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Expressivism, Truth, and (Self-) Knowledge

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I. Introduction

There are two interestingly similar but also notably different theories that go under the moniker 'expressivism'. Each kind of expressivism has a crude original form that has been supplanted by more and more sophisticated versions. In their crude forms, the theories are strikingly similar, whereas in their sophisticated forms they are strikingly dissimilar.

Ethical expressivism is, at least originally, the view that ordinary ethical statements — such as statements about what is ethically right or wrong¹ — express not beliefs but some pro- or con-attitudes.² The

1. A point of terminology that will become clearer as we move along: unfortunately there is no uniform usage of the terms 'statement' and 'sentence' in ordinary discourse or in the metaethical literature. A rough way to distinguish these terms that I think good enough for present purposes is as follows: a statement is a speech-act that involves the tokening of an unembedded declarative sentence; a sentence is an abstract form of words, which obeys syntax rules and has semantic value recursively explicable in terms of the semantic values and concatenations of its parts. When one makes a statement, we can say that one has produced a token of a declarative sentence. In light of this distinction, we can say that semantics attempts to explain the semantic value of sentences and their parts, while pragmatics attempts to explain the norms of proper use of sentences and their parts to perform speech-acts like making statements. The interaction between these is notoriously complex and controversial. Moreover, much of what can be said about statements can also be said about their mental analogs. However, I won't go into either of these issues here. I'll also leave it vague how far the class of *ethical statements/sentences* extends. If everything I say about ethical statements/sentences were true only of statements/sentences about what is ethically right or wrong, that would still be significant.
2. Original defenders include Ayer (1936) and Stevenson (1937). It's worth noting that ethical expressivism is sometimes interpreted as a claim about the meaning of ethical words and the sentences in which they figure. (See, for instance, Schroeder [2008], whose subtitle is "Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism".) However, for both Ayer and Stevenson, their versions of expressivism are views about the meaning of ethical words only in a very attenuated sense of 'meaning'. In any case, as I am understanding the position, it is not directly a claim about semantic value of ethical words and sentences (*i.e.*, it would require further general assumptions about the nature of semantic values before expressivism, as I understand it, would entail a claim about semantic value). But, in my view, this doesn't affect the main sorts of advantages that ethical expressivists typically claim.

motivation for this view stems from certain asymmetries between ethical statements and other statements. Not to put too fine of a point on it, many philosophers have thought that the ontological status of putative ethical facts is questionable and that ethical statements bear a distinctive connection to motivation. In light of this, the two primary advantages usually claimed for the view are (i) the ontologically parsimonious way in which it can construe ethical discourse as nonerroneous, and (ii) the psychologically parsimonious way in which it can explain the apparently tight connection between sincere ethical statements and being motivated to act in certain ways.

One can discern the nature of these putative advantages most easily by considering the contrasting view of ethical discourse, which construes ethical statements as on a par with descriptive statements in that they express beliefs, which, as such, seek to represent the facts. Unless one thinks ethical discourse is wildly erroneous, this then implies a *realist* view, according to which our ethical statements commit us to the existence of ethical facts. And, on such an account, the apparently tight connection between sincere ethical statements and dispositions to act will be explained by positing some special psychological link that connects beliefs in this sort of fact, but not beliefs in most other sorts of fact, with motivations to act. Perhaps there is a tacit standing desire in most humans to act in ways they believe to be moral, or perhaps ethical beliefs are beliefs of a special sort, distinguished by their distinctive motivational capacities.

So, when the expressivist construes ethical statements not as the expression of beliefs but as the direct expression of motivational attitudes, he does so in order to gain a way of interpreting ethical discourse as legitimate although not ontologically committing, and he also wants a very direct way of explaining the apparently tight connection between sincere ethical statements and motivation to act in certain ways. The idea is that by treating statements such as ‘Torture is wrong’ as the direct expression of a pro- or con-attitude, we can allow that one can make or endorse ethical statements without committing oneself to the obtaining of ethical facts; and it’s the expressed attitudes

themselves which then explain the attending motivations. More generally, the attraction of this sort of view is that one can treat ethical discourse as legitimate without committing to a range of ethical facts or to a special psychological link between ethical beliefs and motivations to act. In this way, ethical expressivism is supposed to have the advantages of both ontological and psychological parsimony over its realist rivals.

Avowal expressivism (to coin a new name for an old view) is, at least originally, the view that ordinary first-personal present-tense ascriptions of mental states — avowals like “I want tea” or “I love you” — express not self-ascriptive beliefs but the very mental state they avow — *e.g.*, a desire for tea or love for one’s addressee.³ The primary motivation for this view stems from certain asymmetries between avowals and other statements of contingent fact. On the one hand, avowals seem to be pronouncements on an ordinary contingent matter of (mental) fact, but on the other hand, it would ordinarily be quite strange to challenge someone’s avowal unless you thought that they were being insincere. Moreover, this presumptive authority carried by avowals is restricted to the first-personal case; when pronouncing on the mental states of others, the typical challenges regarding statements of contingent matters of fact are all available and not at all strange.

The idea is not that it’s impossible to challenge avowals. Rather, it’s that it is not possible to challenge them without violating one of the norms that normally attends to the practice of giving and receiving avowals. Perhaps, sometimes there are good reasons to violate such norms; and perhaps some cases that superficially look like violations of these norms are not actually cases of avowing. An important special case is when one avows a so-called “motivated attitude”. This is

3. This position is typically traced back to a suggestive passage in Wittgenstein (1953, p. 89); see also Ginet (1968) for a more explicit early statement. The qualification “ordinary” in the statement of the view is important. There are *unordinary* first-personal present-tense ascriptions of mental states to which the view doesn’t apply. For example, such ascriptions reached in the therapeutic context or by some behavioral analysis will simply not count as avowals, because they don’t exhibit the distinctive features of avowals that require explanation.

a mental state for which one can have good or bad reasons, such as a belief. In cases like these, where one says, for example, “I believe the President is guilty of treason,” we can of course challenge the belief avowed by saying something like “That’s not right: the President hasn’t done what you think he has done.” What remains typically unchallengeable is the avowal itself. To challenge this, we’d have to say instead something like “I think you’re mistaken about your own beliefs; surely you don’t really believe that the President would commit treason.” There may be cases where such a challenge is legitimate, but normally it isn’t, which marks a curious asymmetry to most other statements of contingent fact.

In light of this asymmetry, the two primary advantages usually claimed for avowal expressivism are (i) the epistemologically parsimonious way in which it can explain why, in ordinary discourse, avowals are typically unchallengeable, and (ii) the cognitively parsimonious way in which it can explain the distinctively first-personal nature of avowals’ authority.

Again, the nature of these putative advantages is probably best seen by considering the contrasting view of avowals, which sees them as the expression of beliefs about the avower’s own mental states. Unless one denies the apparent asymmetries between avowals and other statements, one will tend to endorse the *introspectionist* view that the beliefs expressed by avowals must be acquired in some special way, because they do not seem to be reached by some especially secure application of a general method of acquiring knowledge (e.g., empirical observation or deductive, inductive, or abductive inference). That is to say that the introspectionist explains the typical unchallengeability of avowals by appeal to a special faculty or method of acquiring very reliable beliefs about one’s own mental states. Whatever the exact nature of this faculty or method, they call it “introspection”.⁴ And so, on this

4. Although introspectionism is sometimes characterized as the view that we have an “inner-eye” by which we reach beliefs about our own mental lives, one need not commit to the visual metaphor to be an introspectionist in the sense that the expressivist means to challenge. The introspectionist idea, as I understand it here, is merely that we have a non-empirical and non-inferential

introspectionist view of avowals, the distinctively first-personal nature of avowals’ authority will be explained by something about the nature of introspection that makes it impossible to use introspection to form beliefs about other people’s mental states. Introspectionism thus involves a cognitive commitment and an epistemological commitment. The cognitive commitment is to the existence of a faculty or method of introspection. The epistemological commitment is to the idea that the explanation for the distinctive epistemological security of avowals is that they are the expressions of beliefs reached by this special faculty or method.

So, when the expressivist construes avowals as expressing the avowed mental states rather than beliefs about these states, she does so in order to gain an explanation of the typical unchallengeability and first-personal authority of avowals, an explanation that avoids the cognitive and epistemic commitments by not appealing to any special faculty or method of introspection. The idea is to treat avowals such as (the ordinary uses of) “I want tea” or “I love you” as the expression of desire for tea or love for the addressee rather than as the expression of a belief about one’s own mental states. These expressions and our ability to make them are like other expressions of desires, love, *etc.*, and our ability to make them. We humans seem to be endowed with a quite general ability to express our minds by doing things like wincing, crying, and giving a thumbs-up, but also by avowing.⁵ It doesn’t typically make sense to ask for the justification of the former sorts of expression, and this, the avowal expressivist thinks, also explains the unchallengeability of avowal. Moreover, although we can easily claim

faculty or method for generating typically unchallengeable beliefs about our own mental states that are then expressed by avowals. Because of this, it’s not only someone like Descartes or Locke who counts as an introspectionist in my sense but also more contemporary philosophers such as Chisholm (1981), Davidson (1984, 1987), Burge (1988), Peacocke (1998), Bilgrami (1998), and Moran (2001).

5. Despite the broad way I think we should understand introspectionism, it’s implausible to think that the general ability to express our minds should be thought of as the faculty of introspection. For we share this general ability with other organisms to which it is implausible to attribute self-beliefs.

that someone else wants tea or loves the addressee, *etc.*, we cannot, it seems, literally express their desire, love, or whatever, which means that expression of a mental state is distinctively first-personal. More generally, then, on this view, the unchallengeability of avowals is explained by appeal to a general feature of the expression of underlying mental states; and the first-personal authority of avowals is explained by appeal to the fact that we can express only our own mental states. In this way, avowal expressivism is supposed to have the advantages of both epistemological and cognitive parsimony over its introspectionist rivals.⁶

In both the ethical case and the avowal case, treating the relevant class of statements as expressive of something other than beliefs (with the same content as the statement)⁷ is meant to achieve two sorts of explanatory parsimony over the dominant rival theory. This is the sense in which the views are strikingly similar. The sense in which contemporary versions of the views are strikingly dissimilar emerges most clearly in light of recent responses to a common set of objections.

