

Social and Individual Expression

I

The idea behind expressivism as a philosophy of ethics faces a number of different challenges, and has a number of different choices to make as it tries to meet them. Perhaps the first is to specify what is the primitive of the theory, which will be something that is expressed, and is usually identified as a state of mind. Later in this paper, I shall suggest caution about this, but for the moment we can go along with it. Emotion was one suggestion, prescriptions are another, desires of various orders are candidates, but I prefer the less specific term 'attitude'. One might ask why we should not go with the equally general term 'belief'. The answer derives from the second challenge, which queries whether we have actually managed to locate a primitive suited to play its role in a substantive theory. This in turn depends on what exactly the substantive theory is trying to do, so we need to sketch an answer to that first. The need is more pressing since for some time now there have been theorists who have more or less explicitly turned their backs on the whole idea of 'metaethics' or theory of ethics, supposing that the only questions that should bother the philosopher come from within first-order practice, as we try to articulate our standards, to rank obligations and duties, or to relate those to utility and virtue.

I think there are two broad answers to this, although they are related. The first would simply say that we want to understand our nature as creatures who go in for ethics. We might cast this investigation in a Darwinian light, trying to understand, for instance, the evolution of cooperation within the framework of evolutionary psychology, or the genealogy of promises and property in a Humean vein. And we can see that there is a task here when we think of the long list of philosophers, from Callicles and Thrasymachus through to Marx, Nietzsche, John Mackie or Bernard Williams, who have thought that it is no very admirable side of our nature that issues in ethics, or at least in some aspects of it, so that much of the whole business depends on fraud and deception, or self-deception, or errors of various sorts about such things as freedom and choice, or even about what matters or what is important or whether life has 'meaning' or whether everything is absurd. A better understanding would tell us what truth there is, if any, in these scepticisms.

The second kind of answer would not focus on understanding human nature, so much as on understanding what I shall rather grandly call 'the moral proposition', meaning what Moore tried to pin down as the assertion that something is Good with a capital G, or right with a capital R. I shall be quite cavalier about the relation between the good and the right in this paper, and equally I shall be cavalier about what I describe someone putting forward this kind of proposition as doing. It is unfortunate that while the adjective 'moral' twins itself with an associated activity (moralizing), the term 'moralizing' refers to a rather specific kind of activity, and one which people frequently dislike. And there is no general term for the activity of putting forward ethical and normative judgements in general. There is no term 'ethicizing', and no term 'normativizing' although in any context we can indicate well enough what is meant by talking of evaluating, commending, grading, admiring, prescribing, drawing boundaries,

or condemning. Again, I shall use some of these terms without attention to any of the botanizing that would be involved in distinguishing them. Equally I shall remain silent about how general a category the 'normative' covers. Some see it everywhere, as the constant companion of thought itself. Others prefer to restrict it. Nothing I shall say hinges on this choice.

When we affirm or assert the moral proposition, are we asserting something capable of proof? or of verification? or that has a truth-condition? And what is required to understand it? Like the investigation into our nature as ethical creatures, this kind of investigation will be given some of its edge by the sceptic in the wings, suggesting that the moral proposition is tainted with error, that it is as much a fraud as the propositions of theology, or exploded science.

The reason I say these two requests for understanding are related is that it is hard to see how an investigation into the moral proposition could get very far without saying something of what we ourselves are up to when we judge such propositions true or false or verified or beyond debate or open to doubt. But equally it is hard to see how an account of ourselves as ethical creatures can get very far without noticing that our modes of ethical thought revolve around exactly such judgements, judgements focused upon some particular moral proposition.¹ So a psychological and a semantic investigation will need to go hand in hand, neither forgetting the other.

