. However, it seems that expressivists have a problem explaining this. Suppose, for example, that (1) expresses disapproval of murder. What then does (2) express? Surely not disapproval of not murdering, as that should be the attitude expressed by

(3) Not murdering is wrong

So what attitude is expressed by (2) that explains the inconsistency of (1) and (2)? It seems that expressivists have no satisfactory answer. Without such an answer, however, they cannot give a plausible semantics for normative sentences in natural languages.

In *Being For*, Schroeder suggests how such problems can be solved (see Schroeder 2008: 39-75). First, we need the idea of an *inconsistency-transmitting* attitude, an attitude of which two instances are inconsistent iff they have inconsistent contents. To solve the Frege-Geach Problem, says Schroeder, expressivists should introduce a basic inconsistency-transmitting conative attitude that we can call "being for." Second, we should assume that the predicate " Φ -ing is wrong" expresses being for blaming for Φ -ing. We do this to add more structure to the content of the attitude expressed by " Φ -ing is wrong." Given this interpretation, (1)

will express

(1*) Being for blaming for murder

while (2) will express

(2*) Being for not blaming for murder

Because being for is inconsistency transmitting, (1*) and (2*) are inconsistent due to their inconsistent contents, just as they should be. According to Schroeder, if we develop these ideas into a general semantic framework we solve the Frege-Geach Problem. This is the project that he then takes on for the remainder of his book.

Skorupski's objection to Schroeder's proposal is that the general semantic framework he develops on the basis of these ideas cannot yield what Schroeder promises. He first points out that Schroeder commits his semantics to

(Base): Atomic sentences 'A', 'B', and so on express states of being for: $\text{FOR}(\alpha)$, $\text{FOR}(\beta)$ and so on. (see Schroeder 2008: 66).

With regards to (Base), Skorupski then goes on to say:

What, though, are the normative sentences, 'A', 'B', etc., that 'express states of being for'? Schroeder does not say. We can take them to be 'should' sentences, so that, for example, 'we should blame x' expresses $\text{FOR}(\text{blaming } x)$, 'we should kiss and tell' expresses $\text{FOR}(\text{kissing and telling})$. Or we could take them to be of the form 'It is right to', 'One ought to' or 'It would be good to', and the like. (Skorupski 2012: 11).

What Skorupski points out here is that Schroeder's semantics, in virtue of (Base), in principle allows atomic normative sentences that express attitudes of being for toward actions. For example, it allows that there is a normative sentence, "One ought to Φ ," which expresses $\text{FOR}(\Phi\text{-ing})$. But, says Skorupski, for such atomic sentences, the original Frege-Geach Problem would still apply. For example, if

(4) One ought to give to charity

expresses

(4*) $\text{FOR}(\text{giving to charity})$

what attitude does

(5) It is not the case that one ought to give to charity

express that is inconsistent with (4)? It seems that, as with (1) and (2), there is no obvious answer. So, we have the original Frege-Geach Problem again within Schroeder's semantic framework.

Schroeder, however, has a powerful reply to this objection: If you use Schroeder's semantics for normative sentences in natural languages, then for all *atomic* normative sentences in (Base), restrict the possible values of (α) , (β) and so on to *relations* to objects. Indeed, this is exactly Schroeder's original idea: "[A]ll *normative predicates* correspond to being for plus some relation that is contributed by the predicate. For each predicate, F , there is a relation, R_F , so that ' $F(a)$ ' expresses $\text{FOR}(\text{bearing } R_F \text{ to } a)$ ' (Schroeder 2008: 58; my italics). According to Schroeder, the additional structure provided by the relation solves the Frege-Geach Problem, *not* the attitude of being for by itself. Schroeder notes so himself: "If the problem arises from a lack of structure, there can be only one solution: to add structure. That is the solution I am suggesting" (Schroeder 2008: 61).

