**Finding the Missing Moorean Infelicity**

*Abstract*: A number of theorists have argued that evaluative expressivism faces a problem of “missing Moorean infelicity”. It is infelicitous to conjoin a non-evaluative statement with the denial that one is in the corresponding belief state (e.g., ‘It’s raining but I don’t believe it’s raining). But if --- as many expressivists claim --- evaluative statements express non-cognitive states of mind in the same way that non-evaluative statements express beliefs, then we should expect a parallel infelicity in the case of evaluative statements. We should expect it to be infelicitous to conjoin an evaluative statement with the denial of being in the ‘corresponding’ non-cognitive state of mind. But this isn’t what we find with any of the standard non-cognitive attitudes that have been proposed as bearing the ‘expressed by’ relation to evaluative claims. Nils Franzen (2020) has recently proposed that a *non-standard* state of mind can deliver expressivists their ‘missing’ infelicity. He claims that the relevant non-cognitive state is the one picked out by the English verb, ‘to find’. Franzen thus proposes not just a solution to the problem of missing Moorean infelicity, but an argument for a novel form of expressivism. In the following note I argue that Franzen’s project does not succeed.

**1 Introduction**

Nils Franzen (2020) claims that one of the central tenets of evaluative expressivism is the

**Parity Thesis**: evaluative statements express non-cognitive states of mind in the same way that non-evaluative statements express beliefs.[[1]](#footnote-1)

As several theorists have suggested, the Parity Thesis faces a problem of ‘missing Moorean infelicity’ (Atlas 2005, p. 225-230, Finlay 2005, Fletcher 2014, p. 187-191, Woods 2014). The fact that ordinary non-evaluative claims express beliefs makes it infelicitous to conjoin a non-evaluative claim that p with the denial that one believes that p:

(1) # It’s raining but I don’t believe that it’s raining.

Given the Parity Thesis, it seems we should expect something similar of evaluative claims. We should expect that evaluative claims, if they express non-cognitive attitudes in the way non-evaluative claims express beliefs, will generate an infelicity when conjoined with a denial of being in the corresponding non-cognitive state.[[2]](#footnote-2) But this isn’t what we find with any of the standard non-cognitive attitudes that have been proposed as bearing the ‘expressed by’ relation to evaluative claims. For example:

(2) Murder is wrong, but I don’t disapprove of it (/but I’m not against it/ but I like murdering/ but I plan to do it anyway).

No Moorean infelicity here. We don’t see what we expect to see if the Parity Thesis is true, and this is a problem for expressivism.

Franzen offers a unique and interesting solution to this problem by appealing to an attitude thus far ignored in the metanormative literature. There really is, he argues, a non-cognitive state such that it is infelicitous to deny that one is in that kind of state when one makes an evaluative assertion. But it isn’t an approval state, a desiderative state, a planning state, or any of the other usual suspects. Rather, it is the state picked out by the English verb, ‘to find’. It is infelicitous to say, for example,

(3) # Murder is wrong, but I don’t find it wrong.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Such infelicity, Franzen claims, is best explained by the hypothesis that *the very state* *expressed by evaluative statements are ‘finds’ states*. The proposed upshot of his paper, then, is not just a solution to the problem of missing Moorean infelicity, but an argument for a novel form of expressivism.

In this note I pose worries for the two most central claims in Franzen’s argument:

**The Non-Cognitive Thesis**: ‘Finds’ states are non-doxastic, affective attitudes (and in the same family as liking, loving, and appreciating).

**The Infelicity Thesis**: It is infelicitous to conjoin an evaluative assertion ‘p’ with the denial of the corresponding ‘finds’ state in the same way it is infelicitous to conjoin an ordinary, descriptive assertion ‘p’ with the denial of the corresponding ‘believes’ state.

I argue that neither of these claims are supported by the linguistic data, and for much the same reasons. In S2 I take up the Non-Cognitive Thesis. In S3 I take up with the Infelicity Thesis.

**2 Against the Non-Cognitive Thesis**

Franzen’s argument for the Non-Cognitive Thesis appeals to two features of the verb, ‘to find’. He argues that these features can plausiblybe accommodated only by a *noncognitivist* theory of the associated mental state.

