

Neo-Expressivism: Avowals' Security and Privileged Self-Knowledge

(Reply to Brueckner)

Dorit Bar-On

Here are some things that I know right now: that I'm feeling a bit hungry, that there's a red cardinal on my bird feeder, that I'm sitting down, that I have a lot of grading to do today, that my daughter is mad at me, that I'll be going for a run soon, that I'd like to go out to the movies tonight. As orthodoxy would have it, some among these represent things to which I have privileged epistemic access, namely: *my present states of mind*. I normally know these states directly, immediately, non-inferentially – I know them the way no one else can know them, and in a way I know nothing else. It's the job of philosophers to tell us what the scope and source of this self-knowledge and to explain what renders it privileged.

In *Speaking My Mind: Expression and Self-Knowledge* (*SMM* henceforth), I depart from orthodoxy by not *presupposing* that we do possess privileged epistemic access to our present mental states. Instead, my starting point is what I take to be the relatively less controversial claim concerning the special security of what are often called *avowals*. When we consider someone's sincere and spontaneous pronouncement such as "I am feeling tired," "I'm wondering whether to go to tonight's basketball game," questions such as: What's her *reason* for thinking that? How does she *know* that? Is she *really* feeling tired/wondering..? would seem entirely out of place. In contrast with a host of other empirical ascriptions, including 'non-evidential' self-ascriptions of bodily states (such as "I am now sitting down" or "I am moving my toe"), avowals are typically taken completely at face value and we very rarely take ourselves to be in a position to criticize or correct them. Thus the first question I try to answer *SMM* is the following:

(i) Why is it that avowals, understood as true or false ascriptions of contingent states to an individual, are so rarely questioned or corrected, are generally so resistant to ordinary epistemic assessments, and are so strongly presumed to be true?

My answer to question (i) is not only non-Cartesian but also *non-epistemic*, in that it does *not* explain avowals' security by appeal to any specially secure epistemic access. . I take it to be an advantage of my answer to (i) that it allows us to see our ordinary treatment of avowals as *reasonable* in its separation of avowals from all other empirical ascriptions. With the answer to (i) in hand, I turn to a properly epistemological investigation concerning privileged self-knowledge, which attempts to answer the question:

(ii) *Do* avowals serve to articulate *privileged self-knowledge*? If so, what qualifies avowals as articles of knowledge at all, and what is the source of the privileged status of this knowledge?

I take it as another advantage of my account of avowals' security that, though itself non-epistemic, it is compatible with a number of *non-deflationary* answers to question (ii). This, in contrast to accounts that portray avowals' security as something built into their 'logical grammar'.

In his helpful critical study, Brueckner does not seem to take issue with my general strategy. He does not deny either that there is a phenomenon to be explained concerning avowals' security or that one can undertake to explain it without presupposing that we possess privileged self-knowledge. Rather, as I understand him, Brueckner takes issue with the success of my neo-expressivist answer to question (i), as well as with its contribution to a

positive answer to question (ii). In what follows, I want to highlight those aspects of my answers to (i) and (ii) that I think can serve to address the main objections Brueckner raises.¹

Avowals' Distinctive Security

According to contemporary *introspectionism*, we can understand (and demystify) the asymmetries between avowals and other ascriptions on the model of the epistemic contrast between 1st-person and 3rd-person uses of a certain class of bodily predicates, such as “has crossed legs,” or “is sitting down”. The latter predicates are applied on the basis of external observation in the third-person case, but on the basis of internal perception (or monitoring, or sensory feedback) in the first-person case. Likewise, we might think that psychological predicates (such as “is feeling thirsty”, “is thinking of the weather”, “is hopeful that p”) apply on the basis of observation of behavior, or inference, or conjecture, in the third-person case, but, in the first-person case, they apply on the basis of *introspection*, where introspection is to be understood simply as a highly reliable, though fallible and corrigible, faculty that delivers reports, specifically, on our present *mental* states. I argue in *SMM* that assimilating the epistemic status of avowals to that of bodily self-reports delivered by a reliable mechanism has the consequence that avowals should be in principle vulnerable to all the same sorts of failings as, e.g., proprioceptive reports, including, specifically, systematic global error. If so, then it is hard to see how one can accept the materialist introspectionist view and yet see our ordinary treatment of avowals as *reasonable*.²

Of course, the ordinary treatment is not sacrosanct; it could be confused, mistaken, or unreasonable. But I maintain that it isn't. Showing this, however, does not amount to

¹ Because of space limitations, I will not be able to cover all the critical points Brueckner makes, but I have tried to discuss the objections that seemed to me of most interest.

