Epistemology without Metaphysics

Goal: alternative to dipstick model.

(a) to avoid dubious metaphysics

(b) to restore epistemology to its proper role

Examples:

justification of induction

justification of logic

(c) to allow for a better account of change in fundamental norms.

Focus today mostly on (a).

1. Expressivist relativism.

The basic idea:

> (i) Calling a belief (epistemically) justified or reasonable is evaluating it (from an epistemological perspective, that is, from a perspective that rules out factors we deem outside the scope of epistemology);
>
> (ii) Evaluations (including epistemic ones) aren't straightforwardly factual.

The general idea is familiar for morality, though without agreement as to how to develop it.

Most of the reasons for the position in the moral case extend to the epistemological case as well:

> (i) The usual metaphysical (Humean) worry: there seems no room for straightforward normative facts on a naturalistic world-view;
>
> (ii) The associated epistemological (Benacerraf-style) worry that access to them is impossible. (Compounded by the fact that there is substantially greater disagreement about normative matters than about mathematical.)
>
> (iii) The worry that the relation to norms is not only non-naturalistic, but "queer" in the sense that it's supposed to somehow motivate one to reason in a certain way.

Three much-discussed problems for the idea that evaluations have a kind of not-straightforwardly-factual status:

(I) What does it mean to say that they aren't straightforwardly factual?

(II) How can the claim be extended to embedded constructions involving 'justifies' or 'reasonable' ("if *p* is reasonable then *q* is reasonable")?

(III) (a) How can the view accommodate the obvious fact that people can debate (unembedded and embedded) claims about what's reasonable?

(b) How can it allow "straightforwardly factual" claims to have a role in such debates?

The answers will involve *a kind of* relativism: in some sense, evaluative claims involve a free parameter, for a norm of assessment.

But: Two big differences between how the free parameter works in this case and in sentences like 'It's raining'.

The most important: contextual relativism v. "assessor relativism" (in a sense *similar but not identical to* MacFarlane's):

Key contrast: in an evaluative claim,

one doesn't intend the norm-parameter to be "filled", either by an intended norm or by anything else; that would strip away the evaluative force of the claim.

(Also, there typically isn't an intended norm.)

The view is also "expressivist" in that evaluative sentences express a mental state *that is a resultant of norms and factual beliefs*.

Indeed, the view seems to be a notational variant of Gibbard's. He says: Evaluative claims express propositions *of an extended kind*: not just sets of possible worlds, but sets of norm-world pairs.

If *A* expresses an extended proposition consisting of a set of norm-world pairs <*n*,*w*>, then *A* is something that can be true at a world *w* relative to a norm *n*.

> In a typical assertion we are making a claim about the actual world @—we are "filling the world slot with @".
>
> Gibbard obviously didn't intend there to be a metaphysically privileged norm playing a role analogous to that of the actual world; he must have intended to leave the norm parameter free.

The same normative proposition can be true at the actual world relative to some norms but not others.

So speakers who agree on all the relevant facts can still evaluate the proposition in different ways, by employing different norms in making their evaluations.

And none of their conflicting evaluations would be metaphysically privileged over the others.

So the view has both

elements associated with relativism (though not of the contextual sort)

and elements associated with expressivism (though not of the non-cognitivist variety in which "no proposition is expressed" or in which ones factual beliefs don't enter into normative evaluation).

Call it 'expressivist relativism', or 'relativist expressivism', or 'evaluativism'.

2. Description or revision?

Description of the ordinary meaning of sentences about justification,

or

Recommendation for the revision of ordinary practice?

Answer: I take no stand on what the ordinary speaker means—indeed, I doubt that that's a clear question. So I can't choose either disjunct.

What I do claim to be revisionary about is the philosophical views of normative realists (in particular, epistemological realists).

I hold:

> *To the extent that* ordinary people are committed to "metaphysical justification", they are in error;

and *To the extent that* "the meanings of their words is so committed", these meanings are founded on error and must be replaced.

But I want a notion of justification that has no such metaphysical commitments, but could play *much* of the role that the ordinary notion plays in ordinary practice. (Probably not all; and definitely not all the practice of normative realist philosophers.)