We might set ourselves more or less stringent conditions for pursuing these linked explanatory tasks. Familiarly, wholesale reduction might be one goal. It would issue in solutions along these lines: in making moral or evaluative judgments we are really only (issuing prescriptions, expressing desires...). Or, the moral proposition is (contra Moore) only the proposition that p , where p is couched in some other terms. Or, it has the truth condition p where the same is true. But wholesale reduction seems to me and I think many others, quite unlikely. A less ambitious goal would be to achieve some kind of illuminating way of *placing* our nature as ethical beings, or of *placing* the moral proposition in a natural world. It would be a matter of becoming content with those things, no longer seeing them as targets of suspicion, as the sceptics do, or objects of regret, as some kinds of scientism might. But it might be unwise to say, in advance, just when it is right to become contented, or to see the way we have placed the business as finally satisfactory.

However, I believe that conceiving of the task like his does suggest the limitations of certain kinds of approach. Consider, for instance, the approach familiarly called Cornell realism, which gives a purely naturalistic truth-condition for ethical terms, and uses the Kripke-Putnam apparatus (developed in connection with stuff, such as water, but extended to cover properties) to deflect any criticism arising from the open question argument. Even if this succeeded in its own terms, which there are technical reasons for doubting, it is not at all clear how well adapted it is to answering the questions we have raised. For by itself the provision of the naturalistic truth condition does nothing to tell us

¹Some may want to mention a fairly popular approach purporting to do without anything that could be called 'the moral proposition' in the abstract, by according priority to 'thick terms' and associated 'thick concepts' that offer specific evaluations for specific reasons. I deny that this approach really is a rival, since it raises exactly the same questions when we look at the specific valuations the different thick terms offer. See also essay XXX.

what is distinctive about those who see satisfying this truth condition under the heading of the ethical. The wooden, unethical, uninterested evaluative bystander can judge the truth condition fulfilled. But he is not thereby seeing whatever property is manifested as good or right or making an obligation. A way of putting it is that he latches onto the extension or reference, but misses out on the intension or sense. And since this is a possibility, we can see that the provision of a truth condition is not, by itself, adapted to answer the explanatory demands we have sketched. It neither tell us anything about our nature as ethical agents, nor about what is distinctive of judging that it is the things that fall into the extension that are desirable or worth pursuing, or obligatory.

We also see immediately why Moorean arguments work. Consider not the classic context of expression of doubt, but a case of disagreement. Suppose one disputant advocates a standard, X, for right behaviour, and another advocates standard Y. It is no good thinking of them as ‘meaning something different’ by rightness, or thinking of either of them as simply making a semantic or linguistic error, to be reproved by mere facts of majority usage. The issue is whether to approve of X or Y, and while each is bothered about that neither is talking past the other, and neither is to be judged to have won simply because of some majority vote among people speaking the same language. Moral majorities are as fallible as individuals are. Equally, neither of them is to be judged to be in the right because it could be shown that X, or Y, is the ‘causally powerful’ set of properties whose baptism as ‘right’ has led to the term’s current use in the community. We may, or may not, choose to follow the standards of our forbears, but if we do it is not because semantic theory forces us to do so.

Perhaps the point here would be obvious if we take an emotive term. Since it is quite difficult to do so without causing offense, I shall use the Australian term for English people, ‘pom’ as an example: partly because true Englishmen and women are either too complacent to be offended, or more charitably aristocratically above it, and partly because as well as its derogatory implications, the term has a slight overtone of something more affectionate, at least to my ear (perhaps not to all Australian ears). Now one could give as a ‘semantic theory’ for that predicate simply that it has a truth condition, which is that the person to whom it is applied is English. That is correct as far as it goes. But of course, if our explanatory task was something to do with explaining nationalistic contempt or derogation, its aetiology or roots, place in human psychology and so on, then such a theory has splashed in the bath water but failed to notice the baby. When it comes to the right and the good, the case is still more obvious. Even if an agreed truth-condition could be found, which I doubt, the point of classifying terms within the extension so identified as right or good would remain unilluminated. We would, as it were, have the reference but not the sense. But it is the sense we are after.