² See *SMM* esp. Ch. 4 and *passim*.

reviving – albeit in a non-epistemic, perhaps ‘grammatical’ way – the idea that avowals enjoy *absolute* infallibility or incorrigibility. For we do not ordinarily take avowals to have such absolute security. Indeed, I think that an account that guarantees absolute security ‘grammatically’, by portraying avowals as not truth-evaluable at all (as does Simple Expressivism), or otherwise making it some kind of conceptual necessity that avowals are true (as does the expressivist account alluded to by Brueckner on p.xx) is *also* bound to do injustice to the ordinary treatment of avowals.

The alternative, *non-epistemic, neo-expressivist* answer I seek to give to question (i) does neither. My account begins by offering a more tempered characterization of avowals’ security, in terms of a special immunity to error. Consider first proprioceptive self-reports. If I say or think: “My legs are crossed” (in the normal way), I cannot be misidentifying who it is whose legs are crossed – my self-ascription does not rest on a judgment that identifies me with *someone* whose legs I take to be crossed. I thus enjoy *immunity to error through misidentification*.³ However, in ascribing to myself having crossed legs, I *do* rely on a recognitional judgment concerning the state of my limbs. If my legs are *not* crossed, my self-report will be mistaken precisely because I will have mistaken one state of my limbs for another. In this sense, I am subject to an error of misascription. In the case of avowals, though, I suggest, I can be seen as protected from epistemic error in the ascriptive part as well. That is to say, to the extent that a person is indeed *avowing*, say, feeling sad, (as opposed to reporting it on the basis of evidence, for example), she has no reason for thinking she is in some mental state or other than *whatever* reason she has for thinking that she is feeling sad.⁴

³ For a brief summary, see Brueckner’s review, p. XX.

⁴ This leaves room for the possibility that she has *no* reason for thinking that she’s in pain, or that her *only* reason for thinking that she’s in pain is simply her being in pain. (This should also help alleviate the puzzlement Brueckner expresses in passing (p. XX) over my use of the phrase “other than whatever reason or grounds” on p. 223 of *SMM*.)

If her avowal is false, it will not be false due to her mistaking some other state of hers for feeling sad due to the way the state *appears* to her. In opposition to the introspectionist view, I maintain that we should not think of the epistemic position of one who avows as the position of someone who receives direct information about her present internal states, and correctly or incorrectly identifies ('recognitionally', as I put it) the presence and character of those states on the basis of the way they appear to her 'from the inside'.

As Brueckner notes, I motivate my opposition (and the idea that avowals enjoy immunity to error through misascription) by considering a case discussed by Tyler Burge: the case of *self-verifying avowals* of presently entertained thoughts. Brueckner complains that my presentation of the case departs from Burge's, since "[f]or him, when I sincerely avow 'I am thinking that water is wet', I make a *second-order judgement* about my state of mind: I judge that I am thinking that water is wet. ... So it is not the *speech act* of avowing that guarantees that I have the thought in question. It is rather the second-order mental act of *judging* that I am thinking that water is wet that does the guaranteeing in question." (p. XX) However, some clarification is in order here. I agree with Brueckner that "the self-verifying character of avowals of occurrent thoughts has nothing to do with the articulative nature of the pertinent *speech acts*," (p.XX, my emphasis), but I disagree that it has nothing specific to do with their nature as *acts*. As Brueckner himself notes early on (p. XX), the neo-expressivist account I develop is intended from the start to apply to avowals made in thought as well as in speech. Equally, , the notion of immunity to error through misascription is intended to apply to avowals made in thought, and this notion has very much to do with the kind of act performed when avowing (in speech or in thought). As I explain,⁵ this notion can help illuminate features of self-verifying avowals that Burge's account leaves in the dark.

