VARIETIES OF EXPRESSIVISM

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Abstract

After offering a characterization of what unites versions of 'expressivism', we highlight a number of dimensions along which expressivist views should be distinguished. We then separate four theses often associated with expressivism—a positive expressivist thesis, a positive constitutivist thesis, a negative ontological thesis, and a negative semantic thesis—and describe how traditional expressivists have attempted to incorporate them. We argue that expressivism in its traditional form may be fatally flawed, but that expressivists nonetheless have the resources for preserving what is essential to their view. These resources comprise a re-configuring of expressivism, the result of which is the view we call 'neo-expressivism'. After illustrating how the neo-expressivist model works in the case of avowals and ethical claims, we explain how it avoids the problems of traditional expressivism.

1. Expressivism Introduced

"*Expressivism*" designates a family of philosophical views. Very roughly, these views maintain that claims in the relevant area of discourse are 'in the business' of giving *expression* to sentiments, commitments, or other noncognitive (or nonrepresentational) mental states or attitudes, rather than *describing* or *reporting* a range of facts.[1] This view is a natural, attractive option wherever one suspects that there may not *be* a domain of facts for the relevant discourse to describe or report. Familiarly, to avoid commitment to ethical facts, the *ethical* expressivist suggests that ethical claims (e.g., "Gratuitous torture is wrong," "John did the morally right thing") do not serve to describe ethical properties of objects, actions, persons, or states of affairs. Instead, ethical claims simply give voice to specific types of sentiment, or commitment, or more generically to certain types of 'pro-' or 'con-' attitude. Here is a classic statement of the idea by Ayer:

> If I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money', I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'You stole that money'. In adding that this action is wrong, I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, 'You stole that money', in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks.[2]

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[1] Expressivism has traditionally been characterized as a view about the meanings of claims in a given area of discourse (rather than, say, as a view about the basic function or point of those claims). The present characterization is designed to make room for views that capture the essentially expressive character of claims in some area of discourse without committing to the idea that the very meanings of the claims are somehow given by the non-cognitive mental states that they express. (We outline such a view in sections 3 and 4.)

[2] Ayer 1952: 107. Often mentioned alongside Ayer in discussions of early forms of ethical expressivism are C. L. Stevenson (1937, 1944) and R. M. Hare (1952). Stevenson was apparently more open than Ayer to the idea that ethical claims are meaningful, allowing that ethical claims could have a unique sort of meaning that he called *emotive meaning*. Since the claim "This is good" is used to express approval, for instance, the claim itself must have something like the following meaning: 'I approve of this; do so as well'. Hare agrees with Ayer in denying that ethical utterances

Recent versions of ethical expressivism have been defended by, among others, Allan Gibbard and Simon Blackburn.[3]

Similar claims have been made about a number of different types of statements thought to be in some way philosophically problematic or puzzling. Austin, for instance, offered a seemingly expressivist treatment of *knowledge* claims[4]:

> … saying 'I know' is taking a new plunge. But it is *not* saying 'I have performed a specially striking feat of cognition, superior, in the same scale as believing and being sure, even to being merely quite sure': for there *is* nothing in that scale superior to being quite sure. Just as promising is not something superior, in the same scale as hoping and intending, even to merely fully intending ... When I say 'I know', I *give others my word*: I *give others my authority for saying* that 'S is P'. (1970: 99).

And more recently, Gibbard (2003) has suggested that *third-person* knowledge claims, of the form '*S* knows that *p*', should be treated as expressions. According to Gibbard's proposal, to claim that *S* knows that *p* is, roughly, to express one's willingness to rely upon *S*'s judgment that *p* – it's to *plan to rely* on it.[5]

Relatedly, Strawson offered an expressivist treatment on which claims involving the truth-predicate have no descriptive but only expressive function:

> The sentence 'What the policeman said is true' has no use except to confirm the policeman's story; but . . . [it] . . . does not say anything further about the policeman's story. . . . It is a device for confirming the story without telling it again. So, in general, in using such expressions, we are confirming, underwriting, agreeing with, what somebody has said; but … we are not making any assertion additional to theirs; and are never using 'is true' to talk *about* something which is *what they said*, or the sentences they used in saying it. (1949: 93).

More recently, Mark Schroeder has argued that expressivists ought to take the same approach to claims involving the truth-predicate as they do to other sorts of claims. In general, for the expressivists Schroeder has in mind, what 'p' means is to be understood in terms of whatever mental state counts as *thinking that p*. In the case of 'p is true', Schroeder thinks the expressivist ought to explain *thinking that p is true* in terms of being

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function to report or describe, but he does not share Ayer's belief that ethical utterances function to give voice to emotions. According to Hare, ethical utterances are to be treated as a species of *prescriptions*, and their meanings are to be understood in terms of what are now called satisfaction conditions.

[3] Gibbard 2003 (see also Gibbard 1990); Blackburn 1998 (see also Blackburn 1984).

[4] Austin's treatment may be better described as 'performative'.

