

Not Expressivist Enough: Normative Disagreement about Belief Attribution

Abstract: The expressivist account of knowledge attributions, while claiming that these attributions are non-factual, also typically holds that they retain a factual component. This factual component involves the attribution of a belief. The aim of this work is to show that considerations analogous to those motivating an expressivist account of knowledge attributions can be applied to belief attributions. As a consequence, we claim that expressivists should not treat the so-called ‘factual’ component as such. The phenomenon we focus on to claim that belief attributions are non-factual is that of normative doxastic disagreement. We show through several examples that this kind of disagreement is analogous to that of the epistemic kind. The result will be a doxastic expressivism. Finally, we answer some objections that our doxastic expressivism could seem to face.

1. Introduction

Expressivism is a family of (meta-)semantic approaches according to which the primary function of a specific area of discourse (moral, epistemic or logical expressions, for instance) is not to denote worldly aspects (i.e., the sentences containing these expressions are not primarily used to state facts). Instead, the vocabulary under analysis serves different expressive purposes, for instance, expressing conative attitudes, commitments to goals of inquiry or endorsement of inferential connections.

Over the last decades, different versions of expressivism have emerged in different areas of philosophy, including meta-ethics (Chrisman 2008; Gibbard 2003; Ridge 2006), philosophy of logic (Brandom 1994, 2000), theory of meaning (Gibbard 2012; Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne 1998), theory of rationality (Frapolli & Villanueva 2016; Gibbard 1990), or the normative discourse of epistemic justification (Grajner 2015; Kyriacou 2012). This article focuses on epistemic expressivism, that is, expressivist analyses of knowledge attributions (Chrisman, 2007; Field, 2009). Epistemic expressivists think that, when attributing knowledge, one expresses a complex mental state. For Chrisman (2007, 241), for instance, the expressed mental state consists of

(1) A belief with content: “*S* is entitled by norms *e* to her true belief that *p*,”

and

(2) The acceptance of the epistemic norms alluded to in (1),

where (2) is not a factual mental state (i.e., it is not a mental state describing some fact). Many expressivists hold that (1), on the contrary, is a factual belief (for instance, Chrisman 2007, 241; Field 2009, 275). However, we think that the epistemic expressivist should consider not only the complex mental state expressed by knowledge attributions, but also (1) itself as non-factual. The reason for this is that the same sorts of considerations that recommend expressivist accounts of knowledge attributions recommend as well an expressivist analysis of belief attributions.

The epistemic expressivist analysis is motivated, to a large extent, by some allegedly counterintuitive results concerning disagreements that seem to be predicted by contextualist accounts. In a contextualist analysis (as seen from the expressivist perspective), all epistemic disagreements should dissolve after each speaker makes the epistemic standard that she endorses explicit. However, according to expressivists, even when this happens, speakers sometimes intuitively think that the epistemic disagreement at issue persists. These are cases of what we will call ‘*normative epistemic disagreement*’. We claim that such forms of normative disagreement can take place about belief attributions. Thus, the allegedly ‘factual’ component of the expressivist analysis of knowledge attributions should actually receive the same sort of non-factual treatment applied to knowledge attributions themselves.

After presenting epistemic expressivism and normative disagreement in section 2, we focus in section 3 on the phenomenon of belief attributions (what we call ‘*normative doxastic disagreement*’) to claim that the belief attribution involved in the expressivist analysis of “*S* knows that *p*” is as non-factual as the knowledge attribution itself. In sections 4 and 5, we discuss different examples of normative doxastic disagreement that are analogous to the examples that motivated epistemic expressivism in the first place. After summarizing the lesson that can be drawn from these examples, in section 6 we consider a possible objection to our proposal.

Our claim will thus be that anyone who accepts expressivist arguments based on epistemic disagreement should accept the argument that we give for a *doxastic expressivist*¹ approach. This is the kind of approach we depict at the end of section 5. However, what we do is just to give a list of conditions that any account of belief attributions involved in an epistemic expressivist analysis should meet (viz. they should not be seen as describing worldly facts) without committing ourselves to any particular positive proposal. Note, finally, that what we want to put forward is a conditional argument for doxastic expressivism: if one accepts epistemic expressivism, we claim, one should accept doxastic expressivism too.

2. Epistemic Expressivism

Expressivism about knowledge attributions (which we call ‘epistemic expressivism’)² can be seen as a solution to some problems faced by epistemic descriptivism. In this section, we show how epistemic expressivism can be motivated as a response to that kind of view.

Descriptivism encompasses a family of theories according to which the function of declarative sentences is to describe *facts* concerning worldly entities such as objects, properties, relations, events, etc. This has been called the ‘dogma of descriptivism’ (Chrisman 2007, 227). Descriptivism aims to be applied to every kind of declarative sentences. However, in this section we will focus on the semantics of knowledge attributions.

¹ By ‘doxastic’ we mean related to beliefs as opposed to e.g. knowledge, not (as Stevenson 1944, among others, does) cognitive as opposed to conative.

² Sometimes belief attributions are also called ‘epistemic’. However, we use the term ‘epistemic’ only for knowledge attributions.