⁵ See *SMM*, esp. pp.166f. ,172f., 179ff. and 207-221.

Specifically, suppose we take my self-ascription of presently entertained thought to represent a second-order judgment about a first-order state of mind I am in, leaving it *open* that I arrive at the second-order judgment on the basis of recognitionally *identifying* the relevant features of the first-order state, *including* what content it has. Then it should remain puzzling why skepticism about my knowledge of the state's content and my ability to get that content right simply does not arise.⁶

It is worth noting that Burge himself does not confine the explanation of the self-verifying character of avowals of presently entertained thoughts to the features mentioned by Brueckner. As I point out in Chapter 5 (p.172), Burge thinks it's necessary to abandon "the assumption that we need to *identify* the content of our thoughts in such a way as to be able to rule out relevant alternatives to what the content might be" (1998: 354). But Burge does not tell us how to replace the 'recognitional conception' of content assignment. The neo-expressivist account supplies an alternative conception, and shows how content assignment is but one aspect of the different (expressive) way that we ascribe mental states to ourselves when avowing. When I avow a presently entertained thought specifying its content, my content self-ascription does not rest on a recognitional judgment, in the first place. I claim that in this regard the self-verifying case is but a limit case of all avowals of intentional states that involve explicit specification of the avowed state's intentional object ("I'm scared *of x*", as opposed to "I am scared of *something*") or articulation of the propositional content ("I'm hoping *that p*", as opposed to "I'm hoping for something exciting"). When the state I ascribe to myself is not simply the mere entertaining of a certain thought, my self-ascription

⁶ For example: why is it that doubt cannot arise as to whether my present thought isn't really *that water is wet* but rather *that twater is wet*? Given Burge's own content externalism, this is an especially pertinent example to consider. (Content externalism and its apparent threat to self-knowledge are the topic of my (2004a).)

will not be self-verifying. However, even then it's not the case that my reason for thinking that I am in mental state M with content c is that I recognize my being in *some* state with *some* content and take the state to be that of fearing, or hoping, or thinking, and its content to be content c. Just as it would be a mistake to take my reason for thinking that I am sitting down (in the ordinary case) to be that I recognize that *someone* is sitting down and taking that someone to be me, so I think it would be a mistake to regard my reason for thinking that I'm hoping that you'll come tonight (say) when I avow to be that I recognize that I am in *some* state with *some* content and take the state to be hope and its content to be *that you'll come tonight*.

To see this is to recognize avowals as not only immune to errors of misidentification but also but also *immune to error through misascription*. It's important to note, however, that immunity to error is always immunity to certain *kinds* of mistake. It does not bring with it a conceptual guarantee of truth. Take the case of proprioceptive reports again. I can be wrong in thinking not only that my legs are *crossed*; even as I issue a proprioceptive report, I can also be wrong in thinking that it is *my* legs that are crossed (say, if unknown to me my proprioceptive system has somehow been hooked up to receive direct information about *your* limbs). Similarly, perhaps I can be wrong that I'm scared of the dog – perhaps it isn't the dog I'm scared of but the dog's owner; or perhaps it isn't fear I feel but something else. These are conceptual possibilities. All that the ascriptive immunity to error guarantees is that, *if* I am wrong about the character or content of my state, this will not be due to a *recognitional* error about the state or its content.

Given the conceptual possibility of falsehood that is left open by the notion of immunity to error, how can we explain the fact that avowals are so readily taken at face value, and so rarely corrected? This is where it becomes crucial to identify the *source* of

avowals' immunity to error of misascription. It is at this point that the neo-expressivist account makes use of the idea that avowals serve directly to *express* the avowed state. Since this a key idea for my account, and one on which Brueckner takes me to task in much of the critical part of his study, I now turn to a summary of the expressivist idea and its connection to the distinctive, ascriptive immunity to error of avowals, on the one hand, and to self-knowledge, on the other. This summary will be followed by more direct remarks on some of Brueckner's objections.

