

Expression: Acts, Products, and Meaning

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of expression is used in a number of seemingly unrelated contexts and ways. Poems, paintings and pieces of music are often said to be *expressive* of various emotions, there is *expressionism* in art and varieties of *expressivism* in philosophy. People, as well as nonhuman animals, are often said to be *expressing* affective states such as fear, anger, wants; people are said, in addition, to express feelings, emotions and sentiments, attitudes, intentions, opinions, even selves. Groups of individuals (a corporation, an administration), too, are said to express sentiments, attitudes, and intentions. In a different vein, we also speak of *sentences* as expressing propositions, words as expressing concepts, and essays as expressing ideas. *Expression* is a notion in prevalent use, but one that has received surprisingly little direct theoretical attention.

My concern here will be with the use and usefulness of expression in connection with three seemingly unrelated puzzles:

- (1) **Origins of Meaning:** How can we explain the emergence of the meaningful speech so distinctive of humans?
- (2) **First-Person Authority:** How can we explain the apparent asymmetries between present-tense 1st-person ascriptions of occurrent mental states – so-called *avowals* – on the one hand, and 3rd-person mental ascriptions, as well as nonmental self-ascriptions, on the other?
- (3) **Motivational Internalism:** How can we explain the apparently intimate link between making ethical claims and being suitably motivated to act in accordance with them?

In Section 1, I briefly review the puzzles and well-known, expressivist attempts to solve them, which have been dismissed. In each case, opponents have appealed to an apparent incongruence between what is ‘merely expressive’ and what is linguistically meaningful. Thus, regarding (1), it has been argued that, since all apparent precursors of words in animal communication systems are merely expressive (and thus reflexive-reactive) emissions, they cannot be thought to prefigure the elements of genuinely meaningful speech.

Regarding (2), it has been argued that, if avowals are expressions of avowed mental states, they cannot be truth-evaluable self-ascriptions and thus candidates for knowledge claims. And similarly, regarding (3), it has been argued that, if ethical pronouncements are expressions of noncognitive mental states, they cannot be truth-evaluable claims that partake in logical inferences, etc. In Section 2, I sketch the view of expression and expressive behavior I favor, which – as I explain in Section 3 – allows us to articulate more viable versions of the expressivist proposals canvassed in Section 1. My main goal here is not to defend these proposals in any detail (something I’ve done elsewhere). Instead, I aim to show how the allegations of failure are due to an impoverished theoretical understanding of the notion of expression and of the category of expressive behavior. As I point out in Section 4, once we take the measure of relevant distinctions and observations, it can be seen that the category of expressive behavior cuts across various divides – such as the *linguistic/nonlinguistic*, *learned/unlearned*, *arbitrary/natural*, *cognitive/noncognitive*, or *rational/nonrational* – that have made the puzzles seem so intractable.

1. Expression and Three Puzzles

1.1 Origins of Meaning

Although the communicative repertoires of nonhuman animals can exhibit considerable complexity and subtlety, we know of no nonhuman communication system possessing the compositional semantic structure distinctive of natural language. Many nonhuman animals produce vocal responses to environmental stimuli that appear to share certain properties with words. For example, vervet monkeys produce distinct kinds of alarm call in response to different kinds of threat (e.g., eagles vs. snakes vs. leopards). But even the most sophisticated known systems of animal communication exhibit no discrete combinatorial character, and their use appears to be both affect-driven and keyed to environmental stimuli.¹ Thus, there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between the character of human meaningful language and that of all known animal communication systems. But then how *could* meaningful speech possibly have *emerged* in the natural world?

¹ For a recent survey of the relevant literature, see Fitch (2010), especially ch. 4. See also Anderson (2004).

Addressing essentially this puzzle, thinkers from quite different periods and schools of thought – such as Rousseau, Darwin, Wittgenstein, and Grice – have homed in on expressive behaviors of the sort we share with nonhuman animals (yelps, growls, facial expressions, bodily postures, as well as more controlled calls, songs, and gestures) as the ancient source of human speech. Somehow, it is suggested – perhaps due to various selection pressures – the sounds or gestures that our nonhuman ancestors used to give immediate, inarticulate expression to various states of mind were gradually replaced by increasingly arbitrary, referential symbols that combined, first, into simply structured strings, and eventually gained the full phonological-syntactic-semantic complexity of human natural languages.²

However, this idea has met with strong resistance from linguists, philosophers, and theorists of animal communication and language evolution. For example, Friedrich Max Müller, one of Darwin’s most vehement opponents, argued at length that meaningful speech *could not* have emerged out of “the cries of animals” or anything resembling “the sounds which men utter themselves when suffering from pain or joy or any other powerful emotion” (1887: 180). Müller distinguished between mere ‘*emotional* language’, which at best can serve to show “by outward signs what we feel”, on the one hand, and ‘*rational* language’, which must consist of discrete elements that are “expressive of concepts”; yet possessing concepts, he thought, in turn requires language (1887: 200). Thus, like some contemporary philosophers,³ Müller held that language and concepts are interdependent. And like some of them, he saw serious obstacles to our understanding of the emergence of language, famously concluding that language defies all Darwinian explanations, representing “the Rubicon which divides man from beast”.⁴

But even theorists who reject Müller’s interdependence claim, and who don’t share his thoroughgoing skepticism regarding evolutionary explanations of language, still join him in dismissing expressivist

² Or, perhaps, unstructured holophrastic utterances preceded symbolic lexical units. (On the debate between ‘holistic’ and ‘analytic’ views of so-called protolanguage, see Tallerman (2012: 479-491)). On the idea that grammatical complexity was due to the onset of ‘catastrophic syntax’ that radically transformed the character of a relatively simple ‘lexical protolanguage’, see Bickerton (1990, 2009).

³ Notably, Sellars (1956, 1981), Davidson (2001a, 2001b), Brandom (1994, 2009), and McDowell (1994). See also Hutto and Myin (2011).

⁴ For references and discussion of this view, which I dub ‘continuity skepticism’, see Bar-On and Priselac (2011), and Bar-On (forthcoming).

accounts of the origins of meaningful speech. Such accounts are said to ignore the fact that language is a system of learned, bi-directional, and essentially arbitrary-symbolic elements, whereas most mammalian communicative repertoires are innately fixed and non-symbolic, and their production is merely responsive, stimulus-bound, and unintentional.⁵ Animals' expressive calls and gestures are all said to belong to what linguists describe as 'paralanguage', and are therefore thought to form a poor breeding ground for rule-governed, symbolic language that is intentionally and flexibly used, as well as reflectively interpreted.⁶ Hence the puzzle about how the latter could have emerged in nature.

1.2 First-Person Authority

Our second puzzle concerns certain structured utterances that become possible only once language is already in place. So-called *avowals*, such as "I feel awful", "I'm scared of that snake", or "I'm really hoping he got my email", are spontaneous utterances involving *self-ascriptions of occurrent mental states*.⁷ On the surface, avowals resemble other sorts of claims in which some contingent state of affairs is reported or described. But avowals are unique in enjoying a kind of *epistemic security* not enjoyed by other claims. So, for instance, avowals contrast with third-person present-tense ascriptions of mental states (e.g., "She is in pain"), and with past-tense mental self-reports (e.g., "I was in pain yesterday"). Avowals also contrast with non-observational bodily self-reports (e.g., "I'm sitting down") and present-tense self-reports of psychological traits or standing dispositions (e.g., "I'm a patient person," "I like going to restaurants"). Finally, avowals contrast with *evidential mental self-reports* (such as ones made on the basis of a therapist's findings, or the judgment of a well-placed and insightful friend). Avowals seem to be made on no epistemic basis, yet they are typically taken at face value, and are rarely questioned. It seems out of place to challenge an avowal's truth, or to ask an avower to provide reasons or justification for her avowal. Indeed, avowals are taken to represent a paradigmatic case of *privileged knowledge*.

⁵ See, e.g., Burling (2005: 16), Fitch (2010: 392), Hurford (2007: 184ff.), and Tomasello (2008: 17, and *passim*).

⁶ See Anderson (2004: Ch. 2 and *passim*).

⁷ For simplicity, I here focus on avowals made in speech. However, the puzzle – as well as the solution I canvass later – applies to avowals made in speech *or* in thought.

How should these *epistemic asymmetries* between avowals and other ascriptions be explained? Why is it that a person's *present-tense, nonevidential* pronouncements on their *own, occurrent states of mind* are systematically presumed more authoritative, and are less subject to epistemic challenge, etc. than truth-conditionally equivalent pronouncements of even well-informed, reliable observers (as well as individuals' nonevidential reports on their own occurrent bodily states or past states of mind)?

According to simple *avowal expressivism*, although the surface form of avowals closely resembles that of ordinary descriptive reports, logically, semantically, and epistemically speaking they are more like natural expressions of sensations, such as moans and groans, grimaces, giggles, etc. Like these nonlinguistic utterances, avowals function directly to express, rather than report, ascribe, or describe, the mental states of the persons making them. This is what explains avowals' epistemic security. After all, it seems clearly out of place to ask someone grimacing in pain to give reasons or justification for the grimace or to question her being in pain. If avowals share (what Wittgenstein would call) 'logical grammar' with natural expressions, this would explain the epistemic asymmetries without requiring a mysteriously privileged form of introspective access, and without maintaining that the appearance of their special status is illusory.