Epistemic invariantism is the standard framework for descriptivist theories about knowledge attributions. According to epistemic invariantism, knowledge attributions describe a relation between a subject and a proposition. Within this view, knowledge attributions are true or false *simpliciter*. A problem with epistemic invariantism is the apparent cross-context variability in the truth-values of knowledge attributions. In particular, an invariantism that respects ordinary intuitions seems to have problems dealing with skeptical ones. It may be the case that the same knowledge attribution counts as true in an ordinary situation but is taken to be false in skeptical contexts where possibilities such as being in a dream become relevant (see Chrisman 2007, 225–6). This is, *prima facie*, a problem for the invariantist.³

Epistemic contextualism aims to avoid the skeptical conclusions that follow from epistemic invariantism. Epistemic contextualists (for instance, Cohen 1988, 1999; DeRose 1995, 1999) explain why both the speaker in the ordinary context and the speaker in the skeptical context can be justified in saying what they say by allowing the same sentence to express different propositions in different contexts of utterance. One way of modelling this context-dependence is by positing a hidden indexical. Following this, epistemic contextualism analyzes the sentence “*S* knows that *p*” as having a logical form like “*S* is entitled by epistemic norms *e* to her true belief that *p*,” where the value of “*e*” is dependent on the context in which the sentence is uttered (Chrisman 2007, 226). Thus, the proposition expressed by a knowledge attribution, and consequently its truth value can change depending on the value that the hidden indexical acquires in each context of utterance. As a result, the skeptical worries that affected invariantism disappear, since the same ascription of knowledge may be false when made in a skeptical context and true when made in an ordinary one.

However, there are problems with epistemic contextualism too. In particular, contextualism faces what Chrisman calls the ‘dialectical intuitions problem’ (2007, 228–30). Chrisman considers three different cases: reaffirmation, retraction and disagreement. We are going to focus on disagreement.

Let *A* and *B* be two speakers, and let us call any disagreement about knowledge attribution an ‘epistemic disagreement’. All epistemic disagreements we are concerned with here share the following structure, which includes two utterances:

(ED)

A: *S* knows that *p*.

B: *S* doesn’t know that *p*.

For instance, take the following example: *A* claims that a particular person knows that the door is closed while *B* claims that she doesn’t, and none of them is misunderstanding what the other says. This is an instance of (ED), and thus we call it an epistemic disagreement. The problem with contextualism is that it does not always capture the disagreement that we would intuitively attribute to *A* and *B*. According to

³ However, there have been contemporary attempts to solve this skeptical problem using invariantist (but interest-sensitive) approaches (see Fantl and McGrath 2009).

contextualism, if A and B occupy contexts with different epistemic norms, they would be saying different, compatible things:

(EDC)

A^* : S is entitled by epistemic norms e_A to her true belief that p .

B^* : S is not entitled by norms e_B to her true belief that p .

Here, epistemic norms e_A are those that A endorses, while e_B are those that B endorses. Once the standards are made explicit, the appearance of disagreement that we had in the first place dissolves (see Chrisman 2007, 228–230; MacFarlane 2014, 8–13). However, in some cases speakers themselves do not intuitively seem to think that it does. In these cases, which we call of *normative epistemic disagreement*, speakers keep arguing even after the standards are made explicit (and even if they agree about the sort of relativized claims figuring in EDC).

Epistemic expressivism is a promising alternative when it comes to facing all the undesirable consequences of descriptivism. Expressivists aspire to avoid skepticism while accounting for cases of normative epistemic disagreement as instances of genuine disagreement. This is achieved by following an *oblique strategy*. Instead of specifying a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for S to know that p , expressivists look at what mental states we express when we attribute knowledge to others. Gibbard presents this strategy as follows:

The term ‘expressivism’ I mean to cover any account of meanings that follows this indirect path: to explain the meaning of a term, explain what states of mind the term can be used to express. (Gibbard 2003, 7)

Specifically, what we do when we say “ S knows that P ,” according to the expressivist, is to express a complex mental state which involves, along with a cognitive component, a conative one. As Chrisman (2007, 241) puts it, the complex mental state expressed consists of:

(1) A belief with content: “ S is entitled by norms e to her true belief that p ”

and

(2) The acceptance of the epistemic norms alluded to in (1).

Once we adopt this view, disagreement does not dissolve after making different standards explicit; rather, disagreement remains, though at the level of conative attitudes.⁴ For an expressivist, what A would do in (ED) is, on the one hand, to express a belief with the content attributed in A^* , and, on the other, to express

⁴ Disagreement in conative attitude takes place when two subjects have clashing conative attitudes (see Stevenson 1944; Schroeder 2008; Ridge 2013). This kind of disagreement is conceived of as opposed to disagreement in belief – that is, the sort of disagreement that obtains when agents have incompatible beliefs. If you think that playing football is dangerous while I think it is not, then we disagree in belief because we believe different, incompatible things. But we could also disagree even if we shared the relevant beliefs: we could both agree that playing football is dangerous, but we would still be said to be disagreeing if I wanted to play while you didn’t want me to. We have different, clashing attitudes towards me playing football (I want myself to, you want me not to).

her acceptance of e_A , while B would express a belief with the content attributed in B^* plus her acceptance of e_B . So, there is disagreement because A endorses e_A while B endorses e_B . And this makes knowledge attributions non-factual, as they have a non-factual component: the endorsement of an epistemic standard.

Field (2009, 275) calls disagreement that does not dissolve after making the standards explicit ‘not straightforwardly factual’ or ‘normative’.⁵ This kind of disagreement is non-factual because A and B differ in their conative attitudes, not their beliefs. Since they share all the relevant beliefs, they could disagree about what is at issue while agreeing about all the relevant facts. So, in this sense, this kind of epistemic disagreement is normative.

The type of expressivist proposal that we have just presented can be applied not only to knowledge but also to other epistemic notions. In particular, a view analogous to the one put forward by Chrisman may be developed for justification (for proposals in this direction, see Kyriacou 2012; Grajner 2015). Arguably, it will also be possible to find here cases of disagreement analogous to (ED) that will warrant an expressivist treatment. According to an expressivist view along these lines, attributions of justification would involve, on the one hand, the expression of a belief that the attributee’s belief satisfies a certain standard or norm of justification and, on the other hand, the expression of an accepting attitude towards that standard or norm. For ease of exposition, however, we will focus mostly on expressivist views about knowledge.