Neo-Expressivism: Expression, Truth, and Self-Knowledge

On the neo-expressivist account, what renders avowals immune to error to misascription is the fact that, when avowing, we simply *give direct expression* to the self-ascribed states themselves, using self-ascriptive language (or its analogue in thought). In *SMM*, I first motivate this expressivist proposal using the above-mentioned case of self-verifying self-ascriptions. The reason is that I wanted to avoid a motivation that depended on the traditional expressivist comparison (familiar to readers of Wittgenstein) between avowals and bits of non-verbal behavior, such as wincing and crying, since I think that uncritical understanding of that comparison was the downfall of traditional expressivism about avowals.

We have already noted the connection between the self-verifying character of an avowal such as "I am thinking that there is water in the glass," as contrasting with "I am thinking something boring," and the fact that the former, unlike the latter, involves spelling out the content of the self-ascribed state. We also noted that, although avowals of intentional states are not in general self-verifying, they too typically articulate their content. I maintain that, when I *avow*, e.g.: 'I'm feeling worried that the performance won't go down

well,” as oppose to ascribing a mental state to someone else, or even ascribing it to myself indirectly, on the basis of some specific epistemic basis, *explicit articulation obviates the need for assigning the content on a recognitional basis*. When I self-ascribe a state in the 'avowing mode,' I have no reason for taking my state of worry to have *some* content and (separately) identifying that content as *c*. For when I avow such a state, I put to use the very same resources I would put to use in saying, or thinking *worriedly* "The performance may not go down well." When ascribing to myself a state with content *c* in the normal way, I suggest, I exercise an *expressive* capacity, the capacity to *use* content *c* (rather than some other content *c'*) to articulate, or give voice to my present state. When avowing, say, a present thought that is crossing my mind, I tell what content the thought has by telling *it*, by using *that* content as the vehicle of expressing the thought.

We now come to the generalization of the expressivist idea. When avowing, we use our expressive capacity not only to articulate the contents of our thoughts and other propositional attitudes but also to give vent to the very states of mind that our avowals self-ascribe. Here I find useful Sellars' distinction (cited by Brueckner on p. XX) between the three senses (or kinds, as I prefer) of expression: a(ction)-expression, c(ausal)-expression, and s(emantic) expression. Suppose I feel pleased to see you and issue an avowal; I say (or think): "I'm so glad to see you". My self-ascription s-expresses a *self-ascriptive proposition*, true iff I feel glad to see you. Insofar as the avowal comes directly from my feeling pleased, we can see it as c-expressing the feeling itself, as might a facial expression or bodily gesture. But the avowal, just like my saying "It's so nice to see you!" (which is *not* self-ascriptive), and just like a hug or a smile I might give, is not simply a reflex doing of my body. It's something *I* do; an intentional act of mine. Indeed, the hug, the non- self-ascriptive utterance, and the avowal, all seem to be genuine intentional acts that serve to express my pleasure not merely

in the causal sense.⁷ The *products* of these acts are of course different. What is important for my purposes is that the act of avowing directly a-expresses that state, even as the self-ascription s-expresses a proposition *about* the state.⁸ Herein, I maintain, lies the explanation of the asymmetries between avowals and all other ascriptions, including the fact that we so strongly presume them to be true, even though we recognize that they can be false.

Brueckner raises several objections to my use of the expressivist idea. Some pertain to the expressivist idea itself and its relation to the ordinary notion of expression. Some pertain to the use of this idea to explain avowals' security. And some pertain to the connection between this idea and privileged self-knowledge. I shall now address these objections more directly, and in this order.

(1) *Objections to the expressivist idea.* On p. 8f., Brueckner takes issue with my use of Sellars' distinction (pp. 9ff.) for two distinct reasons. He first claims that our ordinary concept of expression treats all (non-semantic) expression as "at bottom a causal notion". His brief remarks in this connection, however, seem to me to run together two different distinctions that play a role in my discussion: the distinction between c-expression and a-expression, on the one hand, and the distinction between expressing *a* mental state (e.g., grief) and expressing *one's* mental state (*my* present feeling of grief). It seems plausible to say that an

⁷ N.B.: It's the hugging, or the uttering of a sentence, *not* the expressing of my state that is my intentional doing.