However, if avowals do not involve genuine – let alone *true* – ascription of mental states to the avowing subjects, then they cannot have truth-conditional equivalents that *do* involve such ascription and with which they can be legitimately interchanged in certain contexts; and they cannot serve as legitimate premises in relevant logical inferences. Moreover, avowals, understood simply as alternative ways of grimacing, groaning, and so on, would also not qualify as articles of genuine – let alone privileged – *knowledge*. Understood this way, avowals would be absolutely invulnerable to error and incorrigible, as well as protected from epistemic assessment, but only in virtue of being excluded altogether (by their logical grammar) from the realm of linguistic meaning, judgment, and knowledge. In short, simple avowal expressivism explains the epistemic asymmetries by compromising notable *semantic continuities* between avowals and other ascriptions, and by assigning avowals *no* epistemic status.

1.3 Motivational Internalism

Finally, again in the realm of meaningful, structured discourse, consider an ethical claim such as “Charity is good”. Proponents of *internalism* in metaethics maintain that one who makes such a claim *competently* can’t be completely *motivationally indifferent* to charity; whereas one who makes the grammatically similar claim “Charity is common in the U.S.” can be. The view is that, in general, a person cannot competently and sincerely make an ethical claim without being somewhat motivated to act (or refrain from acting) in accordance with it. Although there is little consensus even among self-avowed internalists about the character and strength of the internal connection between ethical claims and motivation, they all agree that the connection is somehow ‘built into’ ethical discourse (and reflection) and the conditions on being competent with it.

Now, according to *ethical expressivism*, the internal connection to motivation can be captured by taking ethical claims to *betray* the relevant motivational attitudes. This enables expressivists to capture an internal connection to motivation without succumbing to obvious problems with ethical subjectivism. Instead of taking ethical claims to *report* the presence of the relevant motivational attitudes, as does the subjectivist, the expressivist takes ethical claims to *directly express* these attitudes. As Ayer put it: “...if I say, ‘Tolerance is a virtue,’ and someone answers, ‘You don’t approve of it,’ ... he would not be contradicting me, because, in saying that tolerance was a virtue, I should not be making any statement about my own feelings or about anything else. *I should simply be evincing my feelings, which is not at all the same thing as saying that I have them.*”⁸ And Ayer continues: “[W]hereas the subjectivist holds that ethical statements actually assert the existence of certain feelings, we hold that ethical statements are expressions...of feelings which do not necessarily involve any assertions”.⁹

⁸ Ayer (1936/46: 109, my emphasis).

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.109f. Note that the subjectivist could propose to understand ethical claims as synonymous with self-ascriptions of pro/con- attitudes *understood as avowals*, as opposed to descriptive self-reports. On the expressivist construal of avowals canvassed above, if “Tolerance is a virtue” is equivalent to, say, “I approve of tolerance”, understood as an avowal (rather than an evidential self-report), it should be taken as a direct expression of *approval*. The appropriate rejection of such expression would then come, not in the form of the denial that the speaker approves, but rather in the form of an expression of a contrary attitude (something equivalent to “I disapprove of tolerance”). Arguably, such a clash of attitudes could pass muster as a suitable replacement for rational disagreement in the realm of intersubjective coordination. This would have the result of, in effect, erasing the difference between the subjectivism and Ayer’s expressivism, thus blunting Ayer’s complaint against the former. However, *so long as it’s insisted that avowals*

It was precisely Ayer's view that (genuine and pure) ethical claims may not involve *any assertion at all* that led him to deny that (genuine and pure) ethical claims are truth-apt and to insist on a radically noncognitivist semantics for them, according to which ethical terms make no semantic contribution to sentences containing them beyond the motivational attitudes they serve to express.¹⁰ (On the emotivist view Ayer adopted, saying "Charity is good" is in effect equivalent to saying something like "Yay to charity!", or to "Charity!" uttered in an approving tone of voice.) In ordinary discourse, however, ethical claims exhibit undeniable semantic continuities with ordinary descriptive claims (just as avowals exhibit undeniable continuities with ordinary ascriptions). We often say things like "It's true that tolerance is a virtue, but it's also true that some things cross a line". Moreover, we embed ethical claims in force-stripping contexts, e.g.: "If tolerance is virtue, then one should raise her children to be tolerant" and "Either tolerance is a virtue or the doctrine of 'turn the other cheek' has no bite". The noncognitivist expressivist, it seems, is forced to explain away these appearances; and many philosophers have taken this to be the major stumbling block for ethical expressivism.¹¹

2. What Is Expression?

In each of the three cases just described, the appeal to expression is designed to fulfill a certain explanatory role: to bridge a seeming evolutionary gulf between the non-linguistic and the linguistic, in the first case, and to capture apparent epistemic asymmetries and accommodate a surprising motivational contrast *within* the linguistic domain in the second and third case. Abstracting from some details, the key reason for rejecting the expressivist proposal in each case is the observation that there is *too big a gap* between expressive utterances, on the one hand, and semantically articulate, truth-evaluable, descriptive, compositional sentences,

themselves are not truth-evaluable statements, we would still not get the result that "Tolerance is a virtue" and "Tolerance is not a virtue" amount to *contradictory* statements. See below.

¹⁰ On Ayer's view, the motivational attitudes all belonged to the emotional, or the *conative* side of the cognitive/conative divide (hence the epithet "emotivism").

¹¹ Perhaps the best-known version of this objection comes under the title "the Frege-Geach problem" (for some discussion, see Bar-On and Chrisman 2009, Bar-On and Sias 2013, Bar-On, Chrisman, and Sias, forthcoming, and Schroeder, 2008.) More sophisticated expressivist proposals have been made that attempt to address the problem, to which more sophisticated versions of the objection from semantic continuities have been raised. (For review, see Schroeder 2009.)

on the other hand. The underlying thought is that there is a fundamental incongruity between the expressive and the semantic domains. However, I submit that this thought relies on a certain implicit conception of the domain of the expressive. In what follows, I'll argue that this conception is misguided and sketch an alternative conception – one that draws inspiration from sources as diverse as Darwin and Wittgenstein, as well as more recent philosophical work on expression and empirical work on animal communication. Armed with distinctions that lie at the center of this alternative conception, we will be able to revisit the puzzles and offer more viable, *neo-expressivist* solutions to them.

2.1 A-Expression vs. S-Expression; Acts, Vehicles, and Products

The class of behaviors we ordinarily describe as 'expressive' spans a wide range. At one end of the spectrum, we have so-called *natural expressions*, such as cries and laughs, grimaces, and various gestures, where both the behavior and its connection to the expressed states are supposed to be due to nature. There are also mimicked or acquired facial expressions, sounds, or gestures that become 'second nature', such as shrugging shoulders or tut-tutting. Then we have *conventional nonverbal expressions*, such as tipping one's hat, giving the thumbs up, or sticking out one's tongue. (The line here is far from sharp; giving a hug, jumping for joy, stomping your feet, for example, all seem to fall somewhere in between, exhibiting both 'natural' and acquired elements.) Still in the conventional realm, we have *expressive verbal utterances* such as "Darn it!" or "Ouch!", "Sorry!", "This is great!" "I hate you!" and so on. We also find in the verbal domain utterances such as "It's getting late", which on an occasion may simply serve to express a thought that has occurred to one (as opposed to constituting an assertion, or request to leave, etc.), or "Oh for some rain," which would typically be taken to express the speaker's wish for rain. Finally, at the other end of the conventional side of the spectrum, we have *speech acts*, such as assertion, promising, or commanding, which are said to have the expression of certain mental states as part of their so-called felicity conditions.¹²

Still, we can discern the following commonality among the expressive behaviors mentioned so far: they all express *states of minds*. Following Sellars (1969), and for present purposes, we can focus on expression

¹² See Green (2007: 140-3).

as a relation that holds between performers of *acts* and the mental states these acts directly express: expression in the *action* sense, or “a-expression”, for short. A-expression contrasts with expression in the *semantic* sense (“s-expression”, for short), which is the relation that holds between linguistic strings, such as sentences and other symbolic tokens, and their semantic contents.¹³ Thus, for example, we say that the sentence “Snow is white” s-expresses the proposition that snow is white; of the word “charity” and its translations into other languages, we can say that they s-express the abstract concept of charity. A-expression, on the other hand, is something a minded creature does, be it through bodily demeanor, facial expression or gesture, or else through speech, using natural, culturally acquired, or even idiosyncratic expressive vehicles. Your dog, when he gets up and walks over to give you a lick, is a-expressing his affectionate feeling, nonverbally, of course. And when you give a friend a hug, or say “It’s so great to see you” (or alternatively, “I’m so glad to see you”), you a-express your joy at seeing her through an intentionally produced act, using diverse expressive vehicles.