With the explanatory task sketched, we can return to asking what states of mind can the expressivist happily adopt as primitives? And we can see why ‘belief’ is not a very satisfactory proposal. It is not that it will be wrong, at the end of the day, to say that persons so expressing themselves are voicing the belief that something is good or right. They will be doing that. But since our explanatory task embraced the moral proposition, adopting it as a primitive is not an option. It is no good saying that people so saying express the belief that something is good or right, without more to tell us what that belief is. We need a theory of content.

There are theories that falter at this point. ‘Neo-expressivists’ have drawn attention to an ambiguity which is very important in many contexts, between process and product, or what belongs to the activity of saying something evaluative, on the one hand, and what belongs to the proposition that is the product of that activity, on the other. That is certainly a distinction, and one which we might want to deploy, for instance to account for the difference between an Australian, saying, in just those words, “Simon is a pom” and the same Australian saying “Simon is English”. A quite plausible semantic theory might offer us that the proposition expressed is the same in each case, but there is a convention covering how it is expressed, along the lines that the word “pom” is not to be used in voicing the proposition that someone is English, unless it is intended to convey a contemptuous attitude to people on that account. The convention would govern the *process* which is here the activity of voicing the proposition, rather than the *product* or proposition thereby put up for assent or discussion or any other purpose. It would also, incidentally, govern the voicing more complex utterances, in which the term occurs in negations, conditionals and so on. You cannot say “if he is a pom then at least he is European” or even “no, he is not a pom” without the same derogation being heard.

A theory of this shape could indeed be suggested to govern the moral proposition. Allied, say, to the Cornell realism discussed above, it might defuse at least part of the objection to that position, giving a line on what is distinctive about those with a ‘take’ on the alleged truth-condition offered for the moral proposition, that results in them using a moral or evaluative vocabulary in order to voice it.

In the case of ‘pom’ all is well since there is a straightforward, uncontestable, candidate for the content of the proposition, the product of the saying. It is that Simon is English.² Similarly someone putting the sentence into indirect contexts, such as ‘if Simon is a pom then he wasn’t born in Sydney’ is simply working out one consequence of the hypothesis that I am English, although not failing to voice his contempt as he does so. But in the general case of ethics, I deny that there is any such candidate, for Moore’s reasons. People saying that something is good or right are not merely saying that it is X, where X marks a naturalistic identification of the extension of the term in their mouths. If they were, then as already remarked, people with different standards would be talking past each other, and secondly, what are clearly open questions would be portrayed as closed. Equally, someone hypothesizing that someone is good or that some action is right is not just hypothesizing that something is X: if they were, substantive conditionals would become tautologies, and again, open questions become closed. In short, semantics cannot determine morals. There may be much wrong with people who promulgate bizarre and unlovely ways of determining who is good and what is right. But what is wrong with them does not in general include an inability to understand English. There is an asymmetry here with the Australian case: an Australian urging that Americans are poms is liable to meet laughter and incomprehension rather than serious ethical thought (he may urge that Americans are as bad as poms, but that is another matter). Nor can an Australian doubt whether the English are really poms, although he can learn to stop using the term altogether, if his take on the English improves as it no doubt should.

² I do not intend to deny that there might be indeterminacy, or uncertainty and even dispute at the edges, for example over whether Welshmen or Scots can be poms.

Moore thought that the upshot of his argument was a ‘non-natural’ account of the content of ethical terms. But it has been generally agreed that this is a dead end: a natural truth-condition, or content, at least points us towards properties in which we unquestionably have an interest: such things as creating happiness or abetting health.³ A non-natural one takes us out of the world altogether, and it becomes unintelligible why we should have any interest in it, as well as how we detect it, imagine its relationship with the natural, and so on. I do not suppose neo-expressivists intended to follow Moore down this path. But in that case the actual nature of the moral proposition remains uncertain, and while that is so I cannot be happy with their proposal as more than an initial suggestion. Perhaps they wish to come at the moral proposition in some naturalistic way, but then we would need to know how they square that with the features of its content that Moorean arguments exploit.