One potential problem with these expressivist views comes from the fact that that ordinary discourse treats ethical statements and

6. That doesn't mean that the avowal expressivist has to *deny* that there is a faculty or method of introspection. It's just that she doesn't have to appeal to this faculty or method in providing a general account of the unchallengeability and first-personal authority of avowals, which means that she can say comparatively less about the nature and origin of introspection. Even Wittgenstein may have agreed that we introspect, though he would have wanted to point out the way in which this seems to be a distinctive and fairly rare sort of mental activity and not something implicitly already part of our practice of avowing.
7. The parenthetical qualification is necessary for two reasons. First, in the special case of avowing a belief by stating "I believe that *p*", the avowal expressivist's position is that this expresses *the belief that p*, and not the second-order belief that the speaker believes that *p*. The avowal expressivist holds that avowals express the underlying mental state itself rather than second-order beliefs about it. Second, there are some ethical expressivists who think that an ethical statement can express a belief but not an ethical belief. For example, Ayer seems to have thought that the statement "You acted wrongly in stealing that money" expresses the belief that you stole that money. And ecumenical expressivists such as Ridge (2006, 2007) think that ethical claims express both beliefs and attitudes, but the belief has a nonethical content. I return to ecumenical views briefly in footnote 18 below.

avowals as ostensible manifestations of knowledge in a way that traditional expressivists cannot satisfactorily explain. When Suzy says, "Torture is wrong," if we think the claim is correct, sincere, and one to which Suzy is entitled, then it seems correct to say that Suzy knows that torture is wrong. Likewise, when Suzy says, "I want tea," if we think that the claim is correct, sincere, and one to which Suzy is entitled, then it seems correct to say that Suzy knows that she wants tea. However, if ethical statements and avowals do not express beliefs (with the same content as the statement), and having a belief that *p* is necessary for knowing that *p*, it seems that the expressivist cannot make sense of such attributions of ethical knowledge and self-knowledge on the basis of someone's making an ethical statement or avowal. The objection to both sorts of expressivism stemming from this problem may be called the *objection from epistemic continuity*, since avowals and ethical statements seem to be continuous with other sorts of (belief-expressing) statements in their ability to be counted as manifestations of the speaker's knowledge.

Another potential problem with both sorts of expressivism comes from the fact that ordinary discourse treats ethical statements and avowals as truth-apt in a way that traditional expressivists cannot clearly explain. We say things such as "It's true that torture is wrong, but maybe it is the lesser of two evils." The same goes for avowals: We apply the truth-predicate, saying things such as "It's true that I want tea, but I want to be on time, too". This suggests that ethical statements and avowals are truth-apt. But it is unclear how mere expressions of motivational attitudes or underlying avowed mental states like desires could be truth-apt. Witness the fact that "Boo torture!" and "Gimme tea" are neither true nor false. The objection to both sorts of expressivism stemming from this problem may be called the *objection from semantic continuity*, since avowals and ethical statements seem to be continuous with other sorts of (belief-expressing) statements in being truth-apt.

These objections have persuaded many that ethical expressivism and avowal expressivism are hopeless.⁸ However, the advantages in

8. Another objection that has been even more influential within metaethics is related to but I think distinct from the objection from semantic continuity.

explanatory parsimony gained by both views have proven tempting enough to inspire considerable theoretical sophistication in search of plausible defenses of modified forms of each kind of expressivism. Interestingly, these contemporary defenses have pursued markedly different strategies for shoring up the relevant version of expressivism against the objections. In the ethical case, I think the most worked-out response comes primarily in the position dubbed “quasi-realism” by Blackburn (1984, 1993, 1998) and Gibbard (2003), which seeks to regain for expressivists the language that tempts people to realism by means of some sort of minimalist interpretation of the relevant terms (*e.g.*, ‘truth’, ‘represents’, ‘fact’, ‘belief’, ‘knowledge’, *etc.*). And in the avowal case, I think the most worked-out response comes primarily in the position dubbed “neo-expressivism” by Bar-On (2004), which distinguishes between avowals as acts and avowals as products and allows that acts of avowing express both an underlying avowed mental state and a self-attributive belief. In both cases, I think the resulting expressivist views have conceded too much to their competition and thereby undermined their putative principal advantages over the rival view in each area. This is the main thesis of this paper, which I aim to defend in §2 and §3 below.

It’s interesting that contemporary avowal expressivists have not tried to use the quasi-realist strategy for meeting the objection from epistemic continuity as it confronts their view, and that contemporary ethical expressivists have not tried to use the neo-expressivist strategy for meeting the objection from semantic continuity as it confronts their view. This raises the question: Could a bit of theoretical

This is the Frege-Geach objection. Geach (1965) challenged expressivists to explain how mere expressions of motivational attitudes could be logically related in the way necessary to underwrite patently valid inferences. There has been a cottage industry of proposed solutions and counterarguments to Geach’s objection — see especially Blackburn (1988), Stoljar (1993), Gibbard (2003), Ridge (2006), Schroeder (2008). Here I will say very little about this debate, except to register my view that Geach’s objection must be met for any expressivist view — be it about ethical statements or about avowals — to survive. The present focus, however, will be on the two more intuitive objections from epistemic continuity and semantic continuity.

cross-pollination generate better expressivist positions in both cases? As a subsidiary to my main thesis, I also want to explore this possibility in §4 and §5 below. I do so not to provide a definitive verdict, but rather because I think it throws into sharp relief the unorthodox commitments one must adopt in order to gain the principal advantages of each theory. In the end, I tentatively suggest that the commitments needed to make a cross-pollinated version of avowal expressivism work are much less tenable than the commitments needed to make a cross-pollinated version of ethical expressivism work, though both positions involve significant theoretical costs.

II. Avowal Expressivism And Epistemic Continuity

Originally, avowal expressivism was a deflationary view of self-knowledge. Avowals are declarative in form, yet they typically enjoy a distinctive unchallengeability. This unchallengeability leads us to think that avowals are the manifestations of a special kind of knowledge, achieved by special means: introspection. But, the deflationist says, that’s a bad picture. The declarative form of avowals has misled us; the typical unchallengeability of avowals is to be explained instead in the same way as the typical unchallengeability of the sorts of expressions they can replace, like “Gimme tea” or a particular gesture.⁹ These are direct expressions of certain mental states, and it doesn’t make sense to challenge these expressions in the sense of asking, “Really, what makes you think that?” or “What are your reasons for thinking that?” This is not, according to early expressivists, because they are manifestations of a specially secure sort of knowledge; it’s because they are expressive rather than descriptive, and so to challenge them in this way involves some sort of category mistake. Thus, regarding the objection from epistemic continuity, the deflationist *cum* expressivist will say that avowals aren’t manifestations of knowledge; so to object that they are is just to beg the question against avowal expressivism.

However, most philosophers working on this issue now think such

9. Many attribute this position to Wittgenstein (1953). See Ginet (1968), Fogelin (1976), Hacker (1993), and Wright (1998).

a deflationary view of self-knowledge is unsatisfactorily drastic. After all, even the expressivist should agree that we have the mental states we express. So, whether or not she thinks avowals are true because they correctly describe this extant mental reality, the avowal expressivist needs there to be an extant mental reality corresponding to these statements. Moreover, given that she is committed to the existence of such a mental reality, and given that the typical unchallengeability of avowals comprises (in part) protection from epistemic criticism and doubt, it would be quite strange if the continued justification for treating avowals as specially unchallengeable were not due to the fact that such avowals tended, in a special way, to get things right about this mental reality. But if they do this, then surely they are somewhere in the neighborhood of manifesting genuine self-knowledge.

It is largely for this reason that contemporary avowal expressivists have avoided deflationism about self-knowledge.¹⁰ But that leaves the objection from epistemic continuity unanswered for avowal expressivism. How can one be an avowal expressivist but recognize the possibility that avowals can be manifestations of knowledge?

The most sophisticated and worked-out attempt to answer this question comes in the form of the neo-expressivist view of avowals defended in Bar-On (2004). She defends a view that distinguishes between avowals as expressive acts and avowals as linguistic products of these acts. She suggests that ‘avowal’ “can be read as referring to someone’s act of *avowing*, which is an event in the world with a certain causal history and certain action properties; but it can also be read as referring to the result or product of such act — a linguistic (or language-like) token, an item with certain semantic properties” (p. 251). According to her, acts of avowing gain their distinctive features from the fact that they express the mental state that is avowed. But she recognizes that one might worry that, on this expressivist view, avowals “cannot be taken to articulate things we genuinely know about ourselves, and *ipso*

facto, they do not represent a privileged kind of knowledge that we have” (p. 342). Rather than adopt a deflationary stance towards self-knowledge, she seeks to answer this worry in a nondeflationary way. Her strategy is, first, to argue that avowals express both a first-order mental state (*i. e.*, the underlying desire, love, pain, *etc.*) and, in a qualified sense, a second-order self-ascriptive belief (*i. e.*, that the avower is in the state of desire, love, pain, *etc.*). This is a version of what Bar-On calls the “dual-expression thesis”. Then she argues that endorsing the dual expression thesis makes her version of expressivism consistent with several different accounts of why such self-beliefs are often warranted and true. And it is this that entitles her to the recognition that, *contra* deflationism, they are often manifestations of genuine knowledge (pp. 307–310; 340–396).¹¹

Although there is work to be done to spell out the precise nature of self-knowledge on this view, I want to grant that this line of thought succeeds in letting the expressivist resist deflationism about self-knowledge. For on Bar-On’s view, avowals now express (in part) beliefs, which can be true and warranted. Given how drastic deflationism is, this move away from deflationism surely makes avowal expressivism more attractive. Nonetheless, I worry that adoption of the dual-expression thesis carries a significant dialectical burden. For, recall that the primary advantages of avowal expressivism are the epistemological and cognitive parsimony it gains in not having to appeal to introspection as a way to explain the typical unchallengeability and first-personal authority of avowals. However, if the neo-expressivist now allows that avowals express self-ascriptive beliefs after all, then the question about the epistemic status and cognitive source of these beliefs is renewed, and one wonders whether we won’t be forced back into a form of introspectionism to answer it.