3. Normative Disagreement about Belief Attributions

We have said that, according to epistemic expressivists, one of the components of the complex mental state expressed when attributing knowledge to S is the belief (1) that S is entitled by the relevant epistemic norms to her belief. Many expressivists claim that (1) is a factual belief. Chrisman, for instance, says:

(...) the epistemic expressivist proposal is that instances of [“ S knows that p ”] express a complex state of mind which includes a factual belief with [(1)] as its truth conditions and the acceptance of the epistemic norms e alluded to therein. (Chrisman 2007, 241)⁶

So, according to Chrisman, (1) gives the truth conditions for a factual belief, that is a belief describing some fact.

More generally, expressivists tend to regard relativized beliefs to the effect that some state or action satisfies certain norms as factual. In this vein, Field says:

⁵ Of course, epistemic disagreement might not dissolve after making the standards explicit, but turn into a disagreement about what a term means (see Plunkett and Sundell’s (2013) and Marques’s (2015) ‘metalinguistic disputes’) or about what a term should mean (see Stojanovic’s (2011, 189–192) ‘forward-looking disagreement’). These types of disagreements, though also normative, are outside the scope of this paper.

⁶ Here we have substituted “ S knows that p ” for Chrisman’s (1) and our (1) for Chrisman’s (2’). In both cases, the components are equivalent.

In short, [J^* : “We ought to withdraw our troops within a month relative to Policy n_J ”] and [S^* : “We ought not to withdraw our troops within a month relative to Policy n_S ”] are straightforwardly factual claims: the sensitivity to norms has been lost by the explicit relativization. (Field 2009, 275)

According to Field, the fact that the policies that make J^* and S^* true appear explicitly in them makes both claims factual. Likewise, (1) would be a factual belief for Field, since it is explicitly relativized to the relevant epistemic norms.

So, epistemic expressivists typically take (1) to be a factual belief. However, (1) presupposes the attribution of a belief to S and, we think, epistemic expressivists should endorse an expressivist account of such attributions. This is so because the same considerations that led to epistemic expressivism support as well an expressivist analysis of belief attributions. Remember that epistemic expressivism is motivated, to a large extent, by the intuitive disagreement between A and B in (ED) when they occupy different contexts. We claim that analogous forms of (normative) disagreement can be found for belief attributions. Thus, the allegedly ‘factual’ component of the expressivist analysis of knowledge attributions should actually receive the same sort of non-factual treatment applied to knowledge attributions themselves. As such, our analysis has obvious implications for epistemic expressivism, but also for any expressivist analysis that involves a belief attribution, such as Kyriacou’s (2012) and Grajner’s (2015) analyses of justification.

As we have pointed out, the belief (1) involves the attribution of a belief to S : you cannot believe that S is entitled by norms e to her true belief that p without attributing S the belief that p . Tentatively, we can define this informal sense of ‘involve’ in this way: if the belief were expressed verbally, the utterance would presuppose “ S truly believes that p ”. But, just like there can be normative disagreement about knowledge attributions, there can be normative disagreement about belief attributions. We call disagreement about belief attribution ‘doxastic disagreement’.⁷ An instance of doxastic disagreement will typically follow this schema:

(DD)

A: S believes that p .

B: S does not believe that p .

In the next section, we present three examples following the schema (DD) which aim at showing that there can be normative instances of disagreement about belief attribution as well.

4. Examples of Normative Doxastic Disagreement

⁷ It must be stressed that by ‘doxastic disagreement’ we mean disagreement in the attributions of belief made by certain subjects, and not disagreement in the beliefs held by such subjects. Actually, our claim will be that disagreements in attributions of beliefs do not need to be a matter of disagreement in belief (i.e., a matter of holding incompatible beliefs).

In the previous section, we presented doxastic disagreement through the schema (DD). Now, the question is whether or not there are instances of (DD) that can be identified as normative disagreements. On the face of it, it seems plausible that we will find such cases. Agents may have diverse (sometimes conflicting) aims and concerns when ascribing beliefs (see Clarke 2017; Schwitzgebel 2002); thus, it should not be a surprise that different agents can rely on different criteria for belief ascription, depending on their specific purposes when making the ascription. This section is devoted to discussing three examples that are apt to be naturally considered as normative instances of (DD).

The first case of doxastic disagreement we would like to explore is an example discussed by Dennett (1978). In this example, two interpreters disagree about whether or not Sam, an art critic who has promoted his son's paintings, actually believes that they are good:

(Art)

Interpreter₁: Sam does not believe the paintings are any good.

Interpreter₂: Sam believes the paintings are good.

In order to assess the case as an instance of normative disagreement, note that the two attributors could agree about all relevant evidence and still disagree about the attribution. Assume that the two interpreters are endorsing different standards of belief attribution. Interpreter₁ would support a standard of behavioral coherence (b_c), according to which the coherence between Sam's past behaviors and those that would follow from the belief attributed is the most relevant criterion for the correctness of the attribution. For instance, Interpreter₁ could argue that the paintings do not belong to the kind of art that Sam usually promotes. Given that, he notices Sam's inconsistencies between the evaluations of his son's paintings and similar paintings by other artists. Interpreter₂, on the other hand, endorses a standard of sincerity (b_s), according to which first-person reports are decisive (imagine Sam explicitly says "I believe my son is a great artist").