So it's the *metaphysics of* the error theorist, without commitment one way or the other to the error theorist's claim to be a revolutionary.

But an error theorist can take the proposal as one for how to talk, now that we have recognized the error.

This has *some of* the flavor of what Blackburn calls quasi-realism.

But unlike quasi-realism, this view does not attempt to mimic the normative realist, even in "ground level normative" as opposed to meta-normative discourse. We can mimic a great deal of ordinary practice *without* mimicking normative realism.

> [I'm skeptical of Blackburn-Gibbard line that you can sharply separate the claims internal to morality or epistemology from the external meta-theory. So I make no commitment to capturing all the "internal" claims accepted by ordinary speaker.]

Two big differences between the kind of relativity involved in claims about justification and the kind of relativity involved in ordinary contextual sentences.

1. Normativity involves assessor relativity, not contextual relativity.

2. The relativity in epistemological judgements is controversial: contested at least by epistemological realists, and *may* go against the opinions of the person on the street.

These differences are independent.

Many such cases of controversial (or once-controversial) relativity that are contextual:

> (i) The relativity of temporal priority to a state of motion (special relativity);
>
> (ii) The relativity of parallelism of line segments to a path of transport (general relativity).

These examples of relativity in basic notions went against the views of the person on the street, not just against those of opposing theorists.

They may well involve "change of meaning"; but if so, the old meaning *needed* changing.

Similarly, if we *suppose* that ordinary epistemological practice is committed to a non-relative notion of metaphysical justification:

> If it turns out that the "old meaning" is incoherent or that nothing falls under it, then we need to replace it—by a notion that serves the same purposes but without that commitment.

I won't be arguing that the commitment to metaphysical justification is incorrect:

> My goal is just to put forward a view of justification *compatible with* it being incorrect.
>
> The case for it being incorrect is better made once it's shown that there's a good alternative.

3. Evaluation of norms. The term 'relativism' has had the misfortune of being defined by its opponents.

> (i) They typically define it to mean 'contextual relativism': but that would destroy the whole point of the doctrine.
>
> (ii) They have often defined relativism as committed to the idea that all norms are equally good. No relativism of the sort I want to defend has any such commitment.

(ii): Important norms, whether moral or epistemological, differ in straightforwardly factual ways that matter to us.

If N_1 has straightforwardly factual features that we like less than the corresponding straightforwardly factual features of N_2, we regard N_1 as in this respect worse than N_2. But it might be better in other respects that matter to us.

An overall evaluation takes into account the different respects. (Leads to a *partial* order: incomparabilities as well as ties. And there's some indeterminacy as to the details of the partial order.)

So why would anyone claim that any two norms are equally good?

Objection: "These comparative judgements of which norms are better than which are themselves normative; so you haven't really allowed for one entire normative system being better than another." Reply: second doesn't follow from first.

Issue of whether there's a *uniquely best* norm.

0. Seems likely that answer is 'no': either

> (i) for each norm there is a better one;

and/or

> (ii) there are ties and incomparabilities "all the way up" (i.e. that it isn't just norms that aren't sufficiently good that can be equally good or incomparable).

1. Is relativism *committed to* a 'no' answer?

> Might seem so, on the grounds that it would be hard to make the distinction between a uniquely best norm and an objectively correct norm.
>
> But that's doubtful.

2. Realist may be committed to a 'yes' answer: how could an "objectively correct" norm fail to be uniquely best?

A special fact about *epistemic* norms: a kind of quasi-circularity that plays a very important role in meta-epistemology.

> Moral norms come into play when one evaluates what one ought to do, relative to the assumption that *such and such* are the non-moral facts.
>
> Similarly, epistemological norms come into play when one evaluates what one ought to *believe*, relative to the assumption that the non-epistemological facts are ... (e.g. about the properties of the possible epistemological norms).
>
> *But in addition*, epistemological norms come in in ascertaining what those non-epistemological facts are. This second role is the "quasi-circularity".

What's the significance of the quasi-circularity?