This last example illustrates a general point. When one a-expresses a state of mind using a sentence token (or some other symbolic vehicle), the vehicle retains its symbolic meaning. “It’s great to see you” and “I’m so glad to see you” each have different linguistic meanings. Following tradition, we can take each to s-express a distinct proposition, in virtue of the linguistic rules governing the lexical items and the relevant mode of composition. What proposition? Well, setting aside some nuances about the context-sensitivity of indexicals, it’s most natural to say that the former sentence simply expresses the proposition that it’s great to see the addressee, whereas the latter sentence expresses the proposition that the speaker is happy to see her addressee. For all that, when producing tokens of these sentence types, in speech or in thought, one can be *a-expressing one’s joy*. Intuitively, a-expression is a more basic phenomenon than s-expression. It’s certainly more ubiquitous; nonhuman animals and prelinguistic children express states of mind through a variety of

¹³ I here set aside, for the most part, what Sellars (1969) calls (misleadingly, I think) ‘expression in the *causal* sense’ – e.g., uncontrolled facial expressions or gestures that reveal one’s state of mind. This is because the expressive behaviors relevant to my concerns here – avowals and ethical claims, but also (I’d argue) communicative expressive behaviors that are potential candidate precursors of linguistic expressions – belong in the realm of a-expression. These are *not* nonvoluntary or reflexive bodily happenings, but rather things that are *done by an individual* (as opposed to a subsystem, or module, within the individual), over which the individual exercises a certain kind of central, executive control. The individual is an *agent* doing things *as opposed to a mere patient* undergoing various processes. See Bar-On (2004: 216f., 249ff., 289, 315).

nonlinguistic means. They don't have at their disposal *linguistic, learned, or symbolic* vehicles capable of s-expression; but they are nevertheless capable of a-expressing their states of mind through *nonlinguistic, natural, nonsymbolic* expressive means (which is not to say that they are able to express nonverbally the same states of mind *we* express using language!).

(A word on propositions: to say that sentences express propositions is not to commit to any particular semantic ontology. 'Proposition' is used here as a relatively innocent stand-in for what is sometimes referred to as a (declarative) sentence's *literal* meaning: what a good translation of a declarative sentence into other languages aims to preserve, what serves to specify the content that diverse propositional attitudes can share (as in "John thinks but I only hope that the Democrats will win"), and what is invariable across sentences in different moods (e.g., "Is it raining?" "It's raining" "Let it be raining"). In particular, one can maintain that sentences in a given discourse express propositions, and can thus partake in logical inferences and stand in systematic logico-semantic relations to other sentences (and, in particular, can be embedded in negations, conditionals, intensional contexts, etc.), *without* supposing that the terms in the sentence refer to objects or properties.¹⁴)

Now, our first puzzle, about the origins of meaning, is, in effect, the puzzle of how linguistic vehicles of expression, possessed of symbolic, conventional, compositional meaning, could *emerge* out of nonlinguistic natural expressions. However, it's important to note – and relevant to our other two puzzles (regarding avowals, and ethical discourse) – that the emergence of such linguistic vehicles in no way supersedes the use of expressive vehicles (of whatever stripes) to a-express one's states of mind. Among linguistic creatures, a familiar process of acquisition and enculturation leads to the increasing use of more or less conventional means – intonation, gestures, words, and other devices – to give vent to present states of mind (making a disapproving face, thinking out loud, airing opinions, and so on). Distinguishing between expressive *acts*, or performances, on the one hand, and the expressive *vehicles* used in them, or (as I sometimes put it) the *products* of those acts, on the other, allows us to capture underlying action-theoretic similarities between expressing

¹⁴ I return to discuss propositions in connection with ethical expressivism in 3.3.1 below.

one's annoyance through a gesture, a facial contortion, a tone of voice, an inarticulate sound, or a full sentence, while still acknowledging significant differences. But, importantly, even once compositionally structured linguistic vehicles are in place, language users continue to engage in acts of giving vent to the full array of states of minds they possess – by no means only affective, or emotional states, but also cognitive states – using linguistic *as well as* nonlinguistic devices (more often than not using both). Equally importantly, in the case of expressive acts that use articulate linguistic vehicles, we can separate what a given sentence *s*-expresses from what mental states speakers use the sentence to *a*-express, on a given occasion, or even regularly. After all, as we saw earlier, two sentences with obviously different meanings can, on a given occasion, be used to *a*-express one and the same sentiment. (More on this below.)

2.2. Expressing and Showing

What makes a performance or act one of (*a*-)expressing? Consider first expressive behavior in our own species. Upon seeing a fluffy new teddy bear, little Jenny's face may light up; or she may let out an excited gasp, pointing at the teddy bear; or she may emit a distinctive sound ("Uh!"), or call out: "Teddy!" as she reaches to grab the toy; or she may exclaim: "Gimme Teddy!" perhaps with no reaching. Jenny's facial expression and her gasp are what we ordinarily think of as 'purely natural', unlearned expressions; her eager reaching and subsequent utterances are expressive behaviors she voluntarily – perhaps even intentionally – engages in, and which serve to give vent to her desire to get the toy. The same holds for adult language users. One can express one's amusement at a joke by laughing (where we may assume that, as product, the laughter – even if stylized, or deliberately exaggerated – does not *s*-express amusement, since there is no semantic representational relation between them), as well as by uttering a sentence such as "This is so funny!" (which does have a conventional linguistic meaning), or by saying "I find this *hilarious*". Using the earlier terminology, the *sentences* *s*-express propositions, but the acts performed using them are similar to those performed using nonverbal expressive means, whether acquired or natural; for the expressers use them to give vent to their occurrent states of mind. Similar expressive performances or acts, different products or vehicles of expression, with different etiologies.

But what holds the different performances together? An idea that takes its inspiration from earlier philosophical work on expression, including remarks by Wittgenstein, Ayer, and Alston, is that when an agent engages in an act of expressing her state of mind, what she does is *show* that state. The relevant showing is not that of a mathematical or logical proof (which conclusively establishes some result). It's also not the kind of showing that allows someone simply to see (or learn) *that* something is the case, as when deer tracks show a trained mountaineer that a deer of a certain size and weight, moving at a certain speed and manner, has been on a trail, or when a forensic expert can see that an examined wound was inflicted by a certain implement. The tracks and the wound are simply traces that can convey reliable and detailed information about their causes. By contrast, consider so-called 'natural expressions', which are often thought to be paradigmatic of expressive behavior. When confronted with an animal baring its teeth in anger, a child smiling in pleasure, a person raising an eyebrow, or even blurting out a snide remark, we regard the behavior as allowing us to *witness* how things are with the expresser. We often speak of *seeing* someone's anger, *hearing* the nervousness in someone's uneven voice and *feeling* the tension in someone's body, and so on. Natural expressions are plausibly thought to *make perceptible* the expressed states to observers who are suitably attuned. Naturally expressive behavior can display for a suitably endowed observer the *location* of a pain in the chest, as well as its *severity*; it can display rage, as opposed to panic, at a *specific* attacker, extreme or mild curiosity at a doll disappearing behind a screen, and so on. (Indeed, it's plausible to think that what renders states of mind perceptible through behavior is precisely the fact that the behavior exhibits the quality, degree, or object of the expressed state.)¹⁵

¹⁵ As we'll see below, not all (a-)expression is perception-enabling showing (see Bar-On 2004: 286ff.). But it's worth emphasizing that not all perception-enabling showing is expression. Suppose I point to my child's beaming smile so you can see how much she's enjoying herself. Though my gesture allows you to see a state of mind of my child – her pleasure – I haven't expressed the child's pleasure; *she* has (through *her* smile). Or suppose I roll up my sleeve to expose a sunburn on my arm, or I hand you a stethoscope so you can hear my heart-murmur. Here I do things that enable you to perceive conditions *I* am in. But I haven't *expressed* those conditions. In these cases, though, the behavior that allegedly enables perception of the relevant state is in no way typical or characteristic of *being* in that state. My (or anyone's) *pointing* to my child (or anyone's) smile is in no way part of what *in general* enables the perception of an individual's pleasure. (And, obviously, such 'third-party' pointing isn't part of anyone's *feeling* pleasure, unlike smiling, which is arguably a characteristic component of feeling pleasure.) Similarly, even if my rolling up my sleeve is what enables you in a particular instance to see my sunburn, my (or anyone's) rolling up a sleeve to expose the sunburn is in no way required *in general* for the perception of sunburns; indeed, in this case, *no* behavior is required. (There's a

Pioneering work done by psychologist Paul Ekman on human facial expressions, as well as more recent applications of it to nonhuman primates,¹⁶ support the idea that a suitably endowed individual *can*, for example, perceive an emotion such as anger, in the face of another, possibly by perceiving a *naturally characteristic component of it*, say, the baring of teeth, which foretells the animal's impending action of striking at the target of its anger, and perceiving, e.g. the state's target, through following the expresser's gaze – a capacity with deep phylogenetic roots.¹⁷ But this idea, I think, has application that goes beyond so-called natural expressions, which, as expressive vehicles, are unlearned or innate. Through a process known as 'ontogenetic ritualization', a baby chimp will learn to tap lightly on his mother's back, rather than pulling her down, as a way of showing his desire to climb on her back. And the mother learns to recognize what the tap shows. More or less similar processes in us humans lead to the acquisition of various culturally and even individually diverse facial expressions, vocalizations, gestures, and intonation contours – all of which can still be regarded as characteristic components (albeit acquired, and in that sense not 'natural') of (being in) the relevant states. This should be kept in mind when we turn to expressive behavior involving *linguistic* vehicles.

To express a state of mind is not *merely* to signal its presence, or to provide information about it, or simply to *tell one's audience about it*.¹⁸ It's not just a matter of the behavior's being apt to impart *knowledge* (as opposed to merely providing evidence) about the expresser's state of mind; it also has to do with the specific

completely 'external' relation between the behavior that enables you to perceive the state and the state shown.) For discussion, see Bar-On (2004: 264ff. and *passim*).

¹⁶ See e.g. work by Maestriperi (2011) and Parr (2011); see also Parr *et al.* (2011).