The process-product ambiguity enables us to locate the outstanding task for moral expressivism much more directly. It is to explain how the moral proposition is a product which is entirely to be understood in the light of the process that gives rise to it. In other words, once the state of mind we are expressing is properly understood, the explanation of the proposition follows on from that. The moral proposition is placed or located or identified as what you assert when you have that state of mind to express. A parallel I like, and that has frequently guided my own work, is with the so-called ‘subjectivist’ theory of probability judgments of F.P. Ramsey and Bruno de Finetti. Here too there was an impasse in approaching the ‘truth-condition’ of judgements of probability (the options in Ramsey’s time seemed to be either a ‘logical’ theory, which seemed incredible, or frequency theories, which seemed open to devastating objection in either finite or infinite versions), but there was something clear about the state of someone sincerely voicing one, namely that he was committed to a corresponding betting rate. So the suggestion becomes: forget about any other ‘truth-condition’ or content, and see the proposition as a reflection of the acceptance of a betting-rate. And see discussion of the proposition, doubt about it, desire to investigate it further, or the relaxed claim to know it, as discussion of which betting rate to adopt, doubt whether some rate is appropriate, desire to do more before fixing on one, or satisfaction that just one rate is indeed appropriate. The product, or probability proposition, is entirely to be understood in the light of what someone accepting it thereby expresses—in this case, a disposition to bet. Famously, the demand then arose for an explanation of the basic logic of probability (the way the probability that an event occurs plus the probability that it does not must sum to 1, for example) and such an explanation was then forthcoming in the constraints associated with avoiding a Dutch book.

I do not advance this parallel because the probability case is settled. It is far from being so, and a major stumbling block is the way probabilities function in physical theory. But it illustrates a possible approach, and in the case of ethics, we should deny that there is a parallel stumbling block, since the moral proposition is no part of explanatory physics.

I say, then, that one who advances the moral proposition expresses an attitude, and that the proposition itself is to be understood as a ‘reflection’ of that attitude. It is a

³ It is always sanguine in philosophy to suppose that something is dead and buried. Intuitionism is sometimes disinterred and walks the night again occasionally.

virtual focus: it exists purely as something about which we conduct practical discussion. It comes into being, as it were, as an object of thought in the same way that Ramsey and de Finetti thought probabilities do, or in the way that Gibbard thinks that plans and decisions do.⁴ We need a way of voicing doubts, dissent, persuasions, or distinctions between cases where we need to know more and cases where we think solutions are already in. So we invent a proposition as a target of thought, enabling us to locate these various practical states of mind as attitudes towards the one focus. It is this part of the story that is distinctive of expressivism.

We see immediately, then, why taking belief in the moral proposition as a primitive is simply not an option, any more than it would be possible for a Ramsey style theory to take belief in a value for a probability as a primitive. Hence there is the need for a satisfactory grounding in emotion, desire, or, as I prefer attitude, corresponding to the probabilist's resting upon acceptance of a betting rate. Naturally any such reliance opens one vulnerability, for the theory becomes open to the charge of smuggling in something illegitimate at exactly this point. This would be so if the attitude could not be understood *except* as the belief that something is good. For the expressivist the equation that voicing an attitude of the right kind is identical with believing that something is good has to be read left to right: the attitude is fundamental, and the belief explained in terms of it. If the equation had to be read the other way round, all is lost. Of course, the mere fact that some such equation is acceptable, if it is, does not determine that issue

II

With the ground thus laid, we now turn to an issue which more than any other, except possibly the Frege-Geach problem, makes people doubtful about expressivism. This is the hoary problem of the relation between sincere acceptance of a moral proposition, and the existence of a motivation to act as it suggests. It was, after all, the motivational associations of ethics which led Hume to deny that the moral proposition is to be thought of as representational at all. It has to be expressive of passion, not of an idea derived from an impression. But the association has proved far more elusive than Hume anticipated. For as we also all know, there are people who fail to be moved by thinking of something as good or even obligatory, and there are even Satanic figures who are moved in the other direction by it, being attracted to things because they are bad, or attracted to actions just because it is obligatory not to perform them. The issue has often crystallized around the unhelpful labels 'internalism' versus 'externalism', and it is often thought of as pivotal for the fate of expressivism. But properly understood, it is far from being so.