10. Compare McGeer (1996), Bar-On (2004), and Wright (1998, pp. 34–43), though Wright doesn’t endorse the expressivist view he discusses. One exception to this claim is perhaps Jacobsen (1996).

11. She actually sketches three separate accounts of self-knowledge that are each non-deflationary and consistent with her neo-expressivist view of avowals: a “low road”, a “high road”, and a “middle road” account of self-knowledge. See Bar-On (2004, pp. 369–388). Each of these accounts turns on her claim that, in addition to an underlying mental state, avowals express self-ascriptive beliefs.

As far as I can tell, Bar-On wants to avoid this question by means of the distinction she makes between two different senses of 'belief'. She writes, "In what we may call the *opining* sense, one believes that *p* if one has entertained the thought that *p* and has formed the active judgment that *p* on some basis, where one has (and could offer) specific evidence or reasons for that judgment" (p. 363). And she suggests that this is to be distinguished from

a second, more liberal sense of belief, in which a subject believes that *p*, provided (roughly) that she would accept *p* upon considering it. This holding-true, as we may refer to it, is the one we apply when we say that people have beliefs concerning matters they have not yet considered. For example, I may not presently have any active opinion, formed on some specific basis, regarding matters such as the color of rain in Spain, or the sum of some numbers... yet if suitably prompted, I would affirm the relevant claims. (p. 364)

In her view, an avower may be said to believe the content of the avowal in the holding-true sense but not in the opining sense. This is supposed to help avoid the question about the epistemic status and cognitive source of these beliefs. The idea is that, since holding-true doesn't require the active formulation of a judgment, one can count as believing that *p* in the sense of holding-true that *p* even if this belief has no cognitive source whatsoever, and the epistemic status of this belief can be explained in any number of ways consistent with rejecting introspectionism as long as they don't appeal to a special cognitive source.

However, even if we grant this distinction between opining and holding-true, the problem with this strategy for evading the question about the epistemic status and cognitive source of the beliefs ostensibly expressed by avowals is that these beliefs are not plausibly thought of as mere holdings-true. When I avow "I'm in pain," it is not plausible to claim that I believe I am in pain but I have not yet considered

whether I am in pain. In effect, Bar-On admits this. She writes, "In the case of avowals, unlike the case of purely dispositional beliefs, a subject actively engages in an act of producing a mental self-ascription (in speech or in thought)... On the Neo-Expressivist account, when avowing feeling thirsty, I am saying or thinking that I am feeling thirsty" (p. 365). And she seems to think that this helps her account. She writes,

[T]he Neo-Expressivist can allow that avowals represent beliefs that subjects have about themselves not only in the sense of holding true (as expounded above) but in a more robust, 'self-ascriptive' sense. Subjects can be credited with the relevant beliefs to the extent that they can be seen as intentionally issuing self-ascriptions that represent those beliefs when avowing. If so, then we can maintain that avowing involves a subject's expressing her first-order mental condition without denying that avowals represent beliefs we have in the sense required for knowledge. (*Ibid.*)

But if this is the sense of 'belief' on which avowals express beliefs, then it surely is not mere holdings-true. We seem to have a belief that is the result of an active judgment, and so the question again arises about the cognitive source of this belief and why it has the special epistemic security manifested in first-personal authority. Could Bar-On deny that the first personal authority of this belief derives from its cognitive source or even deny that it has a cognitive source altogether, since it doesn't seem to be based on any specific evidence?

To be sure, the puzzling thing about the beliefs ostensibly expressed by avowals is that, like the avowals that express them, they seem to be very secure from epistemic challenge and yet to result from active judgments for which one doesn't seem to have or be able to offer any specific evidence. However, this doesn't imply that they have no cognitive source; if we have active judgments and not mere holdings-true, there has to be some cognitive faculty or method by which they are formed. It's a further question whether this faculty or method

can be used in an account of what justifies the beliefs, but it seems that there must be a faculty or method nonetheless. Bar-On's opponents call this "introspection", and so it looks like they at least have a name for what they are trying to explain. But, by being forced to admit that avowals express self-ascriptive beliefs in a more robust sense than mere holdings-true, the neo-expressivist seems just as much committed to the existence of a special cognitive source for these beliefs and so owes us an explanation of what it is and how it works.

To be clear about my objection: none of this is meant to show that Bar-On has to appeal to an "inner-eye" to explain the cognitive source of these beliefs. But, on a broader understanding of 'introspectionism', the introspectionist is just someone who thinks that there is some special cognitive faculty or method by which we come to have specially secure beliefs about our own mental states, beliefs that, when true, are articles of self-knowledge. On this understanding of introspectionism, I think Bar-On's adoption of the dual-expression thesis threatens to collapse her neo-expressivist position into a form of introspectionism. For it seems that as soon as she endorses the dual-expression thesis she too owes us an explanation of the special epistemic security and cognitive source of self-ascriptive beliefs.¹²

Indeed, some of what Bar-On writes encourages us to interpret her as proposing a new introspectionist explanation of the security of avowals. For instance, she writes, "On the present proposal, what is epistemically unique about avowals is that the very same thing — one's being in *M* — provides both a rational reason for the avowal understood

12. In correspondence, Bar-On has told me that she thinks it is an empirical question whether we have a special faculty of introspection, but she thinks such a faculty couldn't explain the distinctive security of avowals. But even if that's right, my worry here is that the dual-expression thesis commits her to thinking that there is some special way that the self-ascriptive beliefs expressed by avowals are formed. And it is precisely this that introspectionists have always been trying to explain. Bar-On can insist that her explanatory project is different: it's to explain the security of avowals, not the security of the beliefs they express. But then I'd say that she, unlike traditional avowal expressivists, has simply ignored rather than explained away the question that animates introspectionist accounts. (Thanks here to Ram Neta for pressing me to be clearer about my worry.)

as an (expressive) act and an epistemic reason for the avowal understood as representative of the subject's self-judgment" (p. 390). The idea here seems to be that the self-ascriptive beliefs expressed by avowals are formed in a special way — on the basis of the mental state that they mention. But that just sounds like a new version of the introspectionist strategy for explaining the distinctiveness of self-knowledge. However, to collapse avowal expressivism into a form of introspectionism — even a novel form of introspectionism — is surely to lose the primary advantage of avowal expressivism. For instead of avoiding appeal to introspection as a way to explain the unchallengeability and first-personal authority of avowals, we'd be back, at least implicitly, to positing some special faculty or method for forming distinctively secure beliefs about one's own mental states.

At other times, however, Bar-On appears to want to avoid just this sort of collapse. She writes, "The [neo-expressivist] account needs to insist that avowals' distinctive security derives from the fact that they serve to express₁ subjects' self-ascribed conditions, rather than from whatever epistemic security accrues to any self-judgments [*i.e.*, second-order beliefs] subjects may [also] express₁" (p. 366).¹³ But, even so, as long as she allows that avowals express self-ascriptive beliefs, which are potentially articles of knowledge, then there will be a question of why these beliefs are so secure and how we came to have them. Bar-On could insist that this simply isn't the explanandum of her theory, since she aims to explain the security of avowals rather than the security of the beliefs they express. But surely, once we've admitted that they exist and are distinctively secure, the security of these beliefs is something that needs to be explained; and it would be strange if whatever explains it isn't intimately related to what explains the security of avowals that express them. However, for the avowal expressivist even

13. 'Express₁' — the "action sense" of 'express' — is Bar-On's term for the expression relation between a person and the mental states he conveys by means of an expressive act. This contrasts with 'express₂' (the "causal sense" of 'express') and 'express₃' (the "semantic sense" of 'express'. See Bar-On (2004), p. 216, for the precise characterization of the distinction and Sellars (1969) for the original statement.

to engage the project of explaining the special security of these first-personal present-tense beliefs about our own mental states is, it seems to me, for her to give up on the primary advantages of the position in the debate with the introspectionist.

In this way, the avowal expressivist seems to face a dilemma generated by the objection from epistemic continuity. On the one hand, to deny the premise of this objection by adopting deflationism about self-knowledge seems drastic and misguided. On the other hand, to endorse the dual-expression thesis and say that avowals do after all express self-ascriptive beliefs seems to undermine the primary advantages originally claimed for avowal expressivism. In §4 below, I'll consider the suggestion mentioned above that the avowal expressivist might meet this objection by taking a play from contemporary ethical expressivists' playbook. But first I want to switch arenas and argue that recent attempts by ethical expressivists to overcome the objection from semantic continuity face a fate similar to the neo-expressivist's attempt to overcome the objection from epistemic continuity.

III. Ethical Expressivism And Semantic Continuity

Ethical expressivists have traditionally claimed to be able to recognize ethical statements as non-erroneous without committing to a realm of ethical facts because they don't treat ethical statements as expressive of beliefs that seek to represent the facts. However, if this is because ethical statements are claimed to be *merely* "expressive", as early expressivists seem to have thought, then it is mysterious why we sometimes say things like "It's true that torture is wrong, but maybe it is the better of two evils". To say that ordinary use of the truth-predicate in conjunction with ethical statements is mistaken is to bite a bullet significant enough to make one wonder whether the expressivist is really theorizing about our ordinary ethical discourse. This is the central aspect of the objection from semantic continuity.

The most influential response to this objection was initially formulated in Blackburn (1984), where he proposed the "enterprise of quasi-realism", which is "to earn, on the slender basis [of expressivist

anti-realism], the features of moral language ... which might tempt people to realism" (p. 171). The exact quasi-realist means for achieving this have evolved over the last twenty years, but the dominant strategy now is to endorse a minimalist conception of truth, according to which '*p* is true' is intersubstitutable with '*p*'; and truth is not, in general, conceived of as a correspondence relation. The idea is to try to earn the expressivist the right to talk of ethical truths without committing to anything more than is already committed to by making unembedded ethical statements. As Blackburn puts the point, "[M]inimalism about truth allows us to end up saying 'It is true that kindness is good'. For this means no more than that kindness is good, an attitude we may properly want to express" (1998, p. 79). By denying that truth is a robust correspondence relation, the quasi-realist effects a sort of deflationism about the ontological commitments implicit in the indicative mood, which can then be put to service in responding to the objection from semantic continuity while maintaining a form of anti-realism.