¹⁷ As an aside: Of course, on a given occasion, an animal can bare its teeth without being angry. This can happen for any number of reasons, and not necessarily because the animal is trying to deceive. In such cases, of course, the teeth-baring does not make the anger perceptible. Showing and seeing are both *factive*. But that doesn't tell against perception. Compare: We can see a tree by seeing a characteristic component of it – say, one of its branches – even though on occasion, if the branch were severed, we might be seeing the branch without seeing the tree. If the tree *is* there, attached to the branch, I can see it by seeing its branch. Likewise, if our animal *is* angry, we can see its anger by seeing a characteristic component of it. (A characteristic component need not be an *essential* component, nor do we need to suppose that being angry necessarily requires showing one's anger through behavior. So the present proposal can be divorced from logical behaviorism. Moreover, the proposal does not rule out the possibility of *expressive failures*: e.g., someone showing *sadness*, yet failing to show *her* sadness. For discussion, see Bar-On 2004: 240ff., 310ff., and 410ff.)

¹⁸ See, e.g., Alston (1965), and the earlier quotations from Ayer (1936/1946). If my neo-expressivist account of avowals is right, acts of avowing use vehicles that *say* (in the sense of s-expressing propositions to the effect) *that* the avower is in the expressed state. But even so, this doesn't mean that the *expresser* is using the relevant sentence (merely) *to tell* someone *that* they are in the state. See below.

way knowledge is imparted.¹⁹ This is not the place to develop a positive characterization of the showing involved in expressive behavior in a way that extends beyond the perception-enabling showing characteristic of natural expressions.²⁰ For our purposes, the crucial contrasts between expressing states of mind, on the one hand, and merely signaling, informing, providing evidence, or telling an audience about such states, on the other hand, can be put in *action-theoretic* and *epistemic* terms. On the expresser's side, the relevant contrast – to be explained by an appropriate theory of action – is between engaging in behavior that springs immediately from the expressed state of mind, on the one hand, and behavior that the agent engages in *only* for some specific reason, or with some specific (communicative or other) purpose in mind.²¹ On the observer's side, the relevant contrast is an epistemic one – between, on the one hand, behavior that affords direct recognition of the expresser's state of mind, and, on the other hand, behavior that can *only* be treated as mere observational *evidence* from which the state's presence and character can be inferred.

Thus, on the view of expressive behavior I favor, an individual engaging in expressive behavior is *showing – as opposed to hiding* – the presence and character of a state of mind she is in, *in the sense of making them directly recognizable* by suitably attuned receivers, using some expressive means. The expressive means themselves can belong to a wide variety; they can be acquired through transmission, enculturation, and even idiosyncratic experience. Importantly, they can include linguistic devices. But whether she uses a verbal or nonverbal means, whether the expressive vehicles used are innate or acquired, an expresser does not merely show *that* she is in the state (the way, e.g., someone's taking an aspirin can show that she is in some kind of pain, or someone's opening the window shows that she believes it to be closed, or someone's vivid memory may show him that he was in some state of mind earlier). And receivers of expressive behavior do not merely become able to know *that* the expresser is in a certain state of mind (something they can do in any number of ways, only some of which would take advantage of the expresser's specifically *expressive* behavior).

3. Expressive Communication: A Neo-Expressivist Approach

¹⁹ I thus here depart from Green's account of showing (2007), aspects of which I criticize in Bar-On (2010).

²⁰ For discussion, see Bar-On (2004: ch. 8).

²¹ For discussion of the relevant immediacy, see Bar-On (2004: chs. 6, 8).

Let us now turn to the application of my preferred conception of expression and expressive behavior to the puzzles with which we began.

3.1 Neo-Expressivism: Origins of Meaning²²

To begin with, how *could* the arational, communicatively nonintentional, semantically inarticulate, expressive behaviors of nonhuman animals give rise to rational, intentional, structured speech? In Darwin we find the idea that a key stage in the evolution of meaningful speech would have involved the production of songs that served for ‘the [musical] expression of emotions like love, jealousy, and triumph’. In a later, seminal work – *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) – he identifies expressive behavior more generally as representing an evolutionarily significant common ground between ‘man and animals’.

By expressive behavior, Darwin had in mind these sorts of displays:



To these we could add yelps, growls, wagging tails, fear barks and grimaces, lip smacks, ground slaps, food-begging gestures, ‘play faces’, copulation grimaces and screams, pant hoots, alarm, distress and food calls, grooming grunts, open-mouth and ear-flap threats, eyebrow flashes, and so on.²³ Such behaviors are standardly described by philosophers, as well as ethologists, biologists, and theorists of language evolution, as purely reflexive and merely ‘affective’, meaning that they are nonvoluntary displays that are directly tied to and betray animals’ affective states. Such displays are contrasted with behaviors that are produced with some *communicative intention* and designed by producers to provide a designated audience with some information. Paradigmatic natural expressions are regularly assimilated to mere physiological symptoms, such as red spots on the skin and sneezes, or to unintentional displays that merely convey information about biologically

²² Materials in this section overlap parts of Bar-On (2013) and forthcoming.

²³ For some descriptions and analyses of facial, vocal, postural and gestural expressions, in addition to Darwin’s classic work, see e.g. Juan Carlos Gómez (1996, 1998, 2004), Leavens and Hopkins (1998), Hauser (1999), Pack and Herman (2006), and Cheney and Seyfarth (2007). (Note that at least some of the behaviors on the list can be plausibly characterized as only expressing in (Sellars’) ‘causal’ sense. See footnote 13.)

significant features of the displayer (like a peacock's tail), or to simply reliable *natural signs* of the internal states that regularly cause them.²⁴

Now, Darwin himself provides a rather more nuanced characterization of animals' expressive behaviors – as being at once physiological and psychological, as linking bodily changes and movements intimately with complex, world-directed emotional states, and as being the product of specifically social evolutionary design.²⁵ With Darwin, I think that assimilating them to biological signals that merely convey information, of whatever kind, about a signaler or her environment fails to do justice to the richness and complexity of expressive behaviors.²⁶ Although naturally expressive behaviors aren't in general instances of intentional communication by expressers, they are not simply reliable indicators of their states of mind; this is part of what is entailed by saying that such behaviors *show* expressed states.²⁷ A dog's cowering demeanor upon encountering another will show to a suitably endowed recipient the dog's fear (kind of state), *how* afraid it is (quality/degree of state), *of* what it is afraid (the state's intentional object), and how it is disposed to act – e.g., slink away from the threat (the state's dispositional 'profile'). Similarly for canine play bows.²⁸ A vervet monkey's alarm call not only indicates the presence of, say, an aerial predator, but also shows the caller's fear *of* the predator, thereby *moving others* to act in a particular way so as to avoid the threat. These sorts of performances are Janus-faced: they point *inward* – to the animal's expressed state of agitation, fear, anger, etc. – at the same time as they point *outward* – toward the object or event at which the state is directed. They also

²⁴ See, for example, Grice (1957), Alston (1965), and Bennett (1976). But see also, in the animal communication literature, e.g. Maynard-Smith and Harper (2003: ch. 7), Anderson (2004: ch. 2), and Fitch (2010: ch. 4).

²⁵ Darwin was arguing against an earlier work by Charles Bell (1824) that the expressive behaviors of human and nonhuman animals had shared ancestry (whereas Bell maintained that there were divinely created human muscles designed for the expression of uniquely human feelings).

²⁶ For the account of expressive behavior that follows, see Bar-On (2004). See also Green (2007) [but see also Bar-On (2010) for some reservations] and Bar-On and Green (2010).

²⁷ For relevant references and discussion, see Bar-On and Green (2010), Bar-On and Priselac (2011), and Bar-On (2013), and see below.

²⁸ For discussion of play bows, see Miklosi, Topál, and Csánvi (2003).

reveal the relevant behavior's cause or motivation at the same time as they foretell the expresser's impending behavior and move others to respond appropriately.²⁹

We can discern several dimensions in the communicative complexity of expressive signals: psychological, semantic, pragmatic. As suggested above, in contrast with automatic behavioral reactions and physiological symptoms, insofar as expressive signals (as we may call them) point to a relevant worldly object or state of affairs, they exhibit a *referential* dimension. As ethologist Peter Marler remarks, a bird's call coupled with "head-pointing or gaze direction" *specifies* "a certain object or point in space or particular group member".³⁰ Marler and others have suggested that animal calls are (as they put it) "both emotional and referential".³¹ In addition to their referential dimension, the various acoustic features of alarm calls (such as intensity and repetition) are often systematically correlated with the perceived level of predator danger³² -- its proximity, movement style, etc. Such acoustic features can be seen as forerunners of a *predicative* dimension of certain linguistic utterances. An eagle alarm call produced with high-urgency features is a bit like a distressed utterance of "Eagle *here!*", whereas a softer call is a bit like "Eagle *nearby*".³³ Inasmuch as expressive signals are keyed to objects and features of an animal's environment *as apprehended* ('psychologically filtered', if you will) by the animal, they contrast with automatic physiological reactions, and may be said to exhibit a measure of *intentionality* or subjective directedness, even when not produced intentionally. Though these displays are often not instances of learned or deliberate behavior, they go beyond merely instinctive or reflexive behavior designed to transmit information to designated consumers.