**2.1 Two Linguistic Features**

**Feature #1**: **‘Finds’ is far more selective than paradigmatic cognitive attitude verbs with respect to the verbs it takes in its complement**. ‘Believes’ and ‘thinks’ are quite permissive with their embedded predicates. Consider:

(4) Holmes believes/thinks spaghetti is tasty.

(5) Holmes believes/thinks spaghetti is vegetarian.

(6) Holmes believes/thinks Watson is pretentious.

(7) Holmes believes/thinks Watson is 40 years old.

‘Finds’ is much more stingy:

(8) Holmes finds spaghetti tasty.

(9) # Holmes finds spaghetti vegetarian

(10) Holmes finds Watson pretentious.

(11) # Holmes finds Watson (to be) 40 years old.

Why this selectivity? What features render a predicate admissible or inadmissible into the complement of ‘finds’? Many linguists claim that a necessary condition for admissibility is a predicate’s being‘subjective’, though there is much disagreement on exactly what this means (Bouchard 2012, p.10, Coppock, p.126-127, Fleisher 2013, Kennedy 2013, p. 261, Kennedy & Willer 2016, p.913, Sæbø 2009, p.327).[[4]](#footnote-4) It is felicitous to say, ‘Holmes finds spaghetti tasty,’ but not, ‘Holmes finds spaghetti vegetarian’ in part because ‘tasty’ is subjective in a way that ‘vegetarian’ isn’t. Call this the **subjectivity condition.**

Some linguists claim there is a second way in which ‘finds’ is more selective than ‘believes’ or ‘thinks’. In the case of ‘finds’ there must be some sort of *experiential connection* between the subject of the attitude and the instantiation of the property that is picked out by the embedded predicate (Stephenson 2007, §5.1, Kennedy & Willer 2016, §4). Call this the **experiential condition.** This condition, some have claimed, explains the infelicity of sentences like

(12) # I find spaghetti tasty, though I’ve never tried it.[[5]](#footnote-5)

(13) # I find Watson pretentious, though I’ve never met him.

Franzen affirms the view that predicates felicitously embed under ‘finds’ only if they satisfy both the subjectivity and experiential conditions. But Franzen suggests a third condition above and beyond those that have been advanced by linguists. He claims that predicates felicitously embed under ‘finds’ only if they have a positively- or negatively-valenced, ‘affective dimension’ (12-14). It is felicitous to say, ‘Holmes finds spaghetti tasty,’ but not, ‘Holmes finds spaghetti vegetarian,’ in part because ‘tasty’ has an affective dimension that ‘vegetarian’ does not. Call this the **affective condition**.

Franzen also goes beyond orthodox opinion amongst linguists in claiming that

**Feature #2: Unlike with paradigmatic doxastic attitude verbs, ‘finds’ is not ‘truth-apt’** (14-16).Whereas it is felicitious to say

(14) What Holmes believes is true/false,

or

(15) What Holmes thinks is true/false,

it is infelicitous to say

(16) # What Holmes finds is true/false.

**2.2 Cognitivism or Non-Cognitivism**

Franzen claims that the above features can plausibly be accommodated only by a theory according to which ‘finds’ states are non-cognitive, affective attitudes: ‘Whereas there might be some prospects for cognitivist theories of ‘find’ states to accommodate each of these features individually, it seems unlikely that all of them could be accounted for’ (18).

Let’s grant for the sake of argument that the above data *can* be accommodated by a noncognitivist theory. Let’s set aside an examination of the details of Franzen’s version of such a theory, and an evaluation of its explanatory adequacy. What I want to examine is Franzen’s comparative claim that *cognitivist* theories *cannot* accommodate the linguistic data. I argue that this claim is mistaken.

But first we need to examine Franzen’s interpretation of the linguistic data. Here the generalizations seem too hasty. Consider, first, the ‘affective condition’. The idea that predicates felicitously embed under ‘finds’ only if they have a valenced, affective dimension seems plausible when we extrapolate only from data in which the embedded predicate is a so-called ‘predicate of personal taste’ (e.g., ‘tasty’, ‘delicious’, ‘fun’). But as theorists have noted, the class of predicate types that embed under ‘finds’ is wider than this, including all manner of ‘gradable’ predicates (Bylininga 2017, §4.1, Kennedy 2013, p. 263-265, Silk forthcoming, §5). And many gradable predicates do not plausibly satisfy the affective condition at all. For example, ‘tall’ and ‘cold’:

(17) Holmes finds Watson tall.