But it's not only talk of ethical truths that have tempted some to realism. We also commonly embed ethical sentences in belief-talk. We say things such as "I believe that torture is wrong". And if beliefs are thought to be attempts to represent the facts, this would seem to force a renewed realist interpretation of ordinary ethical discourse. However, once we have accepted minimalism about truth, it can seem easy to deflate the ontological import of other allegedly realist-sounding ways of speaking, by pointing out putatively platitudinous connections between them and truth-talk. Many people think that to make a statement is just to express a belief in the truth of the statement. And this is precisely what underwrites quasi-realists in extending their minimalism about truth-talk into minimalism about belief-talk as well. For instance, Gibbard considers the possibility that "minimalists are right for truth ... and for belief: there is no more to claiming 'It's true that pain is bad' than to claiming that pain is bad To believe that pain is bad is just to accept that it is" (2003, pp. 182–183). If all of this is right, then one might think that there is no problem for the expressivist to recognize the way ethical statements are embedded in belief-talk

without endorsing the realist construal of this feature of ethical discourse. The quasi-realist expressivist can agree that ethical statements express beliefs, as long as he endorses a minimalist construal of belief-talk paralleling his minimalist construal of truth-talk.

In my view, there are two problems with this line of thought, attaching to each of the advantages originally claimed for the ethical expressivist. The first problem is that it threatens to undermine the whole realism/antirealism debate in metaethics. The second problem is that it undermines the expressivist's claim to psychological parsimony. Let me explain.

The first advantage originally claimed for the ethical expressivist was that he could explain the legitimacy of ethical discourse without positing an underlying ethical reality, and thus gained a measure of ontological parsimony over his realist competitors. However, once we endorse a general minimalist understanding of 'true' and 'belief', it becomes hard to stop minimalism from undermining every way that ethical expressivism might be distinguished from realism. For what is a *proposition* if not just the content of a truth-apt sentence or the belief it expresses? And what is a *fact* if not just a true proposition? Going minimalist about truth and belief and related notions means that the quasi-realist expressivist can say that some ethical statements express true propositions, and that, when they are true, they state facts, in which the author of the statement believes. However, then we should wonder: what makes this an antirealist position?

Some have suggested that we posit two different senses to each of these terms, depending on whether they are used in conjunction with descriptive discourse or ethical discourse. For example, perhaps we can distinguish between realist and deflationary senses of 'true' by using all capitals ('TRUE') to refer to the former and lowercase ('true') to refer to the latter, and likewise with 'BELIEF'/'belief' and all of the other relevant terms.¹⁴ However, that would immediately invite vexing

14. Timmons (1999, pp. 152–154) suggests something like this strategy. Along related lines, Ridge (forthcoming) suggests that we can avoid creeping minimalism by distinguishing between robust and minimalist senses of 'belief'.

questions: Does this mean that all of these terms are ambiguous, and if so, what empirical evidence is there for that claim? What about contexts where the two senses seem to be mixed such as "Everything the Pope said today is true/TRUE" or "She believes/BELIEVES that either your action was wrong or it causes no harm"? Because I think these questions are impossible to answer satisfactorily, I demur at bifurcating senses of all of the terms relevant to marking out the distinction between realism and irrealism.

If we don't do that, however, we seem to lose our grip on what's at issue between realists and expressivists. It is because of this that Dreier writes, "Minimalism sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts. If successful, it can help Expressivism recapture the ordinary realist language of ethics. But in so doing it also threatens to make irrealism indistinguishable from realism" (2004, p. 26).¹⁵ But if this is right, then the quasi-realist enterprise has the defect of divorcing the expressivist's leading idea, that ethical statements express a mental state interestingly different from the mental states expressed by uncontroversially descriptive statements, from the first principal advantage of this idea, which is that statements that don't

Roughly, beliefs in the minimalist sense are what causally regulate ordinary use of the word 'belief', while it is beliefs in the robust sense that are part of a mature belief-desire psychology. His idea, then, is that ethical realists are committed to the view that ethical claims express beliefs in the robust sense, while quasi-realists expressivists are not. (Thanks here to an anonymous referee and Michael Ridge for pressing me to address the possibility of multiple senses of the relevant terms.)

15. There is more to be said about whether there is *any* way within a quasi-realist framework to distinguish realism from irrealism. Dreier (2004) proposes an answer, drawing on answers suggested by O'Leary-Hawthorne (1996), Fine (2001), and Gibbard (2003). Roughly, the idea is to distinguish between beliefs that *p* that must be explained by appeal to the fact that *p* and those beliefs for which this isn't the case. Then, realism is supposed to be distinguished from quasi-realism by whether one holds that the mental state expressed by a statement is a belief in the former sense. I've argued against this suggestion in Chrisman (2008b). A lot depends on what we mean by 'explain', but the crux of my argument is that Dreier et al. don't get away from using notions (such as representation) whose ontological purport the minimalist will seek to undermine.

express genuine beliefs do not ontologically commit their authors to a corresponding fact.

Does this mean that the expressivist *cum* global minimalist position represented by quasi-realism collapses into the sort of realism that it was designed to avoid? It's not entirely clear. Some think that it does,¹⁶ but the quasi-realist might insist that, if his program is carried through successfully, then there is no longer the problem with realism. That is to say that he'll grant that ethical claims are truth-apt and express beliefs, some of which are true of the ethical facts; but he'll insist that none of this is to be interpreted in an ontologically committing way.¹⁷ However, unless we can say what *is* to be interpreted in an ontologically committing way, this represents a move to the quietist idea that there is no sense to be made of ontological debate about realism. The idea is that, although we sometimes find it useful to talk about truths, facts, beliefs, *etc.*, none of this answers ontological questions about the real nature of reality, since those questions are meaningless.

It's unclear to me whether this move to ontological quietism is cogent on its own terms, but what is important to realize in the present context is that adopting it undermines the dialectical advantage of the core expressivist strategy for capturing an ontological difference between ethical and descriptive discourse. That strategy turned on claiming an expressive contrast between ethical statements and ordinary statements, in order to gain a contrast in the ontological commitment involved in ethical discourse and other sorts of discourse. With the move to quasi-realist forms of expressivism, however, we can sympathize when realists on the one hand and quietists on the other wonder what it is that expressivism *cum* global minimalism is supposed to do for them. After all, all participants to this debate now agree that ethical claims express beliefs that may be true of the ethical facts. Either that commits one ontologically or it doesn't, but expressivism doesn't seem to have anything to add.

16. Compare Dworkin (1996).

17. Compare Price (2003, 2004).

I said above that I think there's a problem with the quasi-realist response to the objection from semantic continuity attaching to each of the traditional advantages of expressivism. The second advantage was that expressivism has a very direct explanation of the distinctively tight connection between ethical judgments and motivations to act. Because ethical judgments just are a sort of motivational attitude, expressivism purports to give us an explanation of the practical nature of ethical thought that is psychologically parsimonious in the sense that it doesn't require any special psychological story about the connection between ethical beliefs and motivations. And it may seem that this is what expressivism has to add even after going minimalist about all of the putatively ontologically committing notions. However, once we have endorsed minimalism about 'belief', it's hard to see how the expressivist's account of the connection between ethical judgments and motivations is any different from a realist who says that some beliefs have a special motivational capacity. After all, the quasi-realist expressivist is going to say that an ethical statement such as "Torture is wrong" expresses the belief that torture is wrong, since to believe this is just to accept that torture is wrong. And now either this acceptance does or does not have a distinctive motivational capacity. If it does, the expressivist's explanation of the practical nature of ethical thought looks like it has collapsed into one identical to the realist who says that ethical beliefs are specially motivational. If it does not, the expressivist's explanation will owe us just the same sort of psychological explanation of the connection between ethical beliefs and motivations that his view was designed to avoid in hopes of psychological parsimony. Again, either way, it's not clear what advantages ethical expressivism in its quasi-realist manifestation brings to the debate.

If the argument of the previous six paragraphs is right, then the quasi-realist expressivist attempt to answer the objection from semantic continuity has led to the same fate as the neo-expressivist attempt to answer the objection from epistemic continuity. In the end, both sophistications of the original expressivist idea have conceded so much to their competitors that they have lost the distinctive advantages

originally claimed for expressivism in each area. These advantages had to do with parsimony, and of course, some philosophers won't be so moved by considerations of parsimony. However, for those philosophers who are attracted to the expressivist view of ethical statements and/or avowals because of the parsimony those views promise, the conclusion here should be disheartening.

In what follows, I want to consider two theoretical possibilities that the discussion so far has left open. I said at the outset that both expressivist views face both the objection from epistemic continuity and the objection from semantic continuity. However, the structure of my critical argument against recent sophisticated attempts to overcome these objections in either arena has, in each case, focused on just one of the objections. My criticism of Bar-On's neo-expressivism has focused on the objection from epistemic continuity and my criticism of Blackburn and Gibbard's quasi-realism has focused on the objection from semantic continuity. As it turns out, each of these philosophers has also attempted to overcome the objection that I haven't focused on with respect to their view. That is to say that Bar-On has a response to the objection from semantic continuity, and Blackburn and Gibbard have a response to the objection from epistemic continuity. Although I think these responses to those objections are more promising than the ones I have discussed, they won't by themselves help the case of either neo-expressivism or quasi-realism against my criticisms above. However, in light of the symmetry, there does remain the theoretical possibility that each kind of expressivist could adopt a play from the other's playbook to provide a new response to the relevant objection and avoid my criticisms. I think this would change the nature of these views so much that it would make the labels 'neo-expressivism' and 'quasi-realism' misleading, but it would be a possibility for saving expressivism about avowals and/or ethical statements from my criticisms so far. It is this possibility that I want to explore, somewhat more speculatively, in the remainder of this paper. My argument will be that making this possibility work involves a radical commitment on the

part of the avowal expressivist, and two unorthodox commitments on the part of the ethical expressivist

IV. A Different Response to the Objection from Epistemic Continuity

We haven't yet discussed how ethical expressivists respond to the objection from epistemic continuity. Early ethical expressivists such as Ayer (1936) adopted expressivism in part precisely because they thought there was no such thing as genuinely ethical knowledge. However, the drastic nature of this view was partly responsible for the demise of early expressivism. After all, the phenomenon of claiming and ascribing ethical knowledge is quite robust. And this has led contemporary ethical expressivists to try to capture rather than reject the epistemic continuity between ethical statements and descriptive statements. However, interestingly, these ethical expressivists have not sought to meet the analogous application of the objection from epistemic continuity by embracing anything like the dual-expression thesis¹⁸ and they are not deflationists about ethical knowledge. Instead, they ask us to reflect on epistemic discourse in general, and they propose an expressivist-friendly account of what we are doing when we attribute knowledge. In this section, I want to consider this move because it may look like some variant of it would save avowal expressivism from the criticisms leveled above. My suggestion, however, will be that whatever help it may provide to the ethical expressivist in defending his view from the objection from epistemic continuity, this move is much more radical when used by the avowal expressivist.