According to the doxastic expressivist interpretation, Interpreter₁ expresses a complex mental state consisting of:

(1) A belief with content: "Sam does not believe that the paintings are any good, according to standard b_c ,"

and

(2) The acceptance of standard b_c .

Interpreter₂, on the other hand, expresses a complex mental state consisting of:

(1) A belief with content: "Sam believes that the paintings are good, according to standard b_s ,"

and

(2) The acceptance of standard b_s .

The central claim that the expressivist should make is that, even if on a certain occasion the two interpreters made their standards of attribution explicit, they could still disagree about whether or not Sam believes that the paintings are good. For instance, Interpreter₁ could accept that Sam sincerely says that the paintings are good, but still disagree about the attribution on the basis that Sam is confabulating—he is self-deceived about his motivations to support his son’s work. Interpreter₂ could admit the incoherence in Sam’s behavior but still consider that Sam believes his son’s paintings are great. In this sense, the disagreement would persist after the two interpreters explicitly specified that they accept different standards: even if both parts made clear that the contents of their utterances are respectively (1) and (2), they would still have opposite supportive attitudes towards the relevant standards. Importantly, both Interpreter₁’s and Interpreter₂’s standards are in a sense reasonable, since they take into consideration aspects of belief possession that are relevant in different contexts and for different purposes. So, when attributing beliefs there can be cases in which we are particularly interested in the subject’s own reflective appraisal of her views. In these situations, sincere avowals will be a decisive source of evidence for the attribution of beliefs. By contrast, on other occasions we may be more concerned about the role of the subject’s attitudes in shaping her behavior. If so, it becomes natural to pay attention to behavioral cues when attributing beliefs. The example above shows that, in certain cases, focusing on these different features of the agent’s psychology and behavior may lead to clashing belief attributions. Yet it is not clear that there is a fact of the matter as to which of these features is really distinctive of belief, and therefore about which of the attributions is actually correct. Arguably, depending on the attributor’s goals, values, interests and context, different standards of belief attribution may be relevant.

As we mentioned before, the expressivist does not need to deny that once the standards are made explicit the disagreement may turn into a disagreement about what standards are or should be at stake in their context, or about what ‘belief’ means or should mean. Instead, the point of contention is that on certain occasions the disagreement remains to be about the particular attribution: about whether Sam believes or not that his son’s paintings are good. As Dennett characterized the case, the two interpreters are not discussing about whether to take into account Sam’s behavioral coherence, rather than his credibility when ascribing him the relevant belief; instead, the source of disagreement is whether Sam believes his son’s painting are good. In this way, the two interpreters may agree about the relevant facts and still disagree about the attribution.⁸ Notice, for instance, that Interpreter₁ may accept that sincerity is generally an appropriate criterion for deciding whether or not someone possess a particular belief and she

⁸ To make the case for the idea that no fact of the matter can dissolve the disagreement, Dennett (1978) considers a thought experiment where we have a system that analyzes Sam’s brain state and represents his precise judgment when he is evaluating his son’s painting. Even in such a case, Dennett argues, we cannot discard the possibility that Sam is confabulating. Dennett writes: “This suggests that even if we were to discover a brain-writing system that represented our judgments, the mind reading that could be accomplished by exploiting the discovery would not uncover our beliefs. To return to the case of Sam the art critic, if our neuro-cryptographer were able to determine that Sam’s last judgment on his deathbed was, “My consolation is that I fathered a great artist,” we could still hold that the issue between the warring hypotheses was undecided, for this judgment may have been a self-deception” (49).

could even be ready to accept that Sam is being sincere when he says “My son’s paintings are good.” However, she could still be reluctant to attribute the belief on the ground that Sam’s avowals are a result of confabulation and self-deceiving and thus, he does not really believe that the paintings are good. So, Interpreter₁ could agree with all the relevant facts Interpreter₂ is pointing out (even with the fact that from the standard of sincerity the ascription follows). Her resistance to attribute the belief is not a question of facts, but rather a question of which particular standard is to be endorsed on this occasion. Thus, (Art) can be fairly characterized as a normative disagreement.

The expressivist analysis that we have just presented would diverge from the orthodox invariantist view, according to which one of the disagreeing attributors in the example above will be simply wrong about what it takes to possess a belief. On this invariantist proposal, the disagreement between Interpreter₁ and Interpreter₂ can be solved factually. Thus, the invariantist cannot capture the intuition that there is no fact of the matter as to which of the two attributions is correct. Yet this intuition is analogous to the one that motivated epistemic expressivism in section 2. Thus, those moved by such an intuition in relation to epistemic expressivism should also be moved by it in the doxastic case.

On the other hand, the expressivist analysis can be contrasted with a possible contextualist account of belief attribution, according to which this type of disagreement reveals the contextual sensitivity of the term ‘believes’. A consequence of such a contextualist analysis of doxastic attribution, expressivists would claim, is that the disagreement should dissolve once the standards are made explicit. However, since the disagreement can persist even after the standards are made explicit, the contextualist analysis fails to capture the phenomena. The persistence of the disagreement reveals a difference in the speakers’ attitudes of endorsement, and thus, the expressivist analysis captures the genuine difference between describing that Sam believes *P* according to a norm of belief possession *N*, and evaluating Sam as believing *P* according to *N*.

The second example is related to the cases of people who suffer Cotard’s delusion. Cotard’s delusion is a rare psychiatric condition associated with depression, psychotic disorders or mood disorders. Subjects affected by this delusion report to be dead or to have lost their soul (see Bortolotti 2013/2015). In a recent case, for instance, a patient said she was dead, smelled like rotting flesh and wanted to be taken to a morgue so she could be with dead people (Ruminjo and Mekinulov 2008). The interpretation of this syndrome has opened a debate concerning the subjects’ beliefs. While some psychologists claim that it is legitimate to attribute a genuine belief to those patients, other experts argue that it is not possible to attribute them the belief that they are dead. The disagreement between these two groups of experts can be represented as follows:

(Del)

Psychologist₁: People with Cotard’s syndrome believe that they are dead.