(18) Holmes finds Baker Street cold.

Surely one can utter such sentences without any implication that Holmes has positive or negative feelings towards Watson’s height or Baker Street’s temperature.[[6]](#footnote-6) What this suggests is that the affective dimension that Franzen is picking up on has nothing to do with the nature of ‘finds’, but rather with the nature of some of the predicate types that embed under ‘finds’. We should reject the affective condition.

Likewise, we should reject Franzen’s contention that ‘finds’ is not ‘truth apt’.[[7]](#footnote-7) While the construction ‘What S finds is true’ does seem infelicitous in most instances, there are other constructions by which we can felicitously attribute truth or falsity to the complements of ‘finds’ reports.[[8]](#footnote-8) For example:

(19) Listrad: What’s your assessment, Watson?

Watson: I find no connection between these two murders.

Holmes: It’s true. The murders are not connected.

(20) Watson: What Holmes finds is that it’s cold outside. And that’s true. It is cold outside.

Of the data Franzen cites, then, a theory of ‘finds’ need only accommodate the subjective and experiential conditions. And it seems a cognitivist theory can plausibly do this. In fact, there are cognitivist theories already on the market that purport to do this. Consider, for example, Tamina Stephenson’s (2007) theory according to which (roughly) S’s finding that p is equivalent to S’s believing that p *on the basis of S’s having a direct experience of p*. An account like this obviously explains the experiential condition. And it can explain the subjectivity condition by analyzing the subjectivity condition in terms of the experiential condition --- i.e., by cashing out the relevant notion of subjectivity in terms of the notion of direct experience.[[9]](#footnote-9)

None of this is to say that a case can’t be made that a noncognitivist account of ‘finds’ is preferable to a cognitivist account. It’s just to say that Franzen’s paper does not succeed in making that case. And in fact – as I’ll next explain – Franzen actually points us towards data that *favors* a Stephenson-type, cognitivist account over Franzen’s noncognitivist account.

**3 Against the Infelicity Thesis**

I now turn to Franzen’s second central claim:

**The Infelicity Thesis**: It is infelicitous to conjoin an evaluative assertion ‘p’ with the denial of the corresponding ‘finds’ state in the same way it is infelicitous to conjoin an ordinary, descriptive assertion ‘p’ with the denial of the corresponding ‘believes’ state.

The thesis seems plausible when we focus on evaluative judgments that we typically assume are the products of emotional experience or intuitive ‘seemings’. For example:

(21) # Kicking dogs is cruel, but I don’t find it cruel.

(22) # Murder is wrong, but I don’t find it wrong.

(23) # Pleasure is good, but I don’t find it good.

The tension between conjuncts fades, however, when we consider evaluative judgments that are arrived at in less direct ways --- e.g., judgments arrived at via testimony or longs chains of inference. This is especially true of moral judgments that we come to accept despite finding them deeply counterintuitive. Consider, for example, a utilitarian who feels she must follow the arguments wherever they lead, and is thus led to begrudgingly accept Derek Parfit’s (1984) ‘Repugnant Conclusion’, though she agrees that the conclusion *is* repugnant. Such a person, it seems, can felicitously say

(24) A world with very many people, each of whom have lives barely worth living, is better than a world with very few people, each of whom live excellent lives --- though I don’t *find* this to be the case.

This asymmetry in the acceptability of (21-23) versus (24) is at odds with the Infelicity Thesis (and thus with Franzen’s contention that moral assertions *express* ‘finds’ states). But notice: this is precisely what we would expect given cognitivism about both moral judgments and ‘finds’ states.[[10]](#footnote-10)

On an account like Stephenson’s, for instance, to find x (to be) F is (roughly) to believe that x is F *on the basis of direct experience*. Such an account predicts the acceptability of (24), since the moral judgment expressed by the speaker is not one she makes on the basis of any emotional or intuitive experience. She is begrudgingly led to this conclusion by a long chain of inference. She does not experience the crowded, miserable world *as* *better than* the sparse, happy world, and thus she does not *find* the former world better.