[5] Blackburn (1993: 35-51; 1998: 318-319) suggests that, since knowledge claims are irreducibly normative, like other normative judgments, they should understood in expressivist terms – in terms of a certain kind of *endorsement* of S's justification. See also Ridge 2007 and Chrisman 2007. For a survey of epistemic expressivism, see Chrisman 2012.

committed to having certain attitudes toward other claims – specifically, claims of either 'p' or anything that *means that* p.[6]

Similar expressivist proposals have been made regarding aesthetic discourse, mentalistic attributions, probability claims, claims about what is funny, about causation, epistemic and other modals, conditionals, and even logical vocabulary.[7]

It's clear enough that expressivist views have been offered regarding diverse areas of discourse. But even with respect to a given area of discourse, expressivists may disagree on the precise character of *what* claims in that area express. Thus, an ethical expressivist need not maintain that ethical claims serve to express emotions, sentiments, or attitudes. She may instead maintain that, in making an ethical claim, one is expressing one's acceptance of, or commitment to, ethical norms – norms that tell us which actions are ethically required, permitted, or forbidden (see Gibbard 1990). An epistemic expressivist may similarly propose understanding knowledge claims as expressing acceptance of epistemic norms, which either entitle or don't entitle particular beliefs (see Chrisman 2007). Aesthetic expressivists may think that aesthetic claims express emotions, or some kind of pro- or con-attitude (following Prinz 2004), or they may instead think that these claims express states of pleasure or displeasure (following Hopkins 2009). An expressivist treatment of epistemic modals could have it that they express some degree of either *confidence* or *uncertainty* (Egan and Weatherson 2011: 14-15; Schroeder 2010: 218), or *habits* or *dispositions* of various sorts (following Blackburn 1993: 55).

Another dimension of heterogeneity in expressivist proposals has to do with the theoretical purpose to be served. In some cases, the expressivist proposal seems motivated partly (if not primarily) by a desire to capture an apparent connection between sincere utterances of claims in that discourse and non-neutrality on

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[6] Schroeder 2010b and forthcoming-a.

[7] For discussions of expressivist treatments of *aesthetic discourse*: Prinz 2004 and Hopkins 2009; *mentalistic attributions*: Bar-On 2004 and Chrisman 2009; *probability claims*: Logue 1995, Barker 2006, Price 2011 and Yalcin 2012; claims about *what is funny*: Gert 2002 and Dreier 2009; claims about *causation*: Coventry 2006 and Price 2011; *epistemic modals*: Schroeder 2010a and Yalcin 2012; *other modals*: Blackburn 1993: 52-74 and Price 2011; *conditionals*: Schroeder 2008 and 2010a; and *logical vocabulary*: Schroeder 2008. (Brandom 1994 and 2000 describes logical claims as *expressing*, but in the sense of *articulating* or *making explicit* inferential commitments that are implicit in other things we say. This notion of expression is different from the one at work when expressivists invoke a contrast between expressing beliefs and expressing other, noncognitive attitudes. Discussion of the relation between Brandom's view and standard expressivist views goes beyond our scope here. See Williams 2010.)

the part of the speaker in terms of attitude and motivation. Intuitively, someone who sincerely claims that "That comedian is *hilarious*," "What Joe did is *admirable*," "The committee's decision was *unacceptable*," or "That sonata is *beautiful*" is not being impartial about the subject-matter. Such claims seem directly to reveal the subjective attitudes of those making them. Furthermore, these claims, when sincere, seem to license certain expectations with regard to the speaker's behavior – e.g., we can appropriately expect her to commend what Joe did to others, to protest the committee's decision, and so on. And if these expectations are unmet, it seems, we are licensed to question whether the speaker really meant what she said. These features of the relevant discourses suggest that there is an intimate link between, on the one hand, spontaneous characterizations of things as attractive/repelling, amusing/boring, desirable/undesirable, etc., and, on the other hand, the attitudes of those who offer the characterizations toward things so characterized. The expressivist proposal purports to capture that link.

It is less obvious how readily expressivist treatments of labels such as "voluntary" or "must" can be understood along similar lines. For example, while it's quite reasonable to think (as suggested above) that claiming, "What Jones did is reprehensible" directly expresses an attitude of disapproval toward what Jones did, it seems rather less plausible that claiming, "What Jones said is true" similarly directly expresses an attitude of *any* kind. And whereas paradigmatic instances of claiming, "This show is so funny!" clearly seem directly to express amusement, it's very unclear how claiming, "A bachelor must be unmarried" can be said directly to express any sentiment, attitude, or commitment.[8] In cases of this latter sort, expressivism seems primarily motivated by the thought that construing the relevant terms as straightforwardly descriptive – as simply responsive classifications of worldly items – incurs unwanted ontological commitments, or is otherwise problematic. The expressivist construal is thus offered as a way of salvaging some distinctive content or use for the relevant terms, once the face-value construal is rejected. The same may be said for expressivist treatments of knowledge attributions, causal claims (e.g., "The window broke because the rock hit it"), or conditionals (e.g., "If it rains, then the picnic will be canceled"). Here too the primary motivation

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[8] See Blackburn 1993: 52-74. For a recent expressivist treatment of such uses of 'must', see Thomasson 2010. Thomasson has since come to prefer calling her view "modal normativism" (instead of the earlier "modal expressivism"), but as she explains, the view still makes the standard expressivist move of denying that the relevant discourse (in this case, modal discourse) functions to report or describe.

is the thought that a straightforward 'factualist' (or 'representationalist') construal of the relevant claims is not available, or is otherwise misguided.