Psychologist₂: People with Cotard’s syndrome do not believe that they are dead.

As in the previous example, one may argue that Psychologist₁ supports a standard of sincerity in order to assume that first-person avowals provide the relevant evidence about the patient’s beliefs, and would thereby attribute to them the belief that they are dead. On the contrary, Psychologist₂ would attend to

global behavior patterns in order to attribute beliefs, so that, on the basis of a standard of coherence, she does not consider that the patient truly believes that she is dead. The complex mental states expressed by Psychologist₁ and Psychologist₂ can be rendered in a similar way to those we had in the previous example using standards b_c and b_s .

An interesting point regarding (Del) is that it reproduces a real debate about the status of delusional belief. The prevalent position in the discussion, mostly supported by psychologists and psychiatrists, takes delusion to be a belief state. The main argument favoring this approximation is that delusional beliefs can bring out some actions and are frequently reported with firm conviction (Bortolotti 2013/2015). However, a growing alternative in the debate argues that it is not accurate to consider delusions as beliefs. Delusions, it is argued, are states of imagination (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002) or empty speech acts (Berrios 1991), because they do not exhibit some basic features of belief states (for instance, their integration with other mental states and their responsiveness to evidence). However, both parties agree about the relevant facts involved in the case (the clinical profile, the patient's behavior, and so on). Furthermore, both parties in the debate could agree on the fact that, given different standards, different attributions follow. Moreover, both standards are reasonable given the situation and the theoretical purposes of the attributers. On the one hand, patients affected by Cotard's syndrome are sufficiently persistent and their avowals are sufficiently coherent with other mental states (e.g., their desire to go to a morgue) to motivate the attribution by Psychologist₁. On the other hand, given the delusional character of the avowals and their inconsistency with evidence, it is reasonable to look for an alternative explanation of the patient's mental state. However, accepting the conflict between the standards does not dissolve the disagreement. Both psychologists would still disagree about whether or not we can genuinely attribute the belief to the subject: one of the parts could reply to the other with a Moorean "OK, so she doesn't believe that she is dead according to your standards, but *does she believe that she is dead?*" (see Field 2009, 251–2). That is, (Del) is a case of normative disagreement.

Finally, our third example involves the case of two individuals who have different views about whether a common friend, Louise, has xenophobic beliefs. Friend₁, in light of Louise's behavior, attributes to her the belief that foreigners are mean. Friend₂, by contrast, does not attribute to Louise such a belief, since she has always reported non-xenophobic views. This is what the two friends say:

(Xen)

Friend₁: Louise believes that foreigners are mean.

Friend₂: Louise does not believe that foreigners are mean.

Imagine that the two friends start their discussion about Louise's beliefs because of a previous racist joke made by Louise. They both agree that the joke was deeply inappropriate. They also agree on the fact that Louise makes these jokes systematically and she must stop. They may also agree on the fact that Louise generally reports non-xenophobic views even though she makes such jokes in certain contexts. In this sense, both friends agree about all the relevant facts, including Louise's behavior. Also, during their discussion, they can make their standards explicit. For instance, Friend₁ can acknowledge that he has stringent standards because he has recently read a book that makes him especially sensitive to

inequalities. He has read how microaggressions and other types of actions (e.g., xenophobic jokes) could promote inequalities and structural xenophobia. Thus, he considers that xenophobic beliefs can be reflected implicitly by such microaggressions, and not just by overt avowals. On the other hand, Friend₂ may recognize that he has different standards and he is focusing only on the views reported by Louise explicitly and on reflection, as he takes these reports to reveal her real views, whereas her jokes are just a regrettable, thoughtless habit. Again, making those standards explicit may not dissolve the disagreement. Friend₁ may admit that Louise's explicit avowals do not express xenophobic views. However, he could insist that such views can be attributed to her on the basis of her behavior, in particular her jokes, which systematically reveal xenophobic attitudes. By contrast, Friend₂ could counter that Louise's sincere reports of her beliefs do not warrant attributing her xenophobic beliefs. According to Friend₂, Louise's problem would not be that she has xenophobic beliefs, but rather that she is not aware that xenophobic jokes and similar behaviors constitute a form of microaggression with pernicious effects. Of course, as in the previous cases, the discussion may turn to be about which standards they must consider for assessing Louise' belief properly or which facts must count more depending on which standard we consider. However, to the extent that the two friends may insist ("OK, but does she believe or not?"), (Xen) may turn to be a case of normative disagreement, where the disagreement persists because two supportive attitudes toward a particular standard are in conflict.

In sum, the cases (Art), (Del) and (Xen) exhibit certain features that lead us to characterize them as instances of normative disagreement. First, there is no fact of the matter we can point out as a source of disagreement. This is reflected by the fact that the parties involved in the disagreement could agree on all facts about the behavior, linguistic dispositions, neural states and emotional life of the subject but still disagree about the attribution. Second, even when it seems that the disagreement is generated by the fact that different standards produce different attributions, we make the case that the disagreement could persist even when such standards are made explicit. Making the standards explicit through the conversation does not need to shift the focus of disagreement from the attribution to the standards involved. The speakers can recognize that different standards produce different interpretations, but the question is not about the what standards are in play, but about whether or not the subject of the attribution really believes what they claim. Thus, the disagreement persists because the two parties involved differ in the supportive attitude toward a particular standard. Such a feature of disagreements is exhibited when we perceive that the question remains open when the standards are made explicit: "OK, according to *N*, *S* believes *P*, but does *S* believe it or not?"