> It doesn't prevent us from reaching views about what the non-epistemological facts are: by and large, we do so by following the epistemic methods or norms that we in fact employ.
>
> Still, there are concerns about the significance of the resulting evaluations.

Two such concerns:

The *problem of immodesty*: It may seem that *any* method will positively evaluate itself (as better than competitors), in which case positive self-evaluation doesn't really cut any ice.

The *problem of modesty*: If (contra previous) some methods negatively evaluate themselves, and say that other methods do better, then we seem to have a situation where a method tells us not to follow itself. This seems somehow incoherent.

> (Or at any rate, such a method seems not to be consistently followable, since consistently following it would require not following it.)

In the written version of the paper I ultimately argue that these problems aren't in the end as serious as they may initially seem.

But even if that's wrong, it's hard to see how the quasi-circularity supports the charge that according to relativism, all epistemological norms are equally good.

4. Norms.

This notion can be understood in different ways. But I'll take it that norms of obligation, justification, etc. are *policies* of a certain sort, and that norms of goodness are *preferences* of a certain sort.

In the case of epistemic obligation etc.: a policy both

for believing (or believing to a certain degree)

and

for acting so as to improve one's epistemic situation (e.g. by trying to gather more evidence, or to think up more possible explanations, or to determine whether an answer to a question of interest follows from things one already accepts).

Policies are sometimes stated in normative language ("You shouldn't believe a conjunction without believing the conjuncts"), but here **the normative claims are generated by the policy**.

The policy is something like an imperative ("Don't believe a conjunction without believing the conjuncts"). The "shouldn't" formulation just means that if you act in the way suggested you are violating the policy.

What makes a policy moral? Or epistemological?

I won't attempt a serious answer. ("We know one when we see one".)

There are things we can say: e.g. an epistemological policy has a concern for getting truth and avoiding falsehood. These won't take us far. But

> (i) I suspect there's no sharp line between, e.g. the epistemological and the merely pragmatic
>
> (ii) No special problem for the evaluativist here: any answer that the realist gives as to how epistemological oughts differ from other oughts can probably be adapted to an answer to how epistemological *policies* differ from other *policies*.

Dangers in talking of "a person's norms" or "a person's policies":

1. There is more than one role that norms play in a person's life.

A person can *be committed to* a norm; or *act or believe largely in accordance with* a norm, or in a way that is in some sense *guided by* the norm; or *make her evaluations largely in accordance with* a norm, or in a way that is guided by the norm. These needn't coincide (and can themselves subdivide).

This is important when it comes to questions about "how an agent's norms evolve". A key part of the story of how the *various* norms that the agent is related to evolve will involve the interactions among them.

2. Even confining attention to a single way in which an agent is related to a norm, there will be many different norms or policies to which an agent is related.

Intuitively, "low-level" policies are revised via "higher-level" policies.

I'm skeptical of there being a "highest level" policy. (More on this next time.)

But I'll mostly focus on relatively "high-level" norms. (You can take my discussion to be confined to policies that could serve as a "highest level norm" for guiding a person's behavior, if you believe there to be such a thing.)

3. A further point, on *depth of idealization*.

Taking norms in abstraction from their relation to agents:

For norms that are policies, the idea of an action, belief, etc. being *reasonable relative-to-a-policy* admits an obvious **explication in non-normative terms:** it means that acting, believing etc. in the manner in question, given the circumstances in which the agent finds herself, is compatible with the policy.

> [This is an *all-or-nothing* notion of reasonableness. It might ultimately be better to use a graded notion, in which there is a partial ordering of degrees of reasonableness; that would require complicating our picture of what a norm is.]

5. Norm-relative truth. A norm-relative notion of reasonableness induces a norm-relative notion of truth for sentences about reasonableness.

Consider ordinary indexical claims where the indexicality isn't explicit, e.g.

(2R) The birth happened just before the star exploded.

To those not knowing of relativity, this seems to have no indexicality; so when such people say

(2) 'The birth happened just before the star exploded' is true if and only if the birth happened just before the star exploded,

they don't require any indexicality in the truth predicate.