Historically speaking, of course, expressivism in areas such as ethics and aesthetics was often *also* motivated by appeal to the inherent 'queerness' of the relevant facts.[9] Here too expressivists proposed to reject the naïve assumption that the target claims *even aim to* describe or report facts, and are straightforwardly true or false, since it is this assumption that seems to cause trouble. For, on the assumption that statements that purport to describe facts are true provided that the relevant facts obtain (and false otherwise), if one admits that ethical or aesthetic claims are in the business of describing or reporting, then one must either insist that they are systematically false,[10] or else welcome into one's ontology whatever entities are implicated by ethical or aesthetic facts.

Finally, in recent years, another dimension along which expressivist views can be distinguished has emerged, namely, whether the mental state expressed by claims in the relevant domain is *purely* noncognitive or some sort of *hybrid* mental state with cognitive and noncognitive parts. Historically, it was always assumed that these possibilities were mutually exclusive. But some contemporary expressivists have rejected this assumption, allowing that at least some claims express *both* cognitive and noncognitive mental states. For instance, according to Ridge's "ecumenical expressivism,"

> for any declarative sentence *p* in which 'required' is used, an utterance of *p* expresses (a) *an attitude of approval* to all and only actions insofar as they would be approved by a certain sort of advisor, and (b) *the belief* that *q*, where *q* is what you get when you take *p* and replace all occurrences of 'required' with 'such that it would be insisted on by such an advisor'.[11]

Pure expressivists maintain that claims in the relevant domain express only a noncognitive state; whereas *hybrid* expressivists maintain that the relevant claims express states that are both cognitive and noncognitive.[12]

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[9] See, e.g., Mackie 1977: 38-42 for a well-known articulation of this motivation in the case of ethics. And see Brink 1984 for some discussion.

[10] As Mackie and other 'error theorists' have done – see previous note.

[11] Ridge 2007a: 63-64; italics added.

[12] Hybrid expressivist views have received considerable attention in recent literature (see Boisvert 2008; Copp 2001, 2009; Finlay 2005; Ridge 2007a, forthcoming; and Schroeder 2009). Limitations of space do not allow us to discuss these views in any detail. If Schroeder (2009) is right, several of the hybrid views on offer are ultimately subject

So expressivist views vary according to

(a) the particular area of discourse to which they apply – e.g., ethics, aesthetics, knowledge, truth, and so on;

(b) the type of mental state that is supposed to be expressed by claims in the relevant area of discourse – e.g., emotions, sentiments, pro- or con-attitudes, pleasures or pains, confidence, uncertainty, commitment, etc.;

(c) the theoretical purpose(s) that they are meant to serve – e.g., accounting for the tight connection between sincere claims in the relevant area of discourse and a certain sort of attitudinal/motivational non-neutrality, avoiding unwanted ontological commitments, etc.; and

(d) whether they are pure or hybrid.[13]

In the next section, we separate several strands in expressivism, and explore some of the most significant problems it faces.

2. Expressivism Decomposed

We distinguish four different theses often associated with expressivist views, all recognizable from the discussion in section 1. With respect to claims in a given area of discourse D, expressivists have adopted:

1. A positive expressivist thesis (*attitude expression*): claims in D *function to express* a distinctive *noncognitive* type of mental state or attitude.[14]

2. A positive constitutivist thesis (*internalism*): to *count as* sincerely making a claim in D, a speaker must possess (a) the relevant mental state or attitude, (b) a disposition to have the relevant mental state or attitude, or at least (c) the belief that she has the relevant mental state or attitude.

3. A negative ontological thesis (*anti-realism*): there are *no properties* for the terms in D to denote, *or facts* for claims in D to report or describe.

4. A negative semantic thesis (*noncognitivism*): claims in D are *not truth-apt*.[15]

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to some of the same difficulties we canvass below. In a forthcoming paper, however, Schroeder outlines a view he dubs "relational expressivism", which appears to be a hybrid view, and which he thinks avoids some of the more serious problems that have faced traditional forms of expressivism (Schroeder forthcoming-b).

[13] Our discussion in later sections will suggest additional dimensions along which expressivist view may vary (and see footnote 28).

[14] For relevant characterization, see van Roojen 2011. Several contemporary expressivists would reject the *attitude expression* thesis so stated; they would insist only that the mental states expressed are *nonrepresentational*. For instance, Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons defend a version of ethical expressivism that they call "cognitivist expressivism." As the name implies, their view allows that ethical claims function to express cognitive states like beliefs, but adds that the "overall content [of the beliefs expressed] is not descriptive" (Horgan and Timmons 2006: 257). (Thanks to Matthew Chrisman.)

[15] Many contemporary expressivists reject this thesis as well. But insofar as they also embrace the idea that claims in the relevant domain express noncognitive *or* nonrepresentational states of mind, they incur an explanatory debt, viz., to account for the truth-evaluability of such claims. One way to go is to embrace *minimalism* about truth (see below for discussion).

Traditionally, expressivists sought to capture (versions of) all four of these theses at once without subscribing to either an Ayer-style view that claims in D are meaningless or the error theorist's view that claims in D are systematically false. And they assumed that the best way to do so was to suppose that the expression of noncognitive mental states or attitudes was somehow built into the *semantics* of the relevant discourse. Roughly speaking, the idea is that whatever mental states or attitudes are expressed by claims in the given area of discourse is what gives them their *meaning*. Many take this *ideationalist* conception of meaning to be more-or-less definitional of expressivism. As Gibbard explains,

> The term 'expressivism' I mean to cover any account of meanings that follows this indirect path: to explain the meaning of a term, explain what states of mind the term can be used to express. [...]