So, restricting the scope of possible values for (α) , (β) , etc. should not be surprising. And indeed, with this additional structure in place, the Frege-Geach Problem no longer applies. For example, if the attitude of being for is inconsistency transmitting, then for any predicate $F(a)$ that expresses $\text{FOR}(\text{bearing } R_F \text{ to } a)$

(6) $F(a)$

which expresses

(6*) $\text{FOR}(\text{bearing } R_F \text{ to } a)$

and

(7) $\neg F(a)$

which expresses

(7*) $\text{FOR}(\neg \text{bearing } R_F \text{ to } a)$

will be inconsistent, just as they should be. So, if we restrict the values (α) , (β) , etc. for all atomic normative sentences that express states of $\text{FOR}(\alpha)$, $\text{FOR}(\beta)$, etc. to relations toward objects, the Frege-Geach Problem can be solved.

Now, Skorupski might object that this restriction is not part of Schroeder's semantic framework, as there is no such restriction operating on (Base). However, recall that the Frege-Geach Problem is the problem of how to give a semantics of normative sentences *in natural languages*. So, to escape Skorupski's objection, Schroeder can say that no atomic sentences in natural languages express the attitude of being for toward other objects than relations to objects. It will be no objection to Schroeder's approach if the Frege-Geach Problem still occurred if we used his account for an artificial language that allowed predicates that express attitudes of being for toward something other than relations to objects. Whether or not the Frege-Geach Problem applies when we use

Schroeder's semantics depends on the *interpretation* we give to normative predicates and consequently to atomic normative sentences. And Schroeder can say that for any natural language the interpretation we give to any atomic normative sentence will be one where the expressed attitude of being for is taken toward a relation.

Perhaps, however, Skorupski can concede all of this. Maybe his objection should be read more along the following lines: On Schroeder's account, the attitude of being for does a significant amount of theoretical work for the semantics of normative sentences in natural languages. If it was true that the attitude does this work in natural languages, however, that there are *no* sentences in such languages that simply express the attitude of being for toward non-relational objects would be a very surprising and quite implausible assumption. So, if Schroeder wants the attitude of being for to do the required theoretical work, he should concede that there must then be sentences in natural languages that express the same attitude toward non-relational objects. But this means that he will have to concede that there will be some sentences in natural languages for which his semantics cannot solve the Frege-Geach Problem.

Now, it seems quite an interesting and plausible observation that one should expect there to be a more direct means of expressing the attitude of being for if the attitude actually were to play all the robust work in the semantics of normative sentences in natural languages that Schroeder requires of it. So, if this is actually what lies behind Skorupski's objection, then he raises a reasonable challenge. However, it seems that Schroeder can accept that there are sentences that express the attitude of being for toward non-relational objects without having to agree that the Frege-Geach Problem arises for them. It is well known that the Frege-Geach Problem *only* arises for an expressivist treatment of declarative sentences, due to the special logical and semantic properties of those sentences. So, as long as the sentences that express being for toward non-relational objects are *not* declarative sentences, but sentences of some other kind (maybe imperatives or some sort interjections), there will be no problem for Schroeder with having to concede that some sentences in natural languages express being for toward non-relational objects.

Of course, Skorupski might question further why Schroeder would be justified in making such an assumption: Given the work being for does for providing a semantics of *declarative* normative sentences, have we been given any reason to assume that nevertheless *no* declarative normative sentences express being for toward non-relational objects? It seems, however, that we have been given plenty of reason, including by Skorupski himself, to assume that if there are sentences that express being for toward non-relational objects these sentences are not declarative sentences. This is, after all, the lesson that we learn from the Frege-Geach Problem: The way declarative sentences function in natural languages *requires* more of a semantics for those sentences than simply identifying an inconsistency-transmitting attitude that could be expressed by those kinds of sentences. It also requires adding enough structure to

account for all the specific semantic and logical features of declarative sentences. Given this constraint on a semantics for declarative sentences revealed by the Frege-Geach Problem, it should therefore be no surprise that we will find no *declarative* sentences that express being for toward non-relational objects in natural languages. And if that is the case, then Schroeder's semantics can indeed solve the Frege-Geach Problem.

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