Those who know of special relativity will still make utterances of form (2R) or (2), but will "intend them indexically", with a hidden relativity to a state of motion in the predicate 'before'.

> [Talk of 'intending them indexically' is slightly misleading: it's rare to explicitly think about the relativity in the various terms. (Especially clear in parallelism example.)
>
> Rather, one has a standing view that when one makes such utterances or thinks such thoughts, a relativized interpretation is appropriate.]

So for those in the know,

(2) ‘The birth happened just before the star exploded’ is true if and only if the birth happened just before the star exploded

should be construed as

> (For all states of motion *f*,) ‘The birth happened just before the star exploded’ is true relative to *f* if and only if the birth happened just before the star exploded, relative to *f*.

So *there is a hidden relativity to a state of motion in the predicate ‘true’ on the left hand side of (2)* (as well as in the ‘before’ on the right hand side).

That’s to be expected: the nature of truth guarantees the equivalence between the left and right hand sides of (2); the latter has a hidden indexical, so the former must as well.

Summary of the kind of relativity in evaluative claims:

1. It's a *controversial* relativity: it is controverted at least by many theorists of evaluative discourse.

2. Unlike the time-order case, it's not contextual relativity, but assessor relativity (on which more below).

A consequence of difference 2: in the norm case, typical ways of making the indexicality explicit destroy the evaluative nature of the utterance.

But despite this hugely important difference, the remarks on truth carry over from the contextual case:

> (A) it's perfectly OK for an evaluative relativist to say
>
> > (3) 'That belief is reasonable' is true if and only if that belief is reasonable;

but

> (B) this must be understood as involving a hidden relativity to a norm, both in the unquoted 'reasonable' on the right and in the 'true' on the left.

MacFarlane *seems* to advocate a kind of relativism in which the relativity of the truth predicate doesn't derive from a relativity in the ground level propositions to which it applies.

If that's his view, I don't understand it.

My claim that there's a hidden relativity in 'reasonable' applies *at least* to attributions of truth to sentences involving 'reasonable' *as used by relativists*.

How should we apply 'true' to utterances with 'reasonable' made by

(i) committed anti-relativists,

or (ii) the person on the street?

That involves issues like those that arise for the application of 'true' to simultaneity-judgements by those who don't know or don't accept relativity theory.

(My own view: there's no determinate fact of the matter on how to treat them.)

6. Pure and impure degrees of belief. I want to make a distinction between our *pure* beliefs or degrees of belief, which don't depend on our policies, and our *impure* beliefs or degrees of belief, which do.

Pure degrees of belief are treated in the usual way, in terms of a measure on the space of possible worlds.

Extending to the impure:

Gibbard defined a precise norm *n* as something that in conjunction with any possible world *w* determines a truth-value for every evaluative statement *A*.

Precise policies meet this condition: e.g. if the policy prohibits believing *p* in circumstances C but in no other circumstances, it determines the value true for 'You should refrain from believing p' in those worlds in which C is true and the value false in the others.

Restating: the precise norm *n* in effect assigns to each statement *A* the set of worlds $|A|_n$ in which *A* is true relative to *n*.

(If *A* is not evaluative, this is independent of *n*.)

(There are ways to weaken the requirement that policies and other norms be precise.)

But then the probability function P giving the agent's pure degrees of belief determines a function P* that assigns to each precise norm *n* a probability function P^*_n on all claims, evaluative and non-evaluative: $P^*_n(A)$ is just $\mu(|A|_n)$.

> (Note: the only probability measure here is over the set of worlds, not over the set of norm-world pairs.)

P assigns to each non-evaluative claim S's ***pure*** **degree of belief**, unmixed by normative evaluation.

If S is committed to the precise norm *n*, P^*_n extends P by assigning to each evaluative claim a real number (from 0 to 1) that gives S's ***impure*** **degree of belief** in that claim—impure because it contains the evaluative element given by *n* in addition to the pure belief component given by P. (On non-evaluative claims, P^*_n agrees with P.)

For instance: if S is committed to a norm *n* that demands that an agent believe a certain perceptual claim *p* if and only if he satisfies some naturalistic condition C, then S's impure degree of belief that Jones *ought to believe that p* will coincide with S's degree of pure belief that Jones is in conditions C.