> The label 'expressivism' alludes to a way of explaining the meanings of statements in a public language. Holmes tells Mrs. Hudson, "Packing is now the thing to do," and we explain what he means by explaining the state of mind that he thereby expresses.[16]

(Hybrid expressivisms, too, take an ideationalist approach to meaning. For example, Ridge takes himself to be offering "a systematic and unified *semantics* for … normative predicates."[17]) If the *meanings* of claims in D are somehow given by noncognitive attitudes, that explains both (a) how it is that they function to express such attitudes (*attitude expression*), and (b) why it is that speakers only count as making these claims sincerely if they have (or are disposed to have) the relevant attitudes (*internalism*). Moreover, such a view nicely accommodates both *anti-realism* and *noncognitivism*, for it allows the expressivist to deny that there *are* facts for claims in D to report or describe, truly or falsely, while still preserving meaningfulness for claims in D.

However, expressivism in its traditional form ran into serious problems. For one thing, as pointed out by Crispin Wright, at least on *minimalist* conceptions of truth and truth-aptitude, all that is needed for a claim to count as being truth-apt is for that claim to obey certain (minimal) constraints.[18] And most (if not all) relevant areas of discourse include claims that satisfy these constraints. The sentences used when making

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[16] Gibbard 2003: 7, 75.

[17] Ridge 2007a: 63, italics added. However, in (forthcoming) Ridge presents his hybrid expressivism as a view in *meta*-semantics, rather than semantics—i.e., as a view about *that in virtue of which* claims possess their semantic contents, rather than a view about the semantic contents themselves.

[18] See Wright 1992: ch.1, and for a summary Wright 1996. According to what Wright calls 'disciplined syntacticism', the minimal constraints comprise "syntax-embeddability within negation, the conditional, contexts of propositional attitude, etc.-and of discipline: their use must be governed by agreed standards of warrant" (1996: 864).

ethical claims, for example, behave just like ordinary descriptive sentences syntactically as well as logico-semantically. They can be involved in logically valid inferences, they admit negation, embed in conditionals and in propositional attitude contexts, and so on.[19] If these features entitle the minimalist about truth and truth-aptitude to say of a claim that it is truth-apt, then the expressivist would have to give up noncognitivism, and offer a characterization of her anti-realism that does not appeal to failure of truth-evaluability.

Rather than seeing this as a problem for their view, some expressivists actually embrace the marriage of expressivism with minimalism about truth-aptitude that Wright proposes. If the expressivist adopts minimalism about truth-aptitude, then she might similarly deflate notions like *proposition* and *belief*. A proposition, she could say, is just whatever is expressed by a truth-apt claim; and expressing the belief that *p* is just a matter of sincerely making a claim that expresses the proposition that *p*. This is how some expressivists are supposed to be able to talk of such things as the truth or falsity of ethical claims, and it may give these expressivists resources for addressing issues of semantic continuity, which we describe below.[20] But marrying expressivism and minimalism in this way may raise other problems. The more successful the expressivist is in earning the right to enjoy all the trappings of realist talk, the less clear it becomes just what is supposed to set claims in the relevant area of discourse apart *semantically*, i.e., as deserving of a semantic treatment *different* from that provided by the descriptivist for ordinary descriptive sentences. In fact, if we deflate notions like *truth*, *truth-aptitude*, *proposition*, and *belief*, one wonders how we're supposed to then tell the difference between descriptivism and expressivism about a particular area of discourse.[21]

A related, but better known, problem is the Frege-Geach problem. Peter Geach, unsurprisingly, sets up the problem nicely: "A thought may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same

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[19] Wright groups these under the "Geach point" (Wright 1998: sec. 3, especially p. 31, see also Geach 1960).

[20] Simon Blackburn, for instance, has gone to great lengths to formulate a version of expressivism that he thinks earns the right to enjoy all the trappings of realist talk (see Blackburn 1993 and 1998).

[21] An anonymous referee has suggested that the difference between descriptivism and expressivism can be revived by taking them to be *meta-semantic* views, as opposed to theories of meaning for given areas of discourse (see footnote 17). Note, however, that while this makes room for *some* distinction, viz. at the meta-semantic level, it does not allow us to preserve the *traditional semantic* claim that sentences in the designated area of discourse have a different kind of *meaning*.

proposition."[22] The problem is that expressivists about a discourse D deny that sentences used to make

claims in D get their meanings by expressing *propositions*. If the expressivist maintains that these sentences

nonetheless do have meanings, and that they get their meanings from the noncognitive mental states they

express *when asserted*, then it is hard to see how sentences can carry consistent semantic contents across both

asserted and unasserted contexts. If, for instance, the meaning of "Tormenting the cat is wrong" is exhausted

by the disapproving attitude expressed when the sentence is asserted (or when it's used to make a claim), then

it is hard to see what the same sentence means when embedded in an unasserted context, such as in the

antecedent of a conditional, or as part of a disjunction. After all, surely, e.g., "Either tormenting the cat is

wrong or it is not" does not serve to express disapproval of tormenting the cat. So what could such a

sentence *mean* on the expressivist view?

Expressivists differ over the solutions they offer for the Frege-Geach problem, but one prominent

solution involves thinking of logically complex sentences like conditionals and disjunctions as *also* getting

their meanings from the mental states they express, and then conceiving of logical connectives not as

functions from propositions to propositions, but rather as functions from mental states to mental states.[23]

The meaning of "Tormenting the cat is wrong" is supposed to remain constant across both asserted and

unasserted contexts, then, because the attitude it expresses when asserted is precisely the same as the attitude

contributed by the sentence to whatever attitude is expressed by, e.g., the conditional into which the sentence

is embedded.