Expressivists have, of course, come up with a fair battery of defenses. R.M. Hare reminded us that there are cases where people echo judgements insincerely or hypocritically, not meaning what they say. Among them, or at no great distance, are people who use terms in inverted commas senses, meaning only to advert to things about which other people make moral judgements. And then there are people out of control, whose other passions, such as panic or blind rage completely swamp the motivational promptings suggested by their ethics. But, as J.L. Austin famously reminded us, it is

⁴ Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*, Ch ?

impossible to believe that these cover all the cases: his don taking two bits of cake, knowing that it has been carved one-to-one for each guest, and doing so with ‘calm and even with finesse’ is perfectly recognizable. Temptation can be known to be temptation, and we still succumb to it.

My own reaction to this problem has always been fairly relaxed. I dislike the labels that usually set it up—externalism versus internalism—because they imply a simple polarity. Whereas I want to draw attention to a number of things, in particular both the difference between sincerely voicing an attitude, and acting in accordance with it, and more generally, the holism of the mental, in order to give a much more nuanced picture. We are not naïve enough to be surprised that someone can sincerely express affection for someone or something, and then behave in distressingly unaffectionate ways. Othello is merely at one end of a continuous human spectrum.

R.M. Hare made himself particularly vulnerable to the problem, because his preferred mental state for locating ethical commitment was that of ‘accepting a self-addressed prescription’, and the only criterion for accepting a prescription is to do what it prescribes. So the link between sincere ethical commitment and action is immediate and unbreakable. But working with a more general, and generous, conception of attitude, there can be all kinds of indications that someone recognizes that his or her behaviour is bad or even wrong, although they went ahead and did it anyhow. Subsequent guilt or shame is the most obvious; the wry recommendation to do as I say and not as I do is another; even if those who succumbed to temptation brazen it out, perhaps boasting of what they have done, we can often recognize something hollow about it, as if they can’t quite meet our eye. It is natural to handle the phenomena, as Allan Gibbard does, by seeing normative governance as just one element in a full human psychology, often having to compete with desire, temptation, sheer laziness, demoralization, fears of many kinds, including not being one of the boys, and all the other myriad vectors that eventually, somehow, give a resultant action. In fact, this is very much Hume’s own approach. He talks of moral attitudes as those which involved taking up a ‘common point of view’, but he is quite aware, and indeed discusses at length, the way in which our other passions may and often do fail to conform to the general rules which the common point of view gives us: “‘Tis seldom men love heartily that which lies at a distance from them, and what no way redounds to their particular benefit; as ‘tis no less rare to meet with persons, who can pardon another any opposition he makes to their interest, however justifiable that opposition may be by the general rules of morality”⁵

About Lucifer, or the devilish psychology which is actually attracted to actions that it recognizes as evil, I have preferred a ‘split’ personality view.⁶ Lucifer, in the story, is a rebel. He is suffocated by God’s endless harping on the good. He wants space to be his own agent—this is his sin of pride—and the only way he can find such space is to rebel. However, this means that part of him is rebelling against his own self. This is why he is in permanent torment.⁷ He is like the lover who, perhaps out of despair, or pride, or fear, loathes himself for continuing to love someone he has begun to see as hateful. A bad

⁵ David Hume, *Treatise*, III, iii, i. p. 583

⁶ I discuss this case, and Othello, in *Ruling Passions*, pp. 59 - 65

⁷ In Marlowe’s *Faust* this is especially clear. *Mephistopheles*: Why this is hell, nor am I out of it. Think’st thou that I who saw the face of God And tasted the eternal joys of heaven Am not tormented with ten thousand hells In being deprived of everlasting bliss?”

state, but, again, a recognizable one. Things would be so much simpler if we ourselves were.