(All this can be extended to imprecise norms.)

Should impure belief count as "belief"?

That is, suppose an agent is committed to norm *n*, and has degrees of belief in non-evaluative claims given by the function P. Should we think of the extended function P^*_n as literally giving his degrees of *belief* in arbitrary claims, properly so called? Or should we think of it as giving degrees of *something formally like beliefs but not the real thing*.

My view: there's no "properly so-called" about it: we can reasonably talk either way.

We'll see though that there is a naturalness to talk of impure belief: it connects up more directly with the phenomenon of normative disagreement.

7. "Not straightforwardly factual". What do I mean by saying that evaluativism takes statements of justification to be "not straightforwardly factual"?

I mean that they have a hidden relativity, *somewhat* analogous to the hidden relativity in 'simultaneous'; but it is assessor-relativity rather than contextual relativity.

Even with controversial contextual relativity (simultaneity, parallelism), it's natural to say that statements that "aren't explicitly relativized but should be" aren't straightforwardly factual, but only factual relative to a state of motion, path of transport, etc..

But I take this to be more natural still in the case of assessor-relativity.

To call a claim "straightforwardly factual" isn't intended as a positive characterization, but simply as a denial that it has any of the characteristics that would make it appropriate to call it less than straightforwardly factual.

In the present context the only relevant such characteristic is assessor relativity. So 'straightforwardly factual' could be replaced by 'factual in a non-assessor-relative way'.

"Not straightforwardly factual" *doesn't* imply "not truth-apt".

The word 'true' has an important logical role that is as important for normative claims as it is elsewhere.

> If someone expresses an elaborate normative theory, each part of which seems acceptable but which has a normative conclusion I strongly dislike, I may express my own normative attitude toward it by saying "Not all of his theory can be true, though I haven't yet figured out which claim in it isn't true".
>
> I can do this because I take "'*p*' is true" to be equivalent to "*p*" in a fairly strong sense: in particular, *any assessor-relativity in "p" is inherited into "'p' is true"*.

What about 'fact'? There's something to be said for a pleonastic use (though less than in the case of 'true'). On this use, if one makes a normative judgement (e.g. that skepticism is unjustified), one will equally judge that *it is a fact that* skepticism is unjustified.

Still, this won't deny that there is assessor-relativity in "Skepticism is unjustified". It's simply that that assessor-relativity is inherited into "it is a fact that skepticism is unjustified".

One *could* take the same line about 'it is a straightforward fact that *p*': one would judge that it is a *straightforward* fact that skepticism is unjustified, even though the claim is assessor relative.

But it doesn't seem useful to adopt that line: it would make the term 'straightforward' redundant.

> It would be analogous to a supervaluationist saying of a borderline case S of baldness that S must be either determinately bald or not determinately bald, on the ground that in each valuation S is either determinately bald or not determinately bald.

'It is a straightforward fact that', like 'determinately' in the supervaluationist picture, is supposed to be a strengthening of 'true' that give one the means of commenting on the status of the claims in its scope.

Of course, this assumes that the strengthening makes sense. For both 'straightforwardly' and 'determinately', we need an account of just what the strengthening comes to.

In the case of 'straightforwardly' I've suggested that a crucial component is absence of implicit (assessor-)relativity; in particular, absence of sensitivity to policies, preferences, etc. (i.e. to norms as I'm understanding them).

The difference between statements that are norm-sensitive and those that aren't ultimately comes to the difference of the conceptual and social roles of norms on the one hand and pure beliefs on the other.

Perhaps there's room for skepticism about whether such an account can be provided in the end?

I've allowed the relativist to assert normative claims, to assert that they're true, even to assert that they state facts.

> Indeed, I've even *allowed* them to say that they express "straightforward facts", though I've said that this would be misleading and that it's hard to see why they would want to say that.

The worry is that if I allow them to say such things, haven't I given the factualist everything he should want?

Two-fold response:

1. The factualist needs to hold that one norm is objectively privileged. But an evaluativist needn't (and probably shouldn't) accept that any one norm is best.