Indeed, despite the fact that (we may assume) expressive signals are not produced with elaborate communicative intentions, and their uptake is not dependent upon a rational inference or interpretive,

²⁹ For an early occurrence of the idea that expressive behavior shows what's within while pointing to what's without, see Tormey (1971: 27f).

The Janus-face character discussed here is different from the dual force ascribed by Millikan to 'pushmi-pullyu' representations; see Millikan (2004a, 2004b).

³⁰ Marler (2004: 176).

³¹ Seyfarth and Cheney (2003: 30).

³² See Manser, Seyfarth, and Cheney (2001: 55-57).

³³ See Cheney and Seyfarth (2007: 221).

metarepresentational mindreading, they form part of an intricate web of *minded*, *world-directed*, *social*, and *active* interactions. In contrast with perceptual and other, more passive states, which are also often said to exhibit intentionality, expressive communication embodies a certain dimension of *agency*. The production of communicative expressive behaviors are different from rote, automatic, instinctive, or reflexive behaviors, in that they can typically be brought under voluntary control, intensified or toned down.³⁴ Plausibly, such control foreshadows the sorts of intentional production of which humans are capable. Moreover, a creature giving behavioral expression to a present state of mind often shows designated receivers not only how he is disposed to act, but also how *they* should act or *what to do*. (For example, as an animal bows playfully, a like-minded witness will be moved to do likewise.) Thus, proper uptake of expressive communication typically requires more than the mere registration of the expresser's state of mind and its intentional object. Yet the active response can be entirely spontaneous, and grounded in empathy or contagion; it needn't be calculated or dependent upon a rational inference deploying an awareness of others' minds.

Expressive signals inherit their complexity from the complexity of the expressed states of mind. But note that to say that a state of mind exhibits complexity along several dimensions is *not* to say that it has recombinable *parts* or components that correspond to all the dimensions or aspects of complexity. (As Sellars helpfully observes, a single state, which may *not* have any distinct parts or components corresponding to referential or predicative parts of speech, may nevertheless have both a predicative and a characterizing function by virtue of its multiple *aspects* rather than its distinct *parts*.³⁵) The relevant psychological states could be understood as *non-propositional* action-guiding states (both affective and cognitive) that are *directed at* (or are 'about') certain environmental objects: noticing *w*, fear *of x*, anger/excitement *at y*, attending *to z*. However, these *prepositional attitudes* – as I've elsewhere referred to them – can be usefully regarded as prefiguring the

³⁴ There is considerable experimental evidence that the production of alarm and other calls, as well as other expressively communicative gestures, can be brought under control in all primates, many mammals, and even birds; there is also evidence of various flexible 'audience effects' in the production of calls in a number of species. (See Fitch, *op. cit.*, section 4.9.3, Snowdon 2008, and Bar-On 2013: Section 4.)

³⁵ To illustrate, suppose 'a' refers to a, 'b' to b, italicization represents something as red, bold font represents something as blue and one symbol being to the left of the other represents its being larger than the other. On Sellars suggestion, the complex symbol "***a***" shares the *prepositional* but not the *logical* (compositional) form of the sentence "Red a is larger than blue b". (See Rosenberg 2007: 105ff.)

propositional attitudes, rather than being purely ‘enacted’, wholly nonrepresentational states of ‘embodied’ organisms.³⁶ To the extent that expressive signals directly reveal distinct aspects of the complex states they express, they can be seen as foreshadowing *articulate, linguistic* vehicles, despite the fact that they, like the states they are used to express, lack composite structure.

We can think of animals’ expressive behavior as *designed by nature* (as opposed to individual intention or culture) *to show* the kind, degree, and object of *an expresser’s state of mind to a suitably endowed audience* (typically, conspecifics), as well as to *move the audience to an appropriate response* to relevant objects or states of affairs (perhaps via emotional contagion or empathy). Thus, as I’ve argued elsewhere, if our goal is to understand the emergence of vehicles capable of (s-) expressing propositional, compositional thought, we should focus on the informational richness, complexity, texture, and design of animals’ expressive behaviors, as well as on the social purposes for which they have been naturally designed (rather than, for example, on communicative intentions behind individual animals’ expressive acts).³⁷

3.1.1 Showing in Language?

Addressing the puzzle concerning expressive origins of meaning has led us to examine the nature of expressive behavior, and the kind of communication it affords. As regards this puzzle, my proposal has been that the domain of animals’ expressive communication is, after all, the appropriate domain in which to seek viable phylogenetic precursors of significant features of linguistic communication. The proposal can be seen to gain additional (if indirect) support from considering one productive paradigm of the acquisition of linguistic expressive vehicles in ontogeny. Recall little Jenny, eagerly stretching out her hand toward the toy. A parent witnessing her behavior may say: “*Teddy* – you want *Teddy!*” so that Jenny can next utter “*Teddy!*” as she reaches. (Note that we don’t expect to be able to locate the object of Jenny’s desire *in* the eagerly reaching arm. We recognize Jenny’s desire *for Teddy* in part by spontaneously following the direction of her outstretched arm.) Jenny’s acquisition of the word “*Teddy*” allows her to give more articulate voice to her

³⁶ Tormey, *op. cit.*, pp. 10f. speaks (somewhat misleadingly) of the ‘prepositional *object*’ of, e.g., being fascinated *by* centaurs as designating the state’s intentional objects.

³⁷ See Bar-On and Green (2010), Bar-On and Priselac (2011), and Bar-On (2013) and forthcoming.

specific desire for Teddy. The verbal articulation shoulders some of the burden initially placed on the nonverbal behavior to reveal aspects of the state of mind the child is expressing. We have here a familiar acquisition paradigm: the child produces non-linguistic voluntary expressive behavior and the adult offers a label for the intentional object or other aspects of the child's performance. As we take in the expressive behaviors of prelinguistic children, we say things like: "You're *scared*, aren't you?", "You want to *play peekaboo?*", "You're *so* happy to see *Lucy*", and so on. What the language-speaking adult is doing on such occasions is facilitating the child's transition to at least minimally linguistic behavior by passing on to her a new *expressive means* – a *linguistic* vehicle – for articulating aspects of the psychological state that are shown through the behavior.³⁸

Linguistic exposure, habituation, enculturation, and other social experiences enable expressers to integrate a wide variety of acquired ('nonnatural') expressive vehicles into their expressive repertoires. Although expressive vehicles acquired through such processes are not designed by *nature* for their expressive job, we can still think of them as having been designed to suit expressers' purposes through cultural, linguistic, or individual development and history. Consider, in the linguistic domain, the following small and varied sample of what we may call 'linguistic expressives', which form an integral part of any natural language like English:

- inarticulate interjections ("Oh!" "Ow!" "Ooh!" "Yeah!", "Yuk!", "Yum!", "Blah", "Ouch!", "Ugh!", "Huh?")

³⁸ This, I'd argue, can also shed light on some of the most successful language-learning protocols – of Gray Parrots, Chimpanzees, and Bonobos – and the acquisition by animals of human gestures such as pointing. It's at least in part because nonhuman animals are able to *show* their trainers some of their affective *and* cognitive states – what holds their attention, where their focus lies, what they want or need, whether they are bored, excited, tired, agitated, alarmed, and so on – that trainers are able to offer them appropriate labels that they can then incorporate into their expressive repertoires. For one especially striking example, consider Pepperberg's training of Gray Parrots (see e.g. Pepperberg 2002). Capitalizing on these birds' keen interest in various items in the lab, Alex (and later Griffin) were taught (among other things) to say "paper", "cork", "corn" – and later "want paper/cork/corn" to request the relevant items and label them correctly, as well the template "wanna x/y/z" (e.g. "wanna go back/eat") to make various action requests. The parrot's productions of English word sounds were not instances of rote, purposeless mimicry; they were goal-directed, novel, and referential. So they appear to meet standard current definitions of *imitation* (see Fitch 2010: 162).

- expletive words or phrases (“A-hole”, “Damn it!”, “What the heck!”, “Screw you!”, “He is a total sissy”)
- slurs and derogatory terms and phrases, which are often thought to have *some* descriptive content (“kike”, “kraut”, “moron”, “douche bag”, “piece of sh-t”)
- exclamations (“Super!”, “How cool is that!”, “What a jerk!”)
- intensifiers (“This house is *so* big!” “She’s *very/really* tall”)
- expressive adjectives, (“huge”, “enormous”, “tiny”, “gross,” “lovely,” “puny,” “pathetic”, “unbelievable”, “outrageous”)
- mental-state adjectives (“amazing”, “surprising”, “painful”, “boring”, “sad”, “tiring”, “annoying”, “disgusting,” “gross”)
- exclamationatives such as “What a fantastic performance that was!”, “How cleverly he dodges the ball!”
- adverbial modifiers (“She’s *amazingly* smart”, “He’s *surprisingly* quiet”, “*Hopefully/unfortunately* he won’t get there on time”)
- constructions such as “It’s amazing/sad/surprising that ...”, or “It’s painful/tiring/annoying to ...”.

As has been increasingly recognized in recent literature, proper understanding of the role of such devices requires appreciating their expressive dimension. On some views, it can potentially shed light on a hypothetical earlier stage of human language – so-called *protolanguage*. For, at least some linguistic expressives can be regarded as ‘fossils’ of nonlinguistic vocalizations or gestures that may have preceded language (phylogenetically speaking).³⁹ At the same time, linguistic expressives are more or less subject to phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic constraints that govern other linguistic constructions. As can be seen from our list, at least some linguistic expressives exhibit various similarities to items in so-called descriptive language, and are often seamlessly incorporated into it. This should be kept in mind when we turn, below, to

³⁹ See e.g. Jackendoff (1999) and (2002). See also Progovac (2009) and (2010).

examine two specific categories of uses of language that have been alleged to serve in the expression of specific types of states of mind – avowals and ethical claims.