As such, (Art), (Del) and (Xen) are analogous to the cases that Field takes to be representative for supporting an expressivist analysis of knowledge attribution. In this sense, we claim that if the existence of normative disagreement counts as an argument to motivate an expressivist analysis of epistemic judgments, then (Art), (Del) and (Xen) must motivate an expressivist analysis of belief attribution. In other words, the cases should be taken to show that doxastic attributions reflect a conative or supportive attitude of the attributor toward a standard.

5. Belief Attributions and Practical Stakes

In the previous section, we have examined examples of (DD) associated with the endorsement of different types of criteria for belief attribution. Now, we want to explore the possibility that further normative instances of (DD) arise in relation to the influence of practical factors on the stringency of the standards for attributing beliefs.

It is a common view that the correctness of knowledge attributions is sensitive to practical factors, in particular to how high stakes are (see DeRose 1992; Hawthorne 2003; Stanley 2005; Fantl and McGrath 2009). The idea is that in situations where the practical costs are high, the standards for correctly attributing knowledge become more demanding, so that subjects need to have more evidence than in more relaxed cases in order to count as knowing.

Authors like Weatherson (2005; 2012) and Clarke (2013) have put forward an alternative proposal, according to which it is the correctness of *belief attributions* that is sensitive to practical factors—and this is what explains (to a large extent at least) the practical sensitivity of knowledge attributions, given that knowledge requires belief. On Weatherson's view, believing amounts to one's credence being above a certain threshold, and he argues that practical factors may play a role in fixing the threshold of credence required for having a specific belief. More specifically, according to Weatherson's proposal, a subject counts as believing that p only if her credence in p is such that conditionalizing on p would not change her preferences in relation to the choices relevant in the context. In other words, given the possible actions relevant in the context, the subject would make the same choices if she assumed p to be true. When stakes are raised, new choices may become relevant, so that the subject's level of credence can stop being enough for counting as believing: in the high stakes situation, it takes more to believe.

Think, for instance, of bank cases where you have to decide whether to wait for Saturday to cash a check (see Stanley 2005). In a context where not much is at stake, your choices may be those that you would make under the assumption that the bank opens on Saturdays (you prefer to cash your unimportant check on Saturday, in order not to queue on Friday afternoon); thus, you will count as believing that the bank opens on Saturdays. However, in a situation with higher stakes, new choices may come into play. Imagine that you have an important payment due on Sunday, and you need to make sure that you have funds in your account by then. Now you have to decide whether you prefer to wait for the queue on Friday, rather than to risk not having funds for your important Sunday payment. This decision involves high potential costs, and therefore it may happen that your preferences do not align anymore with those that you would have on the assumption that the bank does open on Saturday. Given the costs involved, you may prefer not to risk it and wait for the queue. Thus, in this context, you do not count as believing that the bank opens on Saturday. Your confidence in that proposition is not high enough to make you behave as someone assuming its truth would in this high stakes context.

It is interesting to examine whether the sensitivity of belief attributions to practical factors described by Weatherson may give rise to further instances of normative doxastic disagreement. Weatherson (2005; 2012) endorses a subject sensitive invariantist position, according to which the relevant practical factors are those of the subject's situation. However, one can easily adapt his proposal

so that it is the perspective of the attributor that fixes what practical factors are relevant (see Clarke 2017). This reformulated proposal clearly opens the door for cases of normative doxastic disagreement: attributors with different interests and practical concerns may fix different thresholds of credence for belief, which may result in disagreeing attributions of belief to the same subject. Arguably, this sort of disagreement will be normative, in the sense that it does not depend on any disagreement about facts, but rather on the different interests and concerns of the attributors.⁹

Let us present an example that motivates revising Weatherson's proposal as suggested above. Consider the following case. Mary sees someone leaving the bank at 5 pm. Although she sees the person from some distance and from behind, she is fairly confident that it is John. So, when later Tom wonders whether John has already come back from his holidays abroad (he wants to go for a drink with him if he is in town), Mary says that he has: she saw him leaving the bank around 5 pm. Tom, therefore, attributes to Mary the belief that John left the bank at 5 pm. Now, imagine that, unbeknownst to both, there has been a bank robbery. The main suspect is the person that left the bank at 5 pm. Inspector Sophie is trying to solve the robbery. Thus, it is crucial for her whether Mary would be able to honestly identify John as the person leaving the bank at 5 pm. As it happens, Mary is not that sure that it was John. If she were wrong in her testimony, she might send an innocent person to jail: in this context, her testimony can be very damaging if inaccurate. Therefore, she refrains from recklessly identifying John as the suspect (something that she would do on the assumption that it was actually John who left the bank at 5 pm). According to the view of belief attribution under consideration, from the perspective of inspector Sophie, Mary would not count as believing that John left the bank at 5 pm—even if such belief can be attributed to her from Tom's low-stakes perspective. In this way, Tom and Sophie may be seen as disagreeing about Mary's beliefs, even if they agree about Mary's degree of credence in the relevant proposition.¹⁰

It seems, therefore, that a variable threshold view of belief generates what looks like instances of normative doxastic disagreement, if one adds the modification that the practical perspective of the attributor may contribute to fixing the relevant credence threshold. As we have claimed above, expressivism about belief ascriptions offers a promising way of capturing this form of disagreement (while a contextualist analysis would have to explain away such disagreements as merely apparent).