I do not wish to repudiate any of this. These psychological mechanisms are ones that any half-way adequate theory needs to recognize and are real enough. But I have begun to doubt whether it is the complete story. For although we understand these psychological forces well enough, I think we also need a better understanding of the very idea of expression before all the pieces fall into place.

To see this, let me present a somewhat simplified case, which I shall call that of Magnus, the disaffected wine taster. Magnus, let us suppose, always had a passion for wine. Furthermore, he discovered early in life that he had a very good memory for taste. So in due course he became a wine connoisseur, a Master of Wine, and exercised his taste and skill to build up business as a writer, shipper, and expert on all matters related to wine. So far so good. But now we imagine a gradual change in Magnus. He finds that his memory and powers of discrimination are as strong as ever. But he finds his enjoyment slipping away. The years of slurping and spitting have taken their toll. He now goes to tastings with a heavy heart, when before he would have enjoyed them greatly, and this although he recognizes that the average quality of wine on offer has gone up remarkably in his lifetime. He takes water with his meals, and drinks only scotch before and after.

An aesthetic expressivism may have problems with Magnus. Let us suppose such an expressivism built around the plausible idea that to say that a wine is good is to express or voice pleasure in its taste, and to say one wine is better than another is to externalize, that is, to voice or communicate more pleasure in its taste, and so on. Such a theory, obviously, has the same powerful motivation behind it as ethical expressivism, namely that it puts the pleasure we get from wine as fundamental to the exercise of grading it. And that seems right. For at least if human beings did not take different pleasure from different wines, it is hard to see how the exercise of connoisseurship could have got going. It would simply not have had a function. But now it seems to follow that Magnus can't mean what he says if he pronounces a wine good, or better than another, because the requisite pleasures have disappeared from his life. It sounds as though he is now disqualified as a wine critic. Or, that he should substitute other remarks, if he wants to continue his business, along the inverted commas lines proposed by Hare: "this is what people call good" or "this is going to give people who take pleasure in wine more pleasure than that one" and so on. He can describe and comment on pleasures, but, feeling none himself, cannot express them.

But this in turn sounds wrong and is wrong. Magnus is, surely, still perfectly entitled to his place as a wine critic. He is not relegated to second-guessing the reactions of other people, and neither is this what he is trying to do. He is speaking in propria persona. How then to reconcile the fact that Magnus is still a first-rate wine critic, with the absence of pleasure for him to express?

One solution is simply to shelter behind the intensionality of 'express', which is familiar from other contexts. Few philosophers find it problematic that a sentence can express a belief, although the person uttering it not believe what he thereby expresses. Insincere expression is expression nonetheless. And it is the same with other things we do with words. A warm greeting expresses warmth, even if the greeter feels none. Perhaps, then, Magnus expresses pleasure although similarly he feels none?

The problem with this suggestion, put so barely, is that it imputes something like hypocrisy or insincerity to Magnus. The non-believer and the cold greeter are misrepresenting themselves with their expression of belief and their warm smile. But I hear nothing insincere going on when Magnus exclaims at the quality of the wine, or earnestly insists that one is better than another.

There are at first sight two broad lines of solution. One is to complicate the mental state expressed. It was too simple to locate it as 'pleasure at the taste of the wine'. It should have been something more complex. The other is to complicate expression. It was too simple to see it as simple vocalization or communication; the act of making public the content of one's mind. It is something more complex. We might be reminded of Grice's epicycles on the matter of meaning something by some utterance, and suppose that some of that complexity is found in all expression, not only expression of belief.⁸