In general, mastery of acquired expressive vehicles requires apprehending the link to the states of mind that are to be a-expressed when properly using them. Once such mastery is in place, however, both the *use* of these expressive devices to express the presence (and various aspects) of expressers' states of mind and their *uptake* by observers become second nature, and will typically not reflect their etiology. Their use is as spontaneous, uncalculated, and non-deliberate, and their uptake by observers as direct, as the use and uptake of natural expressions. And especially when it comes to specifically linguistic devices, expressive purposes can be accomplished without any nonverbal expressive accompaniments (even when they are used in print!).⁴⁰ When someone blurts out an expletive, or an exclamative, or makes a fully explicit snide remark, or a spontaneous comment on 'the passing show', we are put in a position directly to recognize what state of mind he is giving voice to, with the linguistic vehicles being used to articulate various aspects of the state.⁴¹ Thus, in creatures like us, some of the communicative role played by of the more 'visceral' showing and perceiving afforded by animals' growls, bared teeth, grimaces, and so on, is taken up by the competent use and direct uptake of linguistic vehicles.⁴²

3.2 Neo-Expressivism: Avowals' Security

Let's now turn to the case of avowals. On the expressivist view mentioned earlier, although they superficially resemble descriptive reports, avowals such as "I'm finding this disgusting" at bottom are, in all crucial respects, just like nonverbal expressions of the relevant states. The problem with that view, we saw, is

⁴⁰ An interesting case to consider, in this context, is the use of *emoticons*, which Wikipedia helpfully characterizes as follows: "An emoticon is a metacommunicative pictorial representation of a facial expression which in the absence of body language and prosody serves to draw a receiver's attention to the tenor or temper of a sender's nominal verbal communication, changing and improving its interpretation. It expresses - usually by means of punctuation marks - a person's feelings or mood ...".

⁴¹ Indeed, it has been argued in recent years that the best model for understanding ordinary use and uptake of language – and not just that of linguistic expressives – is that of perception, as opposed to propositional-inferential information processing. See e.g. Gallagher (2008), Recanatti (2002), and Pettit (2010).

⁴² Thus, to go back to our earlier discussion (in 2.2), as far as I can see, nothing in the transition to verbally articulated expression requires retreating to the idea that verbal expressions enable knowledge of expressed states *only* in virtue of speakers intending to be – and their witnesses interpreting them as – providing conclusive evidence for the presence of the expressed state.

that it purchases the epistemic asymmetries between avowals and ordinary reports at the price of the logical and semantic continuities between them. One *can*, however, account for the asymmetries between avowals and other claims without compromising any of the notable semantic continuities. Recall our earlier distinction between two senses of *expression*:

a-expression: in the *action* sense, an *individual* expresses her state of mind by engaging in some intentional behavior.⁴³

A-expression is a three-place relation: an agent A expresses mental state M by using expressive means E. (Giving a hug, shouting “You’re here!” in an excited tone, and saying, “It’s so great to see you” are all acts – each using a different vehicle – through which a person can express joy at seeing you.) This is to be contrasted with

s-expression: in the *semantic* sense, a sentence (in speech, or a thought-token) expresses an abstract proposition by being a conventional representation of it.

We can take the sentence “It is raining” to s-express the proposition *that it is raining*. The same goes for the sentence “Es regnet,” as well as the *that*-clauses of “Sheila thinks that it’s raining” and “George hopes that it’s raining” and the thought token *It’s raining*. Unlike a-expression, s-expression is a relation between meaningful tokens and their contents.

Now, like such other English terms as ‘building’, ‘painting’, or ‘peeling’, terms such as ‘judgment’, ‘statement’, ‘claim’, ‘report’, are ambiguous between a *process* or *act* of some sort – the *claiming*, or *reporting*, etc. – and the *product* of that act. To make the claim or issue the report “It is raining” is to perform an action of a certain sort; and what is produced by that action is a sentence-token.⁴⁴ It’s true that in making the claim, a state of mind gets expressed (presumably, the belief that it is raining). But in light of the distinction between a-expression and s-expression, we can see that it is the *person*, and not the *sentence*, that a-expresses the

⁴³ N.B.: To say that one engages in some intentional expressive behavior is *not* to say that the *expressing* is something one does intentionally.

⁴⁴ Or thought-token, if the claim is made in thought rather than speech. In what follows, we will drop this qualification.

belief. Sentences are simply not in the business of a-expressing states of mind.⁴⁵ Instead, sentences s-express propositions.

We can now return to avowals. The term ‘avowal’, too, exhibits the act/product ambiguity. In keeping with the expressivist insight, we can explain avowals’ special status in terms of the distinctive expressive character of *acts of avowing*. Consider, first, the intuitive contrast between acts of expressing a given state of mind and acts of merely *telling* about its presence. Anyone can say truly, and some can even tell reliably, *that* I’m feeling sad. But presumably only I am in a position to *express* my sad feeling – for example, by letting tears roll down my cheeks, or saying “This is so sad”. When you say “DB is feeling sad”, you are employing a sentence that s-expresses the proposition that DB is feeling sad, and, if you are sincere, you are a-expressing your *belief* that DB is feeling sad. My tears, on the other hand, s-express nothing, though my letting them roll down may serve to a-express the sad feeling itself; and my utterance “This is so sad” s-expresses a proposition that describes something as sad, but in uttering the sentence, one would typically be a-expressing her sadness.

What about my avowal: “I’m feeling so sad”? On the neo-expressivist account, avowals are different from evidential reports concerning states of mind (whether others’ or our own), in that they are acts in which we a-express *the very state that is ascribed to us by the proposition that is s-expressed* by the sentence we use. This allows us to explain *avowals’ security* (viz., the special presumption of truth that governs them), and the *epistemic asymmetry* between avowals and reports of the same states, but *without* compromising the *semantic continuities* between avowals and other statements. The contrasts hold *not* between *types of sentences with certain semantic contents*, but rather between *acts that directly express* one’s mental state and reports of that state, whoever produces them, and however reliably. Notably, the *sentence* “I am feeling sad” can be used by an individual not to *avow* her sadness, but rather to issue an informed evidential report about her psychological state, say, at the conclusion of a therapy session.

⁴⁵ Although at least in some cases one might be thought to express a state of mind in virtue of using a sentence that s-expresses a proposition that refers to that state.

According to avowal neo-expressivism, then, avowals considered as *acts* – like grimaces and groans – directly a-express the mental states avowed, and are consequently immune to epistemic criticism, requests for reasons, corrections, etc. Unlike in the case of evidential reports, it is inappropriate to question an avowal, to ask the avower to justify it, to correct her, etc. This is the source of the epistemic asymmetries between avowals and other claims. However, considered as *products*, avowals are importantly different from other kinds of expressions of the relevant states in that they are tokens that s-express self-ascriptive propositions. And this accommodates the semantic continuity between avowals (understood as products) and other sentences. At the same time, the strong presumption of truth governing avowals can be explained by noting that to take someone to be avowing e.g. feeling angry, or wanting some tea (as opposed to issuing an evidential report on their state of mind) is to take them to be directly (a-)expressing the avowed state – the very state whose presence and character would make true the self-ascription that is (s-)expressed by the avowal understood as product.⁴⁶

3.3 Neo-Expressivism: Ethical Discourse and Motivation

What do things look like when we turn to the ethical case? We should keep in mind that the distinction between a-expressing and s-expressing, and between acts of expressing and their products, applies across all areas of discourse, and regardless of what semantic, epistemological, or metaphysical analysis we adopt for the relevant domain. For, regardless of the particular domain with which one is concerned, it will be the case that the expression relation between individuals, their mental states, and some expressive vehicle (that is, a-expression) is fundamentally different from the expression relation that holds between meaningful tokens and their contents (that is, s-expression). And, of course, *the act of making a claim* – again, regardless of what the claim happens to be about – is something different from what is produced by the act, namely, a sentence- (or thought-) token.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For a full development of this account see Bar-On (2004: chs. 5-8). (Ch. 9 discusses the status of avowals as articles of *knowledge*.)

⁴⁷ In cases where nonlinguistic vehicles are used, we can think of the product as a token of a type of facial contortion, bodily gesture, (unstructured) vocalization, and so on.