At the same time, the Stephenson account predicts the *un*acceptability of (21-23), since in each of these cases it is part of our background knowledge that people typically arrive at the belief that ‘kicking dogs is cruel’ via emotional or intuitive experience, and thus we will naturally infer, from the fact that the speaker believes that kicking dogs is cruel, that she *finds* kicking dogs to be cruel. On the Stephenson account, the infelicity of (21-23) is nothing more than a special instance of ordinary Moorean infelicity (‘p, but I don’t believe that p’).[[11]](#footnote-11)

It turns out, in the end, that the variety of linguisitic data to which Franzen draws our attention is in fact *better* accommodated by a cognitivist theory like Stephenson’s than by Franzen’s non-cognitivist alternative. The upshot: despite Franzen’s creative efforts, expressivists remain without a plausible analog to ordinary Moorean infelicity.

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1. The ‘Parity Thesis’ is introduced (under this name) by Schroeder (2008, p. 89). Schroeder’s formulation: ‘Normative sentences bear the same relation to non-cognitive attitudes as ordinary descriptive sentences bear to ordinary propositional beliefs’. I think there are two reasons to prefer Schroeder’s formulation. The first is that Franzen’s formulation controversially suggests that all non-evaluative discourse is non-expressivist. The second is that Franzen’s formulation does not make room for self-identified ‘expressivists’ who claim that normative sentences *do* express beliefs, but beliefs of a very different sort than those expressed by ordinary descriptive sentences. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Or should we really expect this? As [redacted] has noted in conversation, it’s not obvious that we should expect the non-cognitive attitude expressed by evaluative statements to have a name in folk psychology or ordinary English. Moreover, it’s not obvious that we should expect the truth of expressivism to be transparent to competent speakers. For both these reasons, it’s not obvious that, given expressivism, we should expect to observe an analog of Moorean infelicity for evaluative statements. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I’ll argue in §3, however, that such infelicities aren’t attested nearly as widely as Franzen suggests. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. But see Silk (forthcoming:§5) for an argument against this popular claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Compare with ‘I believe/think spaghetti is tasty, though I’ve never tried it.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Of course it’s sometimes true that we say things like, ‘I find this drive so long,’ to communicate a negative affective attitude. But this, I think, is best explained pragmatically, in terms of our background assumptions about the unpleasantness of long drives, and nothing to do with the nature of ‘finds’. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As metanormative noncognitivists have argued for the last few decades, though, truth-aptness is *not* the place to draw the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism. So the fact that ‘finds’ *is* truth-apt does not rule out a noncognitivist theory of ‘finds’. It just rules out one of Franzen’s arguments to get us to such a theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. It isn’t even obvious that the ‘What S finds is true’ construction is always infelicitious. It seems more acceptable when offered in reply to a statement with the construction ‘S finds *that* x is F’ or ‘S finds x *to be* F’ rather than ‘S finds x F’. This inclines me to think that the oddness of uttering ‘What S finds is true’ in reply to ‘S finds x F’ has less to do with the ‘truth aptness’ of ‘finds’, and more to do with the syntactic properties of the ‘S finds x F’ construction. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Alternatively, the subjectivity and experiential conditions could be accommodated at the level of pragmatics rather than semantics. Kennedy and Willer (2016) offer an example of an account that purports to do just this. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. At least given a cognitivism about ‘finds’ that accommodates what we called the ‘experiential condition’. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. There’s nothing special about moral discourse here. This phenomenon generalizes to cases involving non-moral discourse. It sounds infelicitous to say, ‘I’m in pain, but I don’t find myself in pain,’ or, ‘This food is delicious, but I don’t find it delicious.’ But, as in the case of moral discourse, the infelicity disappears when we *cancel* the direct experience expectation. For example: (Looking at a thermometer) ‘It’s hot in this room, though I don’t find it hot.’ Or: (Looking at what I know to be a visual illusion) ‘The lines are the same length, but I don’t find them to be the same length.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)