⁸ Brueckner cites in connection with this my 'ambivalent attitude' toward the question whether avowals are *assertions* of propositions (p. XX). If there's any ambivalence on my part, it is purely terminological. If "assertion" is understood to denote a specific type of *speech* act, governed by certain communicative conditions (à la Searle), or if "assertion" is understood, just like "report", as involving the forming of a judgment on some epistemic basis, as well as seeking to convey it (even if only to oneself), then I would indeed resist the claim that avowals are assertions. On the other hand, if "assertion" is understood much more loosely to refer to an utterance as well as thought with truth-evaluable propositional content – and that involves commitment to the truth of that propositional content – then I have no objection to saying that avowals are assertions, since on my view an avowal s-expresses a (self-ascriptive) proposition. To avoid falling into the first reading of "assertion" (all too common among philosophers), as well as the act-product ambiguity of "assertion", "statement" and the like, I have preferred to speak of the (products of) avowals as "self-ascriptions," which can be produced in speech or in thought, and which s-express self-ascriptive propositions.

actor on stage may only *pretend*-fall, pretend-hit someone, etc.⁹ A pretend fall is no more a fall than a rubber duck is a duck. Similarly, Brueckner wants to say, the actor who is feigning grief on stage, does not express his grief at all, but rather *pretend*-expresses it. I agree that, since he is not really feeling grief (one hopes, for his sake), and he only puts on the act, he can only be seen as pretend *a*-expressing. Still, I don't think it goes against our ordinary notion to claim that the actor (if he's any good) does succeed in expressing *grief*, even if not *his* grief. Indeed, unless he succeeds in this, it's not clear how we can identify what it is he's merely pretending to feel. (Arguably, one distinctive feature of the 'method' actor is that she achieves the expression of grief by making it the case that *she* feels grief. But ordinary actors don't do that.) At any rate, the distinction between expressing M and expressing *one's* M seems independently needed to accommodate other kinds of artistic expression, as when, e.g., a painter expresses maternal love through her depiction of the Virgin Mary without expressing *her* love.¹⁰ I also think that there are good reasons to separate a-expression from c-expression, and to *deny* that all expression is at bottom causal. Even if we were to deny that the actor succeeds in a-expressing anything, there are other cases where no dissimulation of whatever kind occurs, and where it seems very intuitive to say not that the person pretend-expresses but rather that she's victim of an *expressive failure*.¹¹ Since c-expression is a factive notion – one cannot c-express grief without actually feeling grief – we need a broader notion to capture cases of behavior that is genuinely expressive (epistemically unmediated, spontaneous, non-dissimulative, etc.) yet unsuccessful. Note that this notion is

⁹ Must we also say that he only pretend-frown and pretend-smile, pretend-bend over? I'm not sure.

¹⁰ Note, however, that although one can express M without expressing her M, the two are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, in the normal case, the two line up: one expresses her M by expressing M.

¹¹ Brueckner cites the case of the person on the dentist's chair saying: "My tooth hurts!" as the drill approaches. Importantly, in this sort of case the person would equally be prone to display *natural* expressions such as grimacing, wincing, as well as emitting a spontaneous "Ow!", making it implausible to see her failure as a matter of *misjudging* the state she is in. I discuss a variety of expressive failures in *SMM* p. XXff.

needed quite independently of an expressivist account of avowals. Under certain circumstances, one can emit a yelp or a verbal “Ow!”, grimace, laugh, and so on, even though one is not in the ‘appropriate’ state, yet *not* because one is dissimulating, pretending, etc. Given a proper action-theoretic understanding of a-expression, I argue, we can make room for expressive failures. This account then enables us to understand the possibility of false avowals, in keeping with ordinary understanding.¹²

Brueckner also finds odd the claim that avowals (at least avowals proper) can be thought of as intentional acts, since they are “not backed by a Davidsonian belief-desire pair that concerns communication with an audience” and thus should perhaps be seen as “closer to expressions in the purely causal sense” (p. 10). But surely the conception of intentional action Brueckner invokes here is too narrow. On this conception, too much of what we do in everyday life would not constitute intentional acts, including, specifically, spontaneous expressive behaviors such as smiling, giving hugs, shrugging, wincing, caressing a beloved’s photo when no one is around, cussing to oneself, etc. etc. The contribution of the neo-expressivist account is to bring avowals in line with these forms of expressive (nonverbal and verbal) behavior, *as well as* with articulate verbal utterances (or thoughts) that involve no self-ascription, such as “What a shame!” “This is such a mess!” “Good for her for doing this” “It’s really annoying that...”. Careful reflection on the character of these various forms of expressive behavior suggests that it is highly implausible to deny them the status of intentional acts (which is *not* to regard them as actions done from a *prior* intention, or *for a particular purpose*), or to assimilate them to behaviors that are *merely caused* or even to ones that express *only* in the causal sense the underlying states. I cannot here reiterate all my reasons