Now, in contrast with the case of avowals, in the case of ethical claims, the sentences produced are understood as s-expressing *non-self-ascriptive* propositions. That is, we are *not* supposing, with subjectivism, that an ethical claim such as “Murder is wrong”, understood as product, is synonymous with – or has the same semantic content as – a self-ascription of a motivational state, e.g.: “I disapprove of murder”. Our question is how to explain the *motivational contrast* between such a claim and an ordinary descriptive claim such as “Murder has been on the rise in Philadelphia”. Elsewhere,⁴⁸ I have proposed to treat the ethical case on a partial analogy with the neo-expressivist treatment of avowals just summarized. According to avowal neo-expressivism, we saw, the epistemic asymmetry between avowals and (even self-)reports is due to the fact that in acts of avowing one gives direct vent to the very state that the token produced self-ascribes. The token produced (be it an uttered sentence or a thought), however, s-expresses a truth-evaluable self-ascription (it’s true iff the avower is in the self-ascribed state of mind.) By analogy, *ethical neo-expressivism* maintains that the motivational contrast between ethical discourse and ordinary descriptive discourse can be captured by appeal to the expressive character of *acts* of making ethical claims (whether in speech or in thought). Another way of putting this: the proposal is to explain the motivational contrast between ethical claims and ordinary descriptive claims by appeal to the idea that ethical claims – understood as *acts* – are ‘in the business of’ a-expressing motivational states (whatever those turn out to be, according to our best moral psychology). However, ethical claims understood as *products* can still be seen as s-expressing truth-evaluable propositions. For present purposes, these propositions can be specified disquotationally; so, for example, e.g., “Murder is wrong” will be taken to s-express, quite simply, the proposition that murder is wrong. (So there is no presumption that a semantic analysis of ethical claims should – or could – yield a paraphrase in some preferred vocabulary that captures the literal meaning of such claims in other terms.) And this explains why

⁴⁸ Bar-On and Chrisman (2009), Bar-On and Sias (2013), Bar-On, Chrisman, and Sias (forthcoming).

ethical claims that use indicative sentences behave in the same ways (logically and grammatically) as ordinary descriptive claims.⁴⁹

So, armed with the right distinctions, we can retain a key expressivist idea – that engaging in ethical discourse and reflection involves expressing the very attitudes that motivate and explain our actions – while avoiding a host of difficulties that beset traditional expressivism (as well as some developments of it). Where traditional expressivists have erred is in thinking that the expressive function of ethical claims is somehow executed through the linguistic *meanings* of ethical sentences. To use Ayer’s example, when one affirms that tolerance is a virtue (in speech or in thought), one produces a sentence- or thought-token that employs an ethical term (or concept); the token can be said to s-express a true or false proposition. However, as with avowals, what is s-expressed does not automatically settle what mental state is characteristically a-expressed by acts of making the claim. The neo-expressivist suggests that ethical utterances serve to a-express the very same states – whatever those are – whose presence is required for understanding the perceived motivational force of such utterances.⁵⁰

One reason for resisting forging the link to motivation through the literal meaning of ethical claims (as do traditional ethical expressivists) is that so doing entails that it is *conceptually impossible* for someone to issue an ethical claim without being motivated to act (or refrain from acting) in accordance with it. A virtue of ethical neo-expressivism is that it can capture the alleged internal connection to motivation without having this implication. Consider again the case of avowals. On the neo-expressivist view, it is *not* conceptually

⁴⁹ It’s a separate issue – to be handled by the *metaphysics* of ethics – to determine what, if any, conditions must obtain in the world for ethical sentences to be true or false, or what, if any, properties are designated by ethical terms. (See below.)

It is consistent with the present proposal to maintain that a complete semantic analysis of sentences containing ethical terms such as ‘good’, or ‘ought’, can go beyond the disquotational pairing up of sentences with propositions. For an illuminating proposal, see Pettit (unpublished ms.). The key point is to deny that such an analysis must provide an analytic paraphrase of some sort, involving lexical decomposition of the relevant terms, or spelling out (nondisquotationally) necessary and sufficient conditions, for example. It is also to deny that there is anything in linguistic use of these terms *as such* that warrants treating *all* sentences in which they occur as non-truth-conditional.

⁵⁰ Thus, neo-expressivism does not purport to settle the question *which* psychological states qualify as motivational. Humeans will insist that they must be noncognitive; others may demur. Moreover, even if one sides with the Humeans, and insists that one who makes an ethical claim is a-expressing a noncognitive motivational attitude, it’s still possible to allow that one is *also* a-expressing a *belief* whose content is given by the proposition that is s-expressed by the sentence used. For some discussion, see Bar-On and Chrisman (2009).

impossible to issue a self-ascription of a state of mind and yet fail to be in the self-ascribed state. However, it is a *propriety condition on acts of avowing* that one is in the self-ascribed mental state. If one issues a mental self-ascription in the absence of the state, one is violating this propriety condition.⁵¹ A parallel account is available in the case of ethical claims. Someone who is making an *ethical claim* (as opposed to producing a descriptive report on some state of affairs) is a-expressing the relevant motivational attitude – the very attitude whose presence would explain why she is suitably motivated. Even if it’s not conceptually impossible for someone to make an ethical claim without having the relevant attitude, having the attitude can be seen as a *propriety condition* on making ethical claims. So someone who makes the claim while lacking the attitude is violating a propriety condition on acts of ethical claim making. And adequate mastery of ethical discourse and ethical concepts requires grasp of this propriety condition.⁵²

As Ayer already saw,⁵³ the expressivist insight is best captured *without* supposing that the vehicles used in making ethical claims s-express propositions that self-ascribe those states. (So it’s important to re-emphasize that the neo-expressivist is *not* construing ethical claims as themselves avowals!) If motivational internalism is right, then ethical claims are ‘in the business of’ expressing, specifically, motivational attitudes. But this is *not* because those making such claims issue reports *that* they have the relevant attitudes; but neither is it because the attitudes constitute part of the literal meanings of ethical sentences in some other way. Rather, it’s because in *issuing* an ethical claim a person gives voice to the relevant attitude. The neo-expressivist makes room for regarding ethical claims as being truth-evaluable, and thus capable of participating in logical inferences, embeddable in negation and other truth-functional contexts, etc. This is possible, because ethical claims *understood as products* can be seen to s-express true or false propositions. More broadly, ethical neo-expressivism denies an assumption shared by traditional expressivists and their opponents, namely: the assumption that expressivism requires locating the expression of motivational

⁵¹ This can happen in a number of different sorts of cases, resulting in a variety of *expressive failures*. For detailed discussion, see Bar-On (2004: 320-336).

⁵² In Bar-On and Chrisman (2009), it is argued that this provides resources for capturing a fairly strong “internal” connection between ethical claims and action, as well as providing a more nuanced array of diagnoses of different ways the connection between making an (apparently) ethical claim and motivation can be broken.

⁵³ Ayer (1936/1946: 104-8).

attitudes in the literal semantics of the relevant discourse – i.e., in the linguistic meanings of sentences used to make claims in that discourse (or in the semantic content of ethical thoughts). Instead, neo-expressivism maintains that the relevant expression occurs in *acts* of making ethical claims – in their *use* or function to (a-) express motivational attitudes.

3.3.1 Expression for Expressivists⁵⁴

Ethical expressivists have traditionally taken themselves to be offering a view about the *semantics* of ethical sentences. On this view, the meanings of ethical sentences, in contrast with the meanings of ordinary declarative sentences, are to be given *not* in terms of propositions but instead in terms of the attitudes they express. But it has proved difficult to provide a systematic ‘expressivist semantics’ for logically complex sentences with mixed ethical and non-ethical parts. In response, some expressivists have proposed an “ideationalist” conception of meaning on which *all* sentences mean what they do in virtue of the ‘idea’ (read: mental state type) that they express.⁵⁵ If I am right, however, on a proper conception of expression, which utilizes the distinction between a- and s-expression, and on a suitably modest understanding of propositions, this wholesale replacement of traditional semantics by an ideationalist semantics may be unnecessary.

There are powerful reasons for accepting the traditional propositionalist framework embraced by neo-expressivism. For one thing, accepting that sentences s-express propositions provides us with a natural explanation of how a sentence in one language can be a good translation of another sentence in another language—namely, because they both express the same proposition. For another thing, the propositionalist framework provides a nice explanation of how it is that a single declarative sentence (e.g., “It’s sunny in Tel Aviv”) can be used to articulate the object of a wide variety of (propositional) attitudes (e.g., *hoping* vs. *suspecting* vs. *imagining* etc. that it’s sunny in Tel Aviv): the declarative sentence expresses the same proposition that is the object of the relevant attitudes. And finally, accepting that sentences in a given area of discourse

⁵⁴ Thanks to Steven Gross and Nick Tebben for questions that led to the addition of this section. For fuller discussion, see Bar-On and Chrisman (2009), Bar-On and Sias (2013), and Bar-On, Chrisman, and Sias (forthcoming).

⁵⁵ See e.g. Ridge (2006a, 2006b), and for relevant discussion, see Richard, this volume.

express propositions allows one to account relatively easily for the various logico-semantic continuities between those and other claims, as illustrated earlier with respect to avowals.

Now, one of the roles traditionally assigned to propositions is that of *being bearers of truth-value* (or, determining the truth-conditions of the sentences that express them). But if this is combined with a metaphysically inflated conception of truth, it looks as if anyone who believes that claims in a given area of discourse express propositions thereby commits herself to the belief that there are *ways the world might be* that would *make* the relevant propositions true—i.e., some set of facts or properties. Historically, many philosophers have been drawn to expressivism in ethics in good part because it seemed to allow them to avoid a commitment to (what they see as) “spooky,” irreducibly normative ethical facts or properties, *while also* avoiding the error theorist’s conclusion that ethical claims are deeply and systematically flawed.⁵⁶ But if one allows – as does neo-expressivism – that ethical claims (s-)express propositions, but still wants to deny that there are ethical facts or properties, it looks as though one will no longer be able avoid error theory.