I suspect any adequate account of aesthetic expression would need to follow up both lines. I think we can see that Magnus's judgement that a wine is good is not simply regarded as a kind of externalization of his own pleasure, if we reflect that Magnus might need to judge that one wine is better than another, even although he has a personal predilection for the second. It is not only when he has lost all sense of pleasure in wine that he may need to keep a distance between what he says, and the pleasure or distaste he feels. This distance has of course been a well-known trope in aesthetics for a long time; so far as I know it is first noticed by Hume in 'The Standard of Taste' where he talks of the error of a critic in confining his 'taste' to the kind of work to which he has a natural predilection. As an example, consider the judgment that some play we are watching is boring. Normally, a requirement on voicing that (say, in the interval in the bar) is that one is oneself bored by it. But if there are special reasons why one's own predilection comes apart from boredom, this general requirement is waived. Someone might recognize that a play is boring, although he himself is on the edge of his seat because his girl friend is taking the lead role. In this case 'I am not bored, but the play is boring' can be entirely sincere while both components are true.

I suspect the two lines of approach will converge. The investigation of the state of mind expressed will, I believe, start finding the whole idea of it being a state of mind a target of suspicion, and even something of a poisoned pawn. And a more adequate idea of expression will stop it being thought of as mere externalization of a state of mind, along the lines of an exclamation made on receiving a jolt or a surprise. It will be more a matter of putting 'something' in the public domain for acceptance and guidance, where the 'something' put there may or may not have a personal psychological identity in the mentality of the speaker. The question then is how to reconcile these complexities with the central place that pleasure takes in the whole business of wine connoisseurship.

To think about this, imagine a parent who has lost interest in football but who may sincerely commend an interest in football in his child, think that the interest will give him a lot of pleasure as he grows up, keep him off the streets, and so on. He can foster this interest by telling the child which moves and which tactics and which teams are good or bad, and which are better than others. To use the vocabulary of some older

⁸ Not all Grice's complexities. I discuss how they can be pruned in *Spreading the Word*, Chapter 4.

expressivists, he is commending and grading and comparing teams and tactics.⁹ And he can have appropriate attitudes: he admires some moves as perfectly adjusted to the team's intentions, and he condemns others as ill-thought out or botched in execution. And in all this he may meet agreement or disagreement among other aficionados. Pleasure in participating or watching is still the motor force, that for the sake of which all this takes place. But the parent is not insincere in voicing what would normally be expressions of differential pleasure, even if he himself feels none. He is, if we like, saying that pleasure at this move or that tactic is appropriate, or that the move or tactic merits or deserves pleasurable appreciation, even if he finds himself left cold.

Here we might want to take some intuitions on board that sound dangerous, to the expressivist, but which I want both to accommodate and to use. They are the intuitions that can lead to what Scanlon called "buck passing" accounts, but which, I think should not quite do so. The idea takes off from the platitude that we express ourselves, whether it is in ethics or on football or wine, in the light of subjacent properties and facts about the subject matter.¹⁰ It is our standards that determine the selection of those properties. These standards give us (what we regard as) reasons for our judgments, and a large part of the point of advocating judgments is to bring out and compare, reject or accept those reasons. So we might try saying that what is voiced is just the view that the subject in question *merits* pleasure or admiration or preference, or that it has properties in the light of which we have *reason* to take pleasure in it or to admire or prefer it. Our reactions remain in the picture, but what is expressed is not such reactions simpliciter but a judgment about their appropriateness.

The problem with this as a general approach to ethics is not that it is wrong, but that by itself it does not get us very far. It is no great trick to substitute for "X is good" the judgement that "X possesses properties that merit approbation" or "X possesses properties that give us a reason for admiring it". Except in tricky cases, the latter two simply sound like a long-winded way of saying what is said more directly by the former.¹¹ And as such, they inherit all the problems of the moral proposition in the first place. Thus everything we have said about 'X is good', can be repeated for 'X merits approval' or 'X possesses properties that give us a reason for admiring it' and variants upon them.¹²

Nevertheless, the equation does give us some machinery for describing our cold-hearted wine taster, or the conscientious but jaded father. Feeling no pleasure, they can nevertheless *invoke* it, and by doing so express approval of finding pleasure in this wine

⁹ J.O. Urmson, 'On Grading' *Mind*, 1950.