18. One possible exception to this claim is Copp (2001); however, the position he defends is explicitly a form of realism, albeit 'realist-expressivism'. This view is discussed much more in Bar-On and Chrisman (2009). Gert (2006, 2007) defends a version of the dual-expression thesis for at least some normative claims; however, he is not an expressivist. There are hybrid expressivist views, such as Tresan (2006), Ridge (2006) and Boisvert (forthcoming), which treat ethical statements as expressing both a belief and a motivational attitude, but these are not endorsements of the dual-expression thesis because the content of the relevant belief is not the same as the content of the statement. I am bracketing these in the present discussion, in order to explore more fully the similarities and dissimilarities between non-hybrid expressivist views about both avowals and ethical statements.

Blackburn suggests that “the primary function of talking of ‘knowledge’ is to indicate that a judgment is beyond revision. That is, we rule out any chance that an improvement might occur, that would properly lead to a revision of the judgment” (1998, p. 318). I think we should understand this along the lines of Gibbard’s (2003) attempt to extend his expressivist theory of ethical statements into an expressivist theory of knowledge statements themselves. The core idea is to treat statements of the form ‘S knows that *p*’ as themselves expressions of plans rather than factual beliefs. Specifically, because he thinks that “the concept of knowing serves to guide us in relying on some kinds of judgments and not on others” (p. 227), he suggests that knowledge attributions themselves are the expression of plans to rely on someone’s judgment about something.¹⁹ He writes, “[A]ttributions of knowledge are plan-laden. Joe knows there are cows on the hill, we say; he knows because he sees them. This means very roughly ... that judgments like his are to be relied on. Concluding that Joe knows, then, amounts to planning to rely on his judgment” (*ibid.*). And Gibbard argues that this account of attributions of knowledge of some matter of fact can be easily extended to account for attributions of knowledge of what to do. He writes, “Plan-laden judgments may be true, in a minimal sense, and they can be formed in a way to rely on. The finding that a judgment meets these conditions is plan-laden” (p. 235). That is to say that when one attributes knowledge to someone of what to do, the act of making this statement is an act of expressing a plan (roughly) to rely on a particular sort of judgment, rather than an act of expressing a factual belief.

To many epistemologists, this will seem like a radical account of knowledge, but in fairness to Blackburn and Gibbard, I think it should be viewed not as a theory of knowledge but as a meta-epistemological reorientation of the project of the theory of knowledge, which is no

19. In Chrisman (2007) I argued that there’s a simple way to extend Gibbard’s (1990) analysis of ascriptions of rationality to knowledge attributions in a way that overcomes two objections threatening epistemic contextualism. I take this to be consistent with Gibbard’s (2003) suggestion mentioned in the text above.

more radical than the metaethical reorientation that expressivists have already proposed of the project of the theory of the good. After all, it is characteristic of ethical expressivism to ask not about goodness but about judgments that something is good; and, likewise, when considering another normative concept, ‘knowledge’, expressivists are now urging us to ask not about knowledge but about judgments that someone knows something. And just as metaethical expressivism remains relatively neutral about specific normative ethical debates about the good, this meta-epistemological account can also remain relatively neutral about specific normative epistemological debates such as internalism versus externalism, coherentism versus foundationalism, *etc.*

Moreover, from the expressivist point of view, there are a couple of considerations speaking in its favor. First, knowledge statements are often said to be normative; and since expressivism is often thought of as a framework for normative statements in general, it’s very natural to extend it from ethical claims to epistemic claims. Second, this strategy provides for a general account of knowledge statements, which when applied to ethical and descriptive statements can explain why both are possible manifestations of knowledge, regardless of one’s account of the mental state expressed by making these statements. For an expressivist to succeed at that explanation just is to succeed at meeting the objection from epistemic continuity.

So, whether or not Blackburn’s and Gibbard’s meta-epistemological accounts of knowledge attributions are ultimately defensible, I think this general orientation towards the objection from epistemic continuity coheres well enough with the rest of the ethical expressivist’s view to grant for the sake of argument that it provides a successful internal response to the objection from epistemic continuity — “internal” in the sense that an ethical expressivist who endorses it cannot be rationally criticized for specifically failing to meet the objection from epistemic continuity in a way consistent with his overall theory.²⁰

I grant this so that we can ask, Would a similar strategy help the

20. Some have argued that an extension of expressivism to epistemic notions incurs special problems not faced by ethical versions of expressivism. See

avowal expressivist to achieve a similarly internal response to the analogous application of the objection from epistemic continuity? The idea, following Gibbard, would be to explain why avowals seem to be manifestations of knowledge by characterizing the attribution of knowledge to an avower as the expression of a plan to rely on this person's avowal and statements like it. For instance, when one says, "I want tea", we will think that this is the manifestation of knowledge if we plan, in Gibbard's sense, to rely on it and statements like it. What is it to rely on these statements? Initially one might question whether it makes sense to rely on someone's statements if these statements do not express beliefs with the same content as the statement, but this would be a mistake. For consider the statements "I'm going to go to the party", which is typically used primarily to express an intention to go to the party, and "I believe that the party starts at 10 pm", which is typically used primarily to express a qualified belief that the party starts at 10 pm. It makes perfect sense to plan to rely on these statement and ones like them in the sense that when someone says, "I'm going to go to the party", we can infer "He's going to be at the party", and when someone says, "I believe that the party starts at 10 pm", we can infer "The party probably starts at 10 pm". These conclusions can then figure as premises in our future reasoning about things like whether to make an appearance at the party and at what time.

The pay-off of this strategy for answering the objection from epistemic continuity as it threatens avowal expressivism is that it provides a natural framework within which we can discuss the distinctive security apparently attaching to avowals without resorting to the introspectionist strategy of explaining this security in terms of a special faculty or method by which we come to form specially secure self-ascriptive beliefs. For one who thinks that knowledge statements express plan-laden judgments can countenance a complex structure of practical reasons that support planning to rely on someone. Perhaps the distinctive security of avowals is a reflection of the fact that we almost

Kvanvig (2003, ch. 7), Cuneo (2008, ch. 5–6), and Lynch (forthcoming). These arguments are addressed in Carter and Chrisman (ms).

always have sufficient reason to plan to rely on someone's avowals. Why? Because they are direct expressions of mental states rather than attempts to discern what mental states the avower is in. To say that they are manifestations of distinctively secure knowledge would, then, be to express a specially entrenched plan to rely on them. This is how Gibbard's strategy for answering the objection from epistemic continuity might be extended to help avowal expressivism with the same objection.

If this could work, it would be a nice result for avowal expressivism — in effect, saving the position from the dilemma between deflationism and introspectionism about self-knowledge that we reached at the end of §2. However, there is a significant disanalogy between avowal expressivism and ethical expressivism that undermines this strategy. In the ethical case, the expressivist holds that ethical statements express one unified kind of mental state. It's the kind of mental state that is properly classified as nonbelief and puts the right sort of pressure on decision and action; perhaps it's a motivational attitude, a moral sentiment, a practical judgment, or a plan.²¹ The ethical expressivist maintains that, although states of this kind are not genuine beliefs, they are still things that we can have reasons for and against, and they stand in articulable inferential relations to one another and to other mental states and actions. By contrast, in the avowal case, the expressivist holds that avowals express a motley assortment of mental states — it's whatever can be avowed: pain, hunger, desires, emotions, first-order beliefs, *etc.* It is not plausible to think that all of these

21. This kind of mental states may not be unified in the sense that there is one English word for all of them. In footnote 2, above, I said that I would leave it vague how far the class of ethical statements extends beyond claims about what is ethically right or wrong. If the expressivist wants her theory to apply to statements deploying other ethical terms, it may actually help her case to have a diversity of ethical attitudes to appeal to in order to make sense of obvious differences between, *e.g.*, the claim that a society is generous and the claim that a society is just. Compare Blackburn (1991, p. 4) for the observation that statements about justice may express many different kinds of sentiment. The important point here, however, is that the kind of mental states the ethical expressivist claims to be expressed is uniformly involved in practical reasoning and decision.

different kinds of mental states stand in articulable inferential relations to one another and to other mental states and actions. For instance, although it does seem that we can have reasons for and against *thinking* that we are in a state of pain or hunger, it doesn't seem that we can have reasons for and against our pain or hunger; witness the fact that it doesn't make sense to say, "Your hunger and pain are unjustified". But these are surely avowable mental states.

Now, on some ways of speaking, it may seem that mental states like pain and hunger can nonetheless themselves be *reasons* for beliefs and actions; consider how it does make sense to say, "His pain and hunger justified the extreme measures". However, I don't think this is evidence that mental states like pain and hunger themselves stand in the sorts of inferential relations necessary for being appropriately called knowledge. For notice how strange it would be to say that he inferred from his pain and hunger that he should engage in the extreme measures. The idea that mental states like pain and hunger may themselves stand in inferential relations may be encouraged by the idea that reasons are facts. For example, we say, "The fact that he's overweight is a reason for him to diet", and likewise we might translate the claim about pain and hunger justifying extreme measures as: "The fact that he was in pain and hungry was a sufficient reason for his extreme measures". These facts might plausibly be thought to justify certain beliefs and actions. However, this doesn't mean that these facts themselves stand in the sorts of inferential relations necessary for being appropriately called knowledge. It would be absurd to call the fact that he's overweight or the fact that he was in pain and hungry "knowledge". Rather, what seem to stand in the necessary inferential relations are *beliefs* that he's overweight or that he was hungry and in pain. However, the avowal expressivist cannot say this without reverting to a version of Bar-On's dual-expression thesis, which we've already seen to be problematic.