2. Consider again relativity about temporal order, parallelism, etc.. Here too, an advocate of such relativity will often use ordinary unrelativized language, in talk and also in thought.

Not only do I use unrelativized [i.e. not explicitly relativized] claims about temporal order, parallelism, etc. in my speaking and writing and thinking, I regard such claims as true.

Those truth attributions have the same "implicit relativity" as the ground level claims, but here too I usually don't explicitly think the relativity.

What distinguishes me from the person who doesn't accept relativity theory?

Answer: while in many contexts I may on a superficial level talk and think just like those ignorant of relativity, I don't **when the chips are down**: when it matters, I explicitly relativize.

And that's basically so in the normativity case too (though there is a difference because the relativity is assessor relativity):

In certain contexts of persistent disagreement about whether I ought to believe X, I will back off the norm-sensitive language, and say instead something like:

> "Relative to such and such standards I ought to believe X; **moreover**, I advocate those standards, because they have such and such properties, which I strongly favor".

We could in principle conduct all normative debate in this sort of terminology, where we fully disentangle

> the impersonal straightforwardly factual aspects (what I should do relative to such and such standards, and what straightforwardly factual properties those standards have)

and the autobiographical factual properties of what my attitudes are (what standards I advocate, what properties of standards I prefer).

But it would be highly impractical to do so. Indeed, it's a feature of typical normative debate that *we usually don't know how to do so* without great circumlocution, because *we're unaware of exactly what our norms are*.

8. Norms *v.* worlds: an untenable dualism?

I take the basic apparatus I've laid out to be *compatible with* normative realism.

But the normative realist adds a certain notion of objective correctness of norms, which is a notion I see no use for.

9. Normative debate. The key question about this apparatus: Can it adequately accommodate normative debate, without appeal to "objective correctness" of norms.

In written paper I discuss this in two parts:

> first, under the pretense that the parties to the debate don't change their norms during the debate;
>
> second and far more interesting, how to accommodate the rational evolution of even "high-level" norms.

I'll say something about the second next time.

10. Assessor relativism. The distinction between contextual relativism and assessor relativism (as I conceive it) connects to the pragmatics of normative debate.

MacFarlane seems to conceive the distinction differently: as semantic, as a distinction of the conditions for truth. But that is *prima facie* puzzling.

> First, he insists that the relativity he's primarily concerned with isn't just in the *sentences* but in the *propositions they express*. Presumably then, these propositions "carry a free variable"—in the present case, for norms. (In addition to the "free variable for possible worlds", if you want to look at it that way).
>
> But second, he says that there's a semantic difference between cases where the value of that variable is determined by the user or the assessor: with user-relativism, the proposition is true when it's true *relative to a user-parameter*, and with assessor-relativism the proposition is true when it's true *relative to an assessor-parameter*.
>
> But **what sense can be made of what determines the value of a free variable in a proposition, as opposed to in an utterance?**

MacFarlane's way out (?): he seems to think that the ground-level proposition doesn't have the extra free variable, only the truth attribution does.

So at the basic level of normative discussion, we deal in propositions without gaps. This leads to his thinking that when it comes to debates about truth, we need to fill the gaps somehow. If not by user, then by assessor.

But this makes the notion of truth mysterious: how can the attribution of truth to a proposition have a gap for a norm when the proposition itself has no gap?

I think instead that we must allow for debating "propositions with gaps". They are the objects of impure belief.

Of course, we don't attribute absolute truth value to them: the attributions of truth to them contain corresponding gaps.

This makes the distinction between contextual and assessor relativism a pragmatic distinction, a matter of what we treat as disagreement.

In the cases of contextual relativity like 'It's raining' or the special relativity cases, people don't count as disagreeing unless they disagree in their straightforwardly factual beliefs.

But this is not so in general: two people can disagree about where to go to dinner, even though there is no relevant factual disagreement between them.

So too in the normative case: people who advocate doing different things, or make opposed claims about what they ought to do, count as disagreeing, even if the difference stems not from a difference in their straightforwardly factual beliefs but from a difference in those policies or preferences that generate normative claims.