However, it seems to me that one can adopt a propositionalist semantics for the above-mentioned reasons (and perhaps others) without having to take a side on such matters as the nature of truth or truth-conditions, or the appropriate metaphysics for this or that area of discourse – e.g., avowals, ethical claims, etc. (Note that none of the reasons in favor of propositions mentioned earlier trade on a correspondence conception of truth, or a construal of truth-conditions as ways the world might be, etc.) On a plausible conception of semantics, its proper job is not to ‘carve nature at its joints’; rather, its role is to systematize our understanding of such things as sameness of meaning across different languages, consistency of content across force-stripping contexts, and the like. Allowing that ethical claims s-express propositions, then, is something theoretically *prior* to settling on the correct metaphysics for ethical discourse. (Indeed, it is even

⁵⁶ It is helpful to separate, in this connection, various strands in what draws philosophers to expressivism in various domains. In particular, even as regards traditional expressivism, it’s perfectly reasonable to separate the *positive expressivist* strand – i.e., the idea that claims in a given domain function to express a distinctive (noncognitive) type of mental state or attitude – from the *negative ontological* strand – i.e., the idea that there are no properties for terms in the relevant domain to denote (or facts for claims in the relevant domain to report or describe). See Bar-On and Sias (2013: Section 2).

different from admitting that ethical terms *refer*.⁵⁷) Whether or not the propositions s-expressed by claims in some area of discourse have ontologically problematic truth-makers is a matter to be settled by metaphysicians, not semanticists; accepting that claims in a given discourse (s-)express truth-evaluable propositions does not yet settle the metaphysical question what in the world *renders* those claims true or false.

Consider: we can accept that the sentence “That joke is funny” expresses the proposition that [a particular joke] is funny. But to say this is not to settle on an ontology in which ‘funny’ designates a *sui generis* irreducible property, nor does it tell us what in the world (if anything) makes it true that something is funny. By the same token, however, there is no reason to expect that knowing what proposition a sentence expresses suffices for knowing what in the world makes it true. A competent speaker of English will know that, e.g., “John loves Mary” has the literal meaning – expresses the proposition that – well, John loves Mary. A proper semantic analysis may yield an account of how the proposition (s-)expressed is a systematic function of the semantic values of the parts of the sentence and how these are composed in its logical form. It may (if one adopts an inferential semantics) reveal various inferential relations that reflect competent speakers’ understanding of the sentence. (Thus, it needn’t be supposed that the job of a semantic theory is exhausted by providing a disquotational specification of s-expressed propositions.⁵⁸) At the same time, it shouldn’t be supposed to be part of its job to offer a substantive characterization (in the form of an analytic paraphrase) of the conditions that must obtain for the sentence to be true.⁵⁹

If the expressivist intuition regarding ethical claims is right, a speaker who claims “What John did is good/bad” or “Mary ought/not to help her aunt” *ipso facto* gives voice to an appropriate motivational state. If motivational internalism is right, that’s an essential part of what renders her claim an ethical claim. *As such*,

⁵⁷ For reasons discussed in Bar-On (2004: 233ff.) and Bar-On (2012), the neo-expressivist about avowals will want to admit that mental state terms refer. But ethical neo-expressivist leaves open that there may be reasons to deny that ethical terms refer.

⁵⁸ See footnote 50 above.

⁵⁹ Relatedly, on pain of strong commitment to verificationism, it should not be assumed to be part of the semantic competence of the average English speaker to be able (even tacitly, or in principle) to offer such paraphrases. Note that, to insist that semantic analysis should adhere to ontological innocence is only to say that it cannot be expected to tell us what *in reality* sentences in any given domain are *about* (beyond disquotational specification).

this is not yet to say anything about the existence or status of ethical facts or properties.⁶⁰ As I've explained here, ethical *neo*-expressivism preserves this ontological neutrality, despite its assertion that ethical claims (as products) s-express propositions. But, as I've also explained, by itself the latter assertion is consistent with embracing ethical anti-realism (as many expressivists do). Thus if there are reasons for those inclined toward expressivism in ethics to resist the neo-expressivist account of motivational internalism, worries about its commitment to unwanted ontological baggage need not be among them.

4 From Showing to Telling and Back Again

Let us briefly take stock. Addressing our first puzzle, regarding expressive origins of meaning, has led us to examine the nature of so-called natural expressions, of the sort we share with many nonhuman animals and with our younger selves. Natural expressions, I suggested, encompass behaviors that are *naturally* designed to betray, or show creatures' states of mind, enabling suitably placed others to perceive the expressed states. As vehicles, natural expressions are not symbolic, and they *do not* s-express propositions. But, as explained earlier, they can exhibit various degrees of what we may call 'proto-propositional' structure, in virtue of showing various aspects (object, degree, quality) of the expressed states. Understood in these terms, the task of theorizing about the emergence of meaningful speech is the task of explaining how complex yet semantically inarticulate expressive vehicles used by nonlinguistic creatures to a-express their states of mind become increasingly more articulate, and begin to take on semantic life of their own.

However, and relevant to the other two puzzles (concerning avowals and ethical claims), as noted earlier, even once language is in place, with a full suite of expressive vehicles that do s-express individual concepts and structured propositions 'all on their own', it remains to be determined what speakers *do* with such vehicles – what states of mind they a-express when using various linguistic vehicles. This is not a question that gets automatically answered by pairing up words and sentences with their linguistic meanings. For, as we saw, a speaker may use sentences with different such meanings ("It's so great to see you", "I'm so glad to see you") – as well as use nonlinguistic means (such as giving a hug) – to a-express the same state of

⁶⁰ So, to repeat, even traditional expressivism has always been – strictly speaking – neutral with respect to the realism/anti-realism debate in ethics (though, of course, nearly all expressivists have also been anti-realists).

mind. Equally, a single sentence (“I am feeling sad”) could be used to express the sad feeling – as when one uses it to *avow* – or to express one’s evidence-based self-belief – as when one merely affirms something of which a therapist has convinced him. Moreover, some sentences can be thought to wear on their linguistic sleeve, as it were, the state of mind that uttering them is designed to betray. Avowals are a case in point. Other sentences – like one word expletives or exclamations, sentences containing slurs, and (if ethical neo-expressivism is right) ethical sentences – do not transparently reveal what states they are designed to a-express. But in this, they are not so different from, e.g., nonlinguistic gestures and tones of voice that are acquired through enculturation.

As remarked earlier, in linguistic creatures, verbal articulation of aspects of expressed states of mind rapidly becomes second nature. Very young children in the process of acquiring expressive linguistic vehicles are known to muse aloud, often with accompanying facial expressions and bodily gestures – giving vent to all manner of things currently on their mind (as opposed to using their words simply to make requests of someone, for example); when doing so, they are in effect *thinking out loud* – about what they want, wish for, are scared of, pleased about, and so on. (The same is true of adults who are not interested in – or are unable to – hide, or suppress, what’s on their mind at a given moment.) At least in some cases, verbal articulation can itself constitute an (acquired) *characteristic component* of the relevant occurrent states. For one pertinent example, the articulation (in speech or in thought) of a thought’s content is constitutive of *having* a passing thought with that content; and the articulation of a proposition endorsed – or even just hypothetically considered – can plausibly be seen as an acquired characteristic component of occurrent judging. And in expressive performances that use fully articulate, self-ascriptive vehicles – as when someone spontaneously says: “I feel absolutely awful about what I just did” – the verbal articulation can supplant (as well as augment) all *nonverbal* behavior (including tone of voice) that shows the expressed state. In these and other ways outlined in this paper, language use emerges as importantly continuous with nonlinguistic expressive communication, diachronically speaking, and intertwined with it, synchronically speaking.

Now, earlier on, I suggested that rejections of expressivist solutions to the three puzzles discussed in this paper have been informed by a certain implicit – and impoverished – conception of the domain of the

expressive. My deeper concern, however, goes beyond reinstating expressivist solutions to the puzzles. The alternative conception I have sketched here of the role expression plays in *both* the emergence of meaningful speech (whether in phylogeny or in ontogeny), *and* in the use of meaningful speech by linguistic creatures, is designed to give the lie to the idea that there is a sharp separation to be found between the expressive and the semantic domains. For when we look at nonlinguistic expressive communication, on the one hand, and at language development and its ordinary use, on the other, we find the expressive and the semantic to be intertwined and integrated. The expressive behaviors of many nonlinguistic animals, and those of prelinguistic children, are social, *communicative* behaviors, with discernible proto-semantic and proto-pragmatic dimensions, while paradigmatically *linguistic* behaviors themselves have important expressive dimensions (avowals and ethical discourse being but special cases of the much broader phenomenon). Neither type of behavior falls neatly into the envisaged mutually exclusive categories of, respectively, the *purely expressive* – which is wholly natural, driven solely by passions and needs, and is stimulus-bound, reflexive, merely responsive, and non-symbolic – on the one hand, and the *properly semantic* – which is governed by convention, reason-based, intentional, flexible, reflective, and symbolic – on the other hand. This long-standing sharp separation is one that – with proper understanding of expression and expressive behavior – we should be able to let go.⁶¹

⁶¹ Thanks to Mitch Green, Peter Hanks, Davis Kashtan, Bill Lycan, Nicholas Tebben, and especially to Steven Gross, Joëlle Proust, Jim Sias, and Carol Voeller, for comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Thanks also to audiences at the Central APA, New Orleans 2013, and the HUJI/UNC workshop on Mind, Language, and Logic, Jerusalem 2013, for helpful discussions.

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