Because of this, if the avowal expressivist were to try to avoid Bar-On's dual-expression thesis by adopting Blackburn's or Gibbard's strategy for responding to the objection from epistemic continuity, I think she would have to commit to the radical view that avowals can count

as manifestations of knowledge though they don't necessarily express mental states that we can have reasons for and against or that can plausibly be said to stand in inferential relations to one another and to other mental states and actions.

Above I suggested that deflationism about self-knowledge is too drastic. But I also argued that, if we opt instead for Bar-On's neo-expressivism, we commit ourselves to the view that an avowal expresses a belief that is the result of an active self-ascriptive judgment, whose special cognitive source and epistemological security must be explained; and this concedes too much to introspectionism. In this section I've been exploring the possibility of using an expressivist-friendly account of epistemic evaluations to escape this dilemma. However, what we've learned is that the application of this strategy to the case of avowals would commit the avowal expressivist to a radically implausible view about what mental states can be properly referred to as knowledge.

V. A Different Response to the Objection from Semantic Continuity

We haven't yet discussed how Bar-On attempts to meet the objection from semantic continuity as it confronts her avowal expressivism. Interestingly, she does not want to follow quasi-realists in adopting a general minimalist strategy, which seeks to earn realist-sounding features of ordinary discourse without committing to realism. And this makes sense, since it's not part of avowal expressivism to be antirealist about mental states. Rather, she argues that we can capture the semantic continuity of avowals and descriptive statements by distinguishing between the act of expressing a mental state and the product of this act.²² She writes, "I think we must distinguish between the *act* of expressing and its *product*" (2004, p. 251). As I mentioned in footnote 1, usage of the term 'statement' both in ordinary discourse and in the

22. Compare also Bar-On and Long (2001) and Bar-On (2004, pp. 216–217) following Sellars (1969), where the distinction is articulated between two different senses of 'express'; I think these attach to the difference between the way a speech-act expresses and the way its product expresses.

metaethical literature is not uniform. In one sense, a statement is an act of stating something, but in another sense, a statement is the product of this act. Above I suggested that we reserve the term ‘statement’ for the former sense and use the term ‘sentence’ (or, more precisely, ‘declarative sentence-token’) for the latter sense.

The important point here is that, with this distinction in hand, we can make sense of Bar-On’s idea that although avowals, considered as products (sentence tokens) are semantically continuous with uncontroversially descriptive sentences, acts of avowing are expressively different from ordinary acts of stating something. She writes, “The product of an act of avowing, unlike a smile or a wince, or even a verbal cry such as ‘Ouch!’, is a semantically articulate self-ascription, an item with semantic structure and truth-conditions” (p. 251). However, in her view, that doesn’t undermine the expressivist insight, which “should be understood, in the first instance, as a claim about the relevant *acts*, not about their products” (p. 252). The idea is that, despite the fact that avowals considered as products are like ordinary declarative sentences in being items with semantic structure and truth-conditions, and ordinary acts of stating something express a belief with the same content as the statement produced by the act, avowals are distinctive in that they express the mental state mentioned in the product rather than a belief with the same content as that product. So, for instance, unlike the act of stating “The tree is tall”, which expresses the belief that the tree is tall, expressivists say that an avowal such as “I want tea” expresses the desire for tea — despite the fact that the products “The tree is tall” and “I want tea” are both truth-apt and otherwise semantically continuous sentences.

What does it mean to say that they are semantically continuous? In the present context, it means that they are both truth-apt, they both mean what they mean in virtue of the same sort of thing, and whatever general compositional rules explain the semantic value of the whole sentence in terms of the semantic value of its parts will apply similarly to both sentences. Importantly, to say that they are semantically continuous is not yet to give any specific explanation of what constitutes

their truth-aptness, meaning, or semantic composition rules. This is why Bar-On insists that hers is not a view about the meaning of avowals. She wants to remain relatively neutral on the semantics of avowals considered as products, while defending an expressive contrast between ordinary statements and avowals, both considered as acts.

Is it coherent to couple an account of the expressive function of a class of statements with such semantic neutrality? Some philosophers like to understand the relationship between sentences, statements, and the mental states expressed in a way that makes this sort of distinction appear unintelligible. For instance, if you think that of ethical statements and avowals on the speech-act theorists’ model of *assertions*, you may be one of these philosophers. This is because you’re thinking of statements as speech-acts that require for sincerity a belief in the propositional content of the sentence stated. Given that model, it will seem analytic or anyway very obvious that statements are speech-acts that token a declarative sentence to express (in the sense that sincerity requires) a belief with the same content as this sentence. And, if you think this, it will seem incoherent to divorce an account of the semantic features of the sentence stated (its truth-aptness, meaning, composition rules) from the mental state expressed by this statement, in the way that Bar-On wants to do.

It’s natural to say things like “To state ‘The tree is tall’ is to assert that the tree is tall, which means that one who does this expresses the belief that the tree is tall, in the sense that sincerity requires that he have this belief”. However, I think generalizing from this case is hasty, as we can see by considering three kinds of cases where it is at least not obvious that statements express beliefs with the content of the sentence used to make the statement. Considering these should make Bar-On’s strategy of divorcing semantic content from expressive function seem to be at least a theoretical option, whose application in the ethical case I will then go on to explore.

First, when we use sentences such as “I’m going to go to the party tonight” to express our intentions, it seems that we use a linguistic product that is perfectly semantically continuous with ordinary descriptive

statements even though we do not use it to express a belief with the content of this product but rather an intention. Perhaps what we want to say in this case is that the statement both expresses an intention and expresses or otherwise conveys a belief with the same content of the sentence, but it seems to me that if one of these is the primary expressive point of such statements, then it must be the expression of the intention.²³

Second, there are many performatives where it is somewhat forced to think we express a belief in the content of the sentence used to make them. For example, it's at least not obviously wrong to think that one who states "I vote for the green-party candidate" is not thereby expressing her belief that she votes for the green-party candidate. Maybe she does believe this, but maybe she hasn't thought about it enough to form the belief, or maybe she knows that the balloting rules prevent her from voting for the green-party candidate (because she's registered for a different party) but she is nonetheless using her statement as a form of protest against these rules. In any of these cases, it would be strange to say that she expresses her belief that she votes for the green-party candidate when she states "I vote for the green-party candidate".

Third, one seemingly legitimate use of terms such as 'seems' and 'think' is to qualify a statement when we are not fully confident. So, for example, we say things like "It seems like it will rain" and "I think he'll answer my email" not necessarily to express the self-ascriptive beliefs, respectively, that it seems like it will rain and that I think he'll answer my email, but rather to express some lower credence in the proposition that it will rain and that he'll answer my email. (Notice that this is very close to the case of avowing a belief. One might ask you, "Is Mary back from vacation?", to which you might respond, "I believe she is". It's not obvious that this response expresses the second-order belief that

23. Some philosophers are cognitivists about intentions, which means that they think that intentions are (at least in part) beliefs. See Setiya (2007a, 2007b). So, this example may not persuade them. However, even they should admit that their view is controversial, which puts pressure on the obviousness of the way of thinking of statements that I am objecting too. Plus, see Ross (2009) for considerations against Setiya's view of intentions.

I believe that she is back instead of a less than fully confident belief that she is back.)

It's difficult to make precise sense of these sorts of cases, but that's not the point of mentioning them. The point, rather, is to motivate the idea that it's at least not obvious that every statement must be thought to express a belief with the same content as the sentence used to make the statement.²⁴ If we accept Bar-On's distinction, this opens up room for several different general semantic explanations of the semantic features of declarative sentences, which can then be applied straightforwardly to avowals considered as products. As products, avowals are declarative sentences with all of the semantic features attaching to this category of linguistic item. Any semantic account of declarative sentences will have to explain these features.²⁵ Specifically relevant here is that declarative sentences are truth-apt; and this is the case, Bar-On insists, even in cases where their core use is not to express a self-ascriptive belief but rather to express some first-order mental state such as pain or a desire for tea.

Because of this, I think we should grant for the sake of argument that Bar-On's distinction between acts and products provides for a successful internal response to the objection from semantic continuity

24. A philosopher enamored of that view might respond by retreating to the notion of *assertion* and suggesting that my cases are not cases of assertion, and that it's only for cases of assertion that the mental state expressed must be a belief with the same content as the sentence used to make the assertion. That's fine. I think the term 'assertion' is like the terms 'statement' and 'sentence' in having no uniform usage in ordinary discourse or philosophy, but if one wants to stipulate that assertions are speech-acts that express beliefs with the same content as the sentence used to perform the speech-act, I'll give up the word 'assertion' in exchange for my stipulative definition of 'statement' (footnote 1). In fact, I haven't used the term 'assertion' in this paper until five paragraphs back, where I began discussing why some will find Bar-On's attempt to divorce the content of avowals (qua sentences) from the account of the mental expressed by avowals (qua acts) unintelligible.

25. And any general semantic and syntactic theory will have to explain the transformation rules relating declarative sentences, with their attendant semantic values, to other grammatical forms such as interrogatives and imperatives. However, the point that is important for the present discussion is the semantic features of declarative sentences.

threatening avowal expressivism. Again, I grant this so that we may ask: Could an ethical expressivist give a similar response, in order to answer the analogous application of the objection from semantic continuity in a way that doesn't run into the problems raised for quasi-realism in §3?