Arguably, similar conclusions can be derived from alternative conceptions of belief attribution. Consider, for instance, the view that believing a proposition amounts to being disposed to treat such a proposition as true in one's reasoning—that is to being disposed to reason as one would reason on the

⁹ Clarke (2017) suggests that one can find examples involving belief ascriptions that are analogous to bank cases. However, he endorses a contextualist reading of such examples, so he cannot see them as genuine cases of disagreement.

¹⁰ On Clarke's view (2013), degrees of credence are themselves sensitive to practical stakes. Thus, Tom and Sophie would be assigning Mary different degrees of credence in the proposition in question. Nevertheless, they could in principle agree about all facts concerning Mary's linguistic, behavioral and emotional dispositions; in this sense, the resulting disagreement would be non-factual. Again, Clarke endorses a contextualist analysis of belief ascriptions, according to which Tom's and Sophie's ascriptions would not disagree in any straightforward way.

assumption that the proposition is true.¹¹ Plausibly, whether a subject is disposed to reason as if p may depend on practical factors, in particular on the costs of inferential mistakes. If this is so, a subject that counts as believing that p from a relaxed perspective in which stakes are low may not count as so believing from a more demanding perspective in which the costs of mistakes have raised.

It is not our purpose here to defend a particular view of belief attribution. We only want to point out that different plausible accounts of belief give rise quite naturally to normative instances of (DD) in relation to variations of practical stakes. This is interesting, because the analogous sensitivity of knowledge attributions to practical stakes is one of the main motivations for epistemic expressivism. In this way, there is further reason to endorse expressivism about belief attributions for those already sympathetic to epistemic expressivism.

What follows from the examples given in this section and the previous one is this: cases of normative disagreement provide reasons to treat belief attributions as non-factual just like they provide reasons to treat knowledge attributions in that way. In other words, we have claimed that the identification of a conative component in belief attributions is as well motivated as the identification of a conative component in knowledge attributions, at least regarding the motivation provided by cases of normative disagreement. Expressivists, thus, should take their strategy to its last consequences. As previously advanced, we propose calling an expressivist approach to belief attributions ‘doxastic expressivism’.

The thesis that mental state attributions are evaluative statements is not new. Several authors have claimed that beliefs or propositional attitude ascriptions in general do not describe or state facts (Blackburn 1998; Dreier 2004; Evans and Shah 2012; Köhler 2017; Toppinen 2015). Furthermore, like doxastic expressivism, these authors have claimed that attributions of propositional attitudes involve an evaluative, motivational component (see for instance, Blackburn 1998: 50; Evans and Shah 2012, p. 93). However, doxastic expressivism should not be taken as a positive characterization of belief attributions. In order to give such a characterization, we would have to tell how exactly the content of belief attributions is individuated; for instance, whether or not it is individuated in truth-conditional terms (see Köhler 2017). Our analysis, on the other hand, is compatible with different ways of individuating this content. We remain neutral on this topic.

So, we have a negative characterization of belief attributions. The only constraint imposed by this characterization is that belief attributions are not entirely factual, but involve a conative component. As a result, disagreement in cases where different standards are accepted are construed as cases of normative and non-factual disagreements. Any expressivist characterization of belief attribution has to be compatible with this, inasmuch as it is the minimal requirement for (or first step towards) a full expressivist approach. However, our view does not select between specific positive proposals, as long as

¹¹Although superficially similar to Weatherson’s proposal introduced above, this approach to belief attribution is more demanding. For Weatherson, to say that S believes that p , it is enough for S ’s credence in p to be such that it leads S to make the same decisions she would make conditionalizing on p . For many contexts and choices, this may happen even if S takes $\neg p$ to be somewhat probable. The view depicted here, on the other hand, requires S to treat p as true, not merely as very probably true.

they satisfy that requirement. This switch from a descriptive to an expressive analysis is what motivates us to label our approach as ‘doxastic expressivism’.

Schroeder (2008) offers an expressivist approach to belief according to which it always involves a conative attitude. Expressivists have traditionally thought that normative or evaluative beliefs involve a conative attitude, and Schroeder aims to offer a homogeneous treatment of belief by extending this to factual ones as well. Belief is, according to Schroeder, an attitude of *being for* a certain content, and this applies to factual beliefs as well as to normative or evaluative ones. Schroeder’s proposal could be seen as akin to ours, since we too take belief to involve a conative attitude. However, there is a crucial difference between Schroeder’s proposals and ours: our focus is on belief attribution. This means that, while Schroeder’s point is that to *have* a belief involves a conative attitude, ours is that *attributing* a belief involves a conative attitude. The latter is what allows for normative disagreement about belief attribution. Schroeder’s proposal, on the other hand, is compatible with there being a fact of the matter about whether the attributee has the relevant conative attitude or not—whether she is for the content at issue or not. In this sense, Schroeder’s approach does not guarantee the possibility of normative disagreement about belief attribution, and is relevantly different from ours.

6. Objections

According to a possible objection to our view, the sorts of cases we have examined in sections 4 and 5 would involve merely apparent disagreements, because the attributors are actually considering different mental states. For instance, it might be argued that an attributor that bases her ascription solely on certain aspects of the subject’s behavior, disregarding other factors such as her reports and self-avowals, is not attributing a genuine belief, but something closer to what Gendler (2008) calls an ‘alief’—states that are tightly connected with certain behavioral routines and emotional reactions, while being unresponsive to the overall evidence possessed by the subject and not being inferentially integrated with her other beliefs. Crucially, alief-like states can coexist with an explicit endorsement of beliefs that are in tension with the behavioral and affective responses associated with the alief state in question. For instance, subjects are reported to be reluctant to drink water from a new, sterilized bedpan, even if they explicitly acknowledge that it is perfectly hygienic and safe to drink from it. A plausible interpretation of this example is that, while the subject believes that the bedpan is clean, she has an alief-like state that elicits some of the behavioral reaction that would be called for if the bedpan were dirty and unfit to drink from (see Gendler 2008 for discussion). Thus, it could be that, once it becomes clear that one of the disagreeing parties is actually ascribing an alief-like state, both attributions are revealed to be compatible and the disagreement dissolves.