Typically, the disagreement about a specific matter, e.g. how quickly the government ought to withdraw troops from Iraq, will be due both to straightforwardly factual differences and to rather basic normative policies.

As a matter of psychological fact our norms and our beliefs are seamlessly integrated. To what extent the disagreement is based on "straightforward facts" and to what extent on "basic norms" is extremely hard to determine in practice.

> Some prefer to reserve the term 'genuine disagreement' for straightforwardly factual disagreement. But in the normative case, such a notion of disagreement would be hard to employ in practice, because it would be extremely hard to determine when people disagree in the proposed sense.

This seamless integration is part of what underlies the naturalness of talk of impure belief: we can say in general that disagreement consists of having opposed impure beliefs, without differentiating the contributions to impure belief made by pure (i.e. straightforwardly factual) beliefs on the one hand and by norms on the other.

The pragmatic difference between “assessor relativity” and ordinary contextual relativity is of fundamental importance.

Because of it, the distinction between implicit relativity and explicit relativity is of vastly more significance in the normative case (where it is assessor relativity that is in question) than in the contextual relativity examples.

With contextual relativity, two people disagree in their utterances of an implicitly relativized sentence such as ‘It’s raining’ if and only if they would disagree had they explicitly relativized to the locations that they intended.

So there, it makes little difference whether they make the relativity explicit: in leaving it implicit they don’t in any important sense “say anything different” than they would have had they made it explicit.

Not so in the case of assessor relativity, for here explicit relativization removes the role for the assessor.

If Jones and Smith utter

J: We ought to withdraw our troops within a month

and

S: We ought not to withdraw our troops within a month,

they are clearly disagreeing, due to some combination of disagreement about straighforward facts and disagreement in fundamental policies. They have opposed impure beliefs.

But suppose they utter explicitly relativized variants, e.g.

J*: We ought to withdraw our troops within a month relative to Policy n_J

or

J**: We ought to withdraw our troops within a month relative to every policy with property Φ_J;

and analogously for Smith, using a different policy n_S or property Φ_S. Then they may not be disagreeing: for instance, if they agree on the straighforward facts, then Jones will agree with S* and S**, and Smith will agree with J* and J**.

In short, J*, J, etc. are straightforwardly factual claims: the sensitivity to norms has been lost by the explicit relativization.** And sensitivity to norms is a large part of what normative disagreement consists in.

Questions: (1) In the case of assessor relativity, does Jones "say something different" when he explicitly relativizes than when he doesn't? And (2) do his utterances "have different truth conditions"?

The least misleading yes-or-no answer by far is 'yes' to each:

> (1) J says something quite different from J* or J**: J can be used to express normative disagreement with Smith in a way that J* and J** can't. (That is: one can impurely disbelieve J without impurely disbelieving J* or J**.)
>
> (2) J has only norm-dependent truth conditions, whereas J* and J** have norm-invariant ones. This is a semantic reflection of the fact that J can't be an object of *pure* belief.
>
> And relative to norms other than n_J (or not having the property Φ_J), J has very different truth conditions from J* (or J**).

Some have objected that the relativism forces me to say that the implicitly relativized statement has the same truth-conditions as the explicitly relativized.

But this comes from trying to read **norm-invariant** truth conditions from the relativism. That's inappropriate—*especially in the case of assessor-relativism*, where the distinction between implicitly relativized statements and their explicitly relativized counterparts is so crucial.

Is there a sense of *straightforward factual content* in which:

> When J is uttered by a person who consistently advocates and employs norm n_J or consistently advocates the employment of norms with property Φ_J, it has the same straightforward factual content as J* or J**?

Maybe, though

(i) one would need to find ground for choosing between J* and J** (and lots of other choices)

(ii) it seems better to deny that normative utterances have straightforward factual content, or to say that they do only relative to norms.

But if one persists in talking in this way, then normative disagreement just isn't a function of "straightforward factual content".

Normative disagreement isn't a matter of opposed *pure* beliefs, it's a matter of opposed *impure* beliefs.