To extend Bar-On's strategy, we have to distinguish between ethical sentences and acts of making ethical statements. As linguistic products, ethical sentences have all of the semantic features of other declaratives. And this, the thought goes, is what gives rise to the observation that they are semantically continuous with other uncontroversially descriptive sentences. That is to say, this is why they appear to be truth-apt, meaningful, and subject to the same composition rules as ordinary sentences. However, with the act-product distinction and the example of avowals now on the table, the mere fact that ethical sentences are semantically continuous with other sorts of sentences is consistent with the original expressivist idea — couched now in more specific terms — that acts of making an ethical statement serve to express not beliefs but some other kind of mental state such as a motivational attitude.²⁶

There is, however, an obvious disanalogy between the ethical case and the avowal case that may seem to undermine this strategy straightaway. Avoiding ontological commitment to mental facts is no part of the avowal expressivist's position, whereas avoiding ontological commitment to ethical facts is part of the ethical expressivist's position. This means that while Bar-On's act-product distinction may win her almost complete neutrality among competing explanations of semantic features like the truth-aptness of mental sentences including avowals, the ethical expressivist cannot remain so neutral. In particular, it

26. In Bar-On and Chrisman (2009) we argue that applying the act-product distinction in this way to ethical claims allows for a novel expressivist understanding of the motivational character of ethical thought and discourse; however, there we remain neutral on the cognitive or noncognitive nature of the mental state expressed by ethical statements. Here I am suggesting that in order to gain the ontological advantages of traditional expressivism, the ethical expressivist cannot remain so neutral.

seems open to the avowal expressivist to say that mental sentences are truth-apt because some of them correspond to the mental facts, even while she denies that their use in avowals expresses beliefs in these facts. In contrast, given that one of the advantages of ethical expressivism is supposed to be ontological parsimony, the parallel position is not open to its proponents.

I don't think, however, this means that Bar-On's response to the objection from semantic continuity is completely unavailable to the ethical expressivist. Rather, what it means is that he cannot use it to remain completely neutral about what constitutes the truth-aptness of ethical sentences; more specifically, he cannot accept an explanation of this in terms of possible correspondence with the ethical facts. However, that doesn't mean that he cannot accept other nonrealist explanations of the truth-aptness of ethical sentences and remain otherwise neutral on the correct account of the semantic features of ethical sentences. For example, as far as semantic continuity goes, he could clearly accept a minimalist conception of truth-aptness that says that basically all there is to truth-aptness is that any sentence is truth-apt that can be meaningfully embedded in the truth-predicate.²⁷

This is very similar to the beginning of the dominant quasi-realist response to the objection from semantic continuity discussed in §3. However, quasi-realists go on to extend minimalism about truth into a minimalist account of belief, based on the putatively platitudinous connections between statements that are truth-apt and statements that express beliefs. This helped quasi-realists to win the right to say many of the things that tempt some philosophers to realism, but it also began the slide that resulted in the collapse into realism or quietism that we saw at the end of §3. Because of this, an ethical expressivist

27. The suggestion here is similar to Stoljar's (1993), which is made in the context of marrying emotivism to a deflationary theory of truth. It is also similar to Horwich's (1994) brief remarks about the consistency of expressivism and minimalism about truth. However, unlike Stoljar, Horwich indicates sympathy for a correlated minimalism about belief. This is the beginning of the slide that, as I argued in §3, results in a dilemma for the ethical expressivist between quietism and realism.

who hopes to profit from extending Bar-On's strategy for the objection from semantic continuity should insist that the act-product distinction shows this move to minimalism about beliefs is unnecessary. It's unnecessary because, given the distinction between ethical sentences and the statements they can be used to make, one can explain semantic continuity at the level of a general semantic theory for declarative sentences, while maintaining that ethical statements are speech-acts whose expressive function can be different from the expressive function of ordinary descriptive statements.

Thus, the sort of response to the objection from semantic continuity that the act-product distinction would seem to make room for when applied in the ethical case is one where:

- (a) ethical sentences are distinguished from ethical statements;
- (b) the semantic features of ethical sentences are explained in the same way as the semantic features of any other declarative sentence, and, in particular, truth-aptness is explained in a nonrealist way; and
- (c) the expressive function of ethical statements is said to be different from the expressive function of ordinary belief-expressing statements.

To those wedded to the parsimony offered by traditional expressivism, this should seem like a promising result of our attempts to "cross-pollinate" the two sophisticated expressivist positions. However, I think there are two potentially problematic commitments of the resulting position.

First, even if the act-product distinction can help to explain, within an expressivist framework, why we treat ethical statements as truth-apt, it does nothing to explain why ordinary discourse often characterizes the mental state expressed by ethical statements as beliefs. Thus, this form of ethical expressivism is committed to giving up on the quasi-realist project of earning the right to *all* of the language of ordinary discourse, which tempts some to realism; it will have to see ascriptions

of ethical beliefs as somehow erroneous. And this may seem not only unorthodox but also seriously problematic, since ethical expressivism is typically seen as gaining some plausibility from its ability to avoid positing error in ordinary ethical discourse.

Second, in metaethics, expressivism is often seen as a view about the semantic value of ethical sentences — the view, roughly, that ethical sentences mean what they do in virtue of the type of attitudes they can be used to express.²⁸ However, enforcing the act-product distinction means that this form of expressivism is committed to denying that ethical sentences mean what they do in virtue of the type of attitudes they can be used to express. This may seem not only unorthodox but also seriously problematic, since even if expressivism is not a semantic view, it should be consistent with at least some semantics of ethical sentences.

These commitments are significant theoretical costs, perhaps so significant that no one will be willing to pay them in order to get the advantages of ontological and psychological parsimony that expressivism brings with it. However, I doubt that these commitments are as problematic as the commitment that, as we saw, an avowed expressivist would have to take on in order to make the cross-pollinated version of that position work. At least, that's what I hope to argue in the remainder of this section.

Regarding the first commitment: It's of course true that we ordinarily speak of ethical beliefs just as much as we speak of ethical truths, and part of the attraction of ethical expressivism is the way it can construe ethical discourse as non-erroneous. However, a defender of the sort of expressivist position that emerges from using the act-product distinction can say that the ordinary use of 'belief' in ethical discourse is loose usage or he can say that it is an explicable and relatively innocent mistake.²⁹ He could argue that, for ordinary ascriptions of osten-

28. Blackburn (1988), Gibbard (1990, 2003), Timmons (1999), Ridge (2006), and Schroeder (2008) all treat ethical expressivism as an explicitly semantic view.

29. Dorr (2002) argues that whatever we say about the semantics of ethical sentences, we cannot treat the mental states expressed by these sentences as

sibly ethical beliefs, 'believes' could be replaced with 'thinks' without loss; and his position is that these thoughts are not, strictly speaking, beliefs but some sort of motivational attitude. For example, if I say, "Mike believes that murder is wrong", this sort of expressivist will claim that nothing is lost by translating this into "Mike thinks that murder is wrong" and understanding this thought as what would be expressed were Mike to say "Murder is wrong". To be sure, this involves positing a sort of error to ordinary ethical discourse, but it doesn't involve thinking that the whole discourse rests on false presuppositions or thinking that many ethical sentences we think are true are actually false.³⁰

So a cross-pollinated version of ethical expressivism is committed to positing some error to ordinary ethical discourse insofar as that involves the ascription of ostensibly ethical beliefs. And this will in turn require an unorthodox understanding of propositional-attitude ascriptions. However, despite its unorthodox nature, I don't think this commitment is as untenable as the commitment required to make the cross-pollinated version of avowal expressivism work. That position, recall, required us to think any avowable mental state (*e.g.*, pain, hunger, love, *etc.*) is a potential item of knowledge.

Regarding the second commitment: Although many recent expressivists have hoped to provide novel accounts of the semantic value of ethical sentences, I think that, in light of the act-product distinction,

motivational states instead of beliefs without undermining the obvious inferential relations that can stand between ethical judgments and other sorts of judgments. This is a nice argument, but I don't think it shows that ethical claims must express beliefs; rather what it shows is that whatever ethical claims express must be capable of standing in rational relations with beliefs. Intentions, plans, certain sorts of commitments, *etc.*, are all plausible non-belief candidates for this job.

30. Admittedly, this move will require a more complicated account of propositional-attitude ascriptions than is normal. For example, this sort of expressivist will have to reject standard accounts of sentences such as "She said that murder is wrong, and I believe what she said" as perfectly analogous to "She said that grass is green, and I believe what she said". The expressivist will have to analyze the former in terms of having the same attitude towards murder rather than in terms of standing in the belief relation to the proposition expressed by the sentence, as is natural in the latter case. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to be clear about this implication of the view.

we should wonder: Does ethical expressivism *have* to be a semantic view? What would be lost in ethical expressivism were we to construe it analogously to the neo-expressivist view of avowals, as a view about ethical statements qua acts and not as a view of the semantics of ethical sentences qua products? To be sure, this would leave a question unanswered that ethical expressivists have often wanted to answer. However, it doesn't, as far as I can tell, abandon the principal advantages typically claimed for ethical expressivism: ontological and psychological parsimony. For the claim that ethical statements don't express ethical beliefs (*i.e.*, beliefs in ethical facts) surely goes a long way towards underwriting the claim that ethical discourse does not commit its participants to the existence of ethical facts. And while the issue of ontological parsimony may have seemed to be a semantic issue, depending on one's views about how to do semantics, the issue of psychological parsimony is not by anyone's lights a semantic issue. The expressivist's explanation of the apparently tight link between ethical judgments and motivations is an explanation turning on the psychological nature of ethical judgments; and, as such, it need not force any particular semantic account of the sentences, which are used to express these judgments.

But the deeper worry here may be that the sort of ethical expressivism that emerges from co-opting Bar-On's avowal expressivist response to the objection from semantic continuity cannot give *any* account of the semantics of ethical sentences whatsoever. After all, if it doesn't explain their meaning in terms of the attitudes they can be used to express, then how can it explain them? Obviously, it cannot appeal to the facts that they represent.

I suspect this worry rests on a mistake. In the metaethics literature, it seems to be assumed fairly widely that explaining the semantic content of ethical sentences requires appeal either to the facts they represent or to the mental states their typical utterance conventionally expresses. And, since the expressivist wants to avoid commitment to ethical facts, one concludes that he must explain the semantic content of ethical sentences in terms of the mental states conventionally

expressed by their typical utterance. But this line of thought rests on a false dichotomy. To be sure, because they have failed to recognize the act-product distinction and they have wanted to avoid error-theory, most ethical expressivists have sought to explain the semantic content of ethical sentences in terms of the mental states they are conventionally used to express. However, there are other non-representationalist approaches to semantic explanation besides the roughly Lockean/Gricean ideationalist approach typically pursued by expressivists.