¹⁰ "Subjacent" was Hare's term for the inverse relation to supervenience.

¹¹ The tricky cases I have in mind are ones where X is not admirable, but there are strategic or artificial reasons for admiring it. An account in terms of what X 'merits' does better with these than one in terms of 'reasons'.

¹² I think it is a peculiar and dispiriting fact about the current philosophical atmosphere that as soon as they hit upon the word 'reason' in these paraphrases of the moral proposition, people seem to heave a sigh of relief, or suppose that they are sailing into calmer waters, as if the work of 'giving a truth condition' were thereby concluded, and problems of objectivity, epistemology, metaphysics, or motivation finally put to rest. Whereas the truth is that everything remains to be done.

or that, or in the football game conducted this way rather than that. The grading or commending remains something that they do, and do sincerely, even if the pleasure is not something that they feel. And if they know that they are idiosyncratic, like the wine taster with a personal predilection of trashy wines, then they may know it is their role, or demanded by propriety, to commend the ones that merit the response, rather than those to which they personally respond, while in just the same way the personally involved playgoer knows that the play has qualities which merit boredom, even if gazing at his girl friend stops him being bored. He approves of boredom as a response to the play, and looks askance at those who, without his own personal reason for being rapt, find interest in it. Finally, the figure taking time off for bad behaviour, or the Satanic figure, can realize this his behaviour merits disapprobation even as he sets about it.

What we have here is the reverse side of a familiar point in aesthetics. It is generally recognized as a mistake to construe artistic expression as the externalization of the artist's own sentiments, and as somehow a failure or a betrayal if it is not. A piece of music, on such a view, successfully expresses sadness if it makes us feel sad *just as the composer was* when he created it as an expression of his feelings. This subjectivization of the activity is surely wrong. The composer creates music to which sadness is an appropriate response. Whether he or she is sad while doing so is beside the point. They are not insincere if they are not, any more than Bernini was insincere as he sculpted St Teresa in the throes of ecstasy, without himself being in those throes, as we can be sure he was not since otherwise the work of sculpture could not have got accomplished. Bernini needed to know what ecstasy was like, or at least what it looked like, and the composer may need sufficient empathy with sadness to know what rhythms and harmonies and progressions in music express it. But that is all that is required of them. In a parallel fashion, I want to say, someone may sincerely put a commendation or a grade or an attitude into the public domain, knowing that the appropriate response is an approval or a disapproval, a pleasure or a pain, without himself feeling the appropriate response, or feeling the response to the extent to which he feels it would be appropriate. He certainly risks a charge of insincerity, but this is not correct in many cases.

Again, there is a parallel with our other voicings. We may put an assertion into the public domain, without quite knowing whether we believe what we say. We announce ourselves as committed to supposing that a belief is true, but that may be compatible with not having ourselves quite succeeded in living up to the commitment. And this can be a state of which we are unaware: it might only be manifested, to others and to ourselves, when some subsequent behaviour comes as a surprise, and suggests that our minds were not as made up, or as unidirectional, as we had supposed. One of the more common things we can be sincerely mistaken about is what we believe or feel. Our expressions remain there, meaning what they do. They do not answer directly to the states of mind of the subject expressing them.

This concentration on the social or public nature of expression, rather than the subjective or personal, seems to me to be necessary to any theory of it. It was a mistake for aestheticians to have the ideal of reading composers' biography directly off from the kind of music they produced. It is a similar mistake treat someone's expression of an aesthetic or moral judgment as an invitation to read their minds. It is much better construed as an invitation to a certain take upon the subject matter; an invitation to notice some subjacent properties and to endorse a response, whether it be a feeling or an

attitude, a prohibition or a prescription, or some yet more subtle posture. And it is these postures, and their place in our social life, that give us our best clue as to the identity of the moral proposition. This is, obviously enough, a wholly Wittgensteinian position, reminding us that it is our social practices that make up our primary data, even when we had been tempted instead to find it in our own acquaintance with our own thoughts and feelings.