¹² I discuss these issue at length (see especially *SMM* p. 259ff. as well as p.200 and p.312 and *passim*); I’m afraid that even a summary would exceed my space limitations here.

for this claim.¹³ What is crucial for our present purposes, in light of several of Brueckner's complaints, is to understand why in *SMM* I focus on a-expression and how this notion in conjunction with that of s-expression helps explain avowals' distinctive security.

Brueckner also questions in passing whether I can explain avowals as a-expressions in cases where there is no natural expression for the avowal to replace (p. XX). The example he mentions (due to Wright) is that of the experience of smelling vanilla. In my discussion of this example I point out that there is no need in every case to find a *natural* expression for the avowal to replace, and I cite the example of belief expression: we could think of "I believe it's going to rain soon" as replacing the *nonnatural* but also *non-self-ascriptive* expression of belief "It's going to rain soon". As I explain (*SMM*, p.XX), the belief case is offered only as an analogy. Applied to the vanilla case, the idea is *not* that "I'm smelling the smell of vanilla" serves to replace an expression of my *belief* that I smell vanilla, as Brueckner wrongly supposes. The idea is rather that, when hunting for the expressive behavior the avowal can replace, we needn't be looking for a natural expression of smelling, specifically, *vanilla*. It is sufficient if we can find behavior that, in context, can be understood as expressive of the experience without yet being an avowal. Little Jenny can walk into the kitchen where daddy is baking vanilla cookies, sniffing (perhaps adding: "[sniff sniff] what's that?"), whereupon daddy can offer her as replacement: "Ah, you're smelling vanilla!" putting her on her way to avowing "I'm smelling vanilla smell".

(2) *Objections to the Neo-Expressivist Explanation of Avowals' Security*. I claim that regarding avowals as acts that serve to a-express the very conditions that their products s-ascribe can help us understand (and see as reasonable) the ordinary treatment of avowals. First, if we regard avowals as acts which serve to give vent to present states of mind, rather than report

¹³ This is the topic of *SMM* Ch. 7 and 8.

them, then it would make sense that we shouldn't expect people to be able to give reasons for their avowals, or question how (or whether) they know what their avowals say, or correct them, and so on. We would expect the *epistemic* standards that apply to avowals to be the same as those that apply to other directly expressive acts, whether natural or semantically articulate.

Brueckner complains that, according to neo-expressivism, unlike its “[s]imple counterpart, avowals are in the ‘space of reasons’. Thus, the Neo-Expressivist, unlike his Simple counterpart, needs to explain why demands for reasons and epistemic assessments are inappropriate, given that avowals make claims to truth” (p. XX). Two points in response:

(i) This gets the order of explanation wrong. If it is agreed that part of the phenomenon to be explained is the fact that avowals are *not* subjected to ordinary epistemic assessment, then it seems perfectly appropriate to cite as an explanation the fact that they are regarded as similar to expressive acts that have non- self-ascriptive products. Although “This is funny/gross/ boring!” can plausibly be thought to be truth-evaluable, it would seem inappropriate to ask someone who says these things simply to express her amusement or disgust or boredom how she knows it’s funny/gross/boring, why she thinks it is, and so on. It’s not that these questions are ruled out conceptually. It’s just that raising them betrays a misunderstanding of what the person was doing in saying “This is funny!” (namely, something she could have done by just laughing). I am claiming that the avowal “I’m finding this funny/disgusting/boring” is in the same boat.