For instance, we might also seek to explain the semantic content of ethical sentences in terms of their socially embodied inferential role: an ethical sentence is a piece that one can play in the language game of giving and asking for reasons for other statements and actions.³¹ Or perhaps we might hold that there is nothing illuminating to be said about the semantics of ethical sentences beyond regimenting commonalities and relations in content among subsentential parts and across languages: an ethical sentence expresses a particular proposition, which is understood not in representationalist terms but simply as what it has in common with synonymous sentences in other languages.³² Or, finally, perhaps we might hold that ethical sentences do get their semantic value in virtue of their representational *purport* but that they are not used to express beliefs in the facts purportedly represented.³³

31. This is the sort of general semantic project pursued by Sellars (1968), Rosenberg (1974), and Brandom (1994). There are other inferential- or conceptual-role approaches to semantics that are less congenial to an anti-realist construal of ethical discourse — *e.g.*, Peacocke (1992) — but the existence of some that are is enough to support the point I am making in the text above.
32. This is one way to interpret the ontological commitments involved in the semantic project pursued by Davidson (1967, 1975), as well as that pursued by Schiffer (2003).
33. This is akin to the version of hermeneutic moral fictionalism defended by Kalderon (2005). This has seemed to some to be an unstable view. Perhaps it is; my point is not to endorse it here but only to point out that, without further argument against it, it does represent a third option for the ethical expressivist who follows Bar-on in making the act-product distinction, in order to overcome the objection from semantic continuity. See Chrisman (2008a) for more discussion of Kalderon's view.

Personally, I think something like the first option is most promising.³⁴ However, the point here is not to articulate and defend an account of the semantics of ethical sentences but simply to point out that, even if following Bar-On in making the act-product distinction means that the expressivist's core thesis doesn't provide for answers to certain semantic questions that ethical expressivists have typically sought to answer, this does not mean that they remain unanswerable for him. To be sure, he'll want to answer them in a way that doesn't presuppose the existence of ethical facts; but we've just seen that there are several options for doing so. As long as that is true, then I think we have to recognize that the second commitment mentioned above doesn't undermine the sort of ethical expressivism that follows Bar-On in distinguishing between statements *qua* acts and statements *qua* products.

This is what we should expect. The expressivist's core thesis is that typical acts of making an ethical statement express motivational attitudes rather than beliefs. If that core thesis is all we want to defend, there is no reason the ethical expressivist has to commit to any particular semantics of ethical sentences.³⁵ It may seem that going this

34. I've defended this in Chrisman (2008b). The point here is not *what* the expressivist should say about the semantics of ethical sentences but *that* there are still several options available even after he follows Bar-On in making the act-product distinction and abandoning the typical expressivist aim of explaining the semantic value of ethical sentences in terms of the mental states that one expresses stating them. Strictly speaking, I think each of the options discussed in the main text above are then open to him. Of course, depending on one's views in the philosophy of language, one or another of these options may appear better than the others. But I take one of the major benefits of the act-product distinction to be the sort of relative neutrality about issues in the philosophy of language it allows expressivists to achieve, all the while hanging onto their core thesis and the advantages it is supposed to bring.
35. One might insist that, even if it is correct that acts of making an ethical statement are not acts of expressing a belief, as long as we grant that ethical sentences are truth-evaluable, it should in principle be possible to have a belief with their content. But if this is true, then any expressivist who pursues an answer proceeding from the act-product distinction to the objection from semantic continuity faces a dilemma: either he must follow the quasi-realist in deflating the ontological import of the notion of belief or he must admit the possibility of ethical beliefs which aim to correctly represent the world. While I think this point is correct, I don't think it would be damaging for the

route makes the core expressivist thesis otiose: don't we already get ontological parsimony from one of the non-representationalist semantics for ethical sentences? I don't think so. Even if a sentence *S* doesn't have its semantic value in virtue of representing the fact that *S*, that doesn't yet imply that one who states that *S* is not expressing a belief in that fact. The core thesis of ethical expressivism fills in this lacuna in pursuit of an ontologically parsimonious way to interpret ordinary ethical discourse. Moreover, the core thesis is also central to the expressivist's claim to a psychologically parsimonious way of explaining the connection between ethical claims and motivations.

So, a cross-pollinated version of ethical expressivism is committed to denying that ethical sentences mean what they do in virtue of the mental states they can be used to express. However, despite its unorthodox nature, I don't think this commitment is as untenable as the commitment that, as we saw, was required to make the cross-pollinated version of avowal expressivism work. In fact, this commitment makes ethical expressivism a more conservative position in virtue of not attempting to be the foundation of a semantic account of ethical sentences.

In §3, I argued that, if we follow the quasi-realist in taking up a minimalist stance towards talk of truth, belief, and all related notions, ethical expressivism seems to be undermined by a dilemma between quietism and realism. In this section, I've explored an alternative

expressivist to embrace the second horn of the dilemma. For, although the expressivist's position is that ethical statements are ordinarily used to express motivational attitudes, that shouldn't make it impossible to have and to express beliefs with the content of the statements any more than the fact that the statement "I'm going to go to the party" is ordinarily used primarily to express an intention makes it impossible to have and express a belief with this content. The important claim is that this is not the ordinary way these statements are used. Perhaps committed moral realists genuinely do believe that murder is wrong, in the sense that they have a mental state with this content that aims to correctly represent the facts. But the mere possibility of having and expressing such a belief does not cause a problem for the expressivist, for he can hold that this belief is false and that ordinary ethical statements do not express beliefs in this way. That is just to hold that moral realism is false, which, after all, is one of the primary attractions of the expressivist's position.

which results from co-opting Bar-On's avowal expressivist's answer to the objection from semantic continuity. Because of the disanalogy in the ontological commitments of ethical expressivism and avowal expressivism, this move may initially seem unavailable. However, what we've just seen is that it is available as long as we allow the expressivist two controversial commitments: (i) an unorthodox account of belief-ascriptions in ethical discourse, and (ii) an unorthodox measure of semantic neutrality. As far as I can tell, these commitments are consistent with claiming the principal advantages typically claimed by ethical expressivists — *viz.*, ontological and psychological parsimony, which is what should make this seem like a particularly attractive move from the point of view of ethical expressivism. Even so, giving up on the part of the quasi-realist project which seeks to earn the right to speak of ethical *beliefs*, and giving up on explaining the meaning of sentences in terms of what they can be used to express, are significant costs. Do they involve an unacceptable affront to ordinary discourse or merely a theoretical cost that may be outweighed by the theoretical advantages of expressivism? I remain unsure, which is why I said at the outset that §4–5 would be somewhat more speculative attempts to draw out the theoretical commitments needed to make a cross-pollinated version of each expressivist position work rather than to provide a final verdict.

VI. Conclusion

The original expressivist idea has, I think, palpable attraction for those with a certain conservative sensibility regarding philosophical explanations. It is interesting how this manifests itself differently for ethical expressivists and avowal expressivists. Ethical expressivists seek to avoid commitment to a particular kind of fact and a particular kind of psychological story. Avowal expressivists seek to avoid commitment to a particular kind of cognitive faculty or method and a particular kind of epistemological story. But both positions face the objections from semantic continuity and epistemic continuity. In this essay, I have sought to draw out the parallels between the two positions and their dialectical situation vis-à-vis the two objections. This is, first, simply

because I think there have not been enough comparisons of the respective theoretical benefits and burdens of the two positions. But, second, I think contemporary sophistications of the original expressivist idea in each area have traced out rather different paths in pursuit of responses to the two objections; and, in each case, the most prominent response to at least one of the objections concedes too much to the expressivists' traditional opponents.

First, the dominant contemporary avowal expressivist's response to the objection from epistemic continuity has come in the form of the neo-expressivist endorsement of the dual-expression thesis, and I argued that this collapses the distinction between avowal expressivism and introspectionism broadly construed. For this reason, I explored the possibility of co-opting the sort of response to the objection pursued by Gibbard's ethical expressivism. This was, in effect, to adopt a general expressivist analysis of knowledge statements, which allowed for an explanation of our attributions of knowledge that makes no commitment on the nature of the mental states expressed by those to whom knowledge is attributed. I found this route to escaping the dilemma of introspectionism and the objection from epistemic continuity to require a radical view of what mental states can be properly called knowledge (much more radical than that required by the ethical expressivist who favors this defensive strategy). And so I think it doesn't ultimately help the avowal expressivist to avoid the criticisms leveled in §2.

Second, the dominant contemporary ethical expressivist's response to the objection from semantic continuity has come in the expressivist *cum* general minimalist program called quasi-realism, which I suggested collapses the distinction between ethical expressivism and realism either by making expressivism into a form of realism or by completely undermining the realism debate. For this reason, I explored the possibility of co-opting the sort of response to the objection pursued by Bar-On's avowal expressivism. This was, in effect, to distinguish between the act of making a statement and the product of this act, which allows for an explanation of semantic continuity at the level of linguistic

products while maintaining an expressive discontinuity at the level of linguistic acts. In this case, I found the route to escaping the objection from semantic continuity to require an unorthodox view of the theoretical aspirations of ethical expressivism. But the theoretical commitments required to make this view work are, in my view, less tenuous than those required to make the correlated avowal expressivist view work.

The first half of this paper argued for two negative conclusions about the prospects of recent sophisticated versions of avowal and ethical expressivism. The second half of this paper has been an experiment in theoretical cross-pollination in pursuit of the explanatory parsimony those positions were originally designed to achieve. I suspect that many who are not sympathetic to the general expressivist strategy will see the cross-pollination explored here as, in the end, perverse inbreeding rather than good engineering. However, I also suspect that many harbor admiration for the explanatory parsimony achieved by both forms of expressivism in their pure forms. They pick up nicely on the Wittgensteinian resistance to positing special kinds of facts or faculties in order to explain the continuities between the ways we use different kinds of language. As Wittgenstein was so good at showing, these continuities don't force us to see all declarative language as having the same expressive function. In the end, though, I can see a way that the ethical expressivist might benefit from the theoretical cross-pollination; I think the avowal expressivist does not.³⁶

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