A further, perhaps more basic, problem facing expressivists is that of accounting for the apparent

semantic continuity between claims in the expressivist area of discourse and claims in other, non-expressivist

areas of discourse. As we noted earlier, ethical sentences behave just like non-ethical sentences syntactically

as well as logico-semantically. They can be involved in logically valid inferences, they admit negation, embed

in conditionals, and so on. Given these similarities in linguistic behavior, and given that ethical terms and

sentences embed seamlessly in 'mixed' contexts – i.e., contexts containing both ethical and non-ethical parts –

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[22] Geach 1965: 449. Geach refers to this as "the Frege point," noting that Frege was the first to make the point "clearly and emphatically."

[23] See Schroeder 2008b: 94.

there is really no good *linguistic* reason to single ethical claims out for special semantic treatment. If there is good reason to construe the meanings of ethical sentences – or sentences used in any discourse – not in terms of propositions, but rather in terms of the motivational attitudes they express, then, *by parity*, the construal should be extended across the board. That is, the expressivist should trade in her local ideationalism – i.e., an ideationalist conception of meaning localized to a particular area of discourse – for a *global ideationalism*.[24]

Indeed, this is roughly the direction that some expressivists have taken. But the move is problematic. Note that global ideationalism as a semantic theory is *revisionary* relative to the propositional-compositional semantics for declarative sentences that is familiar from the philosophy of language. Generally speaking, such wholesale semantic revisionism should not be undertaken lightly. Moreover, there are powerful logical and semantic reasons for invoking propositions as meanings of sentences that apply in areas where expressivism has seemed attractive – i.e., that a natural explanation of why two sentences are good translations of one another is that they express the same proposition; that propositions allow us to explain how semantic content can remain constant across a range of differences of force; and that propositions explain how it is that a single declarative sentence can be used to articulate the object of a wide variety of (propositional) attitudes. An expressivist who adopts a global ideationalist account of meaning incurs a theoretical debt: to offer a global semantic theory that rivals – and is fit to replace – the more traditional propositional-compositional framework. This is a tall order.

But perhaps the expressivist is not utterly without resources to provide a more satisfactory response. Go back to the Frege-Geach problem – arguably, a symptom of the deeper problem of semantic continuity. As we noted above, one prominent response by expressivists to the Frege-Geach problem was to insist that logically complex sentences like conditionals and disjunctions *also* get their meanings from the mental states they express, and then to conceive of logical connectives not as functions from propositions to propositions, but rather as functions from mental states to mental states. But we saw that, if this solution is supposed to

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[24] Compare this to what Schroeder calls the *parity thesis*: "I will be arguing that pure [ethical] expressivism needs to be understood as committed to holding that normative sentences bear the same relation to noncognitive attitudes as ordinary descriptive sentences bear to ordinary propositional beliefs. I will call this the parity thesis" (2008b: 89).

work for "mixed" sentences as well (i.e., complex sentences only one part of which contains a claim in the expressivist's area of discourse), then it represents but a first step toward sweeping semantic revisionism. (This is because, in order for the solution to work for these mixed sentences, the *other* parts of the sentences will presumably have to be given the same sort of semantic treatment that the expressivist gives to claims in her particular area of discourse).

However, Wright's discussion of the Frege-Geach problem points to an altogether different way out for the expressivist, and one that we think prompts a reconfiguring of the traditional expressivist line. Consider a sentence that is normally used to make an assertion: "It is raining." If one uses that same sentence as part of a conditional, or embeds it in any other 'force-stripping' context (negation, propositional attitude construction, etc.), it will no longer be used to make an assertion (though the sentence in which it is embedded may). This just means that from the possibility of embedding a declarative sentence in a force-stripping grammatical context we cannot infer anything about the illocutionary force that is standardly associated with it when it is uttered on its own. Given the familiar separability of force and surface grammar, this should come as no surprise. ("I'd like to know what time it is," for example, is a declarative sentence that is standardly used to ask a question, rather than to make an assertion about oneself.) Similarly, Wright explains, the fact that ethical sentences can be embedded in force-stripping grammatical contexts does not tell against the positive expressivist thesis according to which the standard function of claims in a given domain is to express noncognitive mental states or attitudes (*attitude expression*).[25] So, if there were a way for the expressivist to allow that claims in an area of discourse possess whatever semantic features enable claims in other areas of discourse to behave (logically and grammatically) in the ways that they do, while still maintaining that certain claims function to express noncognitive mental states or attitudes, then the expressivist might be able to solve the Frege-Geach problem without involving herself in sweeping semantic revisionism. (And, we think, solutions to some of the other problems that expressivism has faced would be

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[25] A related point worth considering, however, is this: The fact that claims of a given domain can be embedded so easily in force-stripping contexts may tell against the very notion of a *given domain*, and so may cause trouble for the expressivist in this indirect sort of way. For instance, "If he φ-ed, then he ought to be punished" seems like an *ethical* claim, but what about "If he ought to be punished, then he φ-ed"? And what about sentences like "It's either morally wrong to φ or it isn't"? (Thanks to Matthew Chrisman for this point.)

close at hand as well.) We think there *is* a way for the expressivist to do this, and it involves a rejection of the

assumption noted at the beginning of this section – i.e., the assumption that, in order to best capture all four

of the theses traditionally associated with expressivism, the expressivist must somehow locate the expression

of noncognitive mental states or attitudes in the *semantics* of the relevant discourse – i.e., in the *meanings* of

sentences used to make claims in that discourse.

3.   Expressivism Reconfigured

Consider ordinary *avowals* (as they're called), such as "I am in pain," "I'm wondering if John will

arrive on time," and "I'm afraid of that snake." On their 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"), or 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"). Although, avowals seem to be made on no epistemic basis, it also seems out of place

to challenge their truth, or to ask an avower to provide reasons or justification for her avowal. At the same

time, avowals are rarely questioned, and are taken to represent privileged (self-) knowledge.

Accounting for this epistemic asymmetry between avowals and other claims (which asymmetry often

comes under the label 'first-person authority') might be yet another theoretical purpose served by an appeal to

expressivism. An expressivist treatment of avowals has it that avowals are importantly similar to natural

expressions—like grimaces and groans—in that they function directly to express (rather than report or

describe) the mental states of the persons making them. And this explains avowals' epistemic security. After

all, it seems equally out of place to ask someone grimacing in pain to give reasons or justification for the

grimace or to question her being in pain. Here again, though, while perhaps nicely serving the purpose for

which it was invoked, a simple expressivist treatment seems unable to accommodate the *semantic continuity*

between avowals and other claims. If avowals do not involve genuine – let alone *true* – ascriptions of mental

states to the avowing subjects, then they cannot have truth-conditional equivalents that *do* involve such

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ascriptions and with which they can be legitimately interchanged in certain contexts, and they cannot serve as legitimate premises in logical inferences. (Moreover, avowals, understood simply as alternative ways of grimacing and groaning, would also not qualify as articles of genuine – let alone privileged – *knowledge*.)

One *can,* however, account for the epistemic asymmetry between avowals and other claims without compromising any of the notable semantic continuities between avowals and other ascriptions. Doing so requires drawing certain distinctions. The first distinction is between two senses of *expression*, and the second is between two ways of thinking about *claims*.[26] Following Sellars (1969), we can distinguish between the following two senses of expression:

a-expression: in the *action* sense, a person expresses a state of hers by intentionally doing something; Giving a hug, shouting "You're here!" in a particular tone, and saying, "It's so great to see you" are all actions by which a person can express joy at seeing you. Importantly, a-expression is a three-place relation between mental states, their possessors, and the vehicle of expression—i.e., the means by which the mental state gets expressed. To a-express is to engage in an action of some sort. 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.

The sentence "It is raining" expresses the proposition *that it is raining.* So does the sentence "Es regnet," as well as the *that*-clauses of "Sheila thinks that it's raining" and "George hopes that it's raining." As we observed in section 2, this is commonly thought to be a natural way of explaining what good mutual translations, as well as different propositional attitudes, have in common. Unlike a-expression, s-expression is a relation between meaningful strings and their contents.

Alongside this distinction between two senses of expression, we distinguish between two importantly different ways of thinking about claims. Like such other English terms as 'judgment', 'building', and 'painting', the term 'claim' is ambiguous between a *process* of some sort—the *act* of making a claim—and the *product* of that process. To make the claim "It is raining" is to perform an action; and what is produced by

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[26] Here as before, we prefer speaking of "claims" instead of "utterances" since it allows generalizing the expressivist treatment beyond discourse and speech, to reflection and thought. We also distinguish more carefully than before between *claims* and the *sentences* used in making them.

that action is a sentence-token.[27] It's true that in making the claim, a mental state 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 belief. Sentences are simply not in the business of a-expressing mental states (though one might be thought to express a mental state in virtue of using a sentence that s-expresses a proposition referring to that mental state). Instead, sentences s-express propositions.[28]

Returning to the case of avowals, it should be clear how these two distinctions can help the expressivist accomplish her aims while leaving the semantic features of avowals untouched. According to the view elsewhere called *neo-expressivism*,[29] avowals considered as *acts*—like grimaces and groans—directly a-express the mental states avowed, and are consequently immune to epistemic criticism. This is the source of the epistemic asymmetry between avowals and other claims. However, considered as *products*, avowals are importantly different from natural expressions in that they are sentences, and so, are in the business of s-expressing propositions. And this accommodates the semantic continuity between avowals (understood as products) and other sentences.[30]

An expressivist armed with these distinctions, we think, is equipped to address the Frege-Geach problem. Recall that what the expressivist needs is a way of allowing that claims in her area of discourse possess whatever semantic features enable claims in *other* ('descriptive') areas of discourse to behave (logically and grammatically) in the ways that they do, while still maintaining that expressive claims function to express noncognitive mental states or attitudes. Our idea is this: regardless of the area of discourse, the expressivist is free to allow that claims in that area are embeddable in force-stripping contexts, and so forth, *provided that we*

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

[28] To the earlier list of dimensions along which expressivist views can be distinguished, then, we might add these two: (e) the sense of 'express' that is supposed to be operative in the positive expressivist thesis, and (f) the sense in which the relevant 'claims' are to be understood (as acts, products, or something else). The former of these two dimensions—i.e., the sense of 'express'—has been getting some attention in recent years (see especially Schroeder 2008b).

[29] The label, and the account summarized in what follows, come from Bar-On 2004. (A précis is provided in Bar-On 2010.)

[30] For a full development of this account and an explanation of the strong *presumption of truth* governing avowals, see chs. 6-8 of Bar-On 2004.

are thinking of the claims as products that s-express abstract propositions. But this doesn't stop the expressivist from

maintaining the positive expressivist thesis (*attitude expression*), and insisting that these claims, *when understood as*

acts, a-express noncognitive mental states.

The neo-expressivist is similarly able to maintain the positive constitutivist thesis (*internalism*),

according to which one cannot count as sincerely making a claim in the relevant area of discourse unless one

either possesses the relevant (noncognitive) mental state or attitude, or is at least disposed to have the

relevant mental state or attitude. Again, consider the act of making an avowal. Someone who *avows* feeling

afraid is taken to engage in an act of direct expression of fear—rather than (or in addition to) expressing the

belief that she is afraid. Though it is not conceptually impossible for someone to make a mental self-ascription

and not be in the self-ascribed state, it is nonetheless a *propriety* condition on avowing a mental state (e.g., fear)

that one is in the self-ascribed state. Similarly, it is open to the ethical expressivist, for instance, to insist that

it is a propriety condition on making an ethical claim that one has (or be disposed to have in certain

circumstances) whatever noncognitive mental state is supposed to be characteristic of such claims.[31]

Is neo-expressivism also compatible with the other two theses mentioned at the beginning of section

2 – i.e., the negative ontological thesis (*anti-realism*) and the negative semantic thesis (*noncognitivism*)? As we

explained earlier, expressivism can be applied to a particular area of discourse to allow the expressivist to

avoid particular ontological commitments. So for instance, ethical expressivists are sometimes motivated by a

desire to avoid commitment to (what they see as) "spooky" irreducibly normative properties.[32] Now, it's

worth noting that, despite its common association with the negative ontological thesis, even traditional

expressivism does not *entail* anti-realism. It might be awkward, but it's nonetheless open to one to adopt a

traditional sort of expressivism about claims in discourse D and yet also to be a realist about D-facts or D-

properties. The basic neo-expressivist model that we describe in this section is similarly neutral with respect

to the negative ontological thesis, and as such, it is every bit as accommodating of anti-realism as is

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[31] For relevant discussion of propriety conditions, see Bar-On and Chrisman 2009, and Bar-On, Chrisman, and Sias, "(How) Is Ethical Neo-Expressivism a Hybrid View?" (in progress). (The former also addresses how the relevant distinctions can be applied to claims made in thought, and not just in speech.)

[32] See, e.g., Mackie 1977: 38-42.

expressivism in its more traditional forms. Just like traditional expressivism, neo-expressivism does not *entail* anti-realism, but it can accommodate anti-realism in virtue of its ontological neutrality.[33]

To be sure, the neo-expressivist does assert that claims in D (in the product sense) s-express propositions, and there are many who will want to couple the idea that propositions are truth-bearers with a metaphysically inflated conception of truth, thereby interpreting the neo-expressivist as committed to there being *ways the world might be* that would make these propositions true. But none of this is essential to the propositional-compositional semantics that the neo-expressivist prefers (and note that none of the reasons mentioned above for preferring the propositionalist framework to the expressivist's global ideationalism trades on any conception of truth or truth-conditions). So we deny that the neo-expressivist is committed to any of it. Maintaining that a sentence expresses a proposition is quite different from maintaining that any of the terms in that sentence *refer*. In some cases, a neo-expressivist may want to hold that terms in the relevant area of discourse do refer—e.g., presumably, the neo-expressivist about avowals will want to say that mental-state terms refer.[34] But in other domains, neo-expressivists may be anti-realists. Our point is that whether or not the propositions s-expressed by claims in D have ontologically problematic truth-makers is a matter to be settled by metaphysicians, not semanticists.

Finally, note that neo-expressivism is incompatible with the negative semantic thesis (*noncognitivism*). We hope it is clear that this should not worry the expressivist. For one thing, as we explained earlier, admitting that claims in D express truth-evaluable contents (propositions) seems to be the best way of accounting for the many semantic continuities between those claims and claims in other areas of discourse, and the fact that claims in D can occur in mixed contexts. For another thing, as we've just explained, one can

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[33] Of course, neo-expressivism may foreclose certain specifically *semantic* ways of accommodating anti-realism, since it rejects expressivism as a theory of meaning. If one is indeed concerned about this, it may be helpful to note that the two distinctions lying at the heart of neo-expressivism could in theory be *combined* with an expressivist theory of meaning—so, for instance, one could maintain that what gets *s-expressed* by ethical claims (in the *product* sense) is somehow to be cashed out in terms of non-cognitive mental states or attitudes. For reasons we describe in section 2, we think this option is not preferable. But it is an option nonetheless. (Thanks to an anonymous referee.)

[34] Indeed, as explained in Bar-On (2012), it's very unclear how one can couple avowal expressivism with psychological anti-realism, since, in explaining the special status of avowals, the expressivist invokes the very same things (i.e. states of mind) whose existence the anti-realist denies.

admit that claims in D express propositions that are truth-apt without thereby incurring any unwanted ontological commitments.

4. Expressivism Re-applied

In section 2, we raised three problems for traditional expressivism. We concluded that the expressivist might be able to avoid these problems, if she could maintain that claims in the relevant area of discourse function to express noncognitive mental states, while also allowing that they possess whatever semantic features enable claims in other areas of discourse to behave (logically and grammatically) in the ways that they do. And in section 3, we explained how the expressivist might do this. Armed with two important distinctions—i.e., the distinction between a-expression and s-expression, and the distinction between claims understood as acts and claims understood as products—the neo-expressivist can say that claims in D (as *acts*) a-express mental states of whatever kind, while claims in D (as *products*) s-express propositions, which allows them to behave in the same ways (logically and grammatically) as other claims behave. As we explain below, this neo-expressivist model promises solutions to the problems raised in section 2. But before showing how this works, we want to draw attention to the fact that the neo-expressivist model generalizes.

The two distinctions lying at the heart of neo-expressivism are applicable across *all types of claims*. In the opening section, we noted that expressivist treatments have been given to everything from aesthetic claims, to probability claims, to conditionals, and so on. Regardless of the particular domain with which one is concerned, it will be the case that the expression relation between people and their mental states (a-expression) is fundamentally different from the expression relation that holds between meaningful strings and their contents (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. For a more concrete illustration, let us see how the neo-expressivist model applies in the case of ethical claims.

According to *ethical neo-expressivism*,[35] expressivists have been correct to think that ethical claims are in some important sense different from non-ethical descriptive claims, in that ethical claims function to express certain distinctive mental states or attitudes. Where traditional expressivists have erred, however, is in thinking that this expressive function is somehow executed through the *meanings* of ethical claims. According to the neo-expressivist, so long as we are thinking of ethical claims as types of *acts*, it is clear that ethical claims *are* different from non-ethical descriptive claims. In making ethical claims, speakers characteristically a-express mental states that are different in kind from the states they a-express when making non-ethical claims. Presumably, when making ethical claims, speakers a-express a kind of mental state that often figures in motivation to act – e.g., desires, attitudes, emotions, etc. However, ethical claims understood as *products* – i.e., ethical *sentences* – are semantically continuous with non-ethical sentences in being truth-evaluable, embeddable in truth-functional and intensional contexts, involved in logically valid inferences, and so forth. And this is because, like their non-ethical counterparts, ethical sentences s-express propositions.

Now return to the three problems posed for expressivism in section 2. According to the first, it is hard to see how the expressivist can maintain anti-realism and noncognitivism in the face of minimalism about truth and truth-aptitude. This isn't a problem for the neo-expressivist. Since the neo-expressivist allows that sentences are in the business of expressing truth-apt propositions, she is in no way committed to noncognitivism; moreover, in light of our discussion in the latter half of section 2, there are good reasons to *reject* noncognitivism. And since neo-expressivism is neutral on issues of ontology – leaving the matter to be settled by metaphysicians rather than semanticists – neo-expressivism is compatible with anti-realism (but also with realism). As we mentioned earlier, in some domains, there may be good reasons for preferring realism, which do not apply in other domains.

The second problem was the Frege-Geach problem. As we put it earlier, this is the problem of explaining how it is that sentences as construed by the expressivist can carry consistent semantic contents across both asserted and unasserted contexts. The neo-expressivist has no problem here either. Sentences carry consistent semantic contents across both asserted and unasserted contexts, because *what a sentence s-*

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[35] See Bar-On and Chrisman 2009

expresses does not depend upon the type of act that it is being used to perform. The sentence "It is raining" s-expresses the proposition *that it is raining* whether it is being used to make an assertion (and, thereby, to a-express a belief) or not. In fact, one could argue that failure to attend to the two distinctions that lie at the heart of neo-expressivism is what has led expressivists and their critics to regard the Frege-Geach problem as a persisting problem for expressivism.

And finally, there was the problem of semantic continuity. Here, too, neo-expressivism offers an elegant solution. Rather than committing to sweeping semantic revisionism by adopting the sort of global ideationalist semantics that we describe above, the neo-expressivist opts for the more familiar propositional-compositional semantics, and then suggests that we capture semantic continuity simply in terms of s-expression. Claims in the domain of concern are semantically continuous with claims outside of the domain because *they all s-express propositions.* (It could be argued that the reason expressivists have rejected this is that they were implicitly accepting the representationalist conception of propositions embraced by realist opponents.) Furthermore, the neo-expressivist reminds us, capturing semantic continuity in this way does not bar us from recognizing the apparent psychological discontinuities between different types of claims, because we've not yet said anything about what sorts of mental states get a-expressed by speakers when they make claims in D.

5. Concluding Remarks

Historically, expressivists and their critics have assumed that expressivism is specifically a view about the *semantics* of claims in a particular area of discourse.[36] As we explain above, this is presumably because they have assumed that the only way for the relevant claims to serve their expressive function while retaining their meaningfulness is for the expression of noncognitive mental states to somehow be built into the *meanings* of these claims. Now, those who share this latter assumption will probably want to deny that our neo-expressivist approach should be counted among the varieties of expressivism. After all, neo-expressivism

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[36] A recent and highly-regarded monograph surveying expressivism (Schroeder 2008a), for instance, is subtitled "Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism," and opens by describing expressivism as first-and-foremost a "semantic hypothesis" (2008a: x).

divorces the expressive function of claims from their semantic contents. But as we saw in section 2, it is *because* they attempt to locate the expression of noncognitive states in the semantics of the relevant discourse that expressivists run into the sorts of problems that have plagued expressivism for many years. So, as long as expressivism is construed as a view about the *function* of claims in a particular area of discourse (what those claims are 'in the business of' doing), neo-expressivism is a live – and, we think, attractive – expressivist option.[37]

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