(ii) As regards being ‘in the space of reasons’, it may be correct to say that truth-evaluable products are *ipso facto* ‘in the space of reasons’, since such products can be embedded in

various sentential contexts, logical inferences, etc. But then being in the space of reasons should not be taken to imply the appropriateness of *asking* for reasons.¹⁴ Whether or not it is appropriate to ask for reasons for something one says or thinks has to do not simply with whether what is said or thought admits of a truth-value; it may also depend on *how* one arrives at what she says or thinks.¹⁵

Second, I claim that the neo-expressivist account allows us to understand why avowals are governed by such a strong presumption of truth. The explanation appeals to the fact that avowals, *unlike* non- self-ascriptive articulate expressions of states of mind, are acts that a-express the *very same states* the presence of which would *make true* the propositions s-expressed by their products. To see me as avowing feeling bored is to see me as giving direct (a-) expression to my feeling, and thus to take it that I *am* feeling bored; but that is just to take the avowal to be *true*. By contrast, if I say: “This is boring!” you may recognize me as a-expressing my boredom, but this in no way requires you to take what I said to be true (since the proposition s-expressed is not *about* my boredom). Brueckner cites my explanation of the presumption of truth but goes on to object:

The foregoing account of the presumption of the truth of avowals rests on the assumption that avowals express avowers’ mental states. In a way, it seems to be a truism that avowals express avowers’ mental states. But what exactly does this mean? ... Maybe this *is* a truism, but if it is, then it is nevertheless very close to our explanandum. We are trying to explain why avowals are presumed to be true. A crucial part of the explanation turns out to be that almost always, when a speaker

¹⁴ Brueckner here is alluding to Sellars’ notion. But see “Some Reflections on Language Games” where Sellars makes clear that, for example, although language entries are *in* the space of reasons, it is not always appropriate to ask one to give reasons for them.

¹⁵ The earlier discussion of immunity to error is relevant here.

makes an avowal, he is in the avowed state, which is a cause of his intentional act of avowing. That is what it means to say that almost always, avowals express avowers' mental states. One might well ask, *why* is there this almost perfect expressive success? *Why* are expressive failures involving false avowals so rare? N[eo] E[xpressivism] seems to provide no answer to these questions. (p.13)

I confess that I find what Brueckner says here puzzling. He does not seem to question my explanation of the presumption of truth, on the assumption that avowals express avowers' self-ascribed mental states. Indeed, on that assumption, *especially given* Brueckner's earlier insistence that the commonsense notion of expression is 'at bottom causal' (so that all a-expression is c-expression), my explanation goes through completely straightforwardly. For consider: if we thought that one *cannot* a-express boredom without actually feeling bored, then on the assumption that an avowal of boredom serves to a-express the feeling of boredom itself, it would be trivial that avowals had to be true. So perhaps what Brueckner wants to question here is the very assumption that avowals a-express the mental states they self-ascribe. Yet this assumption he describes as a truism. I would of course beg to disagree, since I regard the assumption as a hard-earned central claim of a potentially controversial substantive account of avowals' security. But if it *is* deemed a truism, what room is there left for the substantive questions Brueckner raises at the close of the paragraph?

Perhaps instead Brueckner is thinking that *insofar as the expressivist claim* about avowals *is not a truism*, there is room to ask why it is that avowals succeed in expressing mental states. But this question, I submit, is ambiguous. It could be read as a question about individual acts of avowing: why should we suppose them to be expressive of actually present mental states? The answer to that question is already contained in the above quasi-conceptual

explanation of the presumption of truth: to see me as avowing is to take me to be a-expressing my mental state, which is to suppose that I am in the relevant state.¹⁶ On the other hand, Brueckner may have in mind the more general question: why, *in general*, do we (creatures with minds) succeed in showing our mental states through expressive behavior, avowals included? For it may seem that it is a contingent fact about us that we express our mental states, whether naturally, through non-self-ascriptive utterances, or through avowals. If so, one may wonder about this ‘expressive success’. I admit that the neo-expressivist account does not directly answer this question. But I don’t see that it must. (I do, however, offer some speculations regarding this question in Ch. 10.)