Perhaps some examples of seemingly non-factual doxastic disagreement may be explained away in this fashion. However, it is doubtful that this explanation can be applied all across the board. Not all the relevant cases revolve around a clash between the global speech and behavior of the subject and some specific, entrenched motor and affective responses. The sources of disagreement in belief attributions are far more varied. For instance, there will be cases where the belief whose attribution is supported by the

subject's overt self-avowals is different from the belief supported by her overall non-linguistic behavior. Think of Louise, the woman from (Xen) that sincerely takes herself not to be xenophobic, but whose global behavior and attitudes show otherwise: the patterns of behavior suggesting that the woman has xenophobic views may be far more widespread and inferentially integrated than the behavioral routines characteristic of alief-like states. In other examples, it may be that the subject's explicit (sincere) self-ascriptions of beliefs after meditated deliberation are in conflict with less reflective aspects of the subject's speech and inferential dispositions. It may also be that different aspects of the subject's global behavior and affective responses (in different contexts, when elicited in different ways) vindicate incompatible belief attributions. The examples presented in section 4 will be hard to account for in terms of the opposition between beliefs and aliefs.

Now, the objection to our analysis of doxastic disagreement can be generalized by claiming that when people attribute beliefs, they may actually be referring to many different fine-grained types of mental attitudes. It would not just be that there is a distinction between genuine belief and alief; according to this view, what we call belief would cover a gamut of related but different states. So, perhaps some types of belief-states need to be the result of careful, conscious deliberation, while other forms of belief may be associated with more transient, fleeting inferential and linguistic responses. Likewise, one might think that there is a sense in which beliefs are privative of linguistic beings, while in a different sense beliefs would be revealed by the subject's behavioral and emotional reactions (so that non-linguistic animals can have them). Similarly, it could be that some types of believing states are always occurrent, whereas other types can be dispositional or tacit.

Perhaps these distinctions can be multiplied until it becomes possible to explain away all cases of apparent non-factual doxastic disagreement as cases in which the speakers are actually talking about different kinds of mental states. The idea would be to treat the term 'believes' (and related ones) as a context-sensitive expression, which can be used to refer to a variety of different mental states. In the apparent cases of disagreement we have discussed, each speaker would be using the term 'believes' in order to attribute different doxastic mental states to the subject.

Is this contextualist view a satisfactory alternative to our expressivist analysis of doxastic disagreement? The answer will depend on one's general assessment of the success of contextualist strategies in dealing with situations of apparent disagreement. Such contextualist strategies seem obliged to make disagreement merely apparent, so they will be problematic in cases where one wishes to preserve some form of genuine disagreement (this is the problem of lost disagreement, mentioned in section 2 in relation to disagreements about knowledge attributions). Arguably, in cases like (Xen), the idea that the speakers are really disagreeing has considerable intuitive pull, even after it is known that the relevant parties are relying on different criteria for attributing beliefs. The contextualist would have to account for this resilient appearance of disagreement.

In general, the contextualist would have to address objections analogous to those posed by expressivists in the debate about knowledge attributions. Our aim here has not been to discuss arguments favoring expressivist over contextualist strategies, so rather than reviewing such arguments in detail here,

we refer the reader to the relevant literature (see among others Chrisman 2007; Field 2009; for objections to contextualism from a non-expressivist perspective, see Hawthorne 2003, 163; Stanley 2005, 52–6; MacFarlane 2014, 8–15). What we have tried to do is to argue that, if one thinks that there are good reasons to adopt expressivism about knowledge attributions, then one should be similarly moved to endorse expressivism about belief attributions. More precisely, we have claimed that, to the same extent that the existence of normative epistemic disagreement provides motivation for expressivism about knowledge ascriptions, the existence of cases of normative doxastic disagreement offers motivation for an analogous form of expressivism about belief attributions.

To be sure, those who remain unmoved by the considerations recommending expressivism over contextualism in the epistemic case may want to endorse a contextualist position about attributions of belief. Although we have explored an alternative expressivist analysis, there may be others who are inclined to opt for a contextualist proposal (see Clarke 2013; 2017). Either way, a suitable account of belief ascriptions will require a careful examination of the sort of doxastic disagreement that we have presented here.

7. Conclusion

According to epistemic expressivism, when we attribute knowledge to other people we are doing two things: saying that some true belief meets a particular epistemic standard, and expressing endorsement of that standard (Chrisman 2007, 241). This explains, according to expressivists, why we can have normative disagreements (i.e., disagreements that do not dissolve after speakers make their standards explicit) about knowledge attributions. Also, this allows expressivists to claim that epistemic attributions have a non-factual component.

Throughout this paper, we have showed that belief attributions can also lead to disagreements that do not dissolve after speakers make explicit to which standards their attributions are relative—that is, normative disagreements. We have argued that the existence of such disagreements should make epistemic expressivists endorse expressivism about belief attributions as well, acknowledging that these attributions have a non-factual component.

In section 6, we have discussed an alternative contextualist view, according to which doxastic disagreements actually involve attributions of different types of mental states and therefore can be explained away as merely apparent instances of disagreement. We have claimed, though, that those who find this sort of view unappealing for knowledge attributions should also find it unappealing in relation to belief.

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