(3) *Objections to what Neo-Expressivism has to say about Privileged Self-Knowledge.* As I explained at the beginning, the first (and central) aim of *SMM* is to offer a neo-expressivist account of avowals’ security. In *SMM* I do not actually offer a settled view of privileged self-knowledge, but rather canvass several non-deflationary accounts of privileged self-knowledge that are *compatible* with the neo-expressivist account. One of these accounts is what I describe as the “synthetic account” (*SMM* p.388ff.), according to which the self-beliefs that avowals can be said to express (in addition to expressing the self-ascribed states) are, as I prefer to put it, *warranted* by the same thing that serves as the rational cause of the act of avowing – namely, the expressed self-ascribed state itself. (So the self-belief expressed by my avowal “I feel worried” amounts to knowledge to the extent that, in addition to its being true, it is grounded in the avowed state, of feeling worried.) Brueckner finds a peculiarity in this view, which is that it turns out that the truth-maker of the avowal “is the

¹⁶ This is complicated by the fact that, given the intentional character of a-expressing, I can genuinely a-express M without actually being in M, as I allude to earlier (p.) and discuss at length in a section called “Expressive Failures” of Ch. 7; see esp. pp. 325ff. where I undertake to resolve the apparent conflict between my quasi-conceptual explanation of the presumption of truth and my claim that there can be false avowals.

same as the justifier” (p.18). However, I am wondering why Brueckner takes this to be unique to the view at hand. He himself mentions the view known as disjunctivism about perceptual states (which I briefly discuss on p. 390f.). On my understanding, at least *some* disjunctivists about perception take the justifier of a perceptual belief – say, that the cat is on the mat – to be *not* the perceiver’s state but rather the perceived state of affairs – the cat’s being on the mat. If so, I point out, disjunctivism in the case of avowals is actually *less* problematic, since in this case (if my expressivist analysis of avowing is correct), there shouldn’t be any analogue of the temptation to point to a ‘judgment of appearances’ that is in common between the ‘good case’ (where one is in the avowed state) and the ‘bad case’ (when one is not, though one still avows).

It is important to note that regarding avowals as epistemically grounded in the avowed states does not amount to taking back the neo-expressivist idea that what renders the avowal distinctively secure is *not* its epistemic basis or ground. Rather, the appeal to the epistemic ground *here* is in aid of explaining how the avowal can amount to a piece of knowledge. Equally, however, we should note that the neo-expressivist idea is only intended to shoulder the burden of explaining avowals’ special security. It should not be expected to hold the key to what renders avowals pieces of genuine self-knowledge. Thus, Brueckner is right that the idea that avowals express mental states is *separable* from the idea that the epistemic ground for an avowal *qua* self-belief is the avowed mental state. That is what one would expect of an account that is offered as one of several that are *compatible* with my preferred account of avowals’ security. Furthermore, I see it rather as an advantage of my account that even someone “who is dubious about the epistemic role of the notion of expression could simply take over Bar-On’s account of the justification of self-beliefs”

(p.20). If I am right, though, such a one, though she may have an account of self-knowledge, will *not* have an account of the distinctive security of avowals.

Before concluding, Brueckner returns to the issue of avowals' success. He points out that "it is a contingent matter that avowals almost always express self-knowledge; ... that the justifying truth-makers (the avowed states) of self-beliefs are almost always present" (p.19). He worries that this means "that nothing rules out the possibility of a global failure of self-knowledge" and opens my account to the same objections I raise against the reliabilist approach. This seems like a serious worry; but I'm wondering whether it rests on a certain false move: from the claim that it is a *contingent* matter that the conditions on avowable self-knowledge are almost always met to the claim that global failure of self-knowledge is possible. Compare: it is clearly a contingent matter that I (or you) have hands; but from this it doesn't follow that humans may have failed to have hands. The possession of hands by humans may be a matter of evolutionary necessity (or, at any rate, global failure to have hands may have been something evolution has prevented), even though the possession of hands by individual human beings is a contingent matter. Similarly, might it not be that, although it is a contingent matter whether individual avowals amount to self-knowledge (because in each case it is contingent whether the individual successfully expresses her mental state), there are good reasons why a creature capable of avowing cannot be subject to systematic global failure? In the concluding chapter of *SMM*, I venture some reflections that bear on this question. These have to do not specifically with avowals, but rather with a proper understanding of the connection between mentality and expressibility – an issue that deserves further investigation, once the neo-expressivist account of